The Animated Skeleton.
A Thrilling Adventure in the Natural History Building.

EDITORS OF THE TECH.:

Gentlemen,—The other day I came across the inclosed MSS. and pictures, and thinking that they might be of interest to your readers, I inclose them to you. The story was written in 1876, which will explain any apparent discrepancy of dates. Hoping that this may be of use to you, I remain, Respectfully yours, W. J. S.

A FEW days ago I visited the rooms of the Natural History Society, on Back Bay, to while away a few hours of unoccupied time, and to refresh my memory with what I had seen there a few years before.

The day was unusually warm; and having had occasion to walk around the city a great deal, I was more wearied, as the result will show, than I was aware of.

Beginning my examination in the departments devoted to the display of minerals, I noted what was of special value to me in my study of mineralogy, and promised myself another visit, to complete the examination of some fine specimens of historic geology, which my limited time would not afford. The cast of the Australian nugget of gold, glittering with gold-leaf, and resembling an immense, rough dumb-bell, particularly attracted my attention, and I envied the fortunate discoverer who, in one huge mass, acquired a princely fortune.

I passed from room to room, looking at many things casually, but occasionally lingered before some object that was prominent or important in its department. Among the latter, I remember gazing up at the stupendous frame of the razor-back whale till my neck ached; and at the gigantic megatherium in wonder; and at the ponderous vertebra of some fabulous-sized reptile, whose disjointed links wound around the head of the staircase.

Being of a moralizing nature, I remained leaning on my cane for quite a time, musing before the cabinet of human, gorilla, chimpanzee, and other kindred skeletons; and left them with many curious, sad, and fanciful ideas floating through my brain.

Skulls, skulls, skulls, I repeated mentally, as I moved away from the innumerable array in several cases,—ancient Peruvian, Egyptian, Negro, Indian, with that of an occasional private famous criminal or notorious character, labeled for the information of the curious inquirer.

At about half-past four I reached the last room, after systematically loitering from one to another, and from gallery to gallery. I found myself in a little corner room at the top of the building. I was tired, and sat down to rest for a few minutes, knowing that the usual time for closing the museum was five o'clock. I discovered as my vis-a-vis, after seating myself comfortably, a life-like white bear, whose eyes glared directly into mine.

I wiped the rills of perspiration from my over-heated face and neck, and allowed my thoughts, filled with the caravan of objects I had seen, to wander idly through my brain,—skeletons, skulls, fishes, ores, birds, insects, reptiles, stomachs, bottled infants, brains, spinal-cords, etc. While these, like an unnoticed throng on a public street, wended their silent way, the eyes of the polar bear and the long, flat back of the black seal occupied my more immediate attention. How I came to notice so specially those eyes I shall never know; but the more I looked the more I became aware that they were searching my very soul with their wonderful, scrutinizing power. The gleam of cold ice-fields and frozen mountains was in them; and the iridescent glitter of icebergs flashed at me from their angry and hungry depths. I shuddered. Cold beads of perspiration rolled down my face. A strange hum filled my ears, like the washing of heavy Arctic seas, in the distance, mingled with the crunching of field-ice. I had heard it often in the bitter experience of two winters in the North with an exploring expedition. A dreamy terror spread through my veins. I fainted, and my head fell back against the cabinet of birds and small animals.

When I again appeared to become conscious, I arose, glanced furtively at the fascinating orbs of the polar monster, and escaped from the room. It was rather dim, and the extreme silence alarmed me, for I feared that I had remained