

THE COAL MINER UNDER THE SEA

F. W. GRAY

He stands where once the Forest spread
Boundless, monotonously green,
Deep-rooted in the acrid swamp;
Where fronded fern and patterned reed
Groped sunwards through the mist.

No joyous song of birds, no sound
Save the swift rush of armored fish,
The crackling burst of ripened pods,
Scattering abroad their yellow spores,
As smokes the yew in Spring.

No flight save darting dragon flies,
Blue arrows borne on dappled wings,
Veering in mazy squadrons through
Dark water-lanes that twining thread
The labyrinth of reeds.

No hint of Man to come, although
For Him, for him alone, stretches
The breeding swamp, the loathly muck,
The living green, with Death below,
The tomb of cofined light.

He stands upon the ancient clay
Where stonily entangled lie
Scarred roots that twined and pulsed with life
A thousand million years ago,
Beneath the youthful Sun.

O'erhead he sees the glossy trace
Of veinèd leaves, of lace-like fern
Chiselled, imprinted on the stone,
Crowded as Autumn leaves upon
The slopes of dark Ben Eoin.

Between him and the circling Sun,
Strata on strata thickly piled
In ancient, vagrant, lonely deeps,
Dead forest upon forest heaped
And over all, the Sea.

The groaning coal with swinging pick
He smites. Blackened with dust and sweat,
Swart sinews rippling in the light
On his round helmet glistening,
A pin-point in the dark.

A man! The destined aim and crown
Of God's prevision. He for whom
The forests grew, the elder seas
Flowed in and out, filling Earth's crust
With treasures old yet new.

This sentient atom, burrowing as a mole,
His life a breath, amidst the timeless stones,
He and his brethren heirs of all for which
Creation groaned until this latest hour:
Is he the End, the goal,
Of the Creator's plan?

Or shall that life, that soul which came from God,
The spirit breathed into our clay,
Escape through Death, as does enprisoned light
From burning coals upon his humble hearth,
To find light in God's Light.
After long questing, Rest?