

situated beneath an aperture in the rock, which leads to the *Bottomless Pit*. The depth of this black awful precipice cannot be conceived by the most excited imagination. Twisted wreaths of oiled paper, which are lighted and flung down into the chasm, die out before they can reach the bottom. It is said that two runaway negroes, hunted to the death in this gloomy labyrinth by their cruel pursuers, precipitated themselves headlong into the shadowy gulf. A sounding-line of 970 feet has failed to make the bottom.*

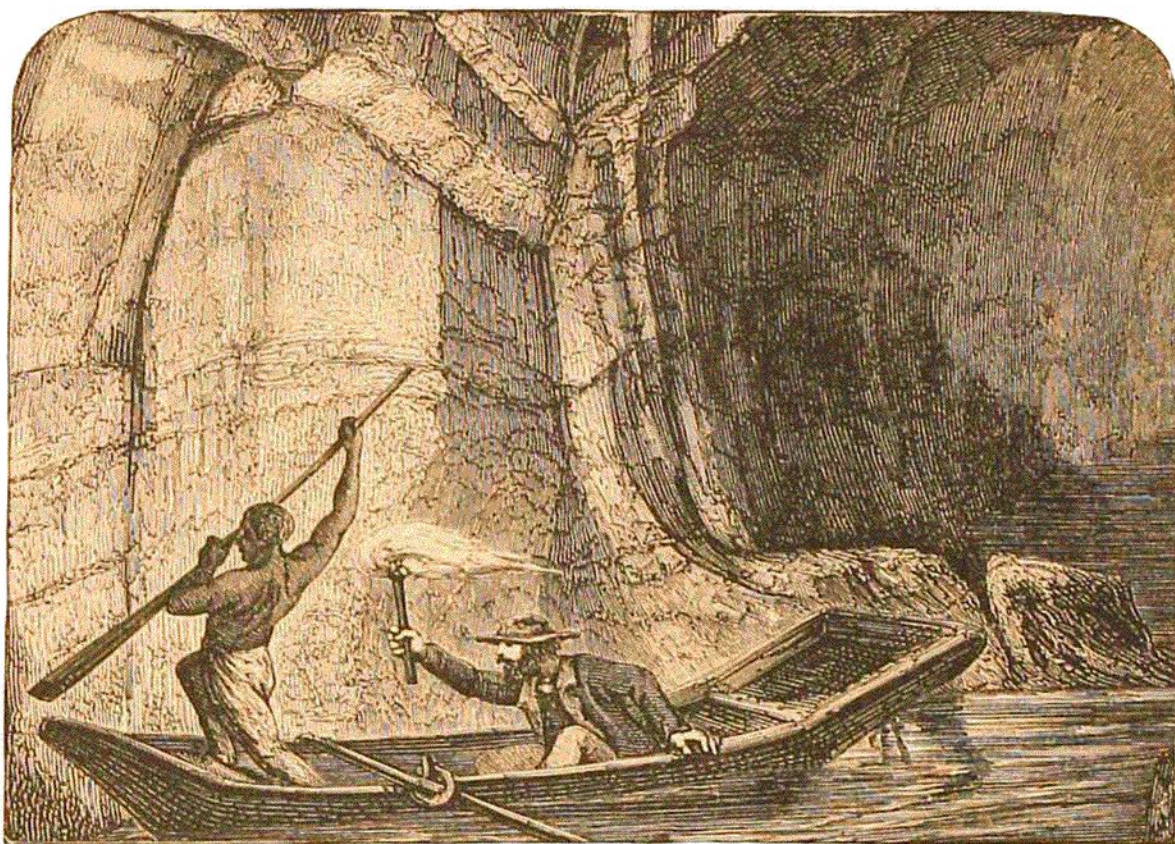


FIG. 170.—THE STYX RIVER, IN THE MAMMOTH CAVE.

Continually ascending and descending, we arrive under the immense *Mammoth Dome*, whose cupola, 425 feet high, is lost in the flickering shadows. A winding pathway leads to a point very near its summit, which consists of a black vault besprinkled with shining crystals: this is known as the *Star Chamber*. Illuminated by a lamp, this cupola, all incrustated with brilliant stalactites, sparkles like the heaven on a summer night. By a skilful management of their

* At Frederickschall, in Sweden, there is a fissure in the granite of so amazing a depth that a stone is a minute and a half or two minutes in falling; equal to a descent of 13,100 to 19,600 yards.