

## THE BLACK COUNTRY OF THE NORTH.



THE picture that Whittier drew of Birmingham, where

"The forges glow, the hammers all are ringing,"

and where the city swings

"Its clamorous iron flail,"

is applicable also to another part of England, which in much more recent years has risen up as our greatest iron-producing district. When the sagacious members of the Society of Friends on Tees-side designed the primal railway, there was only in South Durham a coal-trade in miniature, dependent almost exclusively upon "land-sale"

trade. Cleveland was an isolated agricultural district, and the Tees ran a shallow and tortuous course, pressed by commerce in an olden guise.

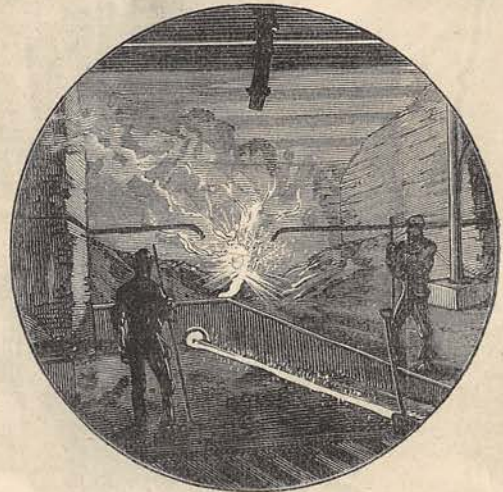
The provision of facilities of travel and traffic has allowed all this to be changed; South Durham is now our chief coal-yielding district, having an output of nearly twenty million tons of coals yearly; and Cleveland, as is well known, is by far the largest of our producers of iron. The whole district has been changed by this upgrowth of industries; towns and populous districts have sprung up; a hundred and fifty huge blast-furnaces have been erected, over two thousand puddling furnaces have been built, and there has been a fully commensurate growth of allied industries, which have drawn into the district scores of thousands of workmen, whilst the whole of South Durham and Cleveland have been permeated by the presence and the effects of the two great controlling mineral trades. Mine and mill, forge and furnace, varied with little streaks of rich agricultural land, form the surroundings of the railways that tap the Black Country of the North, from the twin bathing-places at the north-eastern point of Yorkshire to that bleak region in the north-west of Durham where coal and iron have given industry, though not beauty, to a barren, bleak land.

Near the banks of the sylvan Derwent, and close to the spot where a colony of German iron-workers settled three centuries ago and established the steel trade, there was commenced nearly two-score years ago a

comparatively small iron-works, which, with varied fortunes, grew, until it has attained gigantic dimensions, and has built up the town of Consett, with its tributary coal-mining villages. From this high moorland town we may travel to the south-east down through no un-instructive scene. From the heights the scattered town may be seen with its "cloud-compelling" works; huge and grim blast-furnaces, whose dark forms are crowned with a fitful tongue of flame rising through the dull grey smoke; stacks of columnar puddling furnaces vomiting, as in Hood's verses,

"Flames of red and yellow and white,"

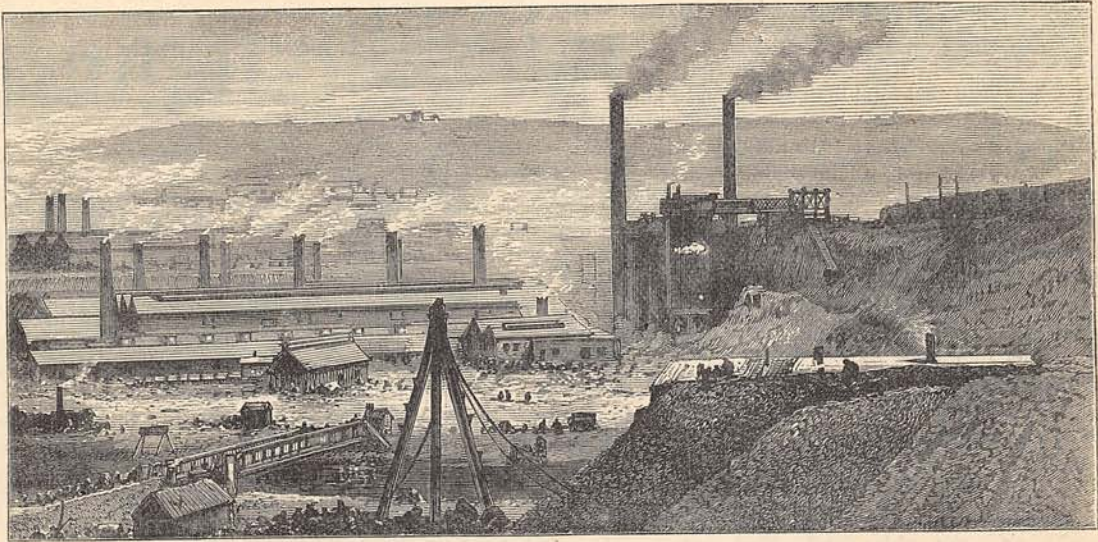
till the half-closed dampers grow white-hot; vast rolling-mills where the great masses of fused iron are drawn to and from the rolls, scorching the air as they pass. Over mill and forge and furnace a great cloud rests, whilst the halo from the metal, as it leaves the furnace for the "sow" of sand, sends up a veiled glow, and the whole scene is impinged on by long trains of trucks of coal, coke, iron, and limestone, and their products in rattling masses of plate, and trucks of solid grey pig-iron. Slowly leaving these traces of a great but isolated industrial centre, we emerge from the gloom into the bleakness of a long stretch of high moorland, changing as we descend into fertile fields. In the long stretch of moorland, sheets of water tell where the reservoirs store up a thousand million gallons for the thirsty thousands of the Pit-country; Tow-law projects its cold furnaces and silent works into an unusually clear sky, and then a few minutes' run through a country darkening with smoke brings us to Crook, the centre of the coke trade of Durham. Long



RUNNING MOLTEN METAL INTO THE CASTS.

rows of the beehive-shaped coke-ovens line on either hand the railway, little orifices here and there showing, by the escaping glow, the fires that convert the coal into coke; and beyond these rows of ovens the winding-wheels and staging of many a colliery shaft





"OVER MILL AND FORGE AND FURNACE A GREAT CLOUD RESTS" (p. 158).

dot the rising ground, whilst the once-green fields between are grimy and black-tracked with the frequent feet of the collier. The route now to Auckland is through long lines of waggons of coal, heaped trucks of lighter coke, and rattling trains of empties returning; whilst in the fields and by the railway-side are collieries, with their adjacent rows of stereotyped cottages, great "pit-heaps" smoking and steaming, and stunted trees penetrating the hard ground. The river Wear is "frowned down upon," but not as in "Marion," for near Etherley great banks of slag arise, which almost hide their creative furnaces, whilst below the line almost a noisy forge sends out a hailing fount of fire.

Passing the dingy little town, and quickly hurrying on through the coal-laden valley, we land at Bishop Auckland, once enthroned only in the purple of the reigning prelates of the rich domain—but now owing its greatness and its dirt, its wealth and its squalor, its population—quadrupled in four decades—and its heavy death-rate to the presence and the accompaniments of King Coal.

Just outside Auckland, below the Brusselton Tower, noted in the history of the railway system, we have in the hollow between Shildon Tunnel and the Bishop's Park, an interjected piece of Pit-land. On the hill-side to the right of the railway is Adelaide's Colliery, with a capacity of producing more coal now out of its depth than all South Durham did fifty years ago; and on the northern side of the line are other collieries equally enlarged in their output. Scattered along the hollow are irregular rows of cottages in the various phases of ugliness the class has known for half a century—the ancient one-storied dwelling of dingy white, its pretentious successor, and the "model" dwellings designed in later years—in unmade streets of irregular form, and with the faithful red-brick chapel, square and solid, and the gaily-painted public-houses near, in-

evitable in Pit-land. Into the darkness of Shildon Tunnel, where the passing train rumbles heavily, and the lights shine out as "shines a good deed in a naughty world," from which we emerge into the light by the side of the little town of Shildon, memorable as the spot where the first engine-repairing works were placed, and where there was done no slight portion of the work necessary to the bringing of the locomotive into a working condition from the first essays.

When the miles of coal-laden sidings are past we are in the agricultural domain, unchanged in the half-century of locomotion by rail, and still presenting by the side of the line tokens of the early days of the railway in the stone blocks that then did duty for sleepers.

Into this green land there is interspersed at Darlington a long streak of industrial gloom. Over the Skerneside town a pall of smoke hangs, rising not only from its ancient woollen mills, but from the great plate and angle mills, the locomotive and forge works, and the other establishments which give to the northern part of that sober town the appearance of one of the black spots of Staffordshire. But it is when Tees-side is near that the centre of the iron manufacture of the North is reached, and it is best seen at night. Crossing into Cleveland, with the lamps shining along the river-side marking its course and dimly showing the roofs of Stockton's houses, we enter a region in which, though there are closed works, the path is for miles through the midst of furnaces, forges, and foundries. Now there is the glow that uprises from the discharge of iron, and the long streaks of molten metal through the sandy furrows in which it takes shape whilst cooling; now, beneath the shed, the pipe foundry is brought into light from the great basin of molten fluid, and from the fire that springs up from the cupola; now we look through the halo at the lift by which the



metals are conveyed to the furnace-top ; now it is the long strips of ruddy bars left to cool as they issue from the rolls ; and now a halo rises through the smoke, and sends down its reflection on the turbid Tees. Over Middlesbrough that faint light is seen in lurid patches, that break the greater cloud of smoke which hides this town, created by the coal-trade and developed by the discovery of iron, till in the fifty years since its birth it has added a thousand yearly to its inhabitants. Below, the ringing of the hammers is heard in the iron-ship-yards, a faint smell suggests the chemical works hidden in the darkness, and through miles of furnaces Eston is reached, where the Bessemer converters throw out furious flames to add to the variety of colours that light up the path ; and on by banks of slag, until near Redcar the last pale blast-flame of the furnaces is seen, and the lights that glisten on the hills to the south only shadow forth the iron mines.

Such, then, is this Black Country of the North, whose stones and iron, and the use of that mineral wealth and the older and allied industry, have created a Black Country as populous almost, as industrious, and as ungainly in some of its surroundings as that in the Midlands, and having as strongly defined

lights and shades, both materially and in the characters of its inhabitants. These have been drawn from the homes of puddling in Welsh valleys and Staffordshire villages, from the rivetters and ship-builders of the Clyde, as well as generally from the metal-workers of Sheffield, the founders of the North, and the hordes of agricultural labourers in many a county. This mixed population has built up a belt of villages, connected by towns new or largely increased, and industries known throughout the world. The great coal and iron fields have been tapped by railways ; five millions sterling, at least, have been invested in smelting and manufacturing plant ; the narrow streams have become broad and deep, pressed by the vessels of all countries ; and in the great race of material development vast strides have been taken by the North. It is the accompaniment of this that gives the sights and the sounds above glanced at ; but there has been no slight attempt to put forth agencies to remove both the thick darkness which covers the land and the "gross darkness" which is over a part of "the people." The accompaniments of material progress are too often the discoveries of mental darkness ; but it is well if with this there is, as in the North, honest effort to remove it.

#### FROM THE SOUTH.

Oh, swallow ! I have longed for thee  
Through all the burning summer  
days,

For thou dost fly each year to me  
And sing to me my fair love's praise.

Now vine-leaves redden in the sun,  
And fruits and corn are garnered now,  
So is the sweetest time begun,  
Though yellow is the maple bough.

For this day from the pale calm skies  
Of the clear north, thy swift wing brings  
Joy to my heart, so full of sighs  
All summer through thy wanderings.

Oh, swallow ! say that thou hast been  
To dwell beneath the hanging eaves  
Of my love's home, where ivy green  
Around her lattice trails fresh leaves.

She saw thee, and she said to thee,  
"Oh, swallow ! say the years are long,  
And bid him come again to me  
Ere thou return with the spring's  
song."

To her I go when winter hoar  
Shall pass and bring the coming year,  
To lead me swiftly to her door—  
To welcome love and banish fear !

