

We step out of the cage, and, each provided with a safety lantern of the latest approved pattern, stand silently watching the shaft guardsman give the signal for the cage to ascend for the remaining members of the party. The hale fellow, in conscious pride of his coal-blackened face, meets our gaze of curiosity with unconcern and coolly opens his lantern to light his pipe. An exclamation of alarm at this proceeding is quieted by the assurance that there have never been any explosions down here for the reason that there are no gases to explode.

It is an *eerie* place, this, with the rapid circulation of the air striking on your cheek and your ears filled with the noise of many waters,—almost you can fancy yourself in the open fields at night within hearing distance of countless mountain rivulets—how they purl and rush and leap in the mysterious depths of all these gloomy caverns opening from the entrance to the shaft.

... There is the cage down again. Our friends step out. A few moments ago we were speaking with them in the fields above; now they are here, deep down, looking strange and grim in the feeble light, and swinging their lanterns with ours to dissipate the darkness.

“Now, Davy, be sure you wait till we get back.”

A broad grin spreads across the blackened face of the guardsman, and we begin our exploration.

Which way shall we go? Down here, there are indeed hills and streams and wildering labyrinths. Before descending, we had a look at a map of the mine and know full well how intricate they are. Once a party lost themselves and wandered for hours and hours in hopeless search for exit: so we must be wary and follow our guides.

Mr. Gilchrist leads off. Erect and eager we follow, the broad Scotchman bringing up the rear to guard against the possibility of our becoming separated. It is straight on and at the full stretch of our statures for a time; but presently the gallery narrows on every side, and as we stoop to avoid discomfort to our heads we become conscious of discomfort at our feet. Our boots are plunging ankle-deep in a thick clayey mud, and we dare not turn to either side to avoid it for we can hear the water rushing in the ditches there; ay, and by our lanterns see it, too.

“Toot, toots! this won’t do; the blacking on our shoes will be ruined.”