

He had been by turns a gambler, convict, ticket-of-leave man, digger and lounge. Old North, who had been one of the original discoverers of Magoari, remembered him as one of the community in his own day, and that he had abandoned his claim after taking out nearly two thousand pounds in gold.

"You better give up the shanty peaceable, my lad," he said to Tom, "mebbe some of us'll find room for you."

"No need of his leavin' 'less he wants to," put in the burly miner in a surly tone, "there's two bunks here; he's welcome to one of 'em, an' if he wants to go shares on the claim, I don't mind."

This was quite a concession on the part of Mr. Deelish, and Tom was advised to take up with it. But indeed he had no other resource. Until he was lucky enough to make more than he had been doing, he had no money to hire another shanty, and all the rest of the old claims were taken up.

"Very well," he finally said, and without being invited Black Mike proceeded to help himself liberally to Tom's tea and "damper."

It soon became evident that Mr. Deelish's idea of working the claim on halves differed essentially from the usual method. That is to say, Tom did most of the work and halved the scanty proceeds with his new partner, who spent most of his time smoking and drinking brandy obtained "on tick" at the canteen.

"If you don't like it you kin leave," he said, whenever Tom spiritedly expressed his views on the subject. And as Tom's luck grew poorer, he could not save enough to help him get even as far as Ballarat. So he stayed.

Perhaps because tired of inaction, Black Mike finally took an industrious fit. Working vigorously at one end of the claim, while Tom plied pick and shovel at the other, he began tunneling toward his young partner, who in turn worked his way slowly toward Deelish, both carefully "shoring up," as they went along.

But their utmost toil did not avail them anything. A few small nuggets from time to time, this was all that rewarded their search. And one morning Tom woke up to find that his partner had decamped, taking with him not only the canvas bag containing their joint savings, but also the little one.

which held his own private store. He had buried this last under a loose slab in the floor, but Black Mike had discovered the hiding place in some way, and levanted with the whole.

Threats of vengeance were freely made by the other miners—a perfectly safe proceeding when Black Mike was miles away. Tom, far heavier hearted than ever, swallowed his sorrows and his scanty breakfast, and started for his claim. What prompted him to enter the excavation made by his rascally partner, rather than his own, is one of those inexplicable things for which there is no accounting. Some men call it Providence—others, "chance."

Induced by whatever cause, Tom crawled in with lantern and pick and began work in the narrow aperture where he could only sit, not stand, stopping from time to time to remove the dislodged earth in a rude drag which he pulled after him by a rope.

"Deelish didn't even take the trouble to half shore up," he muttered crossly, as he noticed how insecurely placed were some of the short props.

"Now look at that!" he exclaimed aloud, pressing his foot against one back of him. "I can shake it."

But the action suited to the word was a terrible mistake. The prop and plank it supported gave way, and with a deafening crash the tunnel caved in behind him.

There was but a moment for collected thought. Already he breathed with difficulty in the confined space of five or six feet which remained. Behind him were tons of earth. It would be hours before his absence would be discovered.

As nearly as he could estimate only a few cubic feet of earth remained between the two miniature tunnels, which had been slowly approaching each other for a fortnight.

Nerved with the energy of despair, Tom plied his pick vigorously, yet with care, packing down the thus loosened earth to make room as he advanced—every moment fearing to be buried beneath some falling mass.

Suddenly his pick struck something hard, but it never occurred to him, in the fight for life and liberty, what the obstruction might be, till he saw by the light of his bull's-eye lantern the dull gleam of yellow metal.

Yet what would gold avail unless he