SUBTERRANEAN ADVENTURE

I have always sympathized with the girl, who, upon being told that she might not go to the photographer, said, "I guess I'll go and have a tooth out then." It was much the same feeling that prompted us (my sister and I) while wintering last year in Switzerland to visit the salt-mines at Bex. We had long since exhausted all the possibilities of life at Montreux, and were beginning to wonder how on earth we should be able to get through the remaining six weeks of our stay. It was at this juncture, that one morning, while listlessly turning over the pages of Baedeker, my attention was arrested by the following passage: "The salt-mines at Bex should be visited by every intelligent traveller, and are within easy reach of Montreux by either train or carriage."

"The very thing!" I said. "For once we will come under the heading of intelligent travellers. And now I come to think of it, I have always wanted to see a salt-mine. I have heard they are not only instructive but very pretty and interesting."

We determined to set off first thing in the morning for Bex. Our proposal met with some opposition from the kind old lady who had burdened herself with the unenviable task of taking care of us while we were abroad. "Why can't you enjoy yourselves in a rational manner," she said when she heard where we wanted to go, "instead of rushing all over the country, keeping me in a perpetual simmer for fear of what you may want to do next? Besides," she added with a conciliatory look at the old maid with whom she had just been discussing our eccentricities, "I don't think it is quite the thing for two young girls to go about as you do in strange places without a chaperon."

"Do I look as though I required a chaperon?" my sister asked, pulling up her shirt-collar with an aggressively masculine air.

"Very badly," the old lady replied. "You are far too pretty for a New Woman! However, into salt-mines I cannot be expected to follow you, so I suppose you must go alone; only do be careful, and don't do anything foolish."

Accordingly, with all sorts of promises and a basket of provisions, we set off the following day to catch the train from Territet.

"How jolly it is to get away for a whole day from that stupid hotel!" Ada said, crunching the snow under her hobnailed boots, and brandishing her alpenstock in a way that quite alarmed an old Russian count who happened to be going in as we came out of the hotel. "Quelle belle sauvage!" I heard him whisper to his companion as we passed; and glancing at Ada's Newmarket coat, and the wide-awake hat pressed ruthlessly down on her rebellious curls, I would not wonder at his mingled admiration and dismay.

We were only just in time to catch the train, and were ignominously bundled into a crowded third-class carriage the atmosphere of which was anything but etherial.

"Do you think I might venture to open the window?" Ada said, wedging herself in between it and an oily-looking monk, who sat praying and stewing in contented bliss.

"Please do," I gasped, with a despairing look at my neighbors, a stout party with a baby, and a soldier smoking the most villainous tobacco. Very stealthily, and with the air of a criminal, Ada let down the window inch by inch, until she was able to get her head right out; and in that position she remained blissfully ignorant of the dark looks and ominous mutterings of our fellow-passengers. The monk pulled his cowl further over his bald head, and looked with an air of holy resignation at my stout neighbor, who glared at me as though I had already murdered the innocent babe upon her lap. The advent of the ticket-collector was hailed with delight; a chorus of complaints (in which ces Anglaises figured pretty freely) were poured forth and the result was an authoritative command to Ada to shut down the window immediately.

"But one cannot breathe in such an atmosphere," she protested, with a pout that would have melted any one but a French railway official.

"All these people can breathe," he retorted angrily. "We do not go to the expense of heating the trains and then let the hot air out again by opening the windows." With this parting shot he left us once more hermetically sealed, and miserable. The monk smiled, the soldier laughed, the baby crowed, and altogether we felt that the place had become too hot for us in more senses than one.

"Let us go and sit outside," Ada said at last. "I'd rather be frozen than roasted alive any day." So forth we went, to the no small consternation of our enemies who doubtless thought we were either mad or intent on suicide. The Swiss trains are arranged differently from the English; the carriages run lengthways, with a door at each end leading on to a platform provided with steps at either side. Upon these steps we ensconced ourselves, and very comfortable we found them, the top one forming a support for the back, and the lower one serving as a footstool. "No more stuffy carriages for me," Ada said, thoroughly enjoying this novel way of seeing the country. "Why, it's as good as being on a jaunting car without the risk of being thrown out every five minutes."

We were quite sorry to arrive at our destination, an important-looking station with the inevitable cafe, and the still more inevitable string of omnibuses outside, the conductors of which nearly tore each other in pieces before we could make them understand that we wanted none of their hotels.

"The salt-mines! Nobody visits the salt-mines in the winter," they said, with an air of profound disgust, when at last we were allowed to speak. But this was merely ill-nature on their part, we felt sure; so, nothing daunted, we set out in the direction of the town, which could be seen nestling at the foot of the mountain, about three-quarters of a mile off.

"Is this the way to the salt-mines?" I asked of a little urchin skating along in front of us.

"But no, miss; you must cross that footpath over the fields, then go for a mile along the highroad, take the third turning to the left, and you will come to a wall——"

"Upon which we shall be ready to sit, if we ever get there," Ada remarked interrupting the flow of his eloquence: and rather crossly we retraced our steps till we came to the footpath indicated. The boy (disappointed of his expected sou, no doubt), called out after us in a jeering way, "You'll see no salt-mines at this time of the year!" But to attend to what little boys say is idle, so we plodded on, glad that the day happened to be so fine, for we evidently had a long walk before us.

The highroad was found, then the turning to the left and then the wall upon which we sat and awaited further directions. The scene before us was like a Christmas card; the blue sky, the snow-capped mountains, the little chalet-shaped houses clustered round the village church; it only needed a picturesque figure or two to make it perfect. "I'm afraid I can't supply the deficiency," Ada said; but it was supplied very effectually in a short time by an old woman, who came tottering down the mountain-path, a bundle of newly gathered firewood on her back, and at her side a sweet little golden-haired cherub, who saluted us with a heavenly smile as he passed. I inquired of the old woman the nearest way to the salt-mine. Pointing with her bony finger towards the path she had just come down, "Go along there," she said, "till you come to some white cottages, and opposite them you will find the entrance to the mine,—though I doubt if you'll get into it," she muttered as she hobbled away.

"What provoking people they seem to be here," I said, still determined to hope for the best. "After all, one must have salt in winter just as much as in summer, so why should not the mines be on view?"

The walk up the mountain was worth all our pains; a regular Swiss walk, or climb, rather, for the path got steeper and steeper every moment, till we seemed to be making steadily for the clouds. "I'm sure that old woman must have been mistaken," Ada said, when after an hour's steady climbing we seemed no nearer our destination. However, we determined to push on a little further, and were soon rewarded by catching a glimpse of something white, which proved to be the cottages of which we were in search; wretched little hovels they were, with not a sign of habitation about them, and no vestige of a mine in the vicinity.

"Most likely these are the miners' cottages," Ada said, "and the men will of course be at work; at any rate, let us go a little further; it is no use turning back now!"

The scenery got wilder and more desolate every moment, and I was just thinking what a propitious place this would be for a murder, when, coming down the path ahead of us we saw the most awful looking tramp. Dressed in tattered clothes, and with a rough stick in his hand, he came upon us so suddenly that we had no time to think of a retreat. His appearance did not improve on closer inspection, one side of his face being horribly disfigured, the mouth drawn up and the eye down in a manner that was very repulsive.

"Let us turn and run for our lives!" I said. "I'm sure he's an escaped lunatic."

"Escaped grandmother!" was Ada's polite rejoinder; and to my horror she walked straight up to the man, and with her most insinuating manner asked him if he happened to know the way to the salt-mines.

With a contortion that would have been a smile if it could, he replied that being one of the miners himself, he knew the way pretty well, and would be glad to show us the entrance, which we must have passed on our way up.

I went through a dumb pantomime with Ada to have nothing to do with the terrible creature, but she turned round and followed him as meekly as a lamb. "We have come to see the mines, and I intend to see them," was her sole answer to my protestations. Even she was a little bit disturbed, however, when she heard that the mines were not on view in the winter; and that if we really wished to see them, our new friend would have to accompany us.

Our fate was however decided for us. We had now returned to the cottages, silent and deserted as before, except for a wretched little black and white kitten, that came running up the path to meet us, and with a happy mew of welcome rubbed itself affectionately against the ragged trousers of our guide. "That decides it," Ada said, cuddling to her breast the half-starved little arbiter. "He must be a nice sort of man or his kitten wouldn't be so fond of him; we will go into the mine with you," she continued, turning to the man, who stood awaiting our decision.

It may have been imagination on my part, but kitten or no kitten, I thought I saw a horrible leer of satisfaction pass over his face, as he took his wretched little animal, and diving into one of the cottages, emerged with two dirty-looking holland smocks, furnished, like monks' cloaks, with long pointed cowls. "What are those things for?" I asked, my idea of a salt-mine being a huge crystal-like cave lit up with electric light.

"You must put them on; it is very dirty in the mine," the man said; "and the roof is so low in some parts that your hats would be ruined, so you had better take them off, and draw the cowls over your heads.

I glanced at the dark, cavernous entrance, and it certainly looked as though we should have to go some little way before arriving at my fairy grotto; so, with a very ill grace, I took hold of the dubious garment, and wiggled into it as best I could. Peals of laughter from Ada did not serve to restore my equanimity. "You look for all the world like Brother Pelican," she said, artistically arranging my cowl, and tying the rough hempen girdle round my waist. She did not take long to get into her mediaeval costume, and was still more amused when the man once more emerged from the cottage, bearing this time two flaming torches, with which he presented us, with a warning to be careful that none of the burning tar should fall upon our dresses.

"Don't you feel as though you were going to a funeral?" Ada asked, walking solemly after the guide, her torch in one hand and the trailing smock in the other. I certainly did not feel particularly lively. Being the elder, I was burdened with a sense of responsibility; and I could not but think we were doing a risky thing, descending into the bowels of the earth with a man of whom we knew nothing, except that he possessed a kitten. However, I consoled myself with the thought that in a few minutes we should be in the heart of the mine, among all the other workmen, and that in this case, as in many others, there would be safety in numbers.

LEAP YEAR LAWS.

Probably few spinsters who have been trying to gather up enough courage to take advantage of their customary privileges during leap year are aware that in two countries at least, and more than 600 years ago, laws were passed which gave women the right of proposing marriage. These enactments went even further than this. They also stipulated that if the man whose hand they sought should refuse, he should incur a heavy fine.

A searcher among the ancient records of Scotland has recently discovered an act of the Scottish Parliament, which was passed in the year 1288, which runs as follows:

"It is statut and ordaint that during the rein of his maist blissit Begeste, ilk for the yeare knowne as Lepe Yeare, ilk madyen ladye of baithe highe and lowe estait shall hae liberte to bespeke ye man she likes, albeit gif he refuses to taik hir to be his lawful wyfe, he shall be mulcted in ye sum of ane dundis or less, as his estait may be; except and awis gif he can make it appeare that he is betrothis ane ither woman, he then shall be free."

A year or two later a law almost similar to the Scottish enactment was passed in France, and received the approval of the King. It is also said that before Columbus sailed on his famous voyage to the westward a similar privilege was granted to the maidens of Genoa and Florence.

There is no record extant of any fines imposed under the conditions of this Scotch law, and no trace of statistics regarding the number of spinsters who took advantage of it or of the similar regulations in France, but the custom seems to have taken firm hold upon the popular mind about that time. The next mention of it is dated nearly 400 years later, and it is a curious little treatise called "Love, Courtship, and Matrimony," which was published in London in 1606. In this quaint work the "privilege" is thus alluded to:

"Albeit it now becomes a part of the common law in regard to social relations of life, that, as often as every leap yeare doth return, the ladyes have the sole privilege during the time it continueth of making love either by wordes or lookes, as to them it seemeth proper, and, moreover, no man will be entitled to benefit of clergy who doth in any wise treat her proposal with slight or contumely."

Up to within a century ago it was one of the unwritten laws of leap year that, if a man should decline a proposal, he should soften the disappointment which his answer would bring about by the presentation of a silk dress to the unsuccessful suitor for his hand.

A curious leap-year superstition is still to be met with in some parts of New England, and that is that in leap year the "beans grow on the wrong side of the pod."

BEAUTIES OF THE PAST.

Sappho is said by the Greek writers to have been a blonde.

Jezebel, the Queen of Ahab, according to one of the rabbis, had "black eyes that were set on fire of hell."

The Empress Anna of Russia was very portly and the fleshiness of her face greatly detracted from its good looks.

Margaret of Anjou had the typical face of a French beauty. She was black-haired, black-eyed and vivacious. Her features were indicative of her strength of character.

Pocahontas is described as having features as regular as those of an European woman. She is also said to have had a lighter complexion than usual among Indian women.

Theodora, the wife of the famous Justinian, was beautiful, crafty and unscrupulous. She is said to have been tall, dark and with "powers of conversation superior to any woman in the empire."

Catherine of Braganza, Queen of Charles II., was singularly gifted both in person, and in intellect, but in spite of her beauty and her good sense she was never able to win the love of her dissolute husband.

Cleopatra was not an Egyptian, but a Greek beauty, with perfectly white skin, tawny hair and blue eyes. Her chief fascination was her voice, which is described as low, well modulated, and singularly sweet in tone.

The Empress Catharine I. had a coarse, red face, generally broken out with pimples from the constant use of strong drink. She was a slave to brandy and died of a disease brought on by intemperance. In youth she had been famous for her beauty.

THE MONEY SAVED.

Detective—I have discovered, sir, that your confidential book-keeper, Mr. De Clerk is a defaulter to the extent of many thousands of dollars. As he has lived plainly, and has not gambled in stocks, he must still have all your money in his possession; but if we arrest him, you will never get it of course; and if we corner him, and try to compromise for half or two-thirds, he will probably skip with the whole boodle.

Business Man—My goodness! Mr. De Clerk!

Mr. De Clerk—Yes, sir.

Business Man—Mr. De Clerk, a few days ago I refused you the hand of my daughter, and I afterward employed this gentleman, who is a detective, to look closely into your personal character and past history. His report refers in such detail to your correct habits and business aptitude that I have changed my mind. You shall have her.

ABOUT BRITISH MINERALS.

RETURN SHOWING OUTPUT AND VALUE FOR LAST YEAR.

As to Hours of Labour and Wages Paid to the Workmen—The Selling Price of Coal—The Inspector's Reports on Quarries—Extent of Work Done.

The Imperial Home Office has issued the annual returns of the output of minerals in the United Kingdom, which have a special interest and significance in view of the discussions that have been in progress in the principal coal-producing districts as to the wages which should be paid to coal-miners in the immediate future, says an English paper. They are also of special interest in view of the fact that in the present publication we have for the first time the returns of the output of the quarries in the country, which include the persons employed, both inside and out, and the quantities raised or produced.

The total output of coal appears to have been higher in 1895 than in any previous year. Including 8,800 tons from open quarries, it amounted, to not less than 189,661,362 tons, which exceeds by 1,383,837 tons the output of 1894—the highest previous record. Including ironstone and fireclay the total recorded output of minerals in 1895 under the Coal Mines Act was 201,738,351 tons, which is an increase of 2,287,000 tons on the output of the previous year. The total number of mines at work in 1895 was 3,512, as compared with 3,419 for the previous year, giving an increase of 93, while the total number of hands employed in the mines under the Coal Mines Act was 700,284, as against 705,240 for the previous year. These are large figures and include in a general way the vast magnitude of our mineral industries up to the present time, despite the prevailing outcry as to the invasion of our chief industries by the success of foreign competition. When we have made this statement, however, we have said almost all that can be alleged with satisfaction as to the condition and prospects of our coal industry. The year 1895 was successful from the point of view of output alone. The fall of the selling price of coal that took place in all the leading coal-producing districts, coupled with the relatively high rate of wages paid, and the irregularity of employment afforded, caused the year 1895 to be a conspicuously bad one for both employers and employed.

AVERAGE OUTPUT.

The average output of minerals per person employed for the year, including all descriptions raised under the Coal Mines Acts, was only 288 tons, but in some cases it rose to over 349 tons, including East Scotland, South Durham, and South Staffordshire. The average output per employe in this country should not be less than 310 to 320 tons, and in some years it has been a good deal more. In some districts the average week's work per man employed throughout the year has not been more than 4 to 4 1-2 days, and it goes without saying that where colliery loses 1 to 1 1-2 day's work per week, it does not enjoy a fair chance of working under ordinary favorable conditions. Then, again, the older mines have had to contend with the competition of new pits, of which 93 have been opened during the year 1895.

As a general rule, new mines can produce for a year or two at least, cheaper coal than mines where the workings are a mile or two from the bottom of the shaft, as in the case in many of the older English colliery districts. The most important developments have taken place in the coalfield of South Wales, where all the newer plants have been laid down on a most complete and modern scale with electrical plant for hauling, pumping, lighting, and other operations, and where the total coal output now amounts to over 30 million tons a year. Almost equally remarkable advances have been made in the great northern coalfields—Durham and Northumberland—which produced in 1895 over 47 1-2 million tons, and in Scotland, which produced in the same year over 32 1-2 million tons of minerals under the Coal Mines Acts, including shale. The returns do not give any clue to the average prices realized at the pit's mouth over the year. For this information we shall have to look to the "Mineral Statistics," which will soon be issued. But it is probable that, on an average, the selling price of coal in 1895 was nearly sixpence per ton less than in the previous year, and sixpence per ton on about 190 million tons means a sum of 4 1-2 millions sterling for a single year—a fact that affords but a slight idea of the magnitude of the interests involved in our mineral operations.

Some time ago, the question of endeavouring to secure an agreement as to selling prices among the coalowners was mooted in one or two of the leading districts, and in the county of Durham a Sales Association was actually constituted, with the view of keeping output abreast of demand and maintaining a standard price. Since then the idea of further developing this syndicate scheme has made no progress. The Durham Association continues to exist, at least in name, but the prejudice that the public entertains against organizations of this kind has tended to check their growth, and consequently we have had a free fighting trade among coal-owners, which has been useful to the public, but in not a few cases calamitous to the competitors. There is no industry that suffers to-day to a larger extent from over-production and ruinous competitions.

ABOUT QUARRIES.

The returns which have been compiled by the Inspectors of Mines under the Quarries Act shows that quarrying is really one of our largest industries—a fact of which direct evidence is now afforded for the first time. The total number of quarries at work in the United Kingdom in 1895 was 8,062, so that they are considerably more than twice as numerous as our coal mines. The total quantity of minerals produced by these quarries—mostly, of course, in the form of building stone—was 29,813,734 tons, and the total number of hands employed was 104,625, of which 53,915 were employed inside, and 50,710 were employed outside the quarries. Besides these, there were 33,373 persons employed under the Metalliferous Mines Act, so that the total number employed in and about our mines and quarries last year was 838,282.

ITEMS OF INTEREST.

A Few Paragraphs Which Will be Found Well Worth Reading.

The average depth of the Atlantic is two and one-half miles.

The cost of living is forty per cent. cheaper in London than in New York.

The ants of South America have been known to construct a tunnel three miles in length.

People who sell newspapers in the streets of Moscow are compelled to appear in uniform.

Eight experienced divers are carried on every English flag-ship, and four on every cruiser.

One hundred and twenty firemen are required to feed the furnaces of a first-class Atlantic steamer.

India ink is made by some secret process which is closely guarded by its inventors, the Chinese.

Livery stable keepers are not at all anxious for the patronage of George W. Walker, of Ligonier, Ind. He weighs 560 pounds.

Mirrors that will not break are made of polished and transparent celluloid plate, backed withh quicksilver, like ordinary glass mirrors.

A man in Glasgow, Mo., bored a well to a distance of 413 feet, and struck an unlimited flow of salt water. Now he can enjoy salt water bathing.

Policemen in the city of Moscow carry lanterns at night. When an officer rests, or enters a house, the lantern is set on the sidewalk near where he happens to be.

A German in Houghton, Mich., intent on suicide, dove into a vat containing 360 gallons of beer. He was rescued, and the owner of the brewery threw away the beer.

Only about two minutes are required for the blood to course through the heart, thence to the lungs, back to the heart, and then through the entire body, and return to the heart.

A Parisian inventor is endeavoring to perfect a phonographic watch. If he is successful, the world will soon see a watch, which by touching a spring, will whisper the time in your ear.

Blood hounds traced the lost three-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Marion Scott, who had wandered three miles away from his parents, at Kokomo, Ind., and fondled the child until attendants arrived.

A vile wretch sent a bottle of wine, anonymously, to Wm. L. Clough, a business man of Springfield, Mass. The wine was analyzed, and found to contain enough strychnine to kill half a dozen men.

Alex. Newman, of Decker, Ind., while hunting, was attacked by a flock of cranes. They fought him furiously, and tried to peck out his eyes. By clubbing them with his gun, he killed thirteen of them.

An esteemed friend was invited to dinner by a lady in Chichester, England. The friend, a lady, while at table, was bitten by a dog belonging to the hostess. The friend brought suit, and recovered £50.

The whiskers of the walrus extend three or four inches out from the snout. They are quite stiff, and become stiffer with age. They are plucked separately and exported to China, where they are used as toothpicks.

A religious sect called the "Abstainers" eat no meat. They built a church in Third street, Philadelphia, years ago, and lack of zeal on the part of the members compelled them to sell the edifice. It is now used as a sausage factory.

A new pavement in use on the streets of Vienna is composed of granulated cork mixed with asphalt and other cohesive substances. It is compressed into blocks of convenient size. Its advantages are cleanliness, noiselessness, durability, and economy.

A sedate wheelman, who is anxious to strictly follow the rules of etiquette, wrote to an Indianapolis paper, and asked this important question: "Would it be all right to a ride a bicycle to the funeral of a distant connection by marriage, providing you keep behind the hurse?"

Professional gossips are common in China. Most of them are elderly ladies who have regular patrons of the female sex, whose houses they visit, and whom they entertain by narrating the news and scandal of the day. They thus earn about enough to maintain them in a life of laziness.

The women in an Oklahoma town outvoted the males in a recent election. A local publisher, desiring to announce the result conspicuously in his paper, dispatched this order to a type-foundry: "Please send us one small cut of a hen. Women carried the election here, and I suppose we will have to swing out a hen instead of a rooster."

MERELY A JINGLE.

Married in white,
You have chosen all right.

Married in gray,
You will go far away.

Married in black,
You will wish yourself back.

Married in red,
You'd better be dead.

Married in green,
Ashamed to be seen.

Married in blue,
He'll always be true.

Married in pearl,
You'll live in a whirl.

Married in yellow,
Ashamed of the fellow.

Married in brown,
You'll live out of town.

Married in pink,
Your spirits will sink.

A BIT OF FINESSE.

Julia has gone in desperately for whist this summer.

Yes; I wonder why?

Oh, don't you see?—it makes men think she is not much of a talker.