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A COAL-MINE HORROR.

Explosion of Fire-Damp in a Coal-Mine at West Leisenring, Pennsylvania.

Nineteen Men Killed Out of a Total of Seventy in the Mine at the Time.

List of the Victims—Dreadful Sights as the Bodies Come to the Light—Personal Experiences.

UNIONTOWN, Pa., Feb. 20.—[Special.]—A terrible explosion of fire-damp occurred at 6:30 o'clock this morning in the mine of the Connellsville Coke & Iron Company, located at West Leisenring, four miles distant from this place, which killed nineteen miners. Fire-damp is the miner's term applied to light carburetted hydrogen or coal gas, which issues from the crevices in the roof of the mine. Wherever this fire-damp exists and comes in contact with the little lamp which the miners have attached to their caps the result is an explosion. This gas runs through the coal in the fissures, and it is impossible to detect it while mining. After-damp is a term applied to the air after the explosion, and it is that which suffocated the miners.

HOW THE MINES ARE WORKED.

There are constructed and in operation at the West Leisenring Coke-Works just 200 coke-ovens. It requires about seventy-five miners to keep these ovens supplied with coal. They work in two shifts, which are called the day and night shifts. The day-shift only comprises about a dozen, who drive headings, while the night-shift comprises the remainder of the miners. The night-shift goes to work early in the evening and goes off at 3 o'clock in the morning. This morning when the night-shift went off they saw no signs of any fire-damp, and the men on the day turn had been at work from 3:30, and it was not until 6:30 that the spout of fire-damp was struck. This mine is worked by means of a shaft which is 400 feet deep, and the sixty miners were at work at all parts of the mine, many of them half a mile apart.

LOCATION AND FORCE OF THE EXPLOSION.

The part of the mine where the explosion occurred was about 800 feet from the bottom of the shaft in a butt-heading. It was heard at a considerable distance both underground and upon top. The rush of air through the mine was terrific, and blew everything in the mine to atoms. The cars were blown to pieces, tracks torn up, and mules killed. Great confusion reigned among the men in the mine who were working at a considerable distance from where the explosion took place, and many rushed wildly to death simply because they did not heed the advice of experienced miners who escaped unhurt. There were in the mine in all—miners, drivers, and others—about seventy men. Of these nineteen lost their lives. Some were burned to death and others suffocated.

THE DEATH-ROLL.

Michael Heffern, Irishman, 32 years old, burned; leaves a widow and six little children.

John Buckley, Irishman, 30 years old, single, suffocated.

Patrick Kennedy, Irishman, 20 years old, single, terribly burned; only child of an aged widow.

James Treacy, Irishman, 45 years old, single, burned badly on head and body.

James Baker, Irish, 38 years old, and leaves a widow and two children, burned on head.

David Lloyd, Welshman, 37 years old, single, burned.

William Davis, Welshman, 25 years old, single, suffocated.

Thomas McGeary, Irish, 35 years old, leaves a widow and three children, who are living in Cumberland County, England; burned.

John Hart, American, 25 years old, single, suffocated.

Michael Ripko, Hungarian, 34 years old, leaves a widow and two children; suffocated.

George Calik, Hungarian, 25 years old, wife in Hungary; suffocated.

Daniel Buckner, negro, leaves widow and two children; suffocated.

John Murray, Irish, 34 years old, leaves widow and one child; suffocated.

Peter Walters Irish, 30 years old, single, suffocated.

William Searing, American and native of this county, 55 years old, leaves widow and four children; suffocated.

Joe Backus, Hungarian, 30 years old, single, suffocated.

Andy Warmus, German, 30 years old, single, burned.

Albin N. Hackney, 35 years old, native of this county, leaves widow and one child; suffocated.

Gary E. May, a Marylander, with no friends here and nothing known of him.

DISEASTFUL SCENES.

It was a dreadful sight to behold. Many of those who were burned, when taken out of the mine and exposed to the air the flesh dropped off of that part of the body which was burned. Those who were suffocated looked quite natural, and seemed simply as if sleeping when laid out, as there was not a scratch on their persons to denote that any accident had happened them. It was not until about 7:30 or 8 o'clock that the dead and living could be taken out, on account of the danger from the foul air.

It would be supposed that the utmost excitement existed about the works after the explosion, but it was not near so intense as at first reported here. The men that were out of the mine and those employed on the outside acted in the most becoming manner, and stood ready, with brave and stout hearts, to assist in searching the mine.

To describe accurately the scene in the mine, the condition the men were in, the way they were lying, etc., is impossible. The men working at a distance from the place of the explosion were more or less affected with the foul air, which was driven with great force throughout the mine, and the only way for them to avoid death was to get to the main entrance, where the air was more pure owing to the direct connection with the air-shaft.

MINERS' RECITALS.

Richard Bailey, who is an experienced miner, and who was working in this mine this morning, tells the following in regard to his escape: He and his partner were at work only a few rooms from where the explosion occurred, and the moment of the report he knew what it was. He tore his clothes, giving his partner a portion, and telling him to stuff it in his mouth. He did the same with the other, which was part of a trouser-leg, but before doing so instructed his companion to be sure and follow him. They were in total darkness, as all the lamps were blown out. After going a short distance the other man told Bailey that he did not think they were on the right road, and left him. Bailey escaped, and the other man, whose name was Hackney, rushed frantically into the heading where the explosion had taken place, and is among the dead.

Patrick Murphy, another who barely escaped, says he crawled on his hands and knees from the heading. He got out into the main entry and there breathed the purer air and gained strength.

RESCUING THE LIVING.

It was not until about noon that all the men living were gotten out of the mine. The last man taken out—Henry Wilson—was thought to be in a dying condition, but was restored, and will get well. Men, women, and children stood at the top of the shaft waiting in terrible suspense for their friends to be brought out. It was there that joy and sorrow were mingled, and both expressed with tears and embraces. To see fond wives and children rush to and embrace the husband and father who was brought out alive was a glad sight, but the next moment to behold the grief and agony of the wife and little ones of him that had perished was a sad sight and cannot be described. The managers did everything they possibly could for these sorrow-stricken people. The dead bodies were taken to their respective dwellings in wagons, and the families properly looked after. Dr. Diehl, the company's physician, was on the ground and did all that medical skill could do for the sufferers.

FIRST NEWS—THE CORONER'S WORK.

There is no telegraphic communication between West Leisenring and this place, and it was not until nearly noon that anything was known here of the accident, when Mr. Taggart, the general manager of the company, and Mr. Howell, the store manager, arrived here after the Coroner. The Coroner and about two dozen others immediately set out for the scene of the disaster, and at 2:30 the jury was selected, and the houses containing the dead bodies were visited and the bodies viewed and identified. This was all the work done today by the Coroner and Jury, and that body adjourned until Saturday at 9:30 a. m., when the evidence in the matter will be heard.

WRETCHED HOMES.

The unmarried men boarded around among the various families, and in almost every house where the dead were found there were two. In one house three of the dead were found—two on a bed and the other on the floor. The scenes in these houses were terrible, and must be seen to be realized. The general impression in regard to the mining class is that they have no heart and care little for their families; but had any such minded people been with me today among these people they would now have different opinions.

The Hungarian would not be credited for having any deep feelings, but one of the most distressing sights witnessed in my rounds today was in the house of Michael Ripko. As I approached the house mournful sounds were heard coming from within, and, when the door was opened there, laid out on two chairs, was the dead body, and at its head sat the almost frantic widow, while a little girl and boy stood at her side, all weeping and stroking the face of him they loved dearly. I found this Hungarian family to be one of the cleanest and most intelligent of all those visited. The little girl could speak very good English. The hearts of all were much moved by this sight and each one contributed to the poor woman, and she was moved greatly by the generous action.

The company will bear the funeral expenses of all and aid the families in a proper manner.

THE MINE HERETOFORE CONSIDERED SAFE.

This mine has, ever since it was opened two years ago, been perfectly free from anything like fire-damp, and miners were always glad whenever they could get work there on that account. It is well ventilated by an air-shaft and fan at the main shaft, and the Mine Inspector has considered it a model in every respect. The Connellsville Coke & Iron Company has another works situated a few miles east of this one, which is called Leisenring. Both are under the general management of John Taggart, and John R. Taverron is the Superintendent at West Leisenring. Both works are called after Judge Leisenring, of Mauch Chunk, Pa., who is President of the company owning them. All the stockholders reside in the East—New York, Philadelphia, Wilkesbarre, and Mauch Chunk.

In talking with many of the miners this afternoon I noticed a total absence of any disposition to blame the company for any negligence, as is usual on such occasions.

THE "FIRE-BOSS" REPORT.

Every mine has a miner who is known as the "fire boss," whose duty it is to go through the mine once or twice every day with a safety lamp and see that the ventilation is all right, and, should fire-damp be found to exist in any part of the mine, it is reported, and men are not permitted to work or enter that part of the mine. Richards, the man who occupies that position at West Leisenring, says he went through the mine last night, and all was right. From the fact that the explosion occurred after the men had been at work for so long a time it is quite evident that the damp was not struck until the time of the accident.

THE DERRICK UNROOFED AND MULES KILLED.

The derrick by which the coal is hoisted from the mine and to which the immense coal-bins are attached is about 125 feet high, and so strong was the current of air forced up the shaft that the roof of the derrick was blown off. The two mules used in the mine for pulling the cars of coal to the shaft were also sufferers. One was killed and the other so badly hurt that it will die.

Mine-Inspector Sterner arrived on the ground about noon, and immediately began making an examination of the mine, and is pretty much of the same opinion as others—that no gas has heretofore existed, and that the crevice containing it was only reached this morning.

INCIDENTS.

Most of the dead bore no visible marks of violence, but had died of suffocation. Their faces generally are very black, smoke and dust having been blown into the skin.

The last man taken out alive was Henry Wilson, who managed to subsist on air in the very bottom of the mine till rescued. He was almost gone.

Many of those who were in other parts of the mine suffered severely.

Dick Bailey reports that the men acted much like horses in a burning stable. They were bewildered, and, not knowing which way to go, refused to go in any direction.

BUSINESS TROUBLES.

Failure of a Dry Goods Firm at Wheeling, W. Va.

WHEELING, W. Va., Feb. 20.—[Special.]—The dry goods firm of John Roemer & Co., one of the oldest in that line in this city, made an assignment for the benefit of creditors. The firm has been in a shaky condition for some time, and the losses sustained by the flood only hastened a collapse that was inevitable. The assets and liabilities have not yet been definitly ascertained, but the firm is supposed to owe about $16,000. Mr. Roemer claims that creditors will be paid in full.

Reported Failure of "Ned" Jones a Small Board of Trade Operator.

It was reported yesterday that "Ned" Jones, a small operator on 'Change, was in financial difficulty, but inquiry later in the afternoon only led to a partial verification of the rumor. Mr. Jones was not to be found, and his statement consequently could not be obtained. From what was learned, however, it is believed that the failure, if it be such, is only a little one.

Suspension of a Manufacturing Firm at Hudson, Mich.

HUDSON, Mich., Feb. 20.—[Special.]—Whitney & Co., large manufacturers of wagon and carriage woodwork material and wheelbarrows, made an assignment today for the benefit of their creditors without preference, Ira Swaney being appointed assignee. Liabilities are not known.

Failure of an Oshkosh Jeweler.

OSHKOSH, Wis., Feb. 20.—George Meyer, the leading jeweler of this city, made an assignment at a late hour last night, the fact being made public this morning. His liabilities are over $10,000 and assets less than $6,000. Poor business was the cause of the failure.

TOM ALLEN.

He Is Wanted in Kentucky for Engaging in a Prize-Fight in That State in 1876.

ST. LOUIS, Mo., Feb. 20.—[Special.]—The case of Tom Allen, the noted prize-fighter, is still undecided. Today Gov. Crittenden should have passed on the requisition of Kentucky's Governor, and the report was received here early tonight that he had honored it. A later telegram just received from Jefferson City states that, in response to the urgent appeals of Chester Krum, Allen's attorney, the matter has been postponed for one day to give lawyers for both sides an opportunity to argue. The case dates back to 1876, when Tom Allen, under arrest for prize-fighting in Kentucky, skipped bail and escaped to Europe. Farrell, one of his bondsmen at that time, is the man at whose instance the requisition was made out.

A QUESTION OF COLOR.

MEMPHIS, Tenn., Feb. 20.—[Special.]—Quite a commotion was created in the Linden-street public school this forenoon by the discovery of a colored young miss, who has been in attendance at the school as a pupil since the opening of the session last September. The person in question is Mary Wells. Her mother, it is al-

1884 West Leisenring Mine explosion
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