

The apartment they lived in was at the very top of a large house, which was in a street one end of which was in the Corso, the other near the Propaganda. As you entered the stone passage off the street through the gates of the courtyard, you could see a queer-shaped griffin's head against a background of blue on the wall, from which water ever flowed into a basin formed of rockwork. Many lines of ropes crisscrossed it from the different windows of the house, which ran round three sides of the little square courtyard, and buckets of water, drawn up by pulleys, were being worked up and down all day long. If you stood in the court and looked up, the variety of life seen from the windows was striking. In the yard itself was often a horse, quietly munching hay; a cart, buckets, and various things. On the little balconies of the windows were flowers; articles of clothing hanging to dry on the railing or strung across on rope; here and there piles of old pots, flasks, chairs. All kinds of things seemed to find their way to these balconies, and at the very top carpets were hanging to air, and you could see the loggia of the Servis' apartment, where Cecilia, a handsome Sicilian girl, with exquisite features and gleaming white teeth, was hanging over the balustrade, screaming down to the porter's wife instead of minding the dinner. A sad-faced little German governess was peeping slyly out of her schoolroom window in the intervals of correcting some exercises and watching her charges, three little English children, who were playing about near her in the dismal schoolroom.

Carina left Lucia to go and scold Cecilia and see after the tomatoes, while she went and talked to her father, to whom the little adventure and invitation was quite a pleasant change. Carina thought of the young Englishman a good deal, almost unconsciously, and she hardly knew why she felt so very happy as she went about the rooms the next day, performing all her wonted tasks.

The day passed and he did not come. Another and another, and after ten days Carina thought all hope of her locket and seeing the stranger had gone, and she tried not to feel it was a blank—but it was.

(To be continued.)

AN UNDERGROUND EXCURSION.

By RUTH LAMB.



WOULD you like to go down into a coal pit? If so, I can easily arrange it for you."

This question was addressed to my husband, during a recent visit in one of the midland counties, by our friend and host, whose mind seemed to be always occupied in finding new objects of interest for us to examine during our stay.

My gudeman looked properly grateful for the offer, but somewhat dubious about accepting it, he having a not unnatural prejudice in favour of daylight and the outer crust of mother earth. So he turned to me and asked what I thought about an underground excursion, and whether, in case of his going, I would accompany him?

I responded with sufficient promptitude, "If you go I shall certainly go too, and afterwards I will tell the dear girls all about it,

for I fancy there are not so many of them who have taken a similar journey."

It was accordingly settled that we should descend, a quarter of a mile into the bowels of the earth, on the following morning. Our kind hostess, who has never been further than the mouth of a shaft, announces her intention of descending with us; this is pleasant hearing, because otherwise I should be the only lady of the party.

But I have a little anxiety as to suitable garments, having only my ordinary wearing apparel, and not knowing what attire will befit the occasion.

This difficulty is easily overcome by our hostess, who places a long waterproof cloak at my disposal, and the gentlemen will take their macintoshes, just to keep off the fine coal dust, all we have to guard against.

Another lady guest is urged to accompany us, but she stoutly declines, and expresses her satisfaction that her husband happens to be away for the day. "If he were here," she said, "he would be certain to go down, and equally sure to want me to join him. I would not go for the world, and I should be miserable if he went without me. I am so glad he is away."

She, however, goes to the pit mouth to see the last of us, as we descend, and to wish us a safe return.

We have a lovely field walk of nearly a mile, and can hardly persuade ourselves that there can be collieries so near with all around bright and pure-looking, in the glow of a summer morning's sun.

But this is a comparatively new pit, and all the arrangements and appliances for working it are of the most advanced description, so that the minimum of smoke and dirt is to be found in connection with it. The offices are handsome, spacious, and well furnished. All around are flourishing potato grounds, allotted to the pitmen and cultivated by them in their leisure hours.

The mining engineer comes forward with a cheery smile and gives each of us a hearty shake of the hand, which says much for the strength of his muscles and our feminine endurance, for we make no sound—though we remember the grip for some little time to come. But we shall remember much longer the hearty kindness and consideration he showed us during our underground trip; for he is a model guide, and thinks and speaks of everything that can inform our minds or tend to the comfort of our bodies.

The engineer—Mr. Hughes we will call him—takes a rapid survey of our party. "Ah, Mrs. Helmburst, you are not going, I see," he said, addressing our friend who had declined to go down the pit with us.

"How do you know that, Mr. Hughes?"

"By your dress," he answered, glancing again at her handsome, matronly costume. "You look fitter for a flower-garden than a coal pit."

Our friend laughingly confessed that she preferred the flower-garden as a recreation ground, and said she would spend the interval during our absence in making a call or two.

From the office window we get our first lesson in connection with the coal business. A railway runs up close to the window. It is a slight incline, sufficient to allow the coal trucks to run down unassisted. There is a weighing machine at the bottom, and two men stand by it. As each truck comes within reach, it is seized, pushed on to the machine, and the weight is shown on a sort of dial-plate inside the office. This is instantaneously registered by the clerk who sits there for the purpose. A chalked number on the truck tells him from which stall in the pit the coal has been brought, and the weight is entered to the credit of the "butty" who works it.

Now we go to the neighbourhood of the

shaft itself, and see the coal brought up on a framework called a cage. This is a two-decker, and brings up four loaded trucks at once, two on each floor. On the floors are iron rails corresponding in width with those above and below ground, so that when the stage is on a level with the incline named, the trucks are sent down it to be weighed. Then those on the lower stage of the cage are raised and sent off, the empty trucks in each case being put on the stage to replace the full ones, and away the machine goes down that great circular abyss, built of stone and sheathed with iron, which is constantly swallowing and returning its freight.

The rapidity with which all this is done is almost bewildering. You see the cage shooft down with empty trucks, and almost before you have had time to think about it, up it comes again to the surface with a new load. The force which moves it is invisible at present; but it is highly suggestive of the magician's finger, only one knows that steam is the mighty wizard of modern days, chained and kept labouring, an untiring slave, at the will of his conqueror—man.

I do not know what my companions thought about it as they looked at the yawning shaft, but I acknowledge I felt a little bit queer. In a wonderfully short time I succeeded in recalling to mind all the pit accidents I had ever heard about, whether caused by explosion, inundation, fire, or the hundred and one causes that contribute to those tragedies of which we read from time to time—read at our quiet family breakfast tables, where we linger, newspaper in hand, warmed by the glow of those cheerful fires, the materials for which have been wrested from earth's treasure-houses for our comfort, often at a cost of life to the worker and of a desolated home to those he loves.

But there is no time for thinking of these things. We are to go down on the cage this time. The scattered coal is being cleared off its upper floor. The ladies are placed in the middle, advised to tuck in their flowing garments as snugly as possible, and firmly grasp the iron rail in front of them. Our thoughtful friend, the engineer, takes one end place, another gentleman the opposite end, and away we go down into the darkness.

There is plenty of fresh air about us, and, short as is the time occupied by the descent, we have leisure to think about our sensations. We cannot in the least tell from these whether we are going up or down. At one part of the descent there is a sort of undulating motion, suggestive of a wave-tossed vessel, and we feel almost certain that, for some unknown reason, those who guide the movements of our vehicle have determined to take us back again to the top.

Nothing of the kind. We are going straight down, though in consideration for our feelings we are not shot into the mine with such rapidity as the trucks are. We catch a glimpse of lights, and in less time than it takes to tell, we are landed in the pit and taken into a comfortable, well lighted office, where we sit down to collect our thoughts and chat a little with its occupants.

There is actually a "Visitors' Book" on the table, at which—proud of having made the descent—we feel inclined to rush, that we may inscribe our names therein. But we are laughingly informed that the miners will take care we do not neglect that duty when we have made the tour of the mine. We leave our bonnets and hats in the office, just tying handkerchiefs round our heads instead, kilt up our dresses so that they will keep clear of the ground, and announce that we are ready. Then a little safety lamp and a stick spiked at the end, an alpenstock in miniature are given to each, and we are led outside the office. The engineer takes special charge of our hostess,

and general charge of us all. I have a grey-headed veteran of the pit allotted as my guide, and suppose we are going to start immediately. Not a bit of it; we are bidden to stand quietly for a short time, until our eyes become so accustomed to the dim light that we can discern objects quite clearly.

Off we go at last along the main street of the mine, which is laid with a double row of rails. On these underground tramways the trucks are continually travelling to and from the bottom of the shaft.

Sixty horses and stout ponies are employed to do this work—principally the latter—as they are from their size “handier” where space is limited. We were constantly passing these little steeds following one another in a long line on the rails to the left, and a boy driver guided each pony.

We paused to pat their sleek sides and admire their fine condition, a proceeding which evidently gratified the young drivers, who are proud of their well-kept ponies. Our hostess recognised the faces of some of the lads, amongst whom she labours lovingly as a devoted Sunday-school teacher, and it was pleasant to see young faces light up at her kindly greetings or inquiries after their still younger brothers at home.

But the boys are to be seen aboveground, and we must listen to what the engineer is telling us about the coal. He bids us notice that there are three layers of it. The top one is soft and much less valuable than the next in order, which is excellent house coal. Below it again is a compact bed of hard cannel, from a foot to 18 inches thick. This is the most valuable of all on account of the great quantity of gas which it contains, and here we get a lesson not to judge by appearances. If we did, we should say that bright, glimmering stuff which forms the top layer *must* give more light than the stony, uncompromising cannel, which looks like masses of slate, only not so capable of being cleft into slices in the same way. But it is this stony cannel which is bought by gasmakers, and yields an abundant return of light for their outlay.

We are surprised to find that for a long distance neither coal nor cannel has been taken from the walls which bound our underground street. But the engineer tells us that for an area of twenty acres all is left intact, as the engine houses and the heavy working machinery are overhead within that space, and abundant room is allowed for their possible extension in the future.

Every forty yards is a recess or refuge, into which the men can go out of the way of loaded trucks, &c., and there are iron breaks—of each of which my guide warns me lest I should trip—by which trucks that had by any chance broken loose would be quickly arrested, and damage prevented.

Walking on a coal-dust path between the rails to the right, we soon come to the portion of the road whence the coal and cannel have been taken. The gaps thus made have been filled up with the stone and *débris* taken out in forming the various passages in the mine, and Mr. Hughes tells us that gradually the pressure from above will form them into a solid mass again. We understand now how it is that the hard cannel forms the bottom part of this coal stratum.

Now there is a rise in the road, and we find it is in consequence of what is called a “fault” in the seam of coal. By some convulsion of nature it has been upheaved, lifted out of its original level and placed a step higher up, so to speak, than it was before; just as if a piece of plank had been sawn in two, and the bottom edge of one portion placed on a level with the top of the other.

My geological knowledge is extremely slight, but I happen to understand what a

“fault” means, and this fact touches a sympathetic chord in the breast of our kind guide.

“You are the first lady visitor who has known the meaning of a ‘fault,’” he says, “without having a long explanation!” Whereat I am properly gratified, and realise the expressiveness of that old proverb which says, “*Among the blind the one-eyed is a king.*”

“Now,” says Mr. Hughes, “we are getting under the church.”

He is immediately pounced upon by our jocular host, who asks him how he can reconcile it to his conscience as a churchman to undermine his own church.

There is a good deal of laughing as we wend our way onward, long since so accustomed to the dim light furnished by our lamps, that we can discern the smallest objects. Having gone on for a good half mile we are taken into what is called a “stall,” to see the actual coal-getting process.

A stall is a cross-cutting about twenty-five yards long—a little bye-path off the main street, in which the work is going on. There are a hundred stalls in this pit, each of which is undertaken by two “butties,” as the head workmen are called, who work it assisted by two men. The “butties” pay their assistants by the day, themselves being paid according to the weight of coal sent out of their stall. They do not strike at the coal itself with their picks, but at the stony bed on which it rests, or the coal would be broken into small fragments. As this bed is gradually removed, strong wooden props are inserted below the cannel at the bottom, and, when a sufficient length has been made ready, the props are knocked from under, beginning at the innermost, the workman retreating towards the entrance of his stall.

In a short time, down falls the stratum of coal, when the cannel is cut into blocks, the coal separated according to quality and sent aboveground, as we have already seen, to be weighed, screened, and despatched in various directions. The best house quality is mostly consumed in London.

But we have not returned to the pit-mouth yet. We, ladies, are expected to take pick in hand and hew down a lump of coal for ourselves, to carry away with us as a sample of our skill. This done, our husbands each hand a coin to the owner of the picks, by way of “paying footing” on our behalf.

“It would be of no use to pass to other stalls, as similar work goes on in each,” says Mr. Hughes; “but before we return, Jim, can’t you let us have a hymn?”

The “butty” paused a moment, and then, in a fine, deep voice, started “Jesus, lover of my soul,” which we all joined in with hearts, I trust, as well as lips. We were told that a number of persons had been down amongst the pitmen, and proved instrumental in awakening many to serious thought about eternal things. The ministers of all denominations, instead of holding themselves aloof because they had not initiated the movement, had striven to encourage those whose hearts had thus been touched. By so doing, they had induced many to become regular attendants in the House of God, instead of spending their Sabbaths in lounging about the lanes, with their pipes in their mouths through the day of rest. Above six hundred hands are employed, but, thank God, no women or girls in connection with this colliery.

We retrace our steps towards the office, and on the road thither meet the nephew of Mr. Hughes, a clever young draughtsman, and his uncle’s engineering lieutenant.

“Well, Master Harry,” says our host, “do you like down below, here, or Old England best?”

“Down below I think, sir,” replied the youth. “It is cooler, and we are not subjected to sudden variations of temperature as we are

up above, to say nothing of the trouble we are saved in the matter of sunshades and umbrellas.”

I should have said that a delicious sense of freshness pervades the whole mine. This is produced by the labours of a mighty fan which is kept continually at work—night and day—sending fresh air into every part of the mine. One of the pitmen, a little time before, had jestingly pointed to his pate where the hair was becoming thin, and expressed a wish that “they would stop that fan, which was blowing all the hair off his head.”

We next have a look at the long range of stables, all beautifully clean and well lighted, the whitewashed walls forming a strong contrast to the dark street we have just left.

Each stall has its ventilator, so that the poor horses breathe air as pure as could be desired. It seems a strange life for them to lead; for they remain wholly below ground except in case of illness, when the patient is sent aloft for change of scene and air. Their plump sides, however, abundantly evidence the care that is taken of them.

There is a stable cat, too, which comes purring round us as if glad to see visitors in her domains.

Now we return to the office where, in the full light, we have a hearty laugh at each other’s black faces. We sign our names in the visitors’ book, and bid our pit-friends farewell, after our gentlemen have given a little remembrance to the colliers in attendance, and handed to them our lamps and sticks.

Then we mount the cage again, and, in even less time than was occupied in the descent, we find ourselves once more under the summer sky. I doubt not there was a prayer in the heart of each as we went down the pit. I feel equally sure there was a thanksgiving, when we were safely landed at the top again.

We go to peep into the engine houses where the motive power is to be found. They are as clean as a lady’s drawing-room; the machinery is quite a picture of polish, and the floors are beautifully white. We rub our shoes respectfully before we venture on them, and stand for a few moments noticing the pulsations of the metal monsters.

In one place we see a man sitting with his gaze constantly fixed on a dial plate before him. His foot is on a break and his hand on a lever, and it is by his movements of these, as the dial directs, that the engine works and the cage goes up and down the shaft. A few moments ago all our lives were in the hands of that silent sentinel.

We see the “screening” process—that is, the separating of the coal according to quality and size. This is all done with great rapidity, the coal being run up to a higher stage, passed through the machine, and distributed into trucks, all ready for sending off by rail, as fast as the eye can follow it.

We have now seen all, and we return to the offices, where Mrs. Helmhurst awaits us. How she laughs at our coal-grimed visages, especially my husband’s, and asks me if I should ever have fallen in love with him in that condition!

Our hostess and I do what we can to improve our appearance by a vigorous application of soap and water in the office lavatory, but the gentlemen disdain half-measures, and march home across the fields with their faces untouched; *we* say in order that it may be known unto all men that they have been down the pit.

I say “good-bye” to Mr. Hughes, and tell him we shall not soon forget his great kindness to us; and he laughingly shouts after us—

“Neither shall I forget that you are our only lady visitor who has known what a ‘fault’ meant.”

We part with another hearty hand shake.

When we reach home we find that the fine coal dust has crept into our clothing and about our persons in such an insinuating fashion, that very thorough ablutions and a vast amount of brushing and shaking of garments are needed. Even after all our scrubbing we cannot soon get rid of the dark rings which have formed under our eyelids, and persistently remain, an evidence of our recent underground journey.

In spite of reading, I had very little idea of what a coal mine really is until I visited this one. Probably many of you, dear girl readers, may be like me in this respect; but I hope you may realise the doings in the pit more readily from this description. If your hearts and mine are more stirred to feelings of sympathy and goodwill towards those who labour in the recesses of mother earth, that we may have cheery light and warm firesides, I shall be still more glad that I descended that grim-looking abyss. And you, dear girls, will not be sorry that, in imagination, you have accompanied me in my "Underground Excursion."

WINTER ENTERTAINMENTS IN VILLAGES.



THERE are various kinds of entertainments suitable for a village; but in this paper I will confine myself strictly to the "village concert," as being easier for girls to manage—more within the resources which are likely to be at their command, and more sure of the success which is desirable at all times, but especially so in a first attempt.

It is very much the fashion to suppose that in the country the clergyman has nothing to do, and that he is the only person to organise "entertainments." He generally does it, because no one else will take the trouble; but if we consult him, as we should naturally do, we shall find him very thankful for our offers of assistance—quite ready to give us his countenance and help; but still more grateful if we will organise the whole thing ourselves, leaving him free for those weighty concerns of the parish which really belong to him.

In country places there is always difficulty as to where our entertainment shall take place. The school is generally fixed upon, because there is seldom any other available building sufficiently large; so we obtain the necessary permission to use it, and we fix the date of our entertainment in consultation with the managers. I know a village in Kent where a hop-barn has been utilised for several winters

as a concert room with the utmost success; indeed, so suitable is it, that now all entertainments are held there as a matter of course; and by degrees the various properties, lamps, carpet, platform, &c., have been bought, to be kept expressly for use on these occasions. All this presupposes a ready—I had almost said an eager—co-operation on the part of the owner of the oast. Indeed, practical help in the matter of lighting and seating from some capable person who is on the spot is inestimable. As a rule, all these matters must be arranged by those who are getting up the entertainment, and they are a great additional trouble.

Before our girls decide to organise a village concert, they should consider well whether they can cope with these difficulties. If all the appliances be already at hand, they need not hesitate; it is only when giving an entertainment for the first time in a village, where nothing of the sort has been attempted before, that I would bid them consider it well. I do not think young people should run away from difficulties, nor ignore them; they should look them steadily in the face, and thus be able to judge whether they can reasonably hope to carry the matter through to a successful issue.

When you have quite decided to give a village concert, the first thing is to fix the date; and here I would remark that in the country the moon is a very important consideration; muddy lanes on a dark night are quite sufficient to keep large numbers at home.

Then as to hours. Doors open at 7, commence at 7.30, is very usual; but we must have regard to extraneous circumstances; if we have a railway-station within reach, we shall do well to fix our hours as much as possible in accordance with trains, in the hope that our neighbours in the adjacent villages may be tempted to come; if the trains are suitable, the fact must be mentioned in the programmes. The date and hour and price of admission having been fixed, the young people should prepare some large posters, which they can do themselves quite easily, saving expense and improving at the same time, somewhat as follows:—

AN ENTERTAINMENT

Will take Place

IN THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS, SEDGELEY,
ON WEDNESDAY, 30th JANUARY,

Consisting of

Music—Vocal and Instrumental.

Readings and Recitals.

Doors open at 7. Commence at 7.30.

To conclude at 9.30.

Admission 1s., 6d., and 3d.

Further particulars shortly.

For these bills, use large white paper, cartridge or cheap drawing paper; prepare a rough copy, see how many lines will be required, place them to come in the middle of the paper; rule them double of various widths, and draw a line down the centre. Now pencil your letters, commencing with the middle letter, which should be on the middle line, and work from it on each side. This will ensure that neatness and precision which are essential in such matters. One bill done in this manner is sufficient; the remainder can be copied from it. Having pencilled all your letters, which should be large and perfectly legible, paint them in colours according to taste. This last may be entrusted to the younger ones, who will take the greatest delight in the work, and bring out their paint-boxes with much eagerness.

From six to twelve of these large bills will suffice. Let them be finished and sent about in all directions as soon as possible.

Now we come to the programme for the

evening. That also must be arranged in good time, and cannot be done in a hurry. Indeed, those friends whom we intend to ask should have been written to, and their answers received before we decide whether we can undertake the entertainment. If our concert is the first which has been held in our village, an infusion of native talent is very desirable. But if ours is one of a series, then I think we should strain every nerve to import "new blood"; indeed, it is not much use to get up a concert with only the same performers, with whom the audience is already too familiar; there are some amateurs who are always favourites, always welcome, but they, alas! are few. We may do a great deal by judicious arrangement of the programme, and I venture to give one, as some sort of guide—

PART I.

1. Duet (Piano and Harmonium).
2. Song (Soprano).
3. Glee.
4. Song (Tenor).
5. Reading.
6. Trio (Vocal).
7. Song (Contralto).
8. Recitation.
9. Humorous Song.

PART II.

10. Duet (Piano and Violin).
11. Song (Bass).
12. Duet (Soprano and Contralto).
13. Catch or Round.
14. Song (Tenor).
15. Reading.
16. Song (Soprano).
17. Glee.
18. Humorous Song.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN.

The songs should not be of too ambitious a character. The people like simple songs that they can understand, and a few old favourites are always welcome. I have frequently heard such songs as "Robin Gray," "Jeannette and Jeannot," &c., rapturously applauded; while others which the singer prefers fall flat, because the audience hearing them for the first time does not grasp either the melody or the words. I need scarcely say that every word should be articulated with the utmost distinctness. In arranging the programme it is very necessary to insert the names of the artists, as well as of the songs and pieces, to prevent the same song being chosen twice over, to make the programme more complete, and to give the promoters powers of supervision.

These programmes must be printed—50 to send about; beforehand, 100 to be sold in the room, at one penny each; but whether sold or given, I consider them quite essential. They should be ready in good time, should contain full particulars as to hours and admission, and exact information as to trains.

The piano is a very important item, and, alas! generally very indifferent; few people care to lend one, so it must be hired, and it is seldom that we can obtain an instrument worth playing upon, for which reason a pianoforte solo is to be avoided. We can more easily procure a harmonium, and a duet with those two instruments is very effective, but of course they must be exactly in tune with each other. The piano should be rather below concert pitch, as easier for the vocalists; and the harmonium must be brought to the same level.

The accompaniments are also extremely important. Singers in public cannot play for themselves, as they must stand and face the audience, and a good accompanist is to the last degree essential, especially if the singer be at all nervous, on which point I shall have something to say presently. Accompaniments are too often left to take care of themselves, it being thought that anybody can play well enough for that; but it is not so, and I would urge our girls to be very particular about this. If a really good musician can be secured for this thankless and subordinate post, we have accomplished much towards success.

The length of the entertainment is another important consideration. It is a fatal mistake to have it too long. Two hours are plenty, and it is much wiser to leave off with the people