

A PECULIAR VERDICT.

The coroner's jury in the Von Storch mine disaster near Scranton, rendered a verdict that the six victims "came to their deaths by suffocation due to a fire, the origin of which is to us unknown, but after listening to the testimony introduced, we believe it to be of incendiary origin." As a matter of fact there was nothing whatever in the testimony of the witnesses examined to indicate that the fire was incendiary. No one could account for the origin of the fire and consequently the jury inferred that the mine must have been fired by some fiend either for the purpose of destroying property or to consign certain men to a horrible death. It seems to us to be altogether wrong for a coroner's jury to officially allege that crime has been committed unless there is at least plausible evidence that such is the case. One can scarcely conceive of a more atrocious and heartless crime than that of firing a coal mine in which men are employed, and if such a fiendish act led to the death of the six victims in the Von Storch, or if there is a reasonable suspicion that such is the case, the Delaware & Hudson Company and the authorities of Lackawanna County should halt at no expenditure of time, effort or money to run down the guilty person or persons, and bring them to trial and punishment.

We do not believe that the Von Storch mine was fired by an incendiary, nor that the jury was justified by the evidence in rendering such a verdict. There is a great deal of crime in the anthracite coal fields, and we do not believe it the proper thing to give these regions a worse reputation abroad than is unavoidable. There could have been no motive in firing the Von Storch mine. The only effect could be the wanton destruction of life and the throwing hundreds of men out of employment, at least temporarily. Fires frequently occur in the coal mines. Sometimes they are the result of carelessness, sometimes of accident, and sometimes of spontaneous combustion. There may have been incendiary fires in the mines, but we do not recall ever having heard of any.

Few men have ever suffered a more horrible death than did the six poor fellows who perished in the Von Storch. One of the number kept a diary in which he gave in detail their awful experience and the vain efforts they made to escape from the deadly gas which finally suffocated them after many hours of agony and despair. If these poor men were the victims of a fiendish incendiary the horror becomes all the more intense.