

He knew more than we did—he had been in a coal mine before, and confessed he did not like the idea of going again—but, if “the Doctor” would go, then of course *he* . . .

“The Doctor” expressed himself as unwilling to spoil his *clothes*, plain as they might be, with coal dust.

O well, for the matter of that, we might all go down, as we were told, in beaver hats and be “nane the waur.”

Ah, then, in that case “the Doctor’s” scruples vanished, and the “Meenister,” rather than seem unsociable, would leave the bairns—two fine boys with a voracious interest in snow-shoes and the “wild Indians” of Canada—in charge of the engineer at the top, and accompany us.

“I was no meanin’ to go down mysel’,” said Mr. Angus, “but as ye’re all daft enough to risk it——” he completed his sentence by stepping into the cage.

Only three persons, it seemed, could descend at a time; so we went down in two contingents. The signal was given, and the cage began to sink.

“He’s no lettin’ you doon so fast as he does the men,” says our escort in a sepulchral voice.

It is very considerate of him, the brawny engineer; for, I declare, the sensation of being suspended at the top of a pit over a thousand feet deep is peculiar enough without the additional thrill of a rapid “drop.” Our lanterns, “dimly burning,” show us how the sides of the shaft—which sparkle with dripping water—slip above us foot by foot, and a peculiar buzzing in our ears announces by its growing intensity that we are surely, if slowly, nearing the bottom of the pit. The novelty of our situation almost dissipates intelligent reflection on a fact which our cicerone mentions as we keep on sinking lower and lower—a fact stupendous in its suggestion of toil and expenditure in reaching the supplies of fuel so providentially buried ages ago for the consumption of generations then and still unborn—that this narrow highway into the heart of the earth was hewn out at a cost *in wages alone* of one pound sterling for every inch of the way! The peculiar buzzing in our ears grows louder and the noise of rushing waters mingles with it, as we realize that the cage has stopped sinking.

We are still several hundred feet from the bottom, but being now fully nine hundred feet below the sward, we acknowledge we are far enough down to satisfy our wildest longings for the sensational.