

THE MINING CALAMITY

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THE DISASTER.

A Theory of the Manner of Suffocation— The Loss of Life Terrible, but Overes- timated—Futile Efforts to Penetrate the Recesses of the Mine—Aid for the Widows and Orphans.

Special Dispatch to the New-York Times.

AVONDALE, Sept. 7, 8 P. M., SCRANTON, 11 P. M.—The great disaster foreshadowed in the dispatches of yesterday, has become a certainty. The miners of Avondale are yet entombed, and scarcely a hope remains that a single one of them will be found alive. At first it was supposed that 200 men were in the mine when the fire broke out, but later investigations have shown that the number was exaggerated. Not less than 138 nor more than 150 men and boys were in and down the shaft at the time. There are fifty-nine chambers in the mine, and in each of these chambers are one miner and one helper, but as some of these men, it is known, were not at work, one hundred is the number allowed for miners and helpers. There were in addition nine drivers, nine door boys, eight gangway men, one oiler, one boss mule-driver, one rodman, one roofman, one footman and six extra hands. This places the number shut up at 138. The General Agent will not admit that there were any more in the mine. But whether they are two hundred or less, they are all dead, and, probably, from a fatal mistake made by their friends above.

A FATAL THEORY.

Some of the men who went down the shaft last night, reported that the fire in the furnace was all out. The presumption was that when the fire broke out the miners had kept their senses, and having dragged the fire, had fled to the upper chambers, closing the doors behind them. Supposing this to be true, the rescuers proceeded on the simple plan of forcing fresh air into the mine by means of a fan working by an engine, both machines having been taken from Scranton, and got to work about 10 o'clock A. M. Forty-six men had been enrolled as volunteers to descend the shaft, and, in less than half an hour the first two went down 100 feet to reconnoitre. They lowered lamps which burned freely. Nearly an hour later four men descended, but quickly returned, reporting that they had encountered "black damp," as the miners call the deadly carbonic acid gas, which had forced them to retire. They penetrated the gangway thirty feet. In another hour more men went down seventy-five feet and opened a set of doors. Thus it went on until nearly 4 P. M., when a party of men, penetrating two hundred feet and opening the door, made the discovery that the fire was still burning in the furnace, and had even ignited the coal piled outside it.

ALL HOPE GONE.

Those understanding the situation, upon hearing this fact, saw in a moment that all hope was at an end, and that all that could be done was to drag the lost miners from their fiery tomb for Christian burial. They saw, too, that all the labor of the day had been more than thrown away, and that they had unwillingly been engaged in making certain the death of their comrades below, if any of them had chanced to remain alive, by forcing air down the shaft to feed the flames, to breed deadly gasses, and to fill the entire mine with life destroying vapours.

THE OPERATIONS CHANGED.

A change of operations was then instantly decided on. It was determined to direct immediate effort to the extinguishment of the fire. Means are now arranged to that end, and the night will be occupied by deluging the mine with water. If the mine is not closed off, dangerous gases, sufficient to allow of its exploration, other remedies will be tried. The risks thus far attendant upon attempts to penetrate the mine have been extreme, and, although no life has been lost, four of the brave men who descended were brought to the surface in an insensible condition, and were only revived after great labor and the applications of the most powerful remedies.

THE SCENE OF THE DISASTER.

The scene of this catastrophe, unparalleled in the history of American mining, is on the Lackawanna and Bloomsbury Railroad, twenty-two miles from Scranton, about six from Wilkesbarre, and about one and a half below the hamlet of Plymouth. The shaft is sunk in the side of a steep mountain, is 237 feet deep and 40 feet below the mountain; has a a tunnel opening into which it is dug through the mountain. The main gangways of the mines are nearly east and west from the shaft, the first being about 1,200 feet in length and the latter about 800. Both east and west the inclines are upward, and the gangways about ten feet in the clear. The sides of the shaft are lumbered with wooden fixtures. The great wooden building in which was the breaking machinery was immediately upon the mouth, and all of this inflammable material was dry as tinder. If a spark of fire touched any of this wood anywhere, even outside the mine, a great conflagration was inevitable, and its communication to the interior of the shaft and mine almost certain to these facts must be added that the mine had no air-hole distinct from the shaft. The miners, working far down in the bowels of the earth, had but that one aperture by which to secure egress to the surface; that cut off, the wholesale destruction of human life which has occurred was sure to happen.

I am informed that very few of the mines have been designed to prove, like Avondale, a horrible sepulchre from a trivial cause, but are generally provided with air holes, separate from the shaft, so that the miners, cut off by any disaster from the one, can have recourse to the other as a means of escape.

FEELING BY THE MINERS.

Very many times to-day have scores of the grimmed miners, gathered around the ill-fated mine, announced that not a ton of coal ever comes up hereafter from a mine unprovided with a distinct air-hole. From expressions of opinions heard everywhere to-day, it seems certain that the catastrophe must result in all the mines being placed under the supervision of officers appointed by the State.

THE SCENES OF THE DAY.

The scenes to-day have been agonizing. A

large proportion of the lost were married men, and their widows and children have been gathered in a wicrd throng around the fatal shaft. Scores of these mothers have babies at the breast. Nearly all are penniless. Their condition calls for the promptest measures of relief. An extemporized effort was made to-day upon the ground by a clergyman, but it did not result in much good. Mr. STORRS, the agent of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Company, which owns the mine, has announced that he will exhume the bodies of the dead and give them decent burial at the expense of the Company, but no further responsibility will be taken without the express sanction of the directors. The efforts making to reach the entombed have been greatly retarded during the entire day, as well as yesterday, by the throngs of people who have flocked to the scene from the surrounding-country. At no time has there been less than 2,500 present, and often during the day nearly double that number. Of all those present not more than 100 were needed, and the remainder were a hindrance rather than a help, subjecting themselves and the real workers to unnecessary hardship, for there was nothing to eat anywhere near the scene, and water was scarce. The crowd of useless lookers-on snatched what little there was of food and drink from those who needed it most. The inconvenience has been so great that public notice will be given to-night in all the towns and villages requesting the people to remain at home during the time occupied in the exhumation. No one knows how long that will be. Some expect that they will be reached and brought out to-morrow; others, and the better informed, think two and possibly three or four days may elapse before the mine is sufficiently cleared of "black damp" to allow of its exploration. As yet the reserves have only penetrated two hundred feet, and have not found a trace of any human being. The inference is that the miners fled away from the shaft at the moment of the disaster, and that their dead bodies will be found in the most remote parts of the gangways and in the most distant chambers.

THE FIRE STILL RAGES.

To-night the fire still rages at the bottom of the shaft; the deadly black damp still chokes the entrance to the horrible charnel house; the bereaved women still sit on the mountain side looking down into the yawning crater, hugging their babies and gathering their broods about them. The day has closed with an exhibition of heroism that no battle ever produced. Another band of four miners have just come up from the mine, after arranging the hose. They did not hesitate to go, although they knew they must meet the "black damp," and knew that it had already proved nearly fatal to several of their comrades. But these brave, unselfish men have been doing this all day. One band of four was hauled up almost dead; another was ready instantly to descend and meet the same peril. The excitement throughout the entire anthracite region is intense, and is deepened as the suspense is prolonged. Nearly all the mines are deserted and business is almost entirely suspended in Scranton and Wilkesbarre, Kingston, Pittston and all neighboring towns.