

Tales and Sketches

(FOR PURE GOLD.)

BEFORE AND AFTER.

In the mist of the early morning,
While over the east still lay
Gleams where the crimson dawning
Had ushered in the day.
They stood in their brief glory
Like the famed in song or story,
In battles bright away.

And when the misty morn had past,
And the golden noon a halo cast,
From far away we heard the sound—
The cannon's roar that shook the ground,
And some could see from the neighboring
height
The smoke and flame of the battle's
night;
We saw the smoke and heard the roar
From far away and nothing more.

But when the peace of evening fell,
And the cannon ceased its deep death
knell,
When the dust and smoke had cleared
away
In the fading light of the dying day,
Shattered and dim and dead they lay,
Here with the fresh wound gaping wide,
There with the mangled bleeding side,
Calling for drink with pitiful moan,
Or dumb with white lips oozing foam.

Yet, each to some loving heart is dear,
Though they lie like the dust of the hill-
side here,
A mother's lips have pressed that brow,
Ploughed with the ghastly death wound
now;
A sister clasped that bleeding neck,
Or maybe somebody dearer yet;
Some one whose love will ne'er forget,
Though now he lies with his strong face
Darkly settling in death's embrace.

From Appleton's Journal.

"BEEN TO THE MINES, SIR?"

I HAD inscribed my name on the register of the Sun Hotel, at Bethlehem, one of those uncomfortable monuments of the simplicity of the last century (the Sun Hotel was built Anno Domini 1758), and soon radiate a little of its heat into my thoroughly-chilled body, when I was startled by the address of the clerk (the clerk had gone to order some supper for me, of which I stood much in need, after my long, cold ride in the cars). I had thought the gentleman to be soundly sleeping, as he was loudly snoring in a bass key.

"Been to the mines, sir?" remarked "the sleeper awakened," in an interrogative tone of voice.

I made a hasty survey of my personal appearance, and, seeing nothing of the miner about me, came to the conclusion that the gentleman was talking in his sleep.

"Been to the mines, sir?" he repeated.

"Sir?" I exclaimed, with a peculiar emphasis on the word, which was intended to convey to him that I did not understand the purport of his question.

He looked at me and I looked at him. He was a short, stout, pussy little man, with a red face, and an old-fashioned black satin stock, at least four inches too deep for his apocryphally-shaped throat—if throat it might be called, for it was more like a thick seam, where his head and shoulders had been welded together. The color of his face deepened till it almost approached a bright purple (I was half afraid that he was going to have a fit on the spot), as he again repeated his inquiry, with a meaning pause between each word:

"I—asked—you—sir—if—you—have—been—to—the—mines?"

"To what mines do you refer, sir?" I inquired, rather testily.

"Why the mines, of course," he replied.

"Ain't you from these parts?"

"I hail from New York," I told him, as curtly as I could.

"Then why didn't you say so before?" he petulantly exclaimed; and, turning himself round in his chair, he closed his eyes, and straightway proceeded to resume his nap.

"Supper ready, sir?" said the clerk, putting his head in at the door. "This way, sir."

"Been to the mines, sir?" asked the clerk, as we ascended the flight of stairs leading to the dining-room.

"No!" I replied, snappishly.

I took my seat at the table. A bland-looking young man, with washed-out eyes and hair, and an incipient mustache of microscopical dimensions, sat opposite to me. Scarcely had I had time to unfold my dinner-napkin, when he stuttered out: "B-b-been to to the mi-mi-ines, sir?"

I would have killed that young man with a glance if it had been possible to do so. As it was, I fired of "No, sir!" after such a bombshell fashion, that he blushed crimson, and immediately began to study the very intricate pattern of the red-and-white table-cover.

I ate my supper in high dudgeon. Those cursed mines almost took away my appetite. I felt as perplexed as the countryman when he saw, for the first time, the bright orange and purple-colored *aufs de Piques* which one sees in the German grocery-stores at Easter-tide, and who exclaimed, as he scratched his head in his bewilderment:

"What the blazes could 'a' been the color of them cocks and hens?"

"There are no coal-mines in this part of Pennsylvania," I mentally exclaimed; "why the deuce, then, does everybody ask me if I have 'been to the mines'?"

Having appeased my hunger, I returned to the apartment which did duty for office and public sitting-room, and, lighting a cigar, ensconced myself, newspaper in hand, in an arm-chair before the fire.

"Mighty cold, sir," remarked a gentleman who sat near me.

"Indeed it is," I replied, quickly, feeling deeply grateful to him for not having asked me if I had "been to the mines."

"Very bad travelling," he rejoined.

"Very bad over these mountain-roads," I replied.

What on earth possessed me to talk about mountain-roads I don't know; I had not traversed any since the snow fell. The words were fatal to me. They were hardly out of my mouth before I saw my error. I read my doom in my neighbor's eyes. It was totally unnecessary for him to pronounce sentence on me; but he did so. Quick as lightning came the hateful words from his lips:

"Been to the mines, sir?"

My heart sank within me. Was Bethlehem suffering from an epidemic of mines on the brain? If so, I will clear out by the first train to-morrow morning, and relinquish the business that has brought me to the place, was my immediately-formed resolution.

"I have not, sir!" I stammered in question, in so rude a way that he almost sprang from his seat.

"I beg your pardon, stranger. No offence, I hope," he meekly remonstrated. Stung almost to madness, I neither accepted nor declined his apology, but glared furiously at him, as though I would eat him alive. I believe he thought I was an escaped lunatic, for he nervously edged his chair away to a safe distance, and then began to whistle—I suppose by way of keeping his courage up. As my anger cooled down, I began to feel ashamed of myself; and, as a peace-offering, I asked him if he would like to look at the *Times*, at the same time handing it to him. He had seen it, and, therefore, politely returned it to me. He, however, ventured on some general remark, by way of rejoinder, and we soon got into conversation on the topics of the day. The evening was then forgotten my *bete noire*, when the landlord seated himself by my side and joined in the conversation. Presently there came a lull—a dangerous lull—in the conversation. In an instant the landlord was there; and, like some gibbing, mocking fiend, he asked, as he turned to me:

"Going over to the mines, sir?"

I shivered with disgust, and then trembled with indignation. After a painful effort I succeeded in controlling myself.

"Say landlord," I asked, in despairing accents, "what time does the sun rise in these parts?"

"About half-past seven, sir," he replied.

"Where are these mines?" I rejoined, doggedly.

"At Friedensville."

"How far from here is Friedensville?"

"About four miles."

"Then for Heaven's sake, have a sleigh at the door for me at sunrise!" I exclaimed in my anguish. "I see that I shall have no peace till I have visited these cursed mines!—What mines are they?"

"Zinc!" replied the landlord, astonished into laconicism by the contemptuous tone in which I spoke of Bethlehem's pride.

"Zinc!" I mused; "well, I have never been in a zinc-mine." And then, fearful that I should again have that hateful enquiry addressed to me, I gave orders that I should be called at six o'clock, and requested to be shown to my room.

What a night I passed! In my dreams I saw imps of darkness sitting cross-legged on the bottom of the bed, and heard them hiss through their red-hot teeth, as they glared at me with their eyes of fire:

"Been down in the mines?"

At one time I was buried alive in a zinc-mine; at another I was being boiled in a caldron of seething zinc, and, again, I was converted into zinc, and was being rolled out into sheets of zinc for house-tops. It was awful. Every now and then I awoke with a start, and shivered till the bed shook as I fancied I saw written in letters of sulphurous fire on the walls:

"Beware of the mines!"

Toward morning I at last fell into a sound sleep, and, when I got up in answer to the porter's summons, I felt as flat and stale as a bottle of badly-corked soda-water.

After partaking of a hasty breakfast, I jumped into my sleigh, and was soon on my way to what in the night I had come to regard as "the place of the damned"—the Lehigh zinc-mines.

"Jack Frost is ne'er at home; for, without doubt, when he is anywhere—he's always out."

Jack Frost was out with a vengeance as I drove over the mountain to Friedensville;

and, by the time we pulled up at the door of the office of the Lehigh Zinc Company, I had considerable doubts as to whether I had a nose to blow, and whether I had one ear or two ears, or none. I might have dropped them on the road without being aware of it, for all I knew—I might say, cared; for I was utterly reckless from the amount of desperation which had accumulated in my system with all the insidiousness which physicians tell us is characteristic of arsenic. I am not certain that I would have cared much whether it were desperation or arsenic at the moment that I turned the handle of that office door.

But what did I see? A cheery-looking, jovial, bluff, and hearty middle-aged man, smoking his Havana in the most affectionate manner, while he toasted his feet before a right royal good fire.

"How do you do, sir?" he said, rising from his chair as I entered, and offering first his hand and then a vacant chair.

"Come over to see the mines, eh?"

Somehow or other his allusion to the mines did not seem to jar my nerves in the electric-shock fashion which had nearly driven me mad at the hotel; and his "Take a fresh cigar, sir," soon produced a general reaction, both mental and physical, which afterward enabled me to perform acrobatic feats worthy of Blondin, and to come out of those fatal mines without being carried out on a stretcher, or so much as breaking a limb or dislocating one of my stiffened joints.

That man was my good Samaritan, and the captain of the mines.

The recuperating effects of the drive, the delicate fragrance of my cigar, the warmth of the cheerful, bright fire, and a chat with my very genial new acquaintance, thoroughly restored me to myself in the course of half an hour, and I proposed that we should start on our tour of exploration.

"Certainly," said the captain; "but we'll have to rig you out before going into the mine. It's very wet and dirty, and you'll ruin your clothes if you go as you are. We keep a regular wardrobe here, of all sorts and sizes, for the use of visitors."

So saying, he led the way across the yard to a substantial building, which we entered.

"Heavens alive! Captain, what's this?" I exclaimed, as he closed the door.

"Pumping-engine," he replied, "far the largest in the world."

I stood lost in awe and amazement as I contemplated that mammoth engine; the captain jerking out the following commentary on its wonderful powers:

"Engine, three thousand horse power—pumps seven thousand gallons of water a minute—can pump fifteen or twenty thousand feet—ten-inch cylinder—ten-foot stroke—weighs seven hundred tons—cost three hundred and fifty thousand dollars—pumping-rods, hundred and fifty feet long—will be three hundred when shaft is finished—mighty big thing in engines!"

"Mighty big" was no adequately descriptive expression for such gigantic machinery. I doubt if Webster's dictionary furnishes adjectives competent to give an adequate impression of its enormous capacity.

While I stood lost in wonder, and watching those ponderous twenty-four-ton walking-beams, the captain was busy selecting a suit for me from his clothing-store. He brought down one or two, but they were too small; and I accompanied him upstairs to pick out one for myself. He pointed out the ward-robe, a long cupboard, in which some twenty-five or thirty suits were hanging from pegs, a hat over each suit. It looked more like a morgue property-room than anything else; one of those dismal chambers where the clothes of the unrecognized unfortunates, whose last resting-place is the Potter's-field, are preserved for possible future identification. I gauged one suit after another with a critical eye, without coming across one that I thought would fit me; but at last the captain's search was crowned with success.

"Here you are," he exclaimed, unhooking a suit from its peg; "I guess this'll do you."

He had selected the largest suit he could find, and, dropping my overcoat, I proceeded to array myself in as grotesque and unbecoming a costume as I ever put on in my life. Buttoning my jacket, I donned a pair of unbleached canvas overalls, which came up well over the ribs, then a jacket of the same material; tying them firmly round the waist with a piece of stout cord, I looked like a diver, minus his helmet. A soft hat, which looked as though it had done good service to several generations of bricklayers or lime-burners, crowned the whole and completed my costume. I was ready, with a vengeance, for mud and water in unlimited quantities—say *x*, plus infinity.

"Like to go down the pumping-shaft?" asked the captain.

"Oh, yes; I want to see every thing," I replied, little knowing what I was undertaking.

Providing himself with a small oil-lamp, such as are used by coal-miners, and attaching it to his hat, the captain led the way to a small aperture, which looked like the entrance to a dark cellar. He began to descend, and I followed, our means of descent being a series of ordinary ladders, springing from small landing platforms,

and forming a very steep and dangerous staircase. I got down the first flight, by dint of great care, with tolerable ease. The rungs of the ladder were incrustated with ice, and, in addition to being very dangerous footing, soon froze all the blood out of my fingers; but the light from the opening above was sufficient for me to see where to put my feet. But, after we had descended two or three flights, we were in utter darkness—darkness that might be almost felt, for the captain's lamp shed no rays for more than a foot or two around his head. The upper atmosphere, too, had no influence over the temperature at that depth below the surface, and the rungs of the ladder, instead of being crusted with a frozen surface, were covered with a still more slippery wet slime. The situation was embarrassing and distressing. I felt as though I was going "down among the dead men" into some horrible subterranean vault—perhaps the abode of the cursed awaiting the final judgment day.

"Groping blindly in the darkness," I had the greatest difficulty in holding on to the ladder. Coming from the glare of the bright sun, playing on the expanse of snow above, my eyes refused to accustom themselves to the darkness. I saw imaginary shapes and forms, platforms where there were no platforms—rungs of ladders which were not. Two or three times I clutched at a rung, as I thought, and my hand closed on nothing, thereby nearly causing me to lose my hold. I shuddered, made a more successful grab, and held on like grim death for a few seconds till I had recovered myself. And all while there was the unearthly noise of the plungers of the pumps and the rush of water overhead, as they discharged their eight hundred gallons at every stroke. I could hear the grinding of the massive pump-rods as they went up and down. I could hear what seemed to be a roaring, seething cataract of water above me, and which might overwhelm me in its flood at any moment; but I could see absolutely nothing—no more than if I had been born blind. And then, suddenly, without a moment's warning, I was dangling on the ladder, with the sensation that my arms were being torn from the shoulder-sockets, and that the muscles of my shoulders were giving way under the sudden, jarring strain caused by the whole weight of my falling body being instantaneously thrown upon their sustaining power. My foot had slipped, and had I not had a pretty firm hold with both hands nothing would have saved the tax-payers of the county from being put to the totally unnecessary expense of a coroner's inquest—my there for at least two or three seconds, paralyzed, and almost helpless; but the natural instinct of self-preservation at last led me to put out my foot in search of a rung, and I stood safe, but with trembling knees and palpitating heart, once more on the treacherous ladder. Fortunately, it was the last one, and a few steps brought me to the bottom of the shaft, a depth of one hundred and seventy feet.

CONCLUDED IN NEXT NUMBER.

GIBBIE STEVENSON THE MISER.

IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. STEVENSON was subject to attacks of rheumatism; and the infirmities of a premature old age were fast setting in upon her. She had exercised a calling for twelve years, which exposed her to inclemencies of weather, and irregularity of sleep and diet; and these agencies were beginning to kythe upon her constitution. By hard scraping and saving she had amassed upwards of twenty pounds, which in those days was reckoned quite a fortune. She wisely resolved to confine her professional exertions for the future to the more immediate neighborhood, and occupy herself with her cow and the small pendicle she rented. Gibbie was in consequence hired out to a sheep farmer, near Parishholm. The food of farm servants at that time was of the coarsest description. The only *kitchen* allowed to dinner, which usually consisted of groat broth, made thick with potatoes and vegetables, was occasionally an egg, or a bit of braxy ham. The sharp eye of Gibbie discovered even here a source of gain. He hoarded his eggs and pieces of meat till they amounted to a disposable quantity, and had them sent or taken to Douglas and sold. He went out also in the summer and moonlight nights and gathered stray wool among the hills; and it was said he sometimes cut, or pulled patches of the fleece from the ewes that he found asleep or in the fold. He sat lines in the water too, and snares in every direction; and every trout and hare was converted, if possible, into money; and if not they were kept till they wasted, for he never gave anything away. The reprimand of his master had no other effect than to make him more wary. He was threatened with dismissal, but still he continued. There was one bond which knit his master to him, and that was Gibbie's handiness. He could do anything, and refused to do nothing. He could milk the cows, or wash the dishes, or make the food, or build a dyke or an outhouse, or repair the farming utensils. Whatever was behind, Gibbie brought it up; and his untiring strength,

and even skill, in some things, made him a valuable servant. Before every term Gibbie gave in his resignation, and managed to get an advance of wages. Not a farthing of his fee was spent. The same hoddan grey suit was first let down, and then eked, story after story, in the legs and arms, and all the rest was left as it originally came from the hands of his provident mother. The only change in his dress was a cap of sheep-skin, which he had got from his master for doing a piece of extra hard work. Nothing was too mean for Gibbie to undertake, if it offered the slightest recompence. He would help out the huxter-wives with their stalls on a fair-day, or hold a horse, or run an errand, or do anything he was bidden, however menial, if a consideration was given. The gibes of the country lasses, or the taunts of the farm lads, had no more effect upon him, than if they had been addressed to a person with whom he had nothing to do. The whiskey was cheap then, but Gibbie drank none of it except what he got for nothing. A scheme was entered into by some shepherds at a Douglas market to get Gibbie intoxicated, and then inveigle him into as much expense as they could. Gibbie drank their whiskey and eat their buns, but not a farthing would he spend. They laid hands on him to rifle his pockets, but he fought like a tiger and made his escape. "Gibbie the miser," had long been in every child's mouth; but Gibbie heeded it not, or only answered them with his usual grumph.—Sometimes it expressed contempt, sometimes anger, sometimes envy, and sometimes even satisfaction, if not delight.—Those who knew him could readily distinguish the one from the other. He had now been five years in his first place, when an express arrived that his mother was dying. The humph he gave on receiving this intelligence was noted as expressive of joy.

"Come away, Gibbie," said his mother, as he entered, "and come near me; for I want to speak to you."

"What are you wanting, mither?" spoke the unfeeling son; "d'ye think ye're dying?"

"Yes, Gibbie; the grips o' death are on me. Lord haec mercy on my soul."

"Where did ye put the siller, mither?" returned the miser, without noticing her statement, or her exclamation.

"Oh! Gibbie, Gibbie, my son, what's siller when death comes—the grave?"

"Where is't?" interrupted the heartless lad.

"It's where it's safe—but what is't now? Though it were twenty times mair, wad death gang by for't?"

"He's no get the offer," retorted the son.

"Oh Gibbie, Gibbie! dinna break my heart," exclaimed Mrs. Stevenson. "Oh, man, think less o' the world, and mair o' your Maker. It's grieved me lang to see you. Wad ye try and pray wi' me, Gibbie? I think it wad do my heart good if I heard ye pray."

"I'll pray name; where's the siller?"

"I'll tell ye if ye pray."

"Where is't first?"

"The minister has't. O pray now."

"How muckle's o't?"

"But will ye no pray?"

"Is there thretty pound o't?"

"O pray wi' me, Gibbie, and I'll tell ye, my dear."

"There should be thretty-three, if ye've done right."

"Whatever's o't ye'll get it; but pray wi' me."

"Did John Park pay the cheese?"

"No, hinny; but—"

"There'll be nae butts about it; he maun pay."

"I forgie'd him't; he's poor, and a sma' family."

"A sma' devil! he maun pay."

"O Gibbie, Gibbie, will ye gie o'er and no break—"

"What wad I gie o'er for? Isnt it but right that folk should get their ain? What business had he eating cheese if he couldna pay for't?"

"I'm to blame," cried the agonized woman, in a passion of tears, "O God! I'm to blame, for bringing him up the way I did,—I nurtured him for the world, and not for Thee,—I sowed the wind, and I've reaped the whirlwind. O my God! my God!"

The only reply on the part of her son was a sullen humph, which was instantly followed up by a demand how much money there was.

"There's twenty-five pound ten," replied his mother, at last, with a deep groan that came from the bottom of her heart. The son ran over his fingers as if counting something, and then exclaimed—

"There's eight pound wanting o' what I was making o't. What have ye done wi't?"

"It's there as it is," said the afflicted and now irritated woman. "It was my ain making, and neabody has ony business what's o't, or what I did wi't."

The effort, and the conflicting emotion within her, brought on a suspension of life; and it was sometime ere she came out of it. As nature rallied, and consciousness returned, she asked, in an anxious voice, and feeling all about her,—