

In Aladdin's Cave—at Kalk Bay.

"In a few moments we were standing in a great natural hall fashioned after the style of a cathedral aisle. High above our heads soared the vaulted roof, with dark shadows lurking in a hundred corners as the rays of light from the torch flashed over Nature's marvellous hand-work. . . . Heavens! What's that! Was it some horrible thing about to drop on me from above, some vampire, some poisonous creature from the darkness?"

I FIND that a new kind of foot and mouth disease has broken out at the Cape. It is highly infectious, though it does not seem to affect very elderly people. Human beings are the "carriers." It is to be caught in offices, stores, on the trains and trams, and even by the seaside.

It is true that certain people of a dull, phlegmatic temperament do not appear to be affected by the attack of the peculiar germs, but persons of a lively, adventurous disposition fall ready victims and get the disease in rather a bad form. And these in turn become "carriers."

I caught the infection down at Fish Hoek, of all places. If there is a place in all the wide world where there are mightier winds, winds strong enough to blow miniature rocks through the

I KNEW it, too. My word! It was hot climbing at 10 o'clock on a warm summer's day. How we slipped and floundered in that reedy grass! How we puffed in clambering over the rocks! True, there were the glorious Watsonias under our eyes, the lovely red and cream Erica heath, the blue agapanthus, blooms overshadowed by trees. Then to get site little blue flowers waving in the breeze. Looking back there were the glorious views. Clear as crystal was the air. Our lungs took in great draughts of it, took it in rather suddenly at times, too. Wonderfully exhilarating, though, was the view of the broad expanse of sea, the broken coast-line, and peaceful-looking Fish Hoek, with its ambitious "avenues"

passing the time. But there are persons who can no more emulate the worm than they can the swallow. The side chamber off the main hall has been named by somebody the "Lady's Chapel," and it has been very well named, too. But my lady would certainly not live there in good health very long, unless she could get in a continuous supply of oxygen. The atmosphere was very reminiscent of a "dead end" in a Kimberley diamond mine.

Pushing on toward the exit at the other side of the mountain we found the roof getting nearer and nearer to our heads until at length it was necessary to stoop low. Then from stooping we came to crawling, and after a bit of crawling I went on strike.

"Come on," said our guide who was crawling on ahead; "let's go right through now."

"What for?" I asked, as I wriggled back from under those great rock masses into a place where I could at least sit up, and breathe like a respectable citizen!

But the third member of the party passed puffing along slowly and laboriously, but with grim determination to follow the guide right on so far as he could at any rate.

"I'll see what it's like further in," he said as he disappeared. Crawling up to the hole I looked in. I could see the leader far ahead down the tunnel as a dark lumbering something, and the occasional flicker of the candle. Behind him there was a rear view of something bulky wriggling a slow way along. Then both forms disappeared.

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I WRIGGLED back to sit and meditate until they came back in a fairly roomy place, where the roof was about eight feet from the floor, and the walls about a dozen feet or so apart. That

a glimmer of light. Then as I looked there appeared a lumbering form. It might be a baboon; it might be a wild pig. Then I heard the authentic note of the human voice.

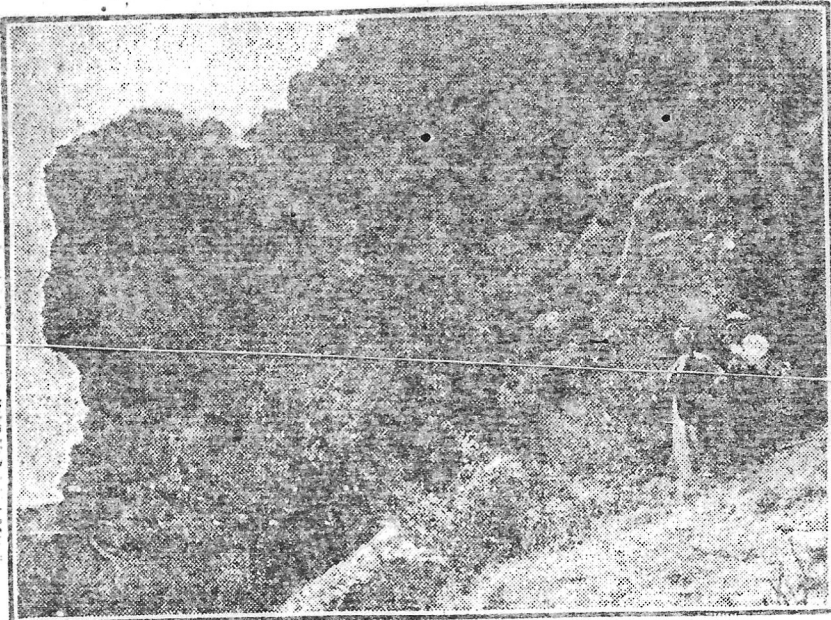
In a few moments there emerged two dirty dishevelled, puffing, but exceedingly happy human beings who had achieved the distinction of getting right through the mountain out into the sunshine. They are of the stuff, I presume, that the Columbuses, the Scotts, the Livingstones, are made.

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THEN we pattered about for for a while running, our eyes over the faces of the great rocks, curiously blackened as though by the smoke of ten thousand fires, though the cause is probably a mineral one, prying into the side chambers, examining wonderful little stone cupboards and recesses and ledges. Fantastic in the extreme are some of the rock formations, due apparently to the action of water.

Thick sand covers the floor in most places—sea sand, somebody said it was, but roof sand would be nearer the mark, since it is due to the eroding action of water on the roof. With a toy spade we dug down at one place in the hope of finding relics of another age, such as bones, or trifles like uncut diamonds, but nothing rewarded our toil.

Flashing the torch in one place I was amazed to see a big spider's web, with an ordinary daddy long-legs spider on it. How in the world did it get flies to eat in this dark place? The mystery was explained when we found another web and another spider with a little worm in its clutches. While examining these webs up popped a tiny frog. Puzzle: How did the spiders get in there? Do they get a decent living on worms? Dr. Gilchrist has examined certain of the specimens found in the cave, and I



from S.A. Crowe
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At the entrance of "Aladdin's Cave."

air at the rate of a mile a minute, and to clear out generating germs, I have yet to learn about it. And yet it was at breezy, blustering, blasty, bracing Fish Hoek that I caught it.

It was in this wise. I was sitting one day on a pleasant stoep facing the mountain which overlooks Clovelly and Fish Hoek, discussing all sorts of people and things on the earth, as is the manner of men when lounging on a stoep. Suddenly the question was fired at me, "Have you been up to the cave?"

"The cave, what cave?" I made reply, as in my time I have been in a few caves, in fact. I have slept in caves, tried and ate snout crops in them, written newspaper articles in them, chased and killed certain active, ubiquitous little insects in them; but far, far away from Cape Town and much nearer the blue sky by many thousands of feet than any cave can possibly be at the Cape.

"Why, Aladdin's Cave up there"—this with a wave of the hand in the direction of the mountain that frowned upon us.

"Didn't know there was one up there. What's it like?"

"Oh, it's a remarkable place. I was up here the other day, and though I didn't go right through, I was very much astonished with what I saw, as I had no idea we had such a place so near. I'm going up again some time, too. It's really worth doing, as the main passage runs right into the mountain for over 600 feet, and in one place there is a great hall, like a cathedral aisle, nearly 50ft. high. The rocks are wonderfully shaped, with all kinds of weird and conical formations, and one can spend a long time pottering about seeing all sorts of funny things."

so plainly marked, the white sand of the shore and the deep blue of the bay.

With the help of the water bottle we managed to get up under the great rock masses where the cave is situated, about three hours after leaving Fish Hoek. I defy anybody to find the opening through without the assistance of a person who knows where it is. For one thing, it isn't big enough for a man of generous proportions to get through, and for another it is a little way up a cleft which is ever shadowed by trees. Then to get inside you have to drop down through a hole, going through a very creditable acrobatic performance in doing it. And it is a most uninviting prospect. You might peer in and decide instantly there was nothing worth going in to see. But things are not what they seem, especially in caves.

Our guide had been there before. He knew the way. He knew how to smash an empty bottle so as to make use of the neck turned upside down for a candlestick with the side of the bottle to serve as a wind break for the flame. A distinct achievement is this clever and cheap invention for cave exploration. I pass on the tip to future generations of caveitors.

I had an electric torch as well. The candle I found was better for general use, and the torch was useful for special use—examining rock faces, looking down holes, chasing tarentulas, inspecting frogs, and so on.

Immediately inside there is plenty of elbow room, but there is a distinct "Two-penny Tube" atmosphere. It smells earthy, cavey, underground, but not unpleasant. Going in on a hot day is very much like paying a visit to a cold storage chamber.

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The wonderful view of Fish Hoek which is to be seen from the cave mouth.

tunnel remember is about 60 yards long. You have to crawl along it, with the great rock roof a few inches above your back. You can't stand up. You can't sit up. You can lie down if you like. Progression is only possible by use of hands and knees, and one hand remember holds a precious candle. You can sit at the beginning of this tunnel and imagine all sorts of wonderful things. What would you do now when 30 yards in you put your hand on a fat puff adder? Supposing your companion behind had a heart attack? What if a rock dropped down in front of you and another did likewise further

understand there is very little difference in them from similar specimens found outside. But there might be some very interesting digging done with appropriate tools; the place must be a geologist's paradise. For the average person it is of extraordinary interest, though it is hardly a place to go rambling about in on your own. Plenty of candles are necessary for a lengthy visit, rough clothing and a pair of boots with fairly thick soles.

From Kalk Bay it is an easy hour's walk up to the entrance for even a person of mature years. Some persons do it in a little over half an hour. A couple of hours can be spent in the

and one can spend a long time pottering about seeing all sorts of funny things."

I was at this stage I was conscious of the first attack of the germs of the disease. I was distinctly aware of the first symptoms. These were a quickening of the pulse, a pricking up of the ears, a slightly nervous motion of the feet, and a very perceptible stimulating of the imagination.

The disease, I may state, is Cave-itis. It is spread by the mouth and it affects the feet very speedily. Therefore it is a distinct form of foot-and-mouth disease.

That it is spreading rapidly is plain from the numbers of people seen toiling up the mountain side from Haik Bay, especially at week ends. It is said that those who have caught the malady very badly are determined to find new caves, and they may be seen poking behind rocks high up under the great turreted masses of sandstone, peering into cavities, and acting generally after the peculiar manner of afflicted persons whose actions are always inexplicable to the average intellect. True it is that there are rather alarming prophecies going about to the effect that some of these adventurous mortals may make a rather hurried exit out of life by dropping down a hole a thousand feet or so in depth, since nobody really knows what queer things lurk in some of the dark chambers of the mountain side into which ventures are being made. Should one or two persons make the rapid descent to sea-level they are hardly likely to return to give us the benefit of their discoveries!

In due course the disease had its way with me, and worked its will. The incubation period was about two days only. On the third day of the attack I found myself strudging along the Fish Hook road towards Obvelly. Two others similarly afflicted trudged with me.

"How far is it up there?" I asked. "Not far," was the easy reply. "It will take us about an hour perhaps."

I had my doubts, grave doubts, as to walk a couple of miles and then climb pretty well straight up a stiff mountain side for over 1,500 feet, through bush and long, tough grass and over rocks, promised to absorb far more than an hour. My informant was an optimist of an exuberant type. But I forgave him before we had reached the top, because he had thoughtfully brought a water bottle.

WITH candle in hand, then, we trudged along in single file through a narrow passage, dripping with water, with a thin stream of water under our feet. "Splash, splash." "Splash, splash." "Swish swash" went our feet and every sound was sharpened to an extraordinary intensity in the still deeps. The voice boomed back from the rocky walls in a hollow roar. Like Dante, we followed the guide down the dark and devious way.

Through and beyond the corridor passage the cave opens out, and there is plenty of room to scramble over the great stones and up into the main passage. Here on a slab of rock we found the "Visitors' Book." The first entry is that of George Stuart Findlay. With becoming gravity we added our names to the list, though we had a good laugh on finding that book and pencil there.

In a few moments we were standing in a great natural hall fashioned after the style of a cathedral aisle. High above our heads soared the vaulted roof, with dark shadows lurking in a hundred corners as the rays of light from the torch flashed over Nature's marvellous handiwork.

Wonderfully impressive is it to find such a place in the heart of the mountain. Very easy it is to people the great chamber with dusky figures belonging to another race and another age gathered there for mystic rites. She-who-must-be-obeyed might here have invoked the aid of the gods, as on the great slab of rock, some sacrifice was being offered up. What a story Rider Haggard could make out of a visit to such a place! "It's distinctly creepy," as one said.

Beyond this hall there is a bit of easy scrambling to be done over some big boulders, and at one place there is a hole into which it would be rather easy to drop. Circumspection is required to getting round and beyond it.

THEN there are various side chambers. Into some of these it is only possible to get by squeezing through holes, and for some people it would be a pretty tight squeeze, too. With a candle in one hand and only one hand free to grip the rock or steady the body it requires a mild feat in contortion to struggle in and then struggle out. Some places can only be seen by crawling into them, and crawling pretty flat, or making it a wriggle. For those who like that kind of thing it's a very pleasant way of

behind had a heart attack? What if a rock dropped down in front of you and another did likewise further back? Suppose a baboon were coming and you met him while making your tummy advance? All sorts of delightful contingencies occur to one in the gloom of those cavernous depths.

That, as I have said, and meditated. I was not enamoured of that crawl. I sat quite a long time. In fact, I began to wonder whether my candle would last out. I had an electric torch, it is true, but the battery was not new, and that light might be quenched at any moment. I resolved to put out the candle, and thus save it until my companions returned.

Be the sensation when I put that light out! Talk about black darkness, Egyptian night and Stygian gloom! It was a veritable pall. I passed my hand and then a piece of white paper in front of my nose, but not the faintest indication did my eyes give that there was anything near them.

HERE I was then, quite alone, sitting with arms resting on drawn-up knees in that pall of darkness. It wasn't exactly exhilarating. In fact, to be quite candid—it was a bit creepy. Marvellous how the imagination works overtime amid such conditions. Then without any warning there was a sudden swish just behind me. Did I jump? I did, indeed. What had happened was this: A big water-droplet had fallen from the roof. But I lifted up after that.

Then my eye caught a movement of something on the roof. Heavens! What's that! Was it some horrible thing about to drop on me from above, some vampire, some poisonous creature of the darkness. Hastily I rose up. From a respectable distance I turned my torch on the moving object. It was revealed as a bat. And then I saw other bats. Many of them were hanging by their toe nails, and some of them had been hanging over my head all the time. Ugh!

What had happened to my two companions I now began to wonder. I listened intently, but could hear nothing of a struggle with a baboon. I had heard the sound of falling rocks. Could I find any way out if they were unable to get back? I had my doubts. Twenty minutes had gone, there alone with the bats and the water-drops. A couple of minutes later I heard faint sound from down the tunnel, seeing in I saw far in

person of mature years. Some persons do it in a little over half an hour. A couple of hours can be spent in the cave. Such a place is a valuable addition to the attractions of the Cape. The Publicity Association, however, does not seem to have taken note of the fact in any of its publications.

W. E.