

Farewell

*Amid the darkness, rain, snow or shine,
They trudged up rawd t'Awd Gang Mine,
Wanton sinners or Saints of God,
All this footworn path have trod,
Women and children of men so poor,
Worked for a pittance at mine's dressing floor.*

*Up in the morning before the lark,
Wrapped up against cold, in a thick flannin Sark,
Down shaft, along level, threading their way,
Up rise or down sump, to their work for the day.
With gloom as companion, they labour with sweat,
Or divert rushing waters, all soaking and wet.*

*The hammer clangs loudly upon the drill,
Boring out holes at t'awd man's will,
The dust hangs heavy on the air,
Guttering candle light, visions despair.
The charge is laid, the fuse does mock,
The gunpowder blows, bursting out the rock.*

*The air is short, heavy the breath,
Advancing sign of an early death.
There's a cry of triumph, "Thar's good ore 'ere t'win,
T'ard times are over, and t'good yans begin,
Thar'll be good pay, and we'll sign a stout tune,
Whilst we drink jugs of ale, at t'awd Half Moon."*

*When the bargain's hard, we tighten the belt,
Try to shield the bairns, the hunger that is felt,
Get our food 'on the strap', at the company store,
Victims of a system that forever keeps us poor,
Unemployed: it's to the Vestry, to beg a crust of bread,
Always in our dreams, there's a vein filled with lead.*

*The deadman inching forward, up to the face,
They grind through the years, like a snail in a race,
Dust and foul air, the dreaded constraints,
Old men at 50, suffer miners' complaints,
Searching for a 'strike' that will lead on to wealth,
Won with sweated labour and the ruin of their health.*

*Yet another miner passed on last night,
Leaving his family in desolate plight,
Mourned by his partners for the loss of his skill,
Who wonder, just wonder, Was it God's will?
What hope for his children, with mother alone,
Compelled to take washing, work finger to bone.*

*Others step forward, into his wake,
Breasts full of hope that a fortune they'll make,
Locked into a life, the only one there,
Careless to danger, without fear or despair,
An early grave beckons, when they enter the pit,
Heroes unsung, these men of true grit.*

*Wherever they labour, Fryerfold or North Rake,
They're sustained by hard cheese and coarse Havercake,
At hay time in summer they escape to the sun,
See the lambs gambol, their children having fun.
Sing hymns in the chapel, to God the divine,
But they never escape the call of the mine.*

*The hushes are hungry, the veins are so thin,
We must up to far places, our living to win.
For Durham and Lancashire, we must be bound,
To the mines and the mills, where work can be found,
Or cross t'Gert Dub, to the Land of Tomorrow,
Wrenched from our loved ones, in hope and in sorrow.*