

between him and them came down with a crash. They managed to rejoin their comrades; John Brown was sealed up within the mine, most probably, as they thought, crushed to death between the ruins of the roof and floor.

Those who have ever by any chance peeped into the sombre mouth of the day-level of a coal-pit will realise what the colliers had now to do to make good their escape. The tunnel had been cut simply as a drain; dark water and mud filled it almost to the roof. For more than half a mile they had to walk, or rather to crouch along in a stooping posture through this conduit, the water often up to their shoulders, sometimes, indeed, with barely room for their heads to pass between the surface of the slimy water and the rough roof above. But at length they reached the bright daylight as it streamed over the green holms and autumn woods of the Girvan, no man missing save him whom they had done their best to rescue. They were the first to bring the tidings of their escape to the terrified village.

No attempt could at first be made to save the poor prisoner. As the colliers themselves said, not even a creel or little coal-basket could get down the crushed shaft of the pit. The catastrophe happened on a Wednesday, and when Sunday came the parish minister Dr. Hill—afterwards a conspicuous man in the Church of Scotland—made it the subject of a powerful appeal to his people. In the words of a lady, who was then, and is still, resident in the neighbourhood, “he made us feel deeply the horror of knowing that a human being was living beneath our feet, dying a most fearful death. On the Sunday following we met with the conviction that whatever the man’s sufferings had been, they were at last over, and that he had been dead some days. On the third Sunday the event had begun to pass away.”