

fruitless, as we were too isolated for anything of this sort. Nor had we any means to strike a light, for this occurred before lucifer matches had been invented. If we remained there, it might be many days before any help reached us, and in that time we should suffer from hunger and thirst, and perhaps die of starvation. Seeing our position thus critically extreme, I addressed Uncle Will, saying there was no other way for us than to endeavour to grope our way through the great darkness to the top of the mine. It was a serious undertaking, but the only way likely at all to prove effectual. Better run this risk than sit there to die of cold and hunger in the sickly sulphurous cell. Should we try? And Uncle Will answered, "Yes."

Taking a pick in my hand to feel the way, I went before, and Uncle Will followed after. How slowly we advanced! Sometimes we had to ascend the face of the rock, where little notches were cut for our feet, the omission of one of which would be swift destruction. Sometimes we had a ladder to climb, and land upon the narrowest platform, full of holes, where a slip of the foot would be our ruin. Sometimes we had low workings to crawl through, where we could not stand upright, and flinty rocks to scramble over with teeth as sharp as swords. Then we had long levels to pass through, in which were deep sinks, with only a single narrow plank across them, which warped and bent as we came upon it, crawling over on our hands and knees. I often had to cheer Uncle Will with words of encouragement, bidding him to keep directly behind me, while we felt our way inch by inch, and foot by foot with the pick-handle. Now we had a set of ladders to mount, shifting this way and that way as we reached the top of one to gain the foot of the other, the ascent being no wider than an ordinary well. Slowly, silently, and solemnly we went; and in the pauses of our steps we could hear the beating of our hearts against our side. A single slip of the foot, and we should be lost in some grim excavation where we might lie undiscovered until the sea gave up her dead, and