

Literature &c.

FROM HONE'S YEAR BOOK.

THE CATACOMBS OF PARIS.

On the 7th of April, 1786, the celebrated catacombs of Paris were consecrated with great solemnity.

For many centuries Paris had only one public place of interment, the "Cemetery des Innocens," originally a part of the royal domains lying without the walls, and given by one of the earliest French Kings as a burial place to the citizens, in an age when interments within the city were forbidden. Previously to the conversion of this ground into a cemetery, individuals were allowed to bury their friends in their cellars, courts, and gardens, and interments frequently took place in the streets, on the high roads, and in the public fields. Philip Augustus enclosed it, in 1186, with high walls, and the population of Paris gradually increasing, this cemetery was soon found insufficient. In 1218, it was enlarged by Pierre de Nemours, bishop of Paris, and from that time no further enlargement of its precincts was made. Generation after generation being piled upon one, another within the same ground, the inhabitants of the neighbouring parishes began, in the fifteenth century, to complain of the great inconvenience and danger to which they were exposed; diseases were imputed to such a mass of collected putrescence, tainting the air by exhalation, and the waters by filtration, and measures for clearing out the cemetery would have been taken in the middle of the sixteenth century, if disputes between the bishop and the parliament had not prevented them. To save the credit of the burial-ground, a marvellous power of consuming bodies in the short space of nine days was attributed to it. Thicknesse speaks of several burial-pits in Paris, of a prodigious size and depth, in which the dead bodies were laid side by side, without any earth being put over them till the ground tier was full; then, and not till then, a small layer of earth covered them, and another layer of dead came on, till, by layer upon layer, and dead upon dead, the hole was filled. These pits were emptied once in thirty or forty years, and the bones deposited in what is called "le Grand Charnier des Innocens," an arched gallery, which surrounded the burial-place. The last grave-digger, Francois Pontracq, had, by his own register, in less than thirty years, deposited more than 50,000 bodies in that cemetery. It was calculated that, since the time of Philip Augustus, 1,200,000 bodies had been interred there.

In 1805 the council of state decreed that the "Cemetery des Innocens" should be cleared of its dead, and converted into a market-place, after the canonical forms, which were requisite in such cases, should have been observed. The archbishop, in conformity, issued a decree for the suppression and evacuation of the cemetery. The work went on without intermission, till it was necessarily suspended during the hot months; and it was resumed with the same steady exertion as soon as the season permitted. The night scenes, when the work was carried on by torches and bonfires, are said to have been of the most impressive character; nothing was seen save crosses, monuments, demolished edifices, excavations, and coffins—and the labourers moving about like spectres in the lurid light, under a cloud of smoke.

It fortunately happened that there was no difficulty in finding a proper receptacle for the remains thus disinterred. The stone of the ancient edifices of Paris was derived from quarries opened upon the banks of the river Bievre, and worked from time immemorial without any system, every man working where and how he would, till it became dangerous to proceed farther. It was only known as a popular tradition that the quarries extended under a great part of the city, till the year 1774; when some alarming accidents aroused the attention of the government. They were then surveyed, and plans of them taken; and the result was the frightful discovery that the churches, palaces, and most of the southern parts of Paris, were undermined, and in imminent danger of sinking into the pit below them. A special commission was appointed in 1777, to direct such works as might be required. The necessity of the undertaking was exemplified on the very day that the commission was installed: a house in the Rue d'Enfer sunk sixty-one feet below the level of its court-yard. Engineers then examined the whole of the quarries, and propped the streets, roads, churches, palaces, and buildings of all kinds, which were in danger of being engulfed. It appeared that the pillars which had been left by the quarriers in their blind operations, without any regularity, were in many places too weak for the enormous weight above, and in most places had themselves been undermined, or, perhaps, had been erected upon ground which had previously been hollowed. In some instances they had given way, in others the roof had dipped, and threatened to fall; and, in others, great masses had fallen in. The aqueduct of Arcueil, which passed over this treacherous ground, had already suffered shocks, and an accident must, sooner or later, have happened to this water-course, which would have cut off its supply from the fountains of Paris, and have filled the excavations with water.

Such was the state of the quarries when the thought of converting them into catacombs originated with M. Lenoir, lieutenant-general of the police. His proposal for removing the dead from the Cemetery des Innocens was easily entertained, because a receptacle so convenient, and so unexceptionable in all respects, was ready to receive them. That part of the quarries under the Plaine de Mont Souris was allotted for this purpose, and a house, known by the name of "La Tombe Isoire," or Isoirard (from a famous robber, who once infested that neighbourhood), on the old road to Orleans, was purchased, with a piece of ground adjoining; and the first operations were to make an entrance into the quarries by a flight of seventy-seven steps, and to sink a well from the surface, down which the bones might be thrown. Meantime, the workmen walled off that part of the quarries which was designed for the great charnel-house, opened a communication between the upper and lower vaults, and built pillars to prop the roof. When all these necessary preliminaries had been completed, the ceremony of consecrating the intended catacombs was performed, and on the same day the removal from the cemetery began.

All the crosses, tombstones, and monuments, which were not reclaimed by the families of the dead, to whom they belonged, were carefully removed, and placed in a field belonging to la Tombe Isoire. Many leaden coffins were buried in this field; one of them contained the remains of Madame de Pompadour. Thus far, things were conducted with the greatest decorum, but, during the

revolution, la Tombe Isoire was sold as a national domain, the leaden coffins were melted, and all the monuments destroyed. The catacombs received the dead from other cemeteries, and served also as receptacles for those who perished in popular commotions of massacre.

Upon the suppression of the convents and various churches, the remains discovered in them were removed and deposited in this immense charnel-house, but, from the breaking out of the revolution, the works were discontinued, and so much neglected, that, in many places, the soil fell in, and clogged up the communications; water entered by filtration; the roof was cracked in many places, and threatened fresh downfalls; and the bones themselves lay in immense heaps, mingled with the rubbish, and blocking up the way. In 1810 a regular system of piling up the bones was adopted. To pursue his plans, the workmen had to make galleries through the bones, which, in some places, lay above thirty yards thick. It was necessary also to provide for a circulation of air, the atmosphere having been rendered unwholesome by the quantity of animal remains which had been introduced. The manner in which this was effected was singularly easy. The wells which supplied the houses above with water were sunk below the quarries, and formed, in those excavations, so many round towers. M. de Thury merely opened the masonry of these walls, and luted into the opening the upper half of a broken bottle, with the neck outwards; when fresh air was wanted, it was only necessary to uncork some of these bottles. Channels were made to carry off the water, steps constructed from the lower to the upper excavation, pillars erected in good taste to support the dangerous parts of the roof, and the skulls and bones were built up along the walls.

There are two entrances to the catacombs, the one towards the west, near the barrier d'Enfer, by which visitors are admitted; and the other to the East, near the old road to Orleans, which is appropriated to the workmen and persons attached to the establishment. The staircase descending to the catacombs consists of ninety steps, and, after several windings, leads to the western gallery, which is under, and in a perpendicular line with trees on the western side of the Orleans road. From this gallery several others branch off in different directions. That by which visitors generally pass extends along the works beneath the aqueduct d'Arcueil, and brings them to the gallery du Port Mahon. A soldier, named Decure, who had accompanied marshal Richelieu in his expedition against Minerva, being employed in these quarries, discovered a small excavation, to which he sunk a staircase, and descended there to take his meals, instead of accompanying the other workmen above ground. At his leisure hours, Decure, who had been long a prisoner at the forts of the Port Mahon, employed himself, from 1777 to 1782 in carving a plan of that part. When it was finished, he formed a spacious vestibule, adorned with a kind of Mosaic of black flint. To complete his work, this ingenious man determined to construct a staircase, but, before he had completed it, a mass of stone fell and crushed him so seriously as to occasion his death. The following inscription, upon a table of black marble, is placed in the gallery du Port Mahon:—

Cet ouvrage fut commence en 1777,
Par Decure, dit Beauséjour de Sa Majesté,
et fini en 1782.

Decure's stone table and benches are still preserved in the quarry which he called his saloon. At a short distance from this spot are enormous fragments of stone (Logan-stones) so nicely balanced, on a base hardly exceeding a point, that they rock with every blast, and seem to threaten the beholder. About a hundred yards from the gallery du Port Mahon, we fall again into the road of the catacombs. On the right side is a pillar formed of dry stones, entirely covered with incrustations of grey and yellow calcareous matter, and 100 yards further on is the vestibule of the catacombs. It is of an octagonal form. On the sides of the door are two stone benches, and two pillars of the Tuscan order. The vestibule opens into a long gallery, lined with bones from the floor to the roof. The arm, leg, and thigh bones are in front, closely and regularly piled together, and their uniformity is relieved by three rows of skulls at equal distances. Behind these are thrown the smaller bones. This gallery conducts to several rooms, resembling chapels, lined with bones variously arranged; and in the centre, or in niches of the walls, are vases and altars some of which are formed of bones, and others are ornamented with skulls of different sizes. Some altars are of an antique form, and composed of the solid rock.

Among the ornaments is a fountain, in which four golden fish are imprisoned. They appear to have grown in this unnatural situation; three of them have retained their brilliant color, but some spots have appeared upon the four, which render it probable that exhalation from light may produce, though more slowly, the same effect upon them that it does upon vegetables. The spring which rises here was discovered by the workmen; the basin was made for their use, and a subterranean aqueduct carries off the waters.

The different parts of the catacombs are named, with strange incongruity, from the author of the purport of the inscription which is placed there. Thus, there is the Crypta de la Verite, the Crypta de la Mort et de l'Eternite, and the Crypta de Neant, the Allee de Job, &c.

There are different calculations as to the number of bones collected in the catacombs. It is, however, certain that they contain the remains of at least 3,000,000 of human beings.

An Indignity.—A medical man who had just returned from setting the broken leg of an Arab, gave the following anecdote:—"The patient, said the doctor, complained more of the accident which had befallen him than I thought becoming one of his tribe. This I remarked to him, and his answer was truly amusing. 'Do not think, doctor, I should have uttered one word of complaint if my own highbred colt, in a playful kick, had broke both my legs; but to have a bone broken by the brute of a jackass, is too bad, and I will complain.'"
—Sketches of Persia.

FROM THE ATHENÆUM.

THE LOST BRIDE.

In vain the solemn shades
No earthly light pervades,
Shrouds thy sad fate from every human eye;
Fancy her aid intrudes,
The awful pall removes,
And bids my shuddering soul the fatal truth descry.

MRS LAWRENCE.

BENEATH the Indian waters,
Where rocks of coral sleep,
One of the West's bright daughters
Is gone down to the deep.
For isles beyond the billow
She sailed in bridal glee,
And now she makes her pillow
In cold caves of the sea.

The couch where she reposes
Is many a monster's lair;
And, for wreaths of summer roses,
The sea-weed wraps her hair!
Bright coral rocks are round her,
And where she sleeps are pearls;
But her mother, if she found her,
Would not know her raven curls.

Now other ships glide over,
Where one as strong went down,
Bearing many a youthful rover,
Who feared no tempest's frown;
With gold and glad hearts laden,
A thousand barks may be,
Yet bear no brighter maiden
Than the one deep in the sea!

MISS JEWSELY.

FROM THE UNITED SERVICE JOURNAL.

THE SAILOR'S SONG.

My bounding bark! I fly to thee!
I'm wearied of the peopled shore!
I long to hail the swelling sea,
My home of liberty once more!
A sailor's life of reckless glee,
That only is the life for me!

I was not born for lighted halls,
Or the gay revel's palling sound;—
My music is, when OCEAN calls,
And echoing rocks the cry resound!
The gaudy sailor's life of glee,
That only is the life for me!

I was not born for fashion's slave,
Or the dull city's drudging strife;
Be mine, the spirit's stirring wave,
And hardy sailor's careless life;
A life of freedom on the sea—
That only is the life for me!

MRS. CORNWELL BARON WILSON.

DISSOLUTION OF THE LONG PARLIAMENT.—At length Cromwell fixed on his plan to procure the dissolution of Parliament, and to vest, for a time, the sovereign authority in a council of forty persons, with himself at their head. It was his wish to effect this quietly by the votes of the Parliament—his resolution to effect it by open force, if such votes were refused. Several meetings were held by the officers and members, at the lodgings of the lord-general, in Whitehall. St John and a few others gave their assent: the rest, under the guidance of Whitelock and Widdington, declared that the dissolution would be dangerous, and the establishment of the proposed council unwarrantable. In the meantime, the house resumed the consideration of the new representative body; and several qualifications were voted, to all of which the officers raised objections, but chiefly to the "admission of members," a project to strengthen the government by the introduction of the Presbyterian interest. "Never," said Cromwell, "shall any of that judgment who have deserted the good cause be admitted to power." On the last meeting, held on the 19th of April, all these points were long and warmly debated. Some of the officers declared that the Parliament must be dissolved 'one way or other,' but the general checked their indiscretion and precipitancy; and the assembly