

## GROVE SHAFT HORROR.

**Determined Efforts to Descend Into  
the Mine and Learn the  
Very Worst.**

**Full Particulars of the Great Disaster of  
Friday; Twenty-seven Widows, One Hun-  
dred and Eight Children Fatherless—Volun-  
teers from Other Mines Present to Give  
What Assistance They Can—Repairing of  
the Shaft Begun; Descent of Working-Par-  
ties—Probable Cause of the Explosion—List  
of the Men Caught Underground, with  
Places of Nativity, Ages, and Family-His-  
tory—The Latest from the Relief Parties—  
Mr. Cuthbert's Account—Down in a Coal-  
Mine; A Description Written in 1843—One  
Body Discovered.**

Though there was little outward evidence of it, yesterday was a day of great sorrow at the Midlothian mines.

Around the mouth of Grove shaft there was no crowd; only men at work. The widowed women and the children made fatherless by the great calamity of Friday generally remained at their homes, suffering the agony of frightful suspense and hoping against hope, while courageous men, with all the means at their disposal, went hard to work to penetrate the mine and discover the worst. It can hardly be possible that any of those entombed by the explosion of Friday can be alive, but their friends feel it a duty to labor with as much zeal and energy as if by so doing they might rescue them from impending death.

The explosion blew out the brattice of the shaft. The brattice is a partition dividing the shaft into two chambers, and is necessary in order that an atmospheric current may be created and the fresh air let in (by the aid of the fan), and the foul air let out. Wherever the miners proceed in the bowels of the earth, in mining of the character done in Chesterfield, this brattice-work in some form or other must be put up. The explosion broke it up in the shaft, and the relief parties yesterday had first to repair it. To do it the quicker canvas was used. As the men went lower and lower into the shaft they cleared the *débris* away, and our latest accounts give, considering all the circumstances, a satisfactory account of their progress.

The disaster makes 27 widows and 108 children fatherless. Ten of the thirty-two men lost were white.

The following information about the shaft is accurate:

	Feet.
Depth of shaft.....	640
Length of tunnel (through bed of granite)...	600
Length of incline.....	2,000

Total distance from mouth of shaft to the  
the extremity of the incline.....3,240

**VISIT TO COALFIELD.**

Mr. J. B. Lightfoot, the agent here of the Midlothian coal-mines, knew nothing of the disaster until he learned it from the *Dispatch* of yesterday morning. Then, impatient to get to the spot, and being unwilling to wait for the train, he drove to Coalfield, and was at the shaft all day.

Mr. William R. Burrows, one of the owners, went to Coalfield yesterday by train, and returned in the afternoon.

The vein of coal which the men were working was about four feet in thickness, and was of very good quality. It sold for \$3 per ton at the mine.

The outlay in preparing these mines during the past twelve years was about \$300,000. A great deal of money was spent in driving the tunnel through solid rock from the bottom of the shaft to the coal-vein.

**The Herald's Account.**

When news of the disaster reached Richmond, Mr. Cuthbert hired a locomotive and hastened to Coalfield and sent off the following account:

The Grove shaft of the Midlothian mine is situated about thirteen miles from Richmond, on the Richmond and Danville railroad, having a track one mile in length running from the railroad to the mine. The shaft is 600 feet perpendicular depth. From that point there is a stone tunnel 600 feet more to the coal-vein. From this point an incline is driven south 54 degrees west, dipping at an average angle of 17 degrees for 2,000 feet, which makes a total depth of 1,400 feet. There are six levels working, the first commencing at 1,250 feet from the top of the incline.

**WHERE THE MEN WERE.**

In these six levels there were fifteen coal-diggers working. The remaining seventeen were in other portions of the pit. One of the seventeen, the engineer, would be with his engine at the head of the incline. A banksman, a driver, and a fireman would be in the vicinity of the engine. The others, who were timber hands, gasmen, and assistants, would be in the levels where the diggers were. The night shift or turn had come off work that morning at 6 o'clock, and were relieved by the men who are now inevitably lost.

## THE LAST MEN OUT.

About the same time there went into the pit a machinist and assistant. They went to remove an engine, and came out to dinner at 12 o'clock noon, thus bearing the last intelligence from the lost men. The machinist says that he saw the pit boss and gasman near the engine-room at 10 o'clock, having come up to eat their breakfast. The pit boss, whose name was William Marshall, told the assistant of the machinist that he could come down the incline in the evening and feel perfectly safe, but that he should observe due caution in coming down the incline. He said he should keep a sharp lookout for the train and not be caught by it. The trains are hauled up the incline by a wire rope. A nephew of Marshall was also to have come down with the assistant, neither being accustomed to the pit—which is an additional proof that no fears were entertained by the workmen below.

## A TUMBLE OF SLATE.

The night pit boss reported to Superintendent Dodds that the pit was free of gas, but that during the night there had been a tumble of slate which knocked down a portion of the brattice, which is a wooden partition for conveying the air to the face of the coal. This caused an accumulation of a small quantity of gas in this level which was removed before he left and the brattice restored. This is all the information that is attainable from the men, or as to the condition of the pit when they went into it, or up to the time the machinist and his assistant left the pit. Work was suspended for dinner until 1 o'clock.

## THE EXPLOSION.

Precisely at that hour there was a report of an explosion in the shaft, followed by a cloud of dust from its mouth. A large number of top-hands, who were near at the time, realized that something appalling had happened. They said at once that it was either an explosion of gas or that a boiler had burst.

## A HORROR-STRICKEN CROWD.

An alarm was soon given, which brought a crowd to the scene. The wives and families of the miners and hands, most of whom reside in the vicinity, were soon on the ground, and all of them realized that there was great if *not* the most imminent danger to the men in the mine. The most distressing scenes followed, but still some of the relatives and friends of the doomed men were not without some hope of their rescue or escape from a terrible death. Among others Superintendent Dodds was promptly on the ground.

#### A PERILOUS DESCENT.

Safety lamps were at once procured, and the Superintendent and Pit-Boss Marshall, brother of William Marshall, and Edward Coxon went aboard the cage, and descended to a point about three hundred feet down the shaft. At that point they discovered that the signal wire was broken, and their lights were extinguished by a strong current of air from above. After attempting to relight the lamps they returned to the top of the pit. Superintendent Dodds and his companions then concluded that the brattice in the shaft was damaged, in consequence of which the current of air did not descend further than that point.

#### A SECOND ATTEMPT.

Marshall and Coxon then descended a second time to the bottom of the shaft. The superintendent remained at the top giving directions and procuring lamps. It was arranged that they should signal from the bottom, if practicable, and send the cage back for Dodds. If not practicable, the cage was to be brought back. At the expiration of one minute it was found the signal-wire was broken, and the men were of course drawn up again. This was the second attempt to penetrate the mine.

#### AN AWFUL SILENCE.

They reported a large portion of brattice in the shaft broken out and a considerable quantity of *débris*, consisting of timber, coal-boxes, water-barrels, and other articles, at the bottom of the shaft. All was silent as the grave. They listened eagerly for some sound from the entombed men, but could hear none. Ventilation was entirely cut off, and "after-damp," or poisonous carbonic-acid gas, had rolled back in volumes to the shaft-bottom. In absolute despair of being able to render any assistance, Marshall and Coxon came up. It was then about twenty minutes past 1 o'clock.

#### ATTEMPTING TO SIGNAL THE MEN.

Another and third attempt was then made to obtain some communication with the men in the pit. This was an effort to repair the signal wire. In order to do this it was decided to endeavor to attach a cord to the broken wire and carry it down with them. The wire was intact to a point four hundred feet below the surface. The first impulse was to cover the break in the shaft brattice with canvas or sail-cloth for the purpose of restoring ventilation. Superintendent Dodds objected to that proposition on the ground that whatever gas might be between the shaft and the boiler, a distance of 500 feet, would be carried on to the boiler fires and would probably result in another explosion. After making known his fears to the men on the ground they quite coincided with his opinion and the plan was abandoned.

**DRIVEN BACK BY AFTER-DAMP.**

Nothing then remained but to try and restore the signal. Marshall, Coxon, and a man named Crump then went down again for the third time. They carried a rope with them which they attached to the signal wire, and after descending a short distance beyond that point were forced to return by encountering carbonic-acid gas. This was the final effort to reach the mine or open communication with it. It then became awfully apparent to those engaged in these efforts that all the inmates of the pit were dead.

**HOPE ABANDONED.**

Upon their return, which was about 2 o'clock, all hope was abandoned, and the most harrowing scenes of wailing women and children and grief-stricken men followed.

**Ventilation Restored.**

COALFIELD, 9 P. M.—Miners are steadily at work in the shaft repairing the brattice-work, and ventilation is now restored to the bottom of the shaft.

None of the bodies have yet been recovered.

**The Descent Into the Mine in Search of the Dead.**

[Special telegram to the Dispatch.]

COALFIELD, February 4.—Snow to the depth of about six inches fell during the night, and the morning broke drear and dismal over the Grove shaft of the Midlothian coal-mines, with its tomb of thirty-two men.

Miners from the Deep-Run, Etna, Jewett, and other mines in the county came early, plodding through the snow, to render any assistance in their power towards the recovery of the bodies of the unfortunate men, whom all generally concede to be dead.

The Burrows Midlothian coal-mine of the company employed at the time of the accident about 110 men, including the thirty-two

**BURIED IN THE SHAFT.**

Nearly all of those living were on the works in the structure surmounting the shaft this morning, besides some dozen or two experienced miners from the neighboring mines.

It was easy to discover from the solemn aspect of the coal-begrimmed visages of the latter, and also of the grave miners, that a descent into the shaft with its treacherous after-damp was looked upon as an undertaking of great personal risk. Notwithstanding this fact there were numerous volunteers ready at a moment's notice to descend and ascertain the doom of the miners and commence the work of searching for the bodies.

During the morning Superintendent Dodds and other experienced miners held frequent

**CONSULTATIONS**

## CONSULTATIONS

as to what was best to be done. The apprehension seemed to be that there was danger from the fires under the engine boilers, which, if not extinct, would cause a fresh explosion, if not already done, as soon as ventilation was restored. The morning hours wore on, and it was as late as 11:40 A. M. when Superintendent Dodds himself, accompanied by George Conrad and E. Coxon, got into the bucket, and, amid breathless excitement, commenced a voyage of exploration into the dangerous regions below. The party carried safety-lamps and a signal hammer. The order was given

“LOWER AWAY STEADY.”

The perilous journey was begun, and in an instant almost the bucket with its human freight disappeared out of sight. Every eye was fixed upon the slowly-moving rope. An intense stillness was observed to catch any sound that might come from the descending party, when the loud and piteous lamentations of a woman on the outside of the building pierced the very heart of every man there. There was an immediate movement to take her away, as her cries disturbed those who were eagerly awaiting a signal from below.

Down, down, the rope continued to go, and not until ten minutes had been consumed in the descent did the signal to stop come to the ears of those at the mouth of the shaft. In about three or four minutes more

## THE SIGNAL CAME TO HAUL UP,

and in a few more minutes the exploring party appeared at the surface. Superintendent Dodds reported that they had descended to within one hundred feet of the bottom, that they had found no indication of fire, and that the shaft was perfectly clear of carbonic-acid gas.

## THIS WAS CHEERING NEWS.

The spirits of all hands revived, even under such mournful circumstances, and a party, consisting of Pit-Boss Johnson Marshall, George Conrad, Royall Johnson, and John Mallory, was at once organized to go down and begin operations with a view to the discovery of the bodies, and, if possible, ascertain the actual cause of the catastrophe.

It may be here remarked that the general

## THEORY OF THE EXPLOSION

is that it resulted from a tumble, which

carried away the brattice, cutting off ventilation, and causing an explosion of carbonic gas, and thereby closing up the shaft and cutting off every avenue of escape. This is almost the unanimous belief here.

John Marshall and party remained below some twenty minutes, and reached the first break in the brattice. They made a thorough examination of that portion of the shaft which was free from after-damp, and again ascended to obtain the necessary materials for the purpose of repairing the brattice, which will be done temporarily with sail-cloth. If this experiment is successful, operations will be vigorously pushed until the lower tunnels are reached, when the bodies will be discovered.

It is the settled opinion of the leading miners on the ground that

**THERE IS NO FIRE BELOW,**

and as soon as this prevails with any degree of confidence among the mine hands the work of removing *débris* and opening the avenues to the coal-face will be commenced in good earnest.

At 2 P. M. another party, consisting of Thomas Jones, William Jewett, and John King (white), and Thomas Pollard (colored), went down. They carried all the necessary materials, and such tools and implements as were required to make the repairs to the brattice.

Report of the working party at 3 P. M. states they had repaired about forty feet of the first break-in. It was found that the damage to the brattice was greater than had been anticipated, and it will require considerable labor and time to reach

**THE BOTTOM OF THE SHAFT**

and beginning of the tunnel. The shaft is very damp and making a great deal of water, which retards the workmen in their operations. It is the opinion of the superintendent that the prospect for reaching the bodies of the men to-night is not very good. Still it may be accomplished, as all the men are eager to do what they can. The following is a

**LIST OF THE MEN LOST**

LIST OF THE MEN LOST

in the mine, giving their supposed ages, places of nativity, whether married or single, and number in family of the former:

William Marshall, aged forty-five years, of Percy Main, England; has wife and four children.

Thomas Hall, thirty-five years, Chesterfield, Va.; has wife and four children

George Jewett, Jr., twenty-one, Chesterfield, Va.; wife and one child.

A. A. Jewett, thirty, Chesterfield, Va.; wife and one child.

James Brown, thirty-three, probably from Georgetown, D. C.; wife and three children.

James Hall, thirty-three, Chesterfield, Va.; wife and five children.

Joe Cournow, twenty-one, Chesterfield, Va.; single, but leaves a widowed mother with seven children.

John Morris, twenty-three years, Chesterfield, Va.; single.

Joseph Shields, fifty years, Durham, England; wife and eight children, now in England.

Richard Cogbill, sixty-six years, Chesterfield, Va.; one child living.

Richard Morgan, forty years, a native of Chesterfield, Va.; wife and four children.

Robert Binford, forty, Chesterfield, Va.; wife and seven children.

Samuel Cox, forty-five, Chesterfield; wife and one child.

Pleasant Stewart, thirty, Chesterfield; wife and one child.

Joseph Cumluff, sixty, Chesterfield; wife and three step-children.

Beverly Brooks, fifty, Chesterfield; wife and several children.

Alexander Logan, forty, Chesterfield; wife and children.

Peter Harper, forty years, Richmond, Va.; wife and children.

Major Pollard, thirty, Chesterfield; wife and three children.

Solomon Taylor, forty, Chesterfield; wife dead, five children living.

Squire Bright, fifty-five, Chesterfield; wife and six children.

John Green, fifty-five, Chesterfield; wife and one child.

Lewis Hobbs, fifty-five, Dinwiddie, Va.; wife and six children.

Daniel Hammond, thirty-two, Powhatan, Va.; wife.

Isham Graves, twenty-one, Chesterfield; single.

Edward Ross, fifty-five, Chesterfield; single.

Robert Booker, eighteen, Chesterfield; single.

Thomas Summels, forty; wife and five step-children.

Albert Hughes, thirty; wife and seven children.

James Mills, thirty, Chesterfield; wife and two children.

Jeff. Coleman, forty-five, Chesterfield, wife and three step-children.

Fred. Anderson, twenty-three, Chesterfield, single.

The following were

IN PREVIOUS DISASTERS:

## IN PREVIOUS DISASTERS :

John Green (colored) was in the upper portion of the same shaft in May, 1876, when the explosion then occurred. He was working with Charles Holder, who was killed. Holder was thrown out of the bucket; Green held on to the rope and was hauled out. Ned Ross, also colored, was in the shaft in May, 1876. He was working at the bottom, and was rescued barely alive. He was about the same place yesterday when the explosion occurred by which he lost his life. Joseph Cournow (white) is the son of Thomas Cournow, who was one of the pit bosses and lost his life in the explosion of May, 1876. Solomon Taylor (colored), among the killed Friday, was also in the explosion of 1876, but escaped with others.

## THE LATEST.

**Discovery of One of the Bodies Not Very Far From the Bottom of the Shaft.**

[Special telegram to the Dispatch.]

COALFIELD, VA., February 4.—Have just (at 10:30 P. M.) arrived from Grove shaft, Midlothian pits.

At last the persistent efforts of the miners have been rewarded by reaching the bottom of the shaft, and by consummate daring discovering the body of one of the unfortunate men about one hundred and fifty feet from the base of the shaft. This was Ned Ross, the colored hanger-on at the shaft bottom. His body was considerably bruised, and showed unmistakable evidence of his having died from the effect of after-damp or carbon gas. The hardy miners who made this success proved themselves heroes, and deserve the highest consideration for their

## GALLANT CONDUCT.

Two of them came near losing their lives. The party consisted of John Kendler, George Conrad, Thad. Crump, and Johnson Marshall. These were the last party that went down to-night, and they fought their way against the insidious "after-damp" after they reached the bottom. The two latter, Crump and Marshall, while out of the cage, or bucket, exploring a tunnel, encountered "after-damp," and were overcome by it. Their companions succeeded in bringing them back to the cage, and after placing them in the signal to haul up was given, and luckily they arrived at the top, to be brought too by restoratives. Both the men are still in a very feeble condition. In all, nine turns went down this afternoon, relief after relief, until the brattice was all repaired, the ventilation restored, and the bottom reached, with the result as given above.

It is not known whether further operations will be continued to-night. The probability is that they will be

## SUSPENDED UNTIL MORNING.

as the men are nearly all exhausted.

There will be great suffering among the stricken families unless benevolent people come promptly to their aid with substantial relief. This community is very poor, and is already encumbered

with widows and orphans, victims of the previous mine disasters.

Let something be done for these destitute people.

**Going Down into a Coal-Mine.**

The following letter, written in 1843, is published in Howe's Historical Collections. Making allowances for the fact that since that date there have been great improvements in machinery, the description is a pretty fair one of the mining operations of the present day. The Midlothian mines referred to were in the same coal-fields, but not reached by the same shafts now worked. The Mr. Marshall mentioned was doubtless the father of Mr. Marshall, the foreman, who lost his life at Grove shaft Friday:

Learning that the Midlothian mines were the most extensively and as skilfully wrought as any, I paid them a visit. Four shafts have been sunk by this company since 1833; in two coal has been reached, one at a depth of 625 and the other at 775 feet. The sinking of the deepest occupied three years of labor, at a cost of about \$30,000. The materials were raised by mules, and it is supposed a like depth was never before attained by horse-power in any country. These shafts, 11 feet square each, are divided by timbers into four equal chambers. At the deep shaft two steam-engines on the surface operate in raising coal; at the other, one. The extra engine at the deep shaft draws coal up an inclined plane down in the mine to the bottom of the shaft. This plane reaches the lowest point of the mine about 1,000 feet, or a fifth of a mile, from the surface. The coal having thus been brought to the pit, the other engine raises it perpendicularly to the surface, when the baskets containing it are placed on little cars on a small hand-railway, and are pushed a few rods to where it is emptied, screened, and shovelled into the large cars on the railroad connecting with tide-water near Richmond. While the engine attached to the plane is drawing up coal it is so arranged that pumps, by the same motion, are throwing out the "surface-water," which, by means of grooves around the shaft, is collected in a reservoir made in the rock 350 feet below the surface. This water is conducted about 20 feet above ground to a cistern, from which it is used by the different engines.

Through the kindness of the president of the company I was allowed to

**DESCEND INTO THE MINES.**

My friend, guide, and self, each with a lighted lamp, sprang into a basket suspended by ropes over pulleys and framework above a yawning abyss 775 feet deep. The signal was given—puff! puff! went the steam-engine, and down, down, went we. I endeavored to joke to conceal my trepidation. It was stale business. Rapidly glided past the wooden sides of the shaft—I became dizzy—shut my eyes—opened them and saw far, far above the small faint light of day at the top. In one minute—it seemed five—we came to the bottom with a bump! The underground superintendent made his appearance, covered with coal-dust and perspiration; his jolly English face and hearty welcome augured well for our subterranean researches. Him we followed, each with a lighted lamp, through many a labyrinth, down many a ladder, and occasionally penetrating to the end of a drift, where the men were at work shovelling coal into baskets on the cars running on railroads to the mouth of the pit, or boring for blasts. We witnessed one or two. The match was put, we retreated a short distance, then came the explosion, echoing and reëchoing among the caverns—a momentary noise of falling coal, like a sudden shower of hail, succeeded, and then all was silence.

THE DRIFTS, OR PASSAGES,

are generally about 16 feet wide and 10 feet high, with large pillars of coal intervening about 60 feet square. I can give the idea by comparing the drifts to the streets and the pillars to the squares of a city in miniature. When the company's limits are reached the pillars will be taken away. The general inclination of the passages is about 30°. Frequently obstacles are met with, and one has to descend by ladders or by steps cut in solid rock. Doors used in ventilation were often met with, through which we crawled. Mules are employed underground in transporting the coal on the small railways coursing nearly all the drifts. They are in excellent condition, with fine glossy coats of hair, nearly equal to well-kept race-horses, which is supposed to result from the sulphur in the coal and the even temperature of the mines. Well-arranged stables are there built, and all requisite attention paid them. Some of the animals remain below for years, and when carried to the strong light of day gambol like wild-horses.

PARTITIONS OF THE FLANK

attached to timbers put up in the centre of the main drifts are one of the principal means by which the mines are ventilated, aided by a strong furnace near the upcast shaft. Near this is a blacksmith-shop. The atmospheric air is admitted into the mines down the deepest shaft, and, after coursing the entire drifts and ascending to the risings of the mines, is thence conducted to the furnace, where it is rarefied and ascends to the surface, having in its progress become mixed with the carburated hydrogen gas emitted from the coal. When this gas is evolved in unusual quantities greater speed is given to the air by increasing the fire. If the partitions in the drifts (known as brattice-work) should be broken, the circulation would be impeded, and the gas so strongly impregnate the air as in its passage over the furnace to ignite, and result in destructive consequences. Or, should too much gas be thrown out of the coal when the circulation is impeded from any cause, it would explode on the application of a common lamp. In such cases the Davy lamp is used. I heard the gas escaping from the coal make a hissing noise, and I saw it set on fire in crevices of the walls by the lamp of our conductor; and although a novice in these matters enough was seen to convince me of the skill of Mr. Marshall, the company's underground superintendent, in managing the ventilation. Some years since, when ventilation was less understood than at present,

AN EXPLOSION

took place in a neighboring mine of the most fearful character. Of the fifty-four men in the mine only two, who happened to be in some crevices near the mouth of the shaft, escaped with life. Nearly all the internal works of the mine were blown to atoms. Such was the force of the explosion that a basket then descending, containing three men, was blown nearly one hundred feet into the air. Two fell out and were crushed to death, and the third remained in and with the basket was thrown some 70 or 80 feet from the shaft, breaking both his legs and arms. He recovered, and is now living. It is believed, from the number of bodies found grouped together in the higher parts of the mine, that many survived the explosion of the inflammable gas and were destroyed by inhaling the carbonic-acid gas which succeeds it. This death is said to be very pleasant; fairy visions float around the sufferer, and he drops into the sleep of eternity like one passing into delightful dreams.

Some years since a gentleman was one autumnal evening hunting in this county in the vicinity of some old coal-pits. Straying from his companions, he accidentally slipped down the side of an

ABANDONED PIT

and caught by one arm a projecting branch on its slope. The pit was supposed to be about 200 feet in perpendicular depth, and its bottom a pile of rocks. He heard in the distance the cries of his companions and the yell of the hounds in the chase. He shouted for help, but no answering shout was returned save the echo of his own voice among the recesses of the surrounding forest. Soon his companions were far away. Death awaited him—an awful death.