

Tales and Sketches.

BURIED ALIVE.

"I wish I were dead!" exclaimed Jack Porter, in an irritable tone.

"Why so?" asked a cheery voice beside him.

"Because I don't see any good in living if I've got to dig in the mines all my days. Some people seem to have all the good things in this world and others nothing but hard work. There's Ruff Hare, a lazy, stupid fellow at school, going off now to travel, with plenty of money to spend, and all the airs of a grand gentleman, just because his father had the luck to buy a bit of land with a rich vein of coal in it; while here I am toilin' and moilin' in the dirt from morning till night, when I might be something or somebody if I had the chance."

"And were selfish enough to leave your mother and sister to take care of themselves. Well, now, suppose, like me, you were blind, and had not seen the sun for twenty years, and could earn only enough to keep soul and body together by slate-pickin' in the Breaker?"

"I couldn't endure such a life, and I don't see how you can always be so cheerful and contented," replied Porter, looking at his companion half-pitifully, half contemptuously, as one lacking the fine nature to feel privations as he did.

"I can hear the birds sing and feel the warm sunshine this bright May morning. I'm not as bad off as poor Jack Fossett, a helpless cripple, on his back, with no end of pains and aches," replied the blind man, in the same cheery voice. "I'll tell you, young man, you better count your marcies, instead of bein' allers complainin', or sometime you'll find you've less to count."

Here the two parted to go to their separate tasks, but Porter went to his work with his heart full of discontent. There were several men digging in the vein of coal beside him. After an hour or two had passed they all noticed a rumbling and crackling which they thought came from the roof, and, fearing that would fall, they began examining it to see if any portion appeared disturbed.

But the noise soon became so violent that they ran into the heading. They had scarcely reached it when the floor of the vein heaved up, opened, and a volume of gas rushed out, filling the whole place.

Porter darted into a passage leading inward from the breast; the other men ran forward, and their lamps set fire to the gas, which instantly caused a terrible explosion. Porter being behind the explosion, which always takes an outward course, was stunned only, and slightly injured by being dashed against the coal.

When he recovered from the shock he was in total darkness, but on relighting his lamp he discovered that a dense wall of rock and coal had been thrown down, and effectually barred his escape to the shaft.

Still he felt quite sure he could find another passage out, and, turning up the tunnel, he walked on for a long distance, over shattered wood work and through narrow stoops, hoping at every turn to see light ahead.

It was a part of the mine he had never explored, it having been worked out and virtually abandoned. To his unspeakable horror, the tunnel he had been following led him to a large cell, from which there was no further advance. He searched round and round, but only the cold, dripping rocks and black dirt met his eyes.

He turned and began painfully to retrace his steps, thinking he might possibly have overlooked some other passage, but no other passage was to be found, and the fearful conviction was forced upon him that he was buried alive.

The air was so foul near the scene of the explosion that he could not breathe there; but he walked back and forth in the dark passage, shouting till he was exhausted, yet hearing only the mocking echo of his own voice. Hope of escape almost left him when he thought how long it might be before help could reach him, for it was impossible to make his position known.

How every circumstance of his past life rushed back to his memory, and especially the feelings with which he had begun that day. What would he give now for a gleam of sunlight, one sound of a living voice to break that deathlike silence!

The air was purer in the farthest cell, and there, at last, in utter despair, he threw himself down, praying that God in mercy would

let the end come soon. And unconsciousness did come, but it was the quiet sleep that exhausted nature demanded.

The light of the lamp flickered fainter and fainter, till all was total darkness, yet he slumbered as peacefully as when in his bed at home. But the waking came, and the reality of his position burst upon him with renewed horror. He found his pick was still at his side, and he resolved to grope his way back to the scene of the explosion and work at the wall till he died or escaped; anything was better than inaction.

As he turned to the wall and was feeling for the tunnel, in creeping round a projecting rock he saw a faint gleam of light, that seemed like a glow-worm.

He put his finger over the spot and felt cold air coming against it. Was it possible that this was an aperture that might be enlarged? Instantly yet cautiously he struck the spot with his pick, and after a few blows more light was admitted.

Hope now nerved him, and, scarcely stopping to take breath, he struck at the rock till the opening was so large he could pass through his hand and feel the warm sunshine upon it.

With a shout of joy he began to pick the earth again, but his random blows brought down more coal than he meant should come. He saw that all danger was not yet over, and that he must use caution where he struck, or he might yet lose his chance of escape.

Slowly now, hour after hour he toiled, bracing up the opening he was making as he worked, till it was large enough for him to pull himself through.

As his head emerged to daylight he looked eagerly about him to see where he was. To his surprise he found himself scarcely half-way up a deep hole, where the mine had caved in.

He remembered the spot, and wondered how he could reach the top; for there was nothing on the sides of the hole that he could cling to, to draw himself out of it.

Yet to feel the warm sunshine, see the green trees, and hear the birds was a pleasure in itself he had not expected to enjoy again, and some one would pass the opening ere long. After what seemed very weary watching, he heard a voice whistling in response to the song of the quails, and shouted aloud for help.

"What's the matter here?" shouted some one; and, looking up, Porter saw his blind friend.

"Don't come too close to this cave-in," he cried to caution him. "But go tell some men to bring a rope and haul me up. I've been buried alive in the mine, but have dug myself out so far, and now want help."

"Why, if it ain't Jack Porter! We thought you were killed in the explosion yesterday, with all the other poor fellows that were workin' in the vein. Any one else with you?"

"No; I jumped behind the fall, and I suppose that saved me. But you don't mean to say that it happened yesterday? Why it seems as if I had been buried for months."

"Yesterday morning at nine o'clock it burst like an earthquake; an' they're diggin' down there now, while yer mother an' sister are waitin' at the shaft, with the other poor women to see yer scorched body brought up, as all that's left of you; but I reckon yer glad you ain't dead, after all. Have you found out yet that there's anything worth livin' for?"

"I don't think you'll hear me complaining again. If I get out of this, I mean hereafter to work above ground, under the light of God's sunshine. But please get the men and help me out."

"Well, well, my keen hearin' served you a good turn, now I'll send those who have eyes to serve you another. It'll be a resurrection to a better life, if you have learned to count your marcies, and not be allers grumblin' over what you haven't got."—*Youth's Companion.*

For Girls and Boys.

"YOU CAN'T COME IN, SIR."

For Recitation.

If you would not be a drunkard,
You must not drink a drop;
For if you never should begin,
You'll never have to stop.