

PORTLAND, OREGON, SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 5, 1908

In 17 Years Nearly 29,000 Men Have Perished Underground

NOT very pleasant, nor creditable to America, certainly, is a report just made to the French government by M. Taffanel, an expert sent to investigate the numerous coal-mine disasters on this side the Atlantic.

Mine operators of the United States, as a rule, he thinks, have little regard for human life, judging from the almost general lack of effective means to guard the lives of the 630,000 or so men and boys who are compelled to earn their livelihood burrowing in the bowels of the earth.

To appalling proportions, indeed, has the death rate in coal mines grown of recent years. Annually nearly as many lives are snuffed out in underground horrors as the United States lost, by bullet and disease combined, during the war with Spain, and more than twice the number are injured.

With his life in his hand, the American miner goes to his daily toil. More than three times as many per thousand employed are killed on this side the Atlantic annually as meet death in the deeper pits of France and Belgium, and nearly three times as many as in the mines of Great Britain. Prussia, with the worst record in Europe, shows an annual death toll from mine disasters only two-thirds as heavy per thousand as that of America.

As a maker of widows and orphans the coal mine holds high rank among the industries of the country.

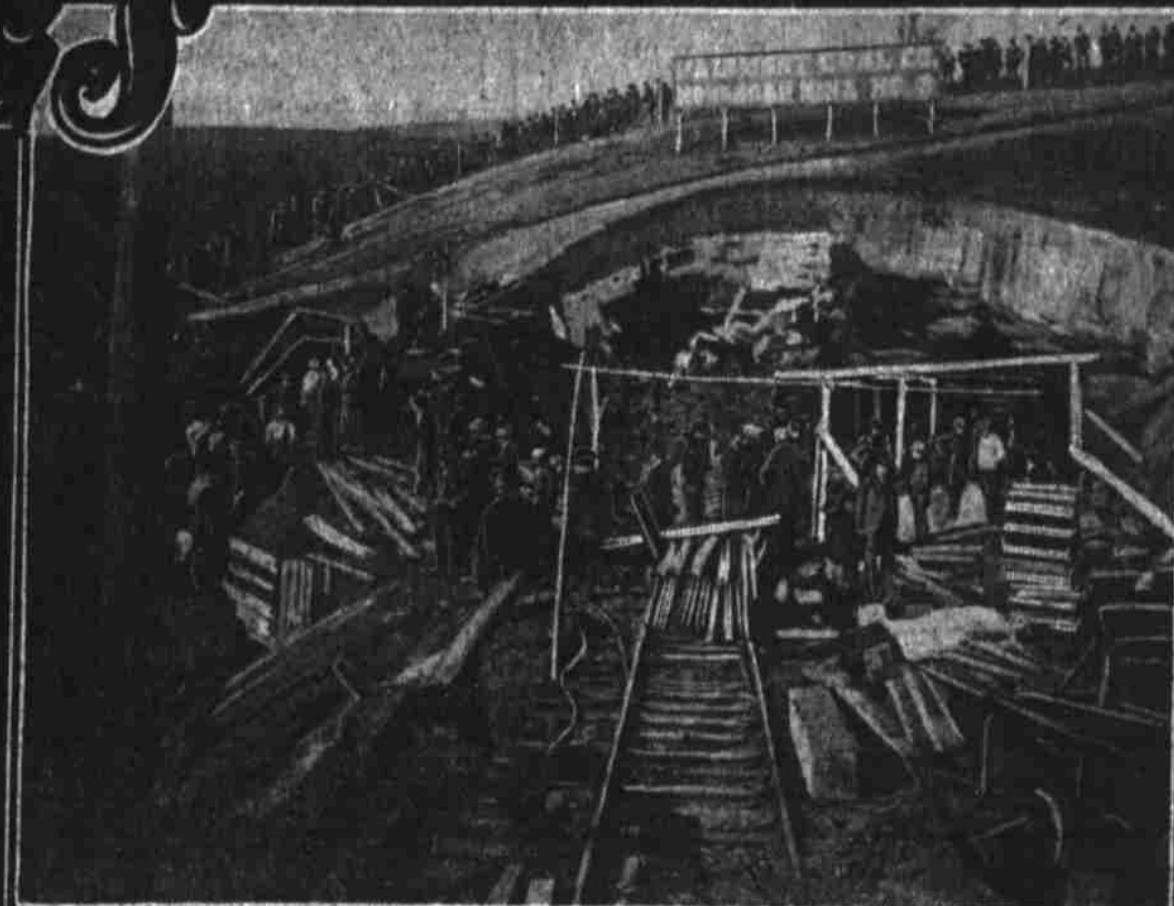
WHEN M. Taffanel made his scathing criticism of American mining methods, at least three bills intended to prevent, so far as possible, such terrible disasters as have marked the last six months were pending in Congress, their sponsors being Representatives McHenry and Watson, of Pennsylvania, and Englebright, of California.

These provide for the establishment of a Bureau of Mines and Mining, to be included in the Department of Commerce and Labor. The bureau will have power to investigate mining accidents, with a view to preventing them, and also to plan the establishment of a fund out of which surviving victims of accidents may be compensated or the dependents of those killed may be

pensioned. For it isn't alone the men and boys whose lives may be snuffed out without warning by an explosion of firedamp or the collapse of a treacherous mine roof who are to be considered in planning battle against the underground demon of death.

A large percentage of fatalities throws newly made widows and orphans upon their own pitiful resources or upon the charity of the community.

When 400 men and boys, one Friday morning, streamed, in two long lines, into the entrances of the Monongah mine, near Fairmont, W. Va., there was no suspicion of danger. No place of underground labor in the state had a higher reputation for safety and good management.



Clearing Entrance to the Monongah, W. Va., Underground Horrors



Waiting for Bodies at Mouth of Darr Mine, in Pennsylvania

Only one of the doomed army came out alive!

Down the long, slanting tunnel they had gone, their jokes and laughter floating back through the grimy passages, the lights in their caps flickering like fireflies in the deepening dusk.

In the town above, wives and mothers were busy about their household tasks and tending the wants of little ones, who, in time, they believed, were destined to join the daily procession of underground toilers.

A few hours later, and the town was lifted and shaken by a heavy explosion. All those on the surface knew what it meant.

In a short time hundreds of frantic women and children and a few score white-faced men had gathered at the mine entrances, which were wrecked and from which poured volumes of smoke, dust and gas.

However desperately pursued, it was soon found that the work of rescue would be in vain.

There was no life left in the grim, hungry maw of the Monongah.

For days the sad after-story engaged the attention of a horrified country, and then passed virtually from mind, as had done many other calamities of like nature.

The world moved on; it transferred its interest to other things.

It was the terrible explosion in the Courriers mine, near Calais, France, in 1906, causing the death of 1060 miners, that led to a stiffening of French mining regulations and to the establishment, under the direction of M. Taffanel, of a special government station to make a study of inflammable substances present in the chambers of mines and which endanger the lives of miners through explosions. This is part of the work proposed for the Bureau of Mining in this country.

That disaster, too, affected the percentage of French mine fatalities for the year—a percentage that had been becoming remarkably small.

INCREASE IN DISASTERS

As stated, America leads the principal coal-mining countries of the world in mine fatalities. And in recent years there has been a marked increase in both the number and seriousness of such disasters.

In the last seventeen years 22,840 men and boys have been killed in the coal mines of the United States.

And many more thousands have been injured, many maimed for life.

In 1906—the latest year for which official statistics have been compiled—2061 were killed and 4800 injured. In 1905 the deaths numbered 2007 and in 1904 they were 1800.

During the last six years, there have been as many violent deaths in the mines as during the preceding eleven years, the number having practically doubled.

In 1890 there were 701 fatalities; this number was about equaled by two accidents late last year—those at Monongah, W. Va., and the Darr mine in western Pennsylvania.

Four mine disasters alone, in the United States, toward the close of last year, resulted in the loss of nearly one thousand lives.

This increase of fatalities during recent years, say Messrs. Clarence Hall and Walter O. Snelling, experts of the United States Geological Survey, "has been due in part to the lack of proper and enforceable mine regulations; in part to the lack of reliable information concerning the explosives used in mining and the conditions under which they can be used safely in the presence of the gas and dust encountered in the mines, and in part to the fact that in the development of coal mining not only is the number of mines increasing, but many areas from which coal is taken are either deeper or farther from the entrance, where good ventilation is more difficult and the dangerous accumulations of explosive gas are more frequent."

PROTECTIVE MEASURES NEEDED

"The increase both in the number and the seriousness of mine explosions in the United States during past years may be expected to continue," they say further, "unless the country adopts means that have proved successful in European countries, where the proportionate death rate has been materially reduced."

A glance at the figures will show that Europe is far ahead of the United States in preventing mine disasters.

In 1895, in America, the ratio of persons killed was 2.67 for every 1000 men employed. A steady increase in the ratio followed; in 1906 it reached 3.40 per 1000. And this ratio was exceeded in 1903 and 1905.

Prior to 1840, when the first preventive measures were taken, Belgium had killed in its mines an average of 3.19 for every 1000 men employed. That ratio in the period of 1901-1906 had been reduced to 1.02, or one-third that of the United States. In 1906 the Belgian ratio had dropped to .94, while that of America had risen to 3.40.

Great Britain dropped its ratio of deaths per 1000 men employed from 1.50 in 1891 to 1.29 in 1906; the Prussian ratio decreased from 2.94 in 1880 to 1.80 in 1904; that of France dropped in five years from 1.03 per 1000 to .84.

America, only, has shown a steady increase of fatalities.

Why is this? Why is America today killing more men per 1000 employed, or per million tons of coal produced, than ever before, or than any other country kills?

Experts declare that the mines of America can be worked more easily than those of any other country, and with less danger.

European mines, as a rule, are older, have been carried deeper into the earth and are considered more gaseous.

Perhaps the best mining machinery in the world is made on this side the Atlantic. It is readily available to every region where men go down to toil underground.

The American Institute of Mining Engineers is known as one of the most advanced scientific bodies on earth, and its experts are in

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