

NEW CUMNOCKTHE SEARCH FOR THE 13

The little town lies quiet in the morning sun. Across the fields the bells call to church and in the mining villages it is a day of rest. There is no coal to be won today. But at Knockshinnoch there is no rest. Dumbly they wait as the Fuel Minister and others plan. Trapped below are 13 miners. There is only one way down and they ask to take it. Needless of the danger that threatens all round, willing hands prepare the way. To protect the hole from further slides a roof is built. Beneath it they will dig through the mud to the galleries below. There is hurry now, and men drive themselves to cheat time. Above the Manager watches their safety and directs their labours. There must be props to shore the sides of their downward digging, to hold back the mud and slush through which they work.

Prayer in heart, the women watch, judging progress by the length of a ladder.

The women of Knockshinnoch come out from church. They have given the care of their missing to their God and returned thanks for the 115 spared.

After their ordeal many of the rescued men needed rest and building up. Some were entombed more than 40 hours, threatened by mud and poison gas. It's not easy to imagine what they endured. To wait and to hope in the dark 700 feet below ground ... to see safety beckon and then learn that poison bars the way.

The rains come and the river rises. The sodden land floods and nature herself fights against the rescuers. Through the marshy surrounds men cut drains to carry away the water. Far away and alone they work, with no sight to encourage them, to stop the water that threatens to wash in the walls of the crater.

Man's giant machines bog down, powerful but powerless. Man alone keeps on.

The shaft is through and the men down, but of the 13 there is no trace. At pithead they call in another machine, but hope for the missing fades, and to their homes go those whose mission is to comfort. In the little cottages, where joy and sorrow mingle, they know the price of coal. They pay it with their hearts, every day.