

THE ECCLES MINE HORROR.

The Eccles mine disaster adds another to the long and ghastly record of West Virginia mine catastrophies. A careful study of the conditions of the Eccles mine indicates that this disaster might have been avoided, had the mine operators sincerely complied with the mine laws of this state. West Virginia mine laws and inspection regulations contemplate the maintenance of two separate exits for every operating mine. At Eccles, two mines operating in different veins were connected, so that the operating shaft of each mine served to afford ventilation and a separate exit for the other mine. The two shafts were about 900 feet apart. One shaft led to the Sewell vein of coal, and one led to the Beckley vein of coal. These veins were about 220 feet apart. From the upper to the lower vein, additional to the main shaft which reached the lower vein, a small stairway or tunnel led, making the second exit for the workers on the lower vein. When the explosion occurred in the lower vein, that stairway was blown literally to pieces; the main shaft was destroyed, and the unfortunate workmen in the lower mine had absolutely no chance to escape. By the expenditure of a very small sum of money both of these mines could have been made safe.

As a matter of fact, both mines were constructed and operated in violation of the spirit of the West Virginia laws. If the inspection bureau had done its duty, the owners would have been compelled long ago to have corrected the conditions which complied only technically with the statutes, and which did not insure that safety which the laws contemplated, and to which the employes were entitled.

No mine ought to be allowed to operate in West Virginia which does not have at least one emergency exit, additional to the main shaft, and so equipped that it may not be easily destroyed or injured. The law of this state contemplates exactly such mine construction, and such mine construction is possible. The hunger for the dollar has caused the owners of many mines either to evade or absolutely to violate this safe and sane regulation. The Eccles mine disaster must go down in history as the needless sacrifice of human lives. Widows have been made. Little children have been left fatherless. A charge has been created upon the state, and all because of inordinate greed.