

After the lapse of some days the cracking and groaning of the broken roof had so far abated that it became possible once more to get down into the pit. The first efforts were, of course, directed towards that part of the workings where the body was believed to be lying. But the former roadways were found to be so completely blocked up that no approach to the place could be had save by cutting a new tunnel through the ruins. This proved to be a work of great labour and difficulty ; for not only were the materials extremely hard through which the new passage must be cut, but an obstacle of another kind interrupted the operations—a dead body lay in the pit, and awakened all the superstition of the colliers. At times they would work well, but their ears were ever on the alert for strange weird noises, and often would they come rushing out from the working in terror at the unearthly gibberings which ever and anon would go souging through the mine.

A fortnight had passed away. The lessee, like the rest of the inhabitants, believed poor Brown to be already dead, and brought a gang of colliers from another part of the county to help in clearing out and reopening his coal-pit. But a party of the men continued at work upon the tunnel that was to lead to the body. They cut through the hard crushed roof a long passage, just wide enough to let a man crawl along it upon his elbows ; and at last, early on the morning of the twenty-third day after the accident, they struck through the last part of the ruined mass into the open workings beyond. The rush of foul air from these workings put out their lights, and compelled them to retreat. One of their number was despatched to upper air for a couple of boards, or corn-sieves, or any broad flat thing he could lay hands upon, with which they might advance into the workings, and waft the air about, so as to