

"We had scarcely passed these small subterraneous houses, when I perceived a number of large wheels, on which on week days those human moles, the inhabitants of the cavern, made ropes.

"I fancied I saw the wheel of Ixion, and the incessant labor of the Danaides.

"The opening through which the light came, seemed, as we descended, every moment to become less and less, and the darkness at every step to increase, till at length only a few rays appeared, as if darting through a crevice, and just tinged the small clouds of smoke which at dusk raised themselves to the mouth of the cavern.

"This gradual increase of darkness awakens in a contemplative mind a soft melancholy. As you go down the gentle descent of the cavern, you can hardly help fancying the moment is come when you are about to bid a final farewell to the abodes of mortals.

"At length the great cavern in the rock closed itself in the same manner as heaven and earth seem to join in the horizon. We then approached a little door, where an old woman came out of one of the huts, and brought two candles, of which we each took one.

"My guide now opened the door, which completely shut out the faint glimmering of daylight, which till then it was still possible to perceive, and led us to the inmost centre of this dreary temple of old Chaos and Night, as if till now we had been traversing the outer coasts of their dominions. The rock was here so low that we were obliged to stoop very much for some few steps, in order to get through; but how great was my astonishment, when we had passed this narrow passage, and again stood upright, at once to perceive, as well as the feeble light of the candles would permit, the amazing length, breadth, and height of the cavern, compared to which, the monstrous opening through which we had already passed was nothing.

"After we had wandered here more than an hour, as beneath a dark and dusky sky, on a level sandy soil, the rock gradually lowered itself and we suddenly found ourselves on the edge of a broad river, which from the glimmering of our candles amid the total darkness, suggested a variety of interesting reflections. To the side of this river a small boat was moored, with some straw in its bottom. Into this vehicle my guide desired me to stop, and lay myself down in it quite flat, because, as he said, towards the middle of the river the rock would almost touch the water.

"When I had laid myself down as directed, he himself jumped into the water, and drew the boat after him. All around us was one still, solemn, and deadly silence; and as the boat advanced, the rock seemed to stoop, and come nearer to us, till at length it nearly touched my face; and, as I lay, I could hardly hold the candle upright. I seemed to myself to be in a coffin rather than in a boat, as I had no room to stir hand or foot till we had passed this frightful strait, and the rock rose on the other side, where my guide once more landed me ashore.

"The cavern was now become all at once broad and high, and then suddenly it was again low and narrow. I observed on both sides as we passed along, a prodigious number of great and small petrified plants and animals; but these we could not examine, unless we had been disposed to spend some days in the cavern.

"And thus we arrived at the opposite side, at the second river or stream, which, however, was not so broad as the first, as one may see across it to the other side: over this stream my guide carried me on his shoulders, because there was here no boat to ferry us.

"From thence we only went a few steps farther, when we came to a very small piece of water, which extended itself lengthways, and led us to the end of the cavern.

"The path along the edge of this water was wet and slippery, and sometimes so very narrow that I could hardly set one foot before the other.

"Notwithstanding, I wandered with pleasure on this subterraneous shore, and was regaling myself with the interesting contemplation of all these various wonderful objects, in this land of darkness, and shadow of death,—when, all at once, something like music at a distance sounded in my ears. I instantly stopped, full of astonishment, and eagerly asked my guide what this meant. He answered,

"Only have patience, and you shall soon see." But as we advanced, the sounds of harmony seemed to die away, the noise became weaker, and at length it appeared to dwindle into a gentle lulling or hum, like distant drops or falling rain.

"It is not difficult to imagine how great was my wonder, when ere long I actually saw and felt a violent shower of rain fall from the rock as from a thick cloud, threatening to extinguish our candles, and leave us in entire darkness. It was this that had caused the melancholy sound which I had heard at a distance, the soft notes of which had been assisted by the distant echo.

"To this shower which fell from the ceiling or roof of the cavern through the veins of the rock, the inhabitants had given the name of a mizzling rain.

"We continued our march along the sides of the water, and often saw on its banks large apertures of the rock, which seemed to be new or sulminate caverns, all of which we passed without looking into. At length my guide prepared me for one of the finest sights we had yet beheld, and which was soon to burst on our view.

"We had gone but a few paces farther, when we entered what might easily be taken for a majestic temple, with lofty arches, supported by beautiful pillars, formed by the plastic hand of some ingenious artist.

"This subterraneous temple, in the structure of which no human hand had borne a part, appeared to me at that moment to surpass all the most stupendous buildings I had ever seen, in point of regularity, magnificence, and beauty.

"Deeply impressed with awe and reverence at this grand display of the Creator's works, my mind became insensibly solemnized; and I felt that it became me silently to adore the Author of all, and acknowledge the hand of the divine Architect.

GEN. XXIV. 2, 3.

EASTERN MANNER OF SWEARING.

Mr. Bruce informs us, that in his passage up the Nile, at a place called Shekh Ammer, the people, after joining hands, repeated a prayer, in which they invoked curses upon themselves and their children, if ever they lifted their hands against him in the field, the desert, or the river; and bound themselves to protect him, or his, who should fly to them for refuge, even at the risk of their own lives, their families and their fortunes. This manner of joining hands may cast some light upon Prov. x. 21, and 2 Kings, x. 15. It appears that Abraham's ancient manner of swearing, had been to lift up his hand unto the Lord, as he informs the King of Sodom, Gen. xiv. 22. And thus in Homer we read of Agamemnon,

To all the Gods his sceptre he uplifts.

But when the Lord had covenanted with Abraham, and enjoined circumcision as the proper sign and seal of that covenant, then the mode of swearing appears to have been altered; thence, when his servant would swear to be faithful to his master's orders, he is to put his hand under his master's thigh, and swear by the covenant of circumcision: this is the manner in which Joseph swore to meet the wishes of his father Israel, chap. xlvii. 29. Some suppose that this ceremony had some relation to their faith in the promise of God, to bless all the nations of the earth by means of one that was to descend from Abraham. HARMER.

GEN. XXIV. 16.

ANCIENT WELLS AND PITCHERS.

It appears from various authority, that some of the wells in the east were furnished with a slight of steps down to the water, which appears to be the case with the well before us. There are wells in Persia and Arabia in the driest places, and above all in the Indies, with troughs and basins of stones by the side of them. It is manifest that this well had something of this kind, as also the Arabian well, to which the daughters of Jethro resorted. Ex. ii. 16.

Sir J. Chardin says that in Arabia, and other places, they cover their wells, lest the sand, which is much agitated by the winds, should stop them up. So we find Gen. xxiv. 1. that they gathered their flocks together before they opened the well, and having drawn as much water as was necessary,

they covered it up again immediately. He says he has known the Easterns lock up their wells or cisterns, when water has been scarce.

Niobuhr informs us that some of the wells are an hundred and sixty feet deep, dug out in sloping ground. According to Thevenot, the people are obliged to carry lines and leathern buckets with them, to draw water; and with these the merchants, who travel in caravans, are generally furnished. This reminds us of the language of the woman of Samaria to our Lord, Sir thou hast nothing to draw with and the well is deep.—John iv. 11. Homer mentions the custom of women being employed in drawing water among the Phœaciens, and Læstrygians. Dr. Shaw says, the Moorish women in Barbary tie their sucking children behind them, and travel with their pit-bore or goatskins, two or three miles, to get water. This custom prevails in ancient Greece, and in other places.

The pitcher was a vessel much like our jars, and made of earth, which the Eastern women used to carry on their shoulder; yet that which was given to Hagar was probably a leathern bottle, or vessel made of a skin. HARMER.

GEN. XXIV. 22.

EASTERN ORNAMENTS.

It appears from Sir I. Chardin, that the Asiatic females wore the most cumbersome ornaments. Some of their ear-rings were extremely large, made of several kinds of metal, wood, and horn, according to the quality of the people, and ornamented with different sorts of weighty pendants, which widen the hole of the ear to an amazing size. Some of those rings are ornamented with figures or charms, which, the Indians say, are preservatives against enchantment. Perhaps the ear-rings, which Jacob buried with the strange gods of his family, were of this description. Gen. xxxv. 4. The bracelets put upon Rebecca weighed about five ounces; but Chardin says, he has seen them so ponderous, as to resemble manacles rather than bracelets. The females wear so many of them, as to cover the arm from the wrist to the elbow. Poor people have their ornaments of glass or horn. These are their riches, which they rarely remove from their bodies.

Chardin, who had large concerns in the jewel way, says, it was common for the Eastern females to wear a gold ring in the left nostril, which was bored low in the middle. This ring was commonly ornamented with two pearls, and a ruby between. That gentleman supposes, that the ring spoken of, v. 47. was not an ornament for the forehead, as we read, Ezek. xvi. 12. but that it should have been translated, I put the ring on her nose. They wore only one, and hence but one is mentioned. Harmer is of opinion, that certain passages in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the Proverbs, should be understood accordingly. Mungo Park says, that the gold about an African lady of consequence, in full dress, may be worth from fifty to eighty pounds sterling. Men as well as women, wear ornaments in their ears. Exod. xxxii. 2. Judges, viii. 24. HARMER.

GEN. XXIV. 65.

VEILS USED BY FEMALES IN THE EAST.

This was the ceremony of presenting a bride to her intended husband. Dr. Pussel gives us an account of a Maronite wedding, in which the bride's veil differed from veils in common, she being veiled all over, and that with red gauze. Rebecca's veil was doubtless appropriate to that solemnity, in which she was probably presented to Isaac, in form, by her nurse and the other female attendants.—Harmer. Rebecca's covering herself may be considered as an expression of virgin modesty and reverence.

Rooks were formerly so scarce and dear as to be beyond the rich of common people. A small library cost a great estate. The Obachtiss of Arjou paid for a copy of the homilies of Athanasius, two hundred sheep, five quarters of wheat; and the same quantity of rye and millet.

The want of a taste for reading, has long since brought the people into vain and stultous company, and their tedious leisure hours