

MINERS' RISKS

At the inquest into the disaster by which on December 21st last 334 miners and lads lost their lives at the Pretoria pits, near Bolton, Eng., the coroner invited wives, fathers, brothers, or other relatives of deceased miners to relate any complaints made by victims about the state of the mines during the weeks preceding the disaster. About forty witnesses reported and below we give some of their complaints, the clipping containing the information having been sent us by one formerly connected with coal mining in Nova Scotia:

MINERS' COMPLAINTS.

John McCabe, an old miner, who lost three sons in the disaster, said that one of them had been sent home every day for a week before the accident.

A lad named Riding had informed his father that he would not be surprised if he and his brother had their brains blown out in the pit.

Wm. Pope said his son always came home sleepy, the result of working in gas.

Thomas Davis, himself a collier, spoke of the complaints of his brother Benjamin about the mine. He was always coming out of the pit, said witness. They seemed to have the chance of staying in or coming out as they liked. Witness added: I've been down the pit often since the explosion, and I found a rammer and powder-tin in one of the roads. That is a mysterious thing, if there was no shot-firing as they said. Witness further said there was a lot of bullying in the mine. The men were compelled to work in gassy places. He could well believe there was bullying at ordinary times, for there had been bullying during the rescue work. Replying to Mr. Ratcliffe Ellis (for the owners), witness said he knew nobody could leave the pit unless he had the permission of the fireman in charge of his district.

INSPECTOR AND MINERS COMPLAINTS.

Levi Worthington, a collier, said his brother-in-law, Orlando Chadwick, had told him on December 10th that the mine was like an oven, very hot and gassy. "It will be blown up as certain as it is a pit," Chadwick had said, "and if it does we have no earthly chance of getting out alive."

Mr. Gerrard (the mine inspector: If you ever work yourself in a mine in Lancashire under such conditions you write to his Majesty's inspector of mines. If a communication had been made to me of this state of things I should have gone immediately and investigated it fully.

Mr. Dootson (representing the relatives): Would it be necessary for the man complaining to give his name?

Mr. Gerrard: No.

Witness: We dared hardly speak our mind.

William Mawson, another victim, was stated to have said, "We will all get blown out some day worse than the Maypole disaster. It is like a gasometer."

Richard Riley, another victim, was stated to have said, "There will be such a crash down there some day, and if there is, everyone will be gone." The day before the explosion this man's lamp was put out by gas and he had to come out.

Edward Dyke, a collier, deposed that his brother had warned him not to take a job in the Pretoria Pit. "It will blow up some day," he had said, "and everyone will be lost." Witness replied, "If it's not fit for me, it's not fit for you." His brother said he would

stick it as long as he could, as he was going to America in the spring.

ROADS NOT FIT FOR A DOG.

Along with complaints attributed to deceased miners about the gas, two others were said to have complained of the roads, one saying they were not fit for a cat, and another that they were not fit for a dog. "Full as a gasometer" and "terribly hot" were other expressions stated to have been used by colliers about the pit. "I don't think it safe for mortal man" was the opinion expressed by a lad, whose father said he came home over his dinner. "We'll have an accident before long," another miner had told his brother-in-law, "and I'll join you in hospital."

Mrs. E. Bradley, who lost her husband, said that two days before the accident her son was working with his father, and was overcome with gas and had to be taken out. Her husband's eyes were badly affected by the gas.

Harry Greenhalgh said his brother, a back fireman, age 60, had complained to him that there were too many young, inexperienced firemen in the pit, and it was very likely a lot of lives would be lost through carelessness.

Mrs. Molyneux said her husband, who had worked on the conveyor and "iron man" (coal-cutter), had said to her they were not fit things to be down a gassy pit. If they made a spark there would be an explosion, "and the Maypole would not be in it."

Margaret Seddon, who lost her husband and two sons in the explosion, said all three had come home from December 12th to the 16th, and when the complained of their broken time, they said it was the gas that kept them out.

"SPARKING" BY ELECTRIC MACHINERY.

Robert Cowburn told how his brother Robert worked for thirteen months at the North Plodder, conveyor sometimes, and at other times got coal. Witness worked with deceased from December 14th to the 20th, and on the latter night deceased talked about danger due to the switch of the motor of the conveyor. He mentioned sparking, and there being much gas in the heading. He saw the switch on the conveyor spark on the Thursday. Mr. Rushton was there, and called the men, including witness, off the conveyor face. On one occasion the lamps were put out by gas. On the Thursday that he saw the sparks from the conveyor switch it was immediately after the signal had been given for the conveyor to start, and the man had hold of the switch handle. Mr. Rushton, the underground manager, saw the sparks, and at once said, "I must stop this; we are going to be blown up."

Mr. Dootson: How was it you did not go to work on the morning of the accident?—I don't know; I just thought I wouldn't go. Perhaps I didn't feel well.

Mr. Dootson: A good thing for you.

Witness, answering other questions, said he did not know how to find out if there was gas present in the pit. He considered it was the company's lookout to see if the mine was safe.

Replying to Mr. Ratcliffe Ellis, witness said he had not been mistaken in thinking the sparks came from near the switch. They were not caused by the haulage ropes crossing the conveyor ropes.

The Coroner: What did Mr. Rushton say when the lamps went out?—Nothing.