THE MUSHROOM-CAVES OF PARIS

(Edward Charles, in the Wide World.)

With most cities life begins at the ground floor (cellars, sewers and electric tubes always excepted) and ends at the top story, but in Paris, while business is being profitably conducted in the bright sunshine of the loftiest story, it is also being as profitably pursued in the darkness of the depths below, far beneath even the sewers and the famous Metropolitan Railway of which the Parisians are so proud. For Paris is honey-combed with subterranean vaults and passages. It is literally built upon columns and walls, and if one fine morning the world awoke to learn that the bottom had fallen out of the Gay Capital and it had crumpled up like a house of cards it would be no surprising thing to those familiar with the underground world of Paris. It would seem as though the former inhabitants had devoted their efforts to hewing out a place wherein they might seek refuge in case of dire necessity, for, though few are aware of the fact, the entire

'CHAMPIGNONNISTES" AT WORK.

population of Paris could hide itself beneath the city.

To build the city we know so well to-day past generations delved and dug beneath it for the coveted stone. What then were quarries have now become caves, portions of which have been converted into catacombs and contain the bones of the dead, while others are used for the very mundane purpose of growing mushrooms. The mushroom is a comestible particularly favored by the French. Wagon loads from near and far find their way into the central markets of the city every day in the year, and the annual consumption by the Parisians of this vegetable represent a value of over $1,250,000. Both beneath the city itself and outside it, these strange mushroom caves extend for miles in all directions; and in them hundreds of men, who often never see daylight from morn till eve, pass their lives in cultivating the mushroom.

"I was told that I should find these "under-boulevards" of the great city well worthy of a visit, and I accepted the offer of an influential friend to obtain permission for myself and a photographer to descend into the bowels of the earth and learn something of the art of underground mushroom growing. We departed one fine morning, the photographer and I, for Malakoff, on the outskirts of Paris. We found the mushroom farmer on his farm awaiting us—a well-built, bluff, hearty specimen of French "fermier," M. Burvingt by name. I looked around for signs of caves, but failed to find them, nor did I see any hills in the neighborhood under which they might be. In answer to a question I was informed that they were just 15 metres under our feet.

"This shaft leads right into them," said the farmer, indicating a covered circular hole in the ground I had not hitherto noticed. He pulled the boards away, and I looked down, shuddering, for I looked only into fathomless darkness. How we were to get down puzzled me; how the photographic apparatus was going to fare worried the photographer, and we were both immensely relieved to learn that this shaft was not the entrance, but only the place where they pitched the manure down. I still had hopes of gaining entrance other than by descending a shaft—a gentle slope or something of that sort was what I wanted—and I felt convinced that this would be the case when our guide said we had rather a long walk before us. It proved a good three-quarters of an hour's journey, over fields and down country lanes, ere he stopped suddenly before a small square fence and told us we had reached our destination. And we had been following the line of one of the underground passages all the time.

Opening a gate, the farmer revealed a shaft; my hopes were scattered to the winds. I had never done any ladder-climbing, and I really did not fancy the feat of "monkeying" down a pole, the rungs of which were just short iron bars inserted, none too near one another, on either side, and which swayed to and fro like a bough in the wind.

"I can't see the bottom," said the photographer, somewhat ruefully.

For my part that did not matter so much, I was only anxious not to feel it too suddenly, for there was nothing to break a drop of 45 feet, unless hitting against the sides as one fell might be regarded as breaking it. The first difficulty was to get the photographic apparatus below. Camera-stand, and flash lamps were packed into a basket, which was hooked on to a rope, and away it sped, but quick as the rope went through the hands of the "champignonniste" the camera-stand was

MOUTH OF THE TUNNEL.

was cold, damp, black, and uninviting; let me now add that it was very uncomfortable, for the ceiling above us,—of solid stone—was not more than 3 feet from the floor. If ever there was a time when I have not been proud of my height it was during those two awful hours. We formed a weird and ghostly procession as we moved forward through the inky blackness, the silence broken only by our footsteps as we splashed along through the puddles, the solemn drip, drip of water from the walls and roof, an exclamation now and then from myself as I nearly tripped over one of the mushroom beds, and strange mutterings from the man who was to work the camera.

The famous mushroom-beds were at our feet. We were, in fact, walking in the narrow space between them— a path perhaps a foot in width. They ran along the caves in rows, two against the sides, and a pair down the centre. They seemed to be banks of sand some 2 feet in height, and inclining up from a 2 feet base to a rounded top. The soil was clammy and crumbling to the touch, and inlaid with round white discs, varying in circumference from the dimensions of a quarter to a small-sized saucer—the precious mushrooms.

"Is there much of this?" I asked of the farmer leading us, who seemed prepared to walk on for ever.

"Seven or eight kilometres," he answered unconcernedly.

We had arrived at a bend. How long I had been creeping onwards, bumping now my head and now an arm, stumbling, sprawling and saying things, I know not; but my back ached frightfully, and I appreciated more than ever before the comforts of being a short man.

It seemed we had walked for ages.

"We will take a photograph here," I said, which brought the party to a halt. While the photographer made ready his camera I explanned to our friends the mystery of the flash-lamp, and when he was quite ready gave them the signal to put out their lamps. They did so. The blackness could almost have been cut with a knife, and the stillness was so intense that we could hear each other's regular breathing. Terrible thoughts scurried through my brain. What must it be, I thought to be lost in such a place without a light, without food, or to be in there with an enemy who was familiar with its ramifications? It was a place to lose one's self in, to go mad in, to be murdered in without the world being a jot the wiser. And what was that? Something crawling over my face, here and there and everywhere; something creeping up my arms; something gliding round my neck. Would that lamp never flash? It seemed an age, but was in reality not a second. A blue, blinding glare went up, illumining the space around with such a light as it had never seen before, and showing up plainly the trio of "champignonnistes" crouched down as they worked, and scaring a million flies and spiders and goodness alone knows what other insects and vermin. The light died down and went out, and again the lamps sprang into life and shed their flickering, welcome gleams around.

After securing some other pictures and a very fine accumulation of small flies on our lamps—indeed, the oil-wells were black with them—we gladly sought the upper world again. I had no ambition to explore the caves in their entirety, but only to get my cramped spine once more into its normal position, to sit down and rest in a neighboring inn and gather mushroom knowledge from the lips of the grower himself. Fifty years before, he told me, the caves had been open to the broad light of day. They were the scene of great activity, resounding continually with the explosions of gunpowder, for there men were quarrying the stone that helped to build Paris. Later on they had been abandoned and covered in, to be finally taken over by the cultivators of mushrooms. This is the history of most of the caves which are now used for this purpose, not only in the neighborhood of the capital, but throughout France.

But all are not of the kind I have just described, otherwise I should not have gone myself and prevailed upon the photographer to accompany me to the famous caves of Issyles-Molineaux, owned by champignonniste Sauvageot. I found them, as I had been told I should, to be in decided contrast to those previously visited; as large as the other were small 630 feet in height at least. And there was no ladder to descend one walked straight into the tunnel from the daylight, for it pierced a hill, a chalk hill whence had been quarried thousands of tons of chalk of the quality that makes acquaintance with the tips of billiard cues. The main tunnel, cutting clean into the hill for a distance of not less than 250 yards would have easily admitted a carriage and pair, carrying another vehicle on top. As mushroom caves go it was certainly a handsome one, but just as cold and damp as any other, with a switchback sort of road leading from the entrance to the bottom of the caves. Here there was space for six lines of mushroom beds to wend their irregular ways side by side, as will be seen in our photograph.

There were six of these large galleries, from which numerous others ran off, twisting and winding about to the length of some seven kilometres. Cut in the sides of the passages were numerous little "chapels," some on a level with the ground, others high up in the side of the wall. In all these caves contained some sixty kilometres of fine mushroom-beds; spiders and flies we found there in their millions, the only occupants beyond rats and the cats that are kept there to catch them.

In no case of such dimensions are all the mushroom beds in the same stage of advancement at once. While some thousands of metres are in full bloom, others are not so far advanced, and in some passages the beds are only just being laid down, while in others the work of clearing out old and useless beds is being carried on. Why this is so will be apparent when it is stated that it would take fifty men employed in the caves at Moulineaux eight months to fill them with the 68,000 metres they are capable of accommodating.

Scrupulous cleanliness is an absolute sine qua non ere a new bed can be laid down. The cave must be cleared of the old bed entirely; not a particle of it must be left, for with all the mushroom's aptitude for lightning growing, it is something of a dandy in the vegetable world. There are certain things it does not like: that it prefers death to, in fact, and amongst them may be mentioned dead rats, old iron, and a parasitical insect with a special weakness for the nutritious mushroom. When this insect gets in its deadily work, the farmer has good reason to sigh. Dead rats are frequently found in the caves with dead mushrooms all around them, for the mushroom apparently cannot tolerate dead rats any more than it can rusty horse-shoes or any other rusty pieces of iron. Such things spell loss to the "champignonniste."

Now beds are laid down every five or six months, and as they do not bear until three months have passed, the harvest need be a rich one, for the average cost of a bed ere it shows signs of produce is 2½ francs per metre. First the manure has to be secured, and then, ere it can be used, it has to be prepared, the work taking from three to six weeks. When ready it is carried into the cave or shovelled down a shaft, as occasion requires.

The building of the beds is a peculiar and laborious process. Sitting astride the portion of the bed he has first made the worker gathers armfuls of manure and presses the materials down to an even height in front of him. Thus he is always provided with a seat. Ere the spawn is sown the temperature of the beds must have reached about 12 degrees to 14 degrees Fahr. (No wonder we had been cold in our shirt sleeves) The spawn sown, the manure is covered with sand, and then every two or three days the beds must be liberally watered. At the end of three months the "buttons" poke their heads through, then gradually the beds become covered with white hoods, which, on attaining the required size, are collected for market. Unless, however, a metre yields four kilos of mushrooms at the least, the proprietor of the cave has little occasion to be cheerful, for its creation and care account for an outlay of three francs, while the harvest only fetches a franc per kilo.

Winter is the best season for the "champignonniste." Then M. Sauvageot told me, he sends to market no few than one hundred baskets a day, which means 1,100 kilos, while during the other seasons of the year forty baskets or 440 kilos is the daily output. In the production of this perennial harvest thousands of workmen find employment round Paris alone—men who pass their days in damp and darkness with only spiders and flies to keep them company, and yet seem to experience no evil effects as the result of their strange surroundings.

SAYING A WORD FOR MULE.

Missouri Animal Shown to Have Many Points of Excellence.

In many respects the mule is the noblest beast that has been placed under man's dominion, but unjust ridicule for some unaccountable reason marked the long-suffering brute for its own and by obscuring his many virtues and playing upon his few defects and idiosyncrasies has compelled him since the day he was discovered by Anah in the wilderness to live under the torture of a false and slanderous report. At last, however, he is being restored to his proper position in the social and economic world.

In truth the mule, if he happens to be a Missouri product, is a valuable, beautiful and lovely beast. For general all around purposes, in comparison with the horse, mules are superior. They are easy and cheap to raise, easy to sell and hard to blemish. They go to the market early and bring bigger profits for the time, work and money expended in growing than any other stock. Time and hard work have less effect upon them than upon any other kind of flesh. Disease rarely touches them. Adversity and hard knocks make them stronger and tougher.

A mule does not wither or weaken with age. The process of years simply turns his coltish friskiness to contemplative sedateness, his silvery voice to a raucous roar and his obstreperous heels to the paths of peace. His habits, as they are better understood, are less feared and more appreciated. He is tractable, gentle, sympathetic and very intelligent. When well treated he loves his master, as Sancho, the companion of Don Quixote, and many old negroes in the South have proved.

He eats little and requires no shelter and toils to the bitter end without complaint or fatigue. He quickly understands the whims of his driver and will go and can be guided without whip or rein. He is a dynamo in hide, an engine on hoof—a perfect machine in flesh and blood which rarely gets out of order or temper.—Kansas City Journal.

Muscle Comes, Mustache Goes.

Tucked away in an uptown side street under the shadow of a towering hotel is an athletic trainer who gets from all his clients the liberal sum of $50 a week to keep them in good physical condition. They are a credit to him and look as if his services were worth the money. They grow strong as a matter of course, the fat are reduced in bulk and the thin made plumper. But there is one other peculiarity of their training which it not so much a matter of course. This is the tendency of all the trainer's clients to dispense with their mustaches after they have had a course or two under him. He is the determined enemy of the mustache. He believes it insanitary and a survival of those primitive days in which men's faces were covered with hair.

The trainer talks eloquently of the impossibility of keeping a mustache entirely clean, especially when a man smokes. During the few minutes of daily exercise that his system requires the trainer talks on many subjects. His conversation covers a wide range. But one subject always reappears. He never neglects the unhealthfulness of the mustache. So his patients, if they are to be called that, come to have a certain distaste for the mustache, even if they have worn one for years. When he sees a sign of weakness the trainer sticks to the attack. So toward the end of their training period it generally happens that the mustache disappears. Some patients have withstood the trainer's arguments. But most of them emerge from their course of treatment stronger and with newly shaved upper lips that are consciously stiff after years of seclusion under the sheltering mustache.—New York Sun.

Canada's Trade in Cattle.

The increase in Canadian cattle sent to Great Britain is enormous—from 10,163 in the first four months of 1902 to 27,300 in the first four months this year.

When a boy isn't in mischief, it is because he is being compelled to take time to repent.

OUR BUDGET OF FUN.

HUMOROUS SAYINGS AND DOINGS HERE AND THERE.

Jokes and Jokelets that Are Supposed to Have Been Recently Born—Sayings and Doings that Are Old, Curious and Laughable—The Week's Humor.

"I can't see what you find in me to admire," said the lovelorn youth who had recently blown himself for a $37.50 engagement ring.

"Why," gurgled the fluffy-haired angel of his domestic dreams, "that's just what everybody else says."

And immediately the silence became oppressive.

As Corrected.

Mrs. O'Hoolihan—Pfwhat koind av a job is yez ould man afther hovin' now?

Mrs. McGarigle—Job, is it? Shure an' it be an illigant sittuashun as tillegraph operather he's afther hovin'. It's trav'lin' about diggin' phost holes fer th' coompany he is, d'y moind."

Sure of His Ground.

Wife of New Minister—Now, Davie, you'll have to look after the church better than this or we will have to think about getting a new beadle.

Davie (beadle of long standing, severely)—Mistress Nicholson, we whiles change oor minister, but we never change oor beadle.

He Never Worried.

A lady waited for hours at a wayside station of the Midland Great Western Railway. The train came along and she got in. The hours dragged by, and at each stoppage she asked if it was Sligo. Finally the guard became irritated. "Don't worry, madam; I'll let you know when we reach Sligo." "But I've been nearly all day on my journey." "Well, madam, I've been on this railway three years, and I'm not worrying." "Poor man!" she retorted, "you must have started the next station beyond mine."

His Plea.

"My plea," said the young lawyer, who had just won his first case, "seemed to strongly affect the jury."

"Yes," replied the judge, "I was afraid at one time that you would succeed in getting your client convicted in spite of his innocence."

Not So Reckless.

"Do you take this internally?" asked the customer as he put the bottle in his pocket and took his change.

"Me?" said the druggist's new assistant. "Great Scott, no! I sell it."—Stray Stories.

An Accommodating Stork.

The following order was received a few days ago by a Chicago grocery firm:

"Please ship at once by freight, one bag salt, fourteen lb shuger. The stork brought us a baby last night and box crackers, also one barrel soap. It weighed nine lb.

The Vagaries of Fashion.

Mrs. Commonhen—Don't mind her, my dear. Long skirts are doomed. It will soon be our turn.

Circumstantial Evidence.

Tommy—Was that your mother I saw with you yesterday?

Willie—I guess so; 't any rate she's the one who carries the key to the jam closet at our house.—Boston Transcript.

Vain.

"Did you find the Chinese a vain people?"

"Very. To hear a Chinese brag you could almost believe an American was talking."

Self-Approval.

"Well," said the detective, "there is one thing upon which we may congratulate ourselves in this case."

"Why, you haven't even found an important clew."

"That's just it. We can rest assured that no innocent person is going to suffer."—Washington Star.

Not Reassuring.

"Do you know what precautions the proprietor of this hotel has taken against fire?" asked the nervous old lady as the bellboy escorted her to a room on the fifth floor.

"Sure I do," replied the knowing youth. "De boss has got de joint inshoor'd fer two times de worth uv it. See?"

His Preference.

Magistrate—It will be either $10 or thirty days, Uncle Rastus. You can have your choice.

Uncle Rastus—Ah's much erblige, yo' honnah, an' Ah reckon yo' all had bettah gib me de money, sah.

His Specialty.

Stranger—You have a fine farm here.

Farmer—Right yew air, stranger. I 'low as it be one o' the finest in these parts.

Stranger—What is your best paying crop?

Farmer—Summer boarders.—Chicago News.

Professional Advice.

"Doctor," said the timid patient, "I'm fond of the water, but I don't want to risk taking cold. What shall I do?"

"Take it hot," replied the wise pill compiler. "Two dollars, please."

In the Puppy Class.

He—But I am willing to wait if you will give me some hope.

She—Well, suppose you wait nine days; perhaps your eyes will be open then.

'Twas Ever Thus.

"The world is backward about coming forward with its appreciation," mused the Irish philosopher. "We never think of strewing flowers on a man's grave until after he is dead."

Backed to Win.

She (after the engagement)—Why were you so nervous when you proposed?

He—Oh, I was merely acting a part. I didn't want you to know how sure I was of your answer.

Affluence.

"Rich? Why, she never has to think of the matter of cost at all."

"No?"

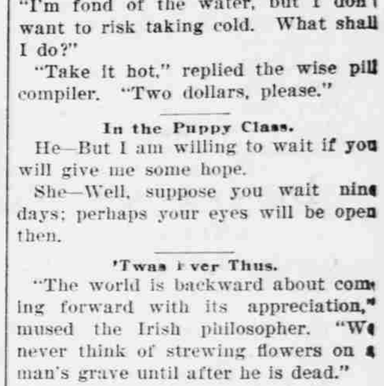
"Not for a moment. She can afford to wear what she likes, even though it is something cheap."

Automobility.

"Steam, eh? Isn't it rather noisy?"

"Oh, no. Except for a slight puffing when it is climbing a very steep hill or running over an extraordinarily large person, quite noiseless."

Reduced Rate.



"Mamma, give me a penny, please, for a glass of lemonade."

"But, dear, if it's only a penny, it can't be good."

"Yes, it is, but they're selling it cheap 'cause a dog fell in it."

No Reciprocity.

Fairy in the pink shirt waist—Reggie boasts that you're his best girl!

Sweet young thing in blue—Maybe I am, but he ain't my best feller by a long shot.

Recognized at Last.

He—But what reason have you for refusing to marry me?

She—Papa objects. He says you are an actor.

He—Give my regards to the old boy and tell him I'm sorry he isn't a newspaper critic.

Force of Habit.

The boss plumber had become a multi-millionaire and was going abroad for his health. On the voyage over a school of whales were sighted and the boss plumber was seen to rub his hands in ecstasies.

"Why is he so happy?" asked a curious tourist.

"He can't help it," whispered the captain. "He imagines each spout is a bursted water pipe, to be repaired by him at his old rates."

From Experience.

"Rudolph, dear, the people next door wish to borrow our lanterns for a lawn fete."

"Don't lend them."

"But they can't hurt the lanterns."

"Oh, you don't know. If you loan them the lanterns they'll want to borrow tables, cloths, knives and dishes. Then as our lawn is larger than theirs they'll want to borrow that. Afterward they'll ask our children to help out as waiters."

Womanlike.

Mrs. Popley—What do you think! Baby spoke her first word to-day!

Mr. Popley—Well, well! And it won't be many years before she'll be having the last word.—Philadelphia Press.

Enough Said.

Nell—So Jack asked permission to kiss you, eh?

Bess—Yes.

Nell—You refused it, of course?

Bess—Certainly.

Nell—What did he say then?

Bess—Nothing. Actions speak louder than words—and Jack is all right as an actor.