

BOYS AND GIRLS

Easter Wishes.

'May the glad dawn
Of Easter morn
Bring holy joy to thee.
'May the calm eve
Of Easter leave
A peace divine with thee.
'May Easter Day
To thine heart say:
"Christ died and rose for thee."
'May Easter night
On thine heart write:
"Oh, Christ, I live for thee."

—Selected.

Ben Joyce's Hymn.

(William Rittenhouse, in the 'Wellspring')

'Stop that,' growled Simons; 'ef you're goin' to work alongside of me, Joyce, you kin sing baddalds,' or you kin keep your mouth shut. I don't want no hymns. A crawlin', sneakin', mean set of hypocrites—that's what church folks are, with their singin' 'nd prayin' 'nd all. I know 'em, 'nd I've no use for 'em, 'nd you'd better keep away from 'em, too.'

'But I'm one of the "church folks" myself, Simons,' said Ben Joyce. 'I sing in the choir, and that's why I'm practicin' the Easter hymns between times.' He smiled frankly at the older man.

'Well, you kin sing in the choir, ef you're fool enough. But you'll not sing hymns here, I tell you. I don't believe in God, or heaven, or hell, or any of the rest of it. If you begin your hymn singin', I'll let loose on my swearin'. They do say I know how, 'nd I guess they're right. But ef you'll start a good ballad, I don't mind joinin' in.'

'I don't want to start anyone takin' the name of the Lord in vain,' Ben said, slowly. 'Twould hurt you a great deal worse than my singin' would help me. So I'll not sing hymns while you're round, Simons. But as for singin' the kind of ballads I've heard round this place, I'd rather cut my tongue out,' he added, with emphasis, striking away at the coal with his pick.

'Suit yourself,' said Simons; 'ef you'll not sing ballads, 'nd I'll not stand hymns, we'll have to do without singin' at all, I guess. You're too smart to be taken in by the preachers. I've got some books at home, 'nd I'll lend 'em to you. Ingersoll wrote 'em, 'nd after you read 'em you'll not be in no church choir long, Ben Joyce.'

'I don't want 'em, thank you,' said Ben, stoutly. 'I'll ruther read the Bible, if it's all the same to you.'

'The Bible!' cried Simons. 'Bah!' and he launched forth into a string of blasphemous assertions, mingled with oaths, that almost made Ben's hair rise on end. There was evidently no use in answering or arguing with such a rabid atheist. Ben silently plied his pick, and silently lifted up his heart in prayer for patience.

But Simons had found his theme. He broke forth at intervals, all that day and again on the next, against religion. Ben, pondering upon it, had a gleam of insight on the second day, and said suddenly and shrewdly:

'Simons, why did you backslide?'

The question went home. 'Who ever told'—his companion began, then stopped short. Ben said no more; neither, after that, did Simons. They worked ahead steadily, and the coal lay loosened in great heaps on the ground beside them.

It had been raining in torrents since the

afternoon before, but down in the shafts and galleries, of course, no murmur of the storm could penetrate. But suddenly, as the afternoon wore on, Ben heard a queer rushing, sucking noise, and then a confused cry in the galleries beyond, nearer the shaft. 'What's that?' he cried. Simons turned and listened.

'Sounds mighty queer,' he said, sharply. 'Water—that's what it is—water!' He grasped Ben's arm. 'I've always been afraid of that creek. Ef it's flooded the shaft, we're dead men, Joyce, every one of us in this mine!'

Before the words were out of his mouth, Dick Jarvis, one of the trackmen, came running in, his face ghastly pale under its grime as the light of the miner's lamp fell on it.

'The shaft's full of water,' he cried. 'It's roaring down it. The lower gallery is full. God help whoever's in it.'

He looked wildly round the dark niche of the coal chamber. 'Where can we go, Simons? How can we get out?'

'We can't go anywhere, nor get out any way,' said the miner, grimly, dropping Ben's arm. 'We're at the end of this upper gallery, the highest in the whole mine. If the water keeps comin' down the shaft, it's all up with us—that's all.'

Jarvis trembled, and leaned against the wall. 'Jim White tried to get up the ladders,' he said, 'but the water caught him. There was three of us, at the shaft, started to run, but the others went up the old gallery.'

'They got to safety, then,' said Simons. 'What about the old drift? Ef the water isn't too deep in the gallery yet to wade through, we might get out that way, ourselves.'

'The ground's fell in, all round there,' replied Jarvis, hopelessly. 'The water wuz comin' down, 'nd it kinder banked up the air 'nd gas, 'nd it made like an explosion, tearing the ground up. White wuz up that way, 'nd that's why he came runnin' to the ladders in the shaft—but the water swep' him away like a chip—poor Jim!'

Ben walked down the gallery a little way. The water was creeping up, only an inch deep, but rising rapidly. He rushed back, and took up his pick. He and Simons had already cut well into the coal at the farther end of the chamber, in a sharp upward slope. A ledge of shale had bothered them, jutting out above the coal.

'Cut out a foothold on the ledge, Simons,' Ben directed. 'That'll give us five feet more of a chance.' He went to work, and Simons drove his pick hastily beside him, while Jarvis toiled away frantically with his hands and the hook of his lamp. Luckily, the coal above the shale was crumbly, and desperate men work more quickly than seems possible. The black, cold water rose to their feet, to their ankles, to their knees; their ears sang with the pressure of the air, forced up by the flood and compressed in this narrow gallery end; the earthy, rank smell of the water rose about them; their lamps flickered, but the picks only rose and fell faster and faster. Ben clambered onto the widening ledge, and Simons followed; then they pulled Jarvis up, the water already above his waist. The ledge was hardly large enough to hold them, crouching side by side. The water rose, rose, slowly, steadily, touched the bottom of the ledge, came to their very feet—and then stayed. Ten minutes passed, during which Joyce held his light out over the black, sullen water again and again. Then he replaced it in his cap.

'It's stopped,' he said, 'We've got a fighting chance.'

'What chance?' cried Jarvis. 'It would take a month to cut through to us from the outside, and longer than that to pump out the mine—and who's to know we're here?'

Ben took his pick, and began knocking up against the wall back of them. Then, lifting up his voice, he sang, at its full strength, the Easter hymn that had so stirred the anger of Simons a few hours before. Simons said nothing now, and Jarvis eagerly caught up the refrain, in a rough bass.

'If they're searching,' he said, 'nd likely they are, they might hear that from the old shaft. Anyhow, a hymn does no harm, the way we are.' Jarvis was one who did not go to church, but respected religion, especially when he was in danger.

But no one heard. The hours dragged on; the black water slept at their feet, neither rising nor falling an inch. Whether it was night or morning they did not know. At intervals Ben sang the hymns he knew best, tapping in unison on the wall with his pick, and Simons crouched silently beside him, while Jarvis joined in. All at once, the latter clutched Ben. 'Listen—listen!' he cried, and far, far away, a sound as of a tap on the wall was heard, and repeated, distinctly, as they all listened.

'They've heard us,' said Jarvis, eagerly. 'But they're far away—may be the old shaft is farther than I thought.'

'Our lamps are going out,' said Simons, grimly, 'and we've not been here half a day. They can't reach us under a week, from that far away.' Then he said no more, relapsing into silence, as if he had no hope, and cared nothing for the outcome.

Continued far-off tapping could now be heard. Evidently the pickmen of the rescuing party were at work. The lamps in the caps of the three went out for lack of oil, and all was dark. Jarvis curled up closer and sank off to sleep, snoring loudly. Ben, uplifted by the thought that friends were toiling to reach them, began to sing, softly, the hymn he loved best, 'Rock of Ages.' In the dark, he felt a hand laid, trembling, on his arm.

'Don't sing that,' said a shaken voice—Simons's voice. 'I can't stand it, Joyce—I can't stand it.'

Ben stopped, astonished. The hand remained on his arm, and the voice went on. 'I may as well tell you. I feel, since we've been shut up here, that I'm shut up here to die—to meet my God. The rest of you deserve to live, I don't. Joyce, I was once a Christian man. I had a good wife—I've sat with her and sung that hymn—it was her favorite—many a time, and meant every word of it. But I fell into temptation, and I broke God's law, and broke her heart, too. She died while I was off among bad company. They sang that hymn at her funeral, but I hardened my heart against it—against the memory of her—against God. I've been worse than an unbeliever ever since. But now I'm face to face with the end—and with God. I'm not going into eternity, Joyce, with a lie on my lips. What I told you to-day wasn't so. I do believe in a God—a just God—and I want to say so.'

'He is just,' said Ben; 'he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, Simons.'

'No, no!' cried Simons. 'I'm not fit to be forgiven—don't speak to me of that. It's fair I should be punished. I ought to be.'

Ben said no more, for Jarvis stirred and woke. The far-away picks worked on, the slow hours dragged in the foul-smelling dark. They had no food, no light, no chance to move from their cramped position. Before another