

THE ENGINEERING AND MINING JOURNAL.

JUNE 3, 1876.

THE EXPLOSION AT THE MIDLOTHIAN COLLIERY, VA.

OUR sensational contemporary, the *New York Herald*, on the 22d May had a report from Richmond, Va., giving the particulars of an explosion of fire-damp, that occurred on the previous day, and which resulted in the loss of eight lives. The telegraph report attributed the accident to "carelessness and penuriousness on the part of the managers in failing to provide proper means of ventilation," and it further stated that Mr. HEINRICH, the Superintendent, "was so overawed and confused by the surroundings that he seemed to lose all presence of mind, and, like every one else, was totally helpless."

Mr. HEINRICH took prompt measures to justify both himself and the proprietor of the mine from these slanderous statements, by immediately calling on the judge of the County Court to make an official investigation into the cause of the accident, with the view of fixing the blame where it belongs.

We congratulate Mr. HEINRICH upon his prompt defence, and upon the very flattering terms in which Judge CLOPTON disposes of the injurious insinuations as follows :

JUDGE CLOPTON'S OPINION AS TO THE CAUSE OF THE EXPLOSION.

To A. G. ELAM, Esq., J. P. :

SIR—Having yesterday made an investigation into the circumstances attending the late explosion at the "Grove shaft," Midlothian, with a view to the propriety of laying the same before the next Grand Jury, I have arrived at the following conclusions :

1st. That the 12-foot level, or "big stall," is subject to irregular "blowers" or "feeders," which at times discharge large quantities of carburetted hydrogen, and at other times much smaller quantities of the same gas.

2d. That CORNEAU, the gas-man, had tested the level up to the head of the working with his Davy lamp, and on his return, with his open lamp lit on his cap, he met the discharge from one of these "blowers," which fired the gas hanging in the ceiling and around the "collars" of the level.

3d. That the hot, sultry weather and low barometric state of the atmosphere on that day, prevented as free a circulation of air in the level as had been kept up in the cooler weather previous, and also permitted considerable expansion of the gas. In my opinion the neglect of the gas-man to note this state of the atmosphere was, most probably, the prime cause of the explosion. I am further of opinion that until the ventilation by the fan now being constructed is established, it will be unsafe to work the twelve-foot level with the door and upcast leading into the California drift open ; and also, that there should be a barometer at the "pit-head" of all deep workings, from which the "top" and "bottom" bosses should frequently take observations.

There can be no question of the skill and practical knowledge of Mr. HEINRICH as a mining engineer, and his tender care of the men under his charge. The testimony I have heard establishes this beyond a doubt, and the works now standing at the "Grove shaft" are a monument to his skill as a mining engineer. I am satisfied that after the explosion he did everything for the rescue of the men in the shaft, which could be expected of any one, and that he was no more excited than was to be expected under such appalling circumstances. In fact, it was proven that everything was done with greater dispatch and less confusion than on the occurrence of any former explosion in the same coal-field. I see no occasion for placing this matter before the Grand Jury, and it will therefore be unnecessary for you to take any further steps.

Very respectfully, etc.,

WILLIAM I. CLOPTON.

May 27, 1876.

The description (which will be found on another page) of the improvements at this mine, contained in a paper read before the Institute of Mining Engineers at Washington in February last, shows that so far from there having been any "penuriousness" on the part of the management, the Midlothian Colliery is worked in much the best manner and with the finest "plant" of all collieries ever opened in Virginia, and indeed there are few in any part of our bituminous fields that can compare with it. The complaint, if any were to be made with the present management, should certainly not be of "penuriousness." Mr. HEINRICH's carefully-matured plans comprised the sinking of a second shaft—not yet required by the laws of Virginia—and he had prepared for a very thorough ventilation of the mine by the erection of a Guibal fan 23 feet diameter, 7 feet face—one of the largest and best yet built in this country. This ventilator was within three days of completion when the accident occurred. It has since been put to work and is giving excellent results.

The real cause of the accident was, doubtless, primarily the existence of sudden outbursts of gas in the mine, and secondly, carelessness on the part of some of the unfortunate men who lost their lives.

There is every reason to believe, that the mine was managed with care and intelligence. We may remark, however, that no mine should be without "special rules," made familiar to every employee working therein, and specifying clearly what each must and what he must not do, to insure the safety of the mine, and that such rules should be strictly enforced. It did not appear in the investigation that any such rules exist in this case, and it is very evident that, working with open lights in that part of the mine which is subject to "blowers" or sudden outbursts of gas, should not be allowed. The recommendation of Judge CLOPTON, that the mine be provided with a barometer, is certainly good, for no fiery mine should be without one, but the thorough instruction of the workmen in their duties, by the establishment and strict enforcement of a few judicious rules, is one of the most efficient preventives of so-called accidents. These remarks have so general an application, that we can safely let them stand, though they may not be applicable in this particular case.

A SHOCKING DISASTER.

Eight Men Killed and Two Wounded by an Explosion at Old Mid- lothian Coal-Pits.

CAUSE OF THE DREADFUL ACCIDENT—FATAL EFFECTS OF FOUL AIR AND AN OPEN LAMP—EXCITING SCENES AT THE MOUTH OF THE PIT—THE DEAD MINERS BURNED AND SCORCHED PERFECTLY BLACK—EFFORTS TO SAVE THE UNFORTUNATES, ETC., ETC.

About 1:22 P. M. on Saturday a terrible explosion occurred at the Old Midlothian coal-pits, in Chesterfield county, now owned by C. P. Burrows, of Albion, N. Y., resulting in the loss of eight lives and several persons injured. At the time of the accident—which was the result of a gas explosion—there were only about thirteen men at work, the company being about to close their working operations preparatory to putting in a new fan.

SEVEN HUNDRED FEET BELOW THE GROUND.

The men were working at a depth of about 700 feet, and in a tunnel running horizontally about 500 feet. At the end of this tunnel, which was poorly ventilated, there had accumulated a large quantity of foul air and gas. From the indications it is believed that one of the unfortunate miners must have ventured into the region of this foul air with an open lamp, which caused

A TERRIBLE EXPLOSION.

The noise made by the explosion, though so far under the surface of the earth, was audibly heard a considerable distance, attracting to the scene every person in the neighborhood. Soon the mouth of the pit was surrounded by men, women, and children, among whom the greatest excitement and confusion existed. It was easily realized by these people that the miners below must have suffered

ALMOST INSTANT DEATH,

and consequently the screams and cries of the women became heart-rending.

Mr. Oswald Henrick, the mining engineer in charge, was so overcome by the excitement and the disaster that he was rendered almost helpless to do anything; and, indeed, the confusion was so great that nearly everybody lost their self-possession. Fortunately, at this juncture Colonel O'Brien, of the Black Heath coal-pits, with William Marshall and John Kendler, experienced miners, arrived at the scene, and the two latter boldly and fearlessly descended to the pit. Immediately upon their arrival at the bottom they found two men who were apparently dead, but who they brought up and were restored to consciousness and life afterwards. They then descended with other miners from other pits and explored the tunnel, which they found in a fearful condition. Wrecked timbers and debris of every sort were scattered and piled in every direction, and the bodies of the

EIGHT ILL-FATED MINERS

were found burnt and scorched perfectly black, five of them being white and three colored. Among the killed Mr. William Marshall, who rendered such signal and efficient service in exploring the mine, found the body of his own son, John Marshall. The body of James Corneau, the foreman of the gang, was found about forty feet from where it is supposed the explosion took place, his watch embedded in his flesh, and the hands stopped at the fatal hour, 1:22 P. M. All the bodies were recovered at various times, from the beginning of the search, but the work of getting them out was not completed until 4 o'clock Sunday morning. Throughout the neighborhood of the entire coal-mining region of Chesterfield

THE NEWS OF THE DISASTER

created great excitement, and the friends of the dead miners are overwhelmed with grief. The names of the killed are as follows:

James Corneau, foreman;
Charles Holder (white),
John Marshall (white),
Thomas Golden (white),
Robert Hall (white),
Joseph Hendley (colored),
William Morris (colored),
Philip Elliott (colored).

A meeting was called on Sunday to take steps to inter the remains of the killed.

The accident is said, among experienced miners, to be attributable to carelessness on the part of the managers of the pit.

A SIMILAR ACCIDENT

occurred a short time ago at the same pit, in which one man was killed and another wounded. Bad ventilation and a lack of proper and experienced workmen is the cause to which all parties agree in attributing this accident. There was but one (the main) shaft which was practical for air purposes, without any up-cast for returning air. It was in the effort to improve the ventilation that the workmen lost their lives.

OTHER FACTS.

The unfortunates who were killed were to have been relieved at 2 o'clock on Saturday afternoon had not this direful accident happened. Yesterday afternoon the bodies of the men who were killed were appropriately interred.

The excitement in and around Manchester was very great when the news reached that place; but all concur in the statement that the noise was heard but a short distance.

It is a singular fact that the news of the accident was not known in Richmond earlier than Sunday.

The bodies of three of the miners, who were Odd Fellows—the foreman, Holder, and Hall—were taken in charge by members of the order and interred with appropriate honors.

One of the many expedients resorted to to save the unfortunates was the pouring of water down the shaft in order to restore fresh air and thus, in a measure at least, give relief to those below.

MIRACULOUS ESCAPE.

It is said here that two or three of the miners were at work in a chamber in the perpendicular shaft well nigh one hundred and seventy-five feet from the bottom; one of them was thrown out and killed by falling to the bottom, while the others actually climbed up the rope of the shaft and thus saved their lives.

Thomas Corneau, Charles Holder, and Robert Hall were married men, and leave families. John Marshall and Thomas Golden were single, and only about eighteen or twenty years old.

**Victims of the Midlothian Mine Disaster
5/20/1876**

James Corneau – Foreman

Charles Holder

John Marshall

Thomas Golden

Robert Hall

Joseph Hendley

William Morris

Phillip Elliot

Fitchburg Daily Sentinel
May 22, 1876

EIGHT MEN KILLED

New York, May 22.

A Richmond special states that an explosion of fire damp in the shaft of the coal pit of the Midlothian mine, 700 feet under ground, on Saturday, killed eight miners and seriously injured two more. Five of the killed were white, and three colored.

JANESVILLE GAZETTE
Janesville, Wisconsin
Monday, May 22, 1876

*A Fire Damp Explosion at Midlothian Mine, Virgine
Kills Eight Men and Seriously Injures Two.*

Richmond May 22 - A dispatch says that a fire damp explosion occurred on Saturday at the old Midlothian coal pit, Chesterfield county, by which eight men were killed and two badly injured. Five of the killed were white and three colored.

GALVESTON DAILY NEWS
Tuesday, May 23, 1876

KILLED 700 FEET UNDERGROUND

New York, May 2, A special from Richmond reports at explosion at Old Midlothian mine, which killed eight people 700 feet underground - five white and three colored.