

## INTO THE HEART OF THE EARTH.

THE most enjoyable ramble is not always that along the beaten path. Often there is more pleasure in leaving the main thoroughfare and exploring for one's self the mysteries of some obscure by-way. And yet on our travels we generally keep to the main thoroughfare.

"Where all are you going to?" a friend had asked me before we sailed.

"O well," I had made answer in my verdancy, "I don't care much where we go, so long as we get to Bruges."

"*Bruges?* Why *Bruges?*—there are many places worth seeing before *Bruges.*"

No doubt. But it was my little *crochet* to see *Bruges*, because I had always fancied Longfellow's lines on the Belfry.

"For I thought, how like these chimes  
Are the poet's airy rhymes,  
All his rhymes and roundelays,  
His conceits, and songs and ditties,  
From the belfry of his brain,  
Scattered downward, though in vain,  
On the roofs and stones of cities!"

Well, it turned out that we did not go to *Bruges* after all, and that the main thoroughfare had more attractions for me than I had anticipated: but if any one had instructed me to be very particular about visiting a place called *Muirkirk*, and I had had any conception of what it would be like, I think I should not have hesitated in asking, "*Muirkirk?* Why *Muirkirk?*—there are many places worth seeing before *Muirkirk.*"

A small mining village, with one street of low thatched cottages, moss-covered. In the middle of the road some of the miners' children at play, hardly looking as picturesque in their merriment as ragged urchins not unseldom do. In the background—a fitting one to the general disfigurement of the village and its inhabitants—vast mounds of slag, and that hideous structure, the iron works, with its complicated coils and tubes exposed to view in all their grimy sootiness. That is *Muirkirk*. Not much to see—is it?

And yet, I admit, there is a kind of fascination in watching the