

Rivers.

BY THE REV. JAMES COOKE SKYMOOR.

Thou wert born where the clouds are high,
Where storms do battle, and the lightnings fly,
Away, far away, in the upper sky,
Art nobly born.

From the mountain-top and its slippery side,
Where the snow and ice eternally hide,
And the glacier vast shoots down with a slide,
Thy childhood's passed.

Through the rocky path to the wide-spread plain,
To cover the fields with ripened grain,
And crown the harvests again and again,
Most fruitful youth.

On thy bosom broad rides the merchant fleet,
Traders of the world in friendship greet,
And the ends of earth on thy waters meet
Thy manly breast.

By the summer's sun the mists arise,
Allured by his love to the lofty skies;
And the dripping cloud and the rain supplies
Thy ripe old age.

With a steady aim, and that the best,
Eagerly seeking an abiding rest,
And losing thyself on thy mother's breast—
Thine ocean mother.

May my life as well its grand mission know;
My cares, all through, as faithfully flow;
And the end at last—to my Saviour go,
All lost in him!

LOST IN A MINE.

BY HESBA STRETON.

CHAPTER I.

THERE is no part of England more unsightly, or more marred or spoiled of its original beauty, than the Black Country—the great coal-field of South Staffordshire—which stretches into the neighbouring counties. Low beds of smouldering slag lie upon the ground, where grass and primroses once grew, and make the air heavy with the fumes and stench of gas. The tall chimneys of the forges belch out clouds of thick smoke, mingled with tongues of flame, which hang overhead, slowly drifting with the wind, but never quite passing away to leave the blue sky clear. The soft, round outlines of the land have been broken up by huge stiff mounds of black and shale, for which no man can find a use, that are thrown up round the shaft of every pit.

No leafy trees can flourish in such a soil or such an atmosphere; but a few pale and stunted willows grow down by the edge of the dark and noisome pools lying in the barren valleys of these desolate hillocks. High poles, not unlike the gibbets of olden days, stretch across the dreary scene, and the chains they support groan and creak dolefully as they wind slowly up and down the dark pits. No chirping and twittering of birds are to be heard, nor the merry cries of rosy children at play; but instead of these you have the deep throbbing of many forge-hammers, which beat like the feverish yet sluggish pulse of Mammon.

But upon the outskirts of this despoiled country the riches that lie underground run into scattered veins of minerals, that pierce under the green meadows, and golden cornfields still smiling undisturbed in the sunshine. Here there is less roughness and ugliness, and more of nature. The pitmen, when they come up from their dingy work, can lift their eyes to the clear sky above and to the hills not far away, clothed with leafy trees. They can cultivate their own little gardens, and grow southernwood and sweetwilliam, to wear in their buttonholes on Sundays.

In some places there is only one shaft, or two perhaps, sunk a mile away from any others, running down into some small separated fragment of the great coal-field. Here the trees grow up to the very edge of the worthless rubble flung about the pit's mouth; and the lark sings its song within sound of the clanking engine. There is no more than a scar or two on the face of the country;

and, like a blemish in a face we love, it grows familiar and dear, as years go by, to those whose home is beside it.

The miners in these little isolated places are very different from the rough and brutal colliers of the Black Country. These have few pleasures but pigeon-flying, and stealthy dog-fighting, and low revels in dirty taverns. The men are little better than rough bull-dogs; and the women are still not much in advance of savages.

But amongst the country colliers are families of quite a different stamp. Their grandfathers or great-grandfathers heard John Wesley preach words they neither forgot themselves nor allowed their children to forget. Their grandmothers laboured to learn to read amidst all the cares of a family and the hard struggle for life, though they had no other books to read than their Bibles and the hymn-book. The families which sprang from them are altogether a different race from those of the rough and ignorant savages, dwelling in dense masses, where the mines are thickest.

In one of these separate coal-fields, with a single old shaft, which had been at work longer than any one living could remember, there had dwelt for several generations one family of the name of Hazeldine. The same roof sheltered them that had sheltered their forefathers. All the men had worked in the pit, and some of them had died there. The old garden round the cottage budded and blossomed year after year with the same flowers and fruit-trees planted by the first Hazeldine; or so nearly the same, that if he had come back to it he would have felt no shock of surprise or strangeness. The square hillock of shale alone had risen to such a height as to hide the pit's mouth; and it was thinly overgrown with yellow coltsfoot since he had left the little house of his own building. At present the widow of one of his descendants was inhabiting it—the mother of two sons who, like their forefathers, were busy all day long in the hidden galleries and foot-roads underground, which had formed a network, crossing and re-crossing, and twisting in and out like a labyrinth wherever coal had been found. Judith Hazeldine spent long and silent days in her quiet cottage whilst her sons were below; for their cottage stood quite alone in the shadow of the great mound of rubbish which had gradually separated it from the neighbouring dwellings. But when Reuben and Simeon came home the evening hours were too short for all that had to be said and done.

The two sons had been named according to a custom of the Hazeldines which no one had yet been bold enough to break through. It was half believed that some long-dead forefather had spoken a curse against the first to break it. This was, to begin with the names of the sons of Israel, and follow them faithfully in the order of their birth; though it had never been known for any mother to reach the favourite name of Benjamin. Judith herself had not more than two sons; but there had once been a child named Issachar, whose grave was in the village churchyard.

There was another custom and an heirloom in the family, which gave it a still higher distinction in the eyes of their neighbours. Old Judah Hazeldine, who had been dead more than two hundred years, had left a favourite black letter Bible, of antique binding, and with silver clasps and silver corner-pieces, which was forever to become the possession of any one of his descendants who at the age of fifteen could open its pages at haphazard and read off aloud the chapter that chanced to lie beneath his eyes, without making a single blunder. To each generation the difficulty had become greater, for the black-letter fell more and more into disuse. The later descendants of Judah Hazeldine, who might be able to read easily enough a chapter in an ordinary Bible, found themselves puzzled and baffled by the old and crabbed letters they were bound to turn into ready speech. Reuben, Judith's eldest son, had tried it and failed, with tears of disappointment smarting under his cast-down eyelids. That was seven years ago; and it would soon be Simeon's turn to prove his scholarship, for he would be fifteen in a week or two.

Judith had set her heart upon her younger boy gaining the coveted heirloom. He was the head scholar in the Sunday-school, and had repeated

the whole of a long chapter at the Sunday-school anniversary, in the face of all the congregation, without missing a single word. Her heart had been swelling with pride and pleasure as he went triumphantly forward from verse to verse, though she would take no notice of Reuben nudging her elbow, as if he was putting in the full stops which were left out by Simeon. Why should not the lad win the old black-letter Bible? He was a better scholar than Reuben, though Reuben was a good son—aye, the best of sons. She was a very happy woman for a widow, she said to herself. Reuben was the best of sons, but Simeon was the better scholar: Simeon could not fail to win the Bible.

There was the more reason why Simeon must not fail to win it, as the present owner was on the point of emigrating, and no one knew exactly how to act in this unforeseen emergency. It had not entered the head of old Judah Hazeldine, who had certainly never even heard of Australia, to dream of any of his descendants wandering so far away from the ancient home. He might otherwise have made some provision against the difficulty. If the Bible went to the other side of the world, would it ever come back to England?

There had been a good deal of talk up and down the country, among the Hazeldines, as to what ought to be done; but no one could see the way clearly. Levi Hazeldine was not willing to give it up unless the conditions were fulfilled. He had won it himself more than thirty years ago, and had held it ever since, for lack of any successful competitor. The only concession he would make was to delay his voyage for a few weeks, until Simeon should reach the stipulated age, and declare himself ready for the trial.

"It's not as I set much store by the Bible," said Levi, sarcastically. "Why, the Bible's just like a bone thrown down among a pack o' curs. You Christians are always a-snarlin' over it, and pullin' it about, and snatchin' a morsel off it here, and another morsel there. You can always get up a dog-fight over the Bible. It's likely a man of sense like me 'ud value it!"

Levi had been a greater traveller than any other of the Hazeldines, and was looked up to as a man of more than ordinary knowledge. He could read many books which were difficult to be understood by the greater number of his neighbours. He had been a great scholar thirty years ago, when he won the black-letter Bible; and he was believed to be a greater scholar now. So it made all his simple-minded kith and kin very uneasy to hear his estimate of the Bible.

"If you set so little store by it," said Judith, who was a shrewd woman, "why not leave the old Bible behind you? We'd pay the value of the silver, and welcome."

"It's not a Bible: it's an heirloom," answered the wise Levi; "there's a charm with it. Those that have got it have good luck. If your lad can win it, it's his, and the luck 'll go to him; but if he can't it 'll stay with me, and go with me out o' the country. It's a great deal that I'll stay to give him a chance."

You may be sure that Simeon was as eager as Judith herself that he should win the Bible. The lad had been sharp enough to get for himself an alphabet of Old English letters, and had copied verse after verse diligently in their characters. But he had no idea of what chapter he might have to read. According to tradition, the usage was to blindfold the eyes of the candidate, and to lay his open palm on the closed volume, which he then opened for himself. Some familiar psalm or well-known passage in the Gospel might lie before him, or some long hard chapter in Chronicles, or the still more unaccustomed words of the minor prophets might meet his eye. He felt as if it would almost break his heart to let the old Bible quit the country.

(To be continued.)

"You are very stupid, Thomas," said a country teacher to a little boy, eight years old. "You are a little donkey; and what do they do to cure them of stupidity?" "They feed them better and kick them less," said the little urchin.