

CHAPTER XVII

THE SOUTH WALES AND MONMOUTHSHIRE COALFIELD

PART I

ONLY since the advent of ocean-going steamers and the development of modern ships of war has the coal of Glamorganshire, Monmouthshire and Carmarthenshire, usually referred to as "South Wales" coal, attained its present importance. In the early part of the last century and during the century before, South Wales was regarded less as a coalfield than as an iron-producing centre. The coal to smelt the ore found in the valleys that run down to the sea was worked easily from the outcrops, and used freely for that purpose. In 1839 there were no fewer than forty iron plants, comprising 132 furnaces, the property of as many owners—coal-miners only because they were iron-smelters—operating in South Wales and Monmouthshire. Scanning these names, it is easy to recognise in many among them the founders of some of the largest and most prosperous collieries of later times, whose tips and sidings now probably occupy the sites of ancient furnaces and forges. The early importance of Welsh iron-making has, however, been since eclipsed by the Scottish, Cleveland and Derbyshire districts. On the other hand, the steam-raising qualities of Welsh coal, which are superior to those of any other known fuel, have developed Welsh collieries to such an extent as to utilise a huge capital and afford employment at high wages for a large and constantly increasing number of men.

The early output of Welsh coal was scanty. In 1854, including the anthracite mines of Breconshire and Pem-