

the strength of that winsome personality. The preacher passed from the lectern into the pulpit, and with a clear, steady voice he announced his text. His lips parted to utter the opening sentence of the message he had prayerfully sought and carefully prepared.

It was at that moment the awful unexpected happened!

A terrific roar that thundered its echoes from peak to peak awoke the stillness of the hour. The little church shook to its foundations; the windows rattled; the children screamed; the congregation started to its feet with blanched cheeks and trembling lips. One thought, and one only, was in their minds at that awful moment — the pit!

With a cry of agony the whole assembly rushed for the door and the cry of "The Pit! The Pit!" broke from every lip. Down the avenue of elms they surged. Sobbing, heart-chilled wives rushed on through their blinding tears; lassies whose tearless eyes told the story of anguish; fathers and mothers whose boys were the great solace of their old age, all hurried on hoping in some way to save those near and dear. "What has happened? Where are the men?" they cried. The cloud of smoke pouring from the shaft was their only reply. Around that fearful column of blinding smoke gathered the grief-stricken people in fear. Down there were husbands, sweet-hearts, sons, — and God alone knew what had happened to them!

"Where are the men?"

Again the question was asked, but this time with a voice of authority and strength, and a tall, athletic-looking man pushed his way through the crowd. The whisper went round, "the new parson," and somehow his presence gave them courage. Again he asked the question and a sobbing voice answered, "Doon i' the pit, parson, doon i' the pit!"

"Can nothing be done to save them?"

"Nothin', parson, we canna goa doon i' that stuff."

Drayton turned his eyes again to the shaft and breathed a simple prayer for guidance. A gleam of hope came into his heart as he fancied the smoke looked thinner. His sense of duty asserted itself; his decision was made.

"Who will volunteer to go down with me?" he cried.

Stimulated by his courage a dozen men sprang to his side, whilst a cheer broke from the people around.

We cannot stay to narrate in detail the story of that gallant band of rescuers. We can but hint how one by one those entombed miners