

**"TOMMY KNOCKERS,"  
THE  
MINERS' GHOSTS.**

(Harry Beardsley in Leslie's Weekly.)

It is during the "graveyard" shift in a mine that the superstitions of the miners develop; and it is then that the "tommy knockers" are heard, but not always. The "graveyard" shift is in the dead of night—usually between 11 o'clock p. m. and 2 o'clock in the morning. Nearly all of the big mines of the west are in operation constantly during the twenty-four hours of each day and the seven days of every week, Sunday and holidays having no consideration. A great mining plant does not shut down on the Fourth of July or even at Christmas. The men are driving the drills, the "shots" are being fired, the broken ore shoveled into cars and carried out through shaft or tunnel, and the big mills are grinding, pounding and roaring for 365 days in the year. So the miner who works steadily has no variation in his life. He is almost as much alone and away from the world as the sailor at sea, and the conditions are, it seems to me, far more propitious for the birth and growth of superstitions.

The miner works always in total darkness. No matter whether he be of the day shift or the night shift, it is always night in the mine. And much of the time the miner, who who drills in the breast of the tunnel or "drift," is entirely alone—he and his flickering little candle—in the dark. Perhaps he is working in a wet mine. Then, to the tune of his hammer as he strikes the drill, he hears the accompaniment of dripping water—drip, drip, drip, incessantly. The miner stops to rest and mop his face and light his pipe. Then he sits for a few minutes puffing; looks into the black tunnel back of him. The dripping never ceases; and the miner begins unconsciously to wonder and to dream. Surely this is fertile soil for imagination.

Not long before, perhaps, a man was killed in this mine. He was a driller and alone in the breast of the tunnel, when throughout the mine an explosion was heard. The driller was found in the darkness, for the explosion had blown out his candle. The air was thick with powder smoke and the dust of rock, and his body was torn and bruised so that it no longer had human form. It was as though an old suit of clothes had been filled with a mass of bloody flesh.

"A missed hole," said the foreman. And so it undoubtedly was, for the "missed hole" has killed many drillers in mines. In working in a breast of rock, in driving a tunnel or "drift" the driller usually, if the rock is hard, puts in five or six holes, fills each with powder, sets the fuses, touches a light to them, and then steps back into the tunnel a safe distance until the powder has exploded.

The crew of men, the "shift," changes and another driller, unconscious of the presence of the "missed hole," goes to work in the tunnel. Perhaps, as he hammers merrily away, driving the hard steel into the rock, the end of his drill strikes the cap of the load that did not go off. Then there is an explosion, a cloud of smoke and dust in the darkness, a poor mutilated dead body. And another fatality from a "missed hole" is recorded.

The miners, of course, all know of these things; and likely as not the solitary driller in the graveyard shift, sitting to rest a minute and smoking, turns over in his mind some of these fearful tragedies that add danger and mystery to mining. In the dead of night with the knowledge that his turn may come next, such thoughts are not comforting or exhilarating to the solitary man.

Then, suddenly, in the never-ceasing drip, drip, drip of the water, he hears some one drilling. He hears the regular ring of the hammer somewhere not far from him in the mine. He is at first puzzled and mystified, for he knows that he is alone in that part of the mine. The graveyard shift contains usually the smallest number of men. Never doubting the accuracy of his understanding, the miner takes his candle from the rock and tramps through the tunnel toward the sound of the drilling. He stops to listen. Now it seems above him and he climbs up into a "raise," where he has been taken down from above the tunnel. He holds his candle over him and searches the darkness with straining eyes.

There is no light of another driller, but the sound of the hammer continues—only it seems to be a little farther away. The miner descends from the "raise" and tramps again through the tunnel, his feet splashing through the mud and water. The miner stops in surprise. He is alone, 500 feet below ground, except for his unknown companion. There is a moment of silence, intensified, it seems, by the drip, drip, drip of the water and the utter darkness.

Not far ahead the miner suddenly hears a new sound. Some one is walking rapidly through the tunnel with a regular tread, slashing in the mud and water. The miner, his candle at his side, quickly follows. He almost runs in haste to find his companion. But the tramp and splash of the unknown feet are always just ahead of him. The miner stops and shouts:

"Hey! who are you, there?"  
No answer comes, and he calls again and again. Still he hears in the darkness the tread and splash of the phantom feet. All at once, although

he is a strong man, the miner is filled with fear. He begins to tremble and grow cold, and then in a panic of dread he turns and flies, stumbling and plunging through the tunnel to the shaft.

Here is the empty cage for lifting ore. It is at the foot of a shaft when it fits exactly, and when the miner pulls the wire, which rings a signal bell at the top, and springs into the cage, he is raised in a few seconds through the darkness to the free air 500 feet above. The engineer at the hoisting machinery wonders what has happened. The miner tells him his experience, and both men sit silent in a vague fear. They realize then that the "tommy knocker," the ghost of the mine, has been heard again.

Miners don't laugh about the "tommy knockers." I have known men of intelligence, who have long since ceased to work "under ground," solemnly aver that the "tommy knockers" invariably visit the mine where a man has been killed. The spirit comes back, it seems, to the old haunts of the body. Sometimes it drills, sometimes it runs a phantom car, sometimes it only wanders aimlessly through the workings of the mine. But invariably, according to the miner's belief, the ghost returns. Sometimes the ghost of the mine is seen, but usually only heard.

To the miner who works alone in the darkness there are many sounds that might be exaggerated by imagination. Sometimes a timber that prevents the caving in of the sides of a tunnel grows rotten and breaks, and the sound rings resonantly throughout the hollow underground passageways. In some mines there are curious echoes, caused by the formation of the rock, and some loose earth in the wall of a "slope," an empty chamber where ore has been taken out, falls with a clatter that is heard far away. To the miner whose imagination has been stimulated by his solitude and the darkness, these noises may be prolonged and changed until they become to him the sound of a footfall or of a driller's hammer.

And the mine has mysterious voices, too. A mining friend of mine told me of a strange warning which came to him once, and a narrow escape from death. He was working in a mine in Montana, into which the water flowed in such quantities that it was necessary to keep pumps constantly at work drawing it to the surface. My friend was in charge of the pumps, and when each crew, or "shift," of men finished its work this man would regularly make an inspection of all the five pumps which were in operation.

The ore was lifted from this mine on an inclined shaft. The cars which run on wheels up such a shaft are called "skips," and it was the breaking of a "skip" which came near being fatal that night. The pump inspector had visited four of the pumps, and was about to start down the shaft to the fifth, which was on the level 500 feet below the ground, when, as he tells me, he felt a peculiar feeling of fear, and a voice directly over his shoulder said to him:

"Don't you go down that shaft tonight!"  
The miner stopped. He seemed almost to feel the breath of the voice against his cheek. He was aware, he said, of a distinct presence. Then he told himself that he was foolish to heed any such imaginings like this, and he went down to the pump when he reached the 500-foot level he began at once his inspection of the machinery. Back in the tunnel, which extended away in the darkness, the water stood, nearly filling the passage over a man's head in depth.

A hundred feet above, an ore-car filled with tons of rock was emptied into a "skip," which was started up the incline shaft toward the surface. A moment later the man working at the pump heard a crashing, a terrific rattling sound. He realized at once that the "skip" had broken, and that the tons of rock were tumbling toward him down the shaft. Instinctively he flattened himself against the wall and the rock came like an avalanche. Most of it he escaped, but heavy pieces struck his breast and shoulders, causing painful bruises. But that was not the worst.

Soon the air was filled with hissing steam. The load of ore in its fall had broken a steam-pipe above, and the inspector knew that in a few minutes more he would be smothered. The steam was blinding. It was hot and stifling in his nostrils and his lungs. But he had little time to think. Only one course was open. He plunged into the icy water of the tunnel and swam out into the darkness.

Then the break in the steam-pipe was discovered by those above. An engineer turned a valve and stopped the hot vapor's flow. The inspector, seeing that the cloud of steam had diminished, swam back to the shaft and rang a signal bell. A car was lowered, and he rode to the surface, weak with his bruises. And now he does not doubt the voice that spoke to him over his shoulder and said:

"Don't go down the shaft tonight!"

Although fatalities in mines are so frequent, miners are peculiarly careless, it seems, about repairing the breaks in flooring or timbers that cause death. Among miners themselves this is admitted, but they do not explain the reason for it. Last winter I went through a large mine that is acknowledged to be one of the most carefully and systematically operated mining plants in the United States. Several of us were picking our way very carefully by the light of our candles through a sort of side tunnel which extended over a deep crevice, from which large quantities of ore had been taken. We were walking on a flooring of plank and logs, when suddenly the superintendent

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dent of the mine, who was ahead and was our guide, stopped.

"Look out for this hole!" he said, pointing to a gap in the plank. Then, as we came up, he told us that a month before, a "shift boss" had been walking on these same planks, when one of them gave way and the man fell into the open crevice beneath. He was found sixty feet below, dead, his neck broken. Yet the broken place had not been repaired, although a month had passed.

Certain mines, like certain houses, are believed to be haunted. And these mines, where the "tommy knockers" are, have usually been the scenes of violent deaths. The records of such mines are talked over by the miners as they gather at lunch-time far under ground to eat the contents of their dinner-buckets, or as two or three of them assemble somewhere in the workings for a few minutes to loaf and smoke their pipes when the boss is out of sight. But in spite of its dangers, the arduous labor which it necessitates, and the fatal ailments which it breeds, no calling is so fascinating to its followers as is mining. Men who have become crippled and bent and old in their labor gladly take up their buckets, climb on to the cage, and are dropped under ground; and there, like some burrowing animal, they are at home and happy.

The most superstitious are the Cornishmen. Everywhere they are known among the miners as "Cousin Jacks." They are great smokers, and frequently they gather together in little groups under ground to smoke and talk—when the "shift boss" is away. And when a "Cousin Jack" invites a comrade to smoke he says, "Come, touch pipe a bit, old son," which is a very sociable greeting indeed. "Tommy knocker" is a term originated by the Cornishmen; and a superstition which they persist in is that there must never be any whistling in a mine. It's bad luck.

**The Lost Statue.**

When Michael Angelo was about 15 years old he was allowed to copy a statue of a fawn in a great Prince's garden. While at work he perceived a man looking at the statue. The man showed Michael some of his mistakes and Michael set to work to rectify them.

The next morning Michael was very much surprised to find that the copy he had made was gone. Soon after the stranger of the day before approached Michael. He told Michael to follow him and he would show him where the statue was. Michael consented and the stranger led him into a beautiful room in the palace where there were many fine works of art. There, in the midst of them stood the statue Michael had made.

"Oh, let me finish this rough sketch," said Michael, "for the Prince will be angry that this statue is in the palace."

"I am the Prince," said the stranger "and I will treat you as my own son, for no doubt you will some day be a great artist." The Prince's words

proved to be true, for no other artist's works have ever excelled those of Michael Angelo.

**MINNIE KABATCHNICK (11.)**

**Fainting Animals.**

A little gray dog tumbled headlong into the area of a house in a west end square, says the Baltimore Herald, and the maid who happened to be sitting there closed the gate.

When the dog saw she was safe from pursuers—two huge bull terriers—she toppled over in a dead faint. The other servants, who crowded out into the area to help bring the little animal to, derided the assertion, but a veterinary surgeon who finally joined the group said there was nothing preposterous about it.

"Of course, she fainted," he said. "Lots of animals faint. Cats and dogs and even more stolid animals keel over in moments of fear and exhaustion. In the case of horses the prostration is generally attributed to sunstroke, but quite often they are knocked out by a plain, everyday faint instead of atmospheric excesses. Fowls faint, too, and the birds of the air. In fact, it is hard to find any living creature that doesn't topple over under crucial circumstances."

**A Poetry Party.**

Girls often like to have suggestions for methods of making their meetings attractive, says St. Nicholas—something beside the usual "talk and refreshments"—what some eminent man of letters in a waggish way described as "giggle, gabble, gobble and git."

A series of little meetings, each in celebration of some poet's birthday or other anniversary, would be an excuse for making some interesting additions to the usual program. Thus there would be no great difficulty in arranging a Shakespeare party or a Milton party, in which quotations from the works of either poet were used in invitations, dinner cards, bills of fare and so on. Or an American poet might be chosen. Oliver Wendell Holmes would furnish lines of a cheering nature fit for mild festivities; or you might introduce your guests to some of the beautiful poems of Celia Thaxter, or of Jean Ingelow, if you do not mind going outside of your own land.

**Worth All It Cost.**

Mr. Yeast—"You see my daughter got her musical education abroad."

Mr. Crimsonbeak—"Well, I guess you think it is worth all to you that it cost."

"How so?"

"Why, she practiced over there, too, didn't she?"—Yonkers Statesman.

A course embroidered white or light-colored linen, resembling a stamped leather effect, is a pretty material. However, it needs but a brief interruption of the customary movement of produce and food materials to show that at all times a great city lingers on the edge of famine, and that a very slight provocation will send prices up with leaps and bounds,

**BLESSING THE WATERS**

**As Safeguard Against Floods—In Memory of Christ's Baptism.**

Midwinter in St. Petersburg each year sees a unique and solemn ceremony, called "the blessing of the waters." A chapel of ice, richly decorated with ornaments from the palaces and churches and dedicated to St. John the Baptist, is erected on the frozen surface of the River Neva. The river is then called the Jordan and religious services are conducted in the temple by the metropolitan or high priest of the national church, attended by the emperor and all his court. The ceremony is in memory of the baptism of Christ, and is supposed to be a safeguard against dangers from floods, as well as to benefit those who make their living on the sea.

A hole is cut in the ice in the center of the floor of the chapel. From this the people are baptized by sprinkling by the priests, and the faithful members of the Greek church go in vast crowds to get their share, while religious devotees often plunge into the ice-cold food through the hole. If they catch cold and die, as they often do, heaven is secured for them. On the evening before the ceremony devout churchmen make crosses on their thresholds to prevent the evil spirits that are driven from the water from taking refuge in their houses.

Both a blessing and a curse to St. Petersburg is the River Neva. Upon its banks the most magnificent palaces are erected. The numerous islands are parks or pleasure grounds of the people and are filled with resorts that are thronged during both the winter and summer months. There is only one permanent bridge, the remainder being so constructed that they can be removed when the stream freezes over, as it usually does in November, when the teams and pedestrians pass over the ice until April. The Jockey club holds its race meetings on the ice.

But when the spring thaw comes or when a strong northwesterly wind blows the water in from the sea several days in succession, there is great danger of food, for the city is not more than four feet above the mean level of the river. When a flood is coming the inhabitants are warned by the firing of guns. Ice jams are removed by dynamite and the army is ordered out with axes. There is no way to prevent the floods that come with the winds.

**The Feeding of a City.**

Under normal conditions the food supply of a city seems to come hand so naturally that it is scarcely regarded as a problem at all. A hundred channels of transportation pour into it day and night what its markets call for, sometimes with such lavish profusion that great waste is inevitable. However, it needs but a brief interruption of the customary movement of produce and food materials to show that at all times a great city lingers on the edge of famine, and that a very slight provocation will send prices up with leaps and bounds,

so creating an artificial scarcity before the actual scarcity is felt. The pinch is first felt in milk, which must come fresh from the dairy every day. In point of fact this is really not a necessity. In the Canadian markets one may see cakes of frozen milk stacked like cordwood on the stalls of the dealers in dairy products, and they are "good until used," like unlimited railway tickets. Milk which very well be kept frozen in cold storage if it were not that the interruption to a daily sufficient supply are so infrequent and brief that in this climate the matter does not present itself as offering a business opportunity.

**Ingenious Life-Saver.**

The life-savers attached to Uncle Sam's stations on Fire Island encountered great difficulties and dangers in crossing the Great South Bay to the Long Island shore, either by watercraft or ice-craft. Still, naturally enough, they had a longing to visit family and friends when the great sea was choked with drift ice or partly frozen over. These ingenious people long ago realized the needs of a vehicle capable of traveling on either ice or water safely, and about thirty years ago they launched the first "scooter," a boat constructed to travel on both ice and in water. It was a small boat, made fast to a sled, which was pushed on the ice and rowed on the water. This crude mode of travel with the wind against or across the boat, made the trip one of tremendous exertion. In the course of time a sail was tried, at first square-rigged and very small, but it was used only when the wind was fair. Then a special boat was built which was partially decked, and the sled was made lighter until at last the scooter of the present day came about, with nothing left of the sled but the bottom of the runners, shod with iron, or better still, as experience has shown, with brass. And so has developed the wonderful "scooter" of the Long Island lakes and bays, a swift ice-boat that will sail in the water and from one element to the other quickly without a jar.—Country Life in America.

**Russia Dominates Asia.**

There can be no doubt but that Russia has been holding the "whip-hand" over China, and, in general, the whole of Central Asia as far south as the Indian border—rulers in substance if not in name—quietly pushing forward to consummation her gigantic schemes for political and commercial dominance in Asia. Already her traders, her spies, her military officials and diplomats have threaded the wilds of Turkestan, and even Tibet, and, hitherto, other inaccessible regions of Central Asia—sowing seed in one spot conciliating the native tribes in another, blinding the Chinese Government and the world at large as to her real intent—each and every step a part of a carefully thought out and pre-arranged plan formulated years ago in Russian chancelleries, to undermine British influence, which is the only barrier liable to obstruct Russian policy.—Gunter's Magazine.