

RISK ABOUT STEAM POWER.

It would hardly seem possible, says the *Manufacturer's Gazette*, when we are told so much about mechanical, social, moral and other branches of progress, that men should be found who really believe, if we are to judge from their actions, that a steam boiler is safe as long as there is water inside of it, and the more water the safer the boiler. We have recently encountered an instance of this which would do credit to the old witchcraft days of 1,600 and something, which was no more or less than a pair of tubular boilers, being worked to drive a mechanical establishment; one boiler has been set 13 years, had never been insured, was working under ninety pounds of steam, and the safety valve to all appearances had not been tested for months. With the growth of the concern another boiler had been added, larger in diameter, longer, much larger fire-pit, and capable relatively of doing twice as much as the old one. An engine which may have been imported in the ark, or the Mayflower, or anywhere between those two dates, was doing service, probably on the plan that the older the engine the better the mechanical work on it, contrary to the general supposition that the better use of steam made, the cheaper the engine no matter what it costs. In conversation with the engineer we received a very frank expression of opinion, and it is, perhaps, needless to say, that this conversation was limited to about five minutes. This man expressed the opinion frankly and evidently perfectly sincere, that, so long as he had plenty of water, it was impossible for an accident to occur. He didn't know but that gas might, under certain conditions, be formed, and, "Of course," he said, "if gas gets into the boiler, then she's got to go." We questioned him as to how often he tried his safety valve levers. His answer was characteristic of the man—"Had 'nuff to attend to without monkeying with them there fixings." Here was the solid extract of ignorance and prejudice—ignorance of his business and prejudice toward the adoption of any regulations to insure the safety of those about him. He considered inspection, or to use his own words, "fooling around with a lamp or pick," as altogether unnecessary, and the idea of hydraulic test—he thought the best test "was to put hot water into a boiler, be sure and keep plenty of water, and be sure on't." When asked about his blow off, he sometimes "blowed off when steam was low; didn't remember when he blowed off last." After seeing his safety valves had neither chain, lever, nor cord, so that they might be tested from the floor of the boiler-room, noticing that the steam gauges stood plump ninety pounds, with a boiler thirteen years old, and no one knew when it had been last examined carefully, although there was an inspection certificate hung up in the room, we bade the man good day and left.

It is one of the things to us that is totally unaccounted for, how any employer can hire a man who knows no more about his business than to weigh down the safety valve of an old boiler to carry steam at 90 pounds, when neither the man nor the foreman of the place can name the date when the boiler received an internal inspection. "So long as there's plenty of water she's all right," is the estimation of the ignorant who was in charge. He had not even time to examine the safety valves occasionally, say once a week or month. Whether he was in a hurry when six o'clock at night came to adjourn to a gin mill, or some other place where his kind of intelligence was disseminated, we have no means of knowing, and, contrary to the generally accepted theory among intelligent men, this man had a standard of his own, that the more water he had, the safer he was. Whether his safety valve was capable of raising at all or not he did not know, and evidently did not care. He was to all appearances totally ignorant of one important fact, that any accumulation of pressure beyond the strength of the boiler, of which nobody knew anything for certain, would make a blow-out somewhere, or if a rupture commenced, the more water he had in the boiler the worse for him and everybody near what would be a first-class explosion. He seemed to be perfectly ignorant of the fact that the more water the worse when

anything did occur, and we presume the idea never entered his head that carrying water six inches too high in a boiler with a lively circulation would carry over a good deal of water into the cylinder, and instead of no danger, he was really threatened with several elements, each one of which only tended to aggravate the other, and as matters seldom go by contraries in this respect, we make a mental calculation about as follows: An ignorant engineer, evidently hired because he could be employed at a cheaper rate than an intelligent, capable man. This was a negative quantity. Corroborative of this was the fact that the owners of the property did not believe in boiler inspection and insurance by people who back up their opinion from careful examination, by writing a policy for several thousand dollars upon the risk, so that the parties who saved money by employing an incompetent man, entirely ignorant of the first principle of his business, also, judging from their actions, saved money by not insuring their boilers any further than a certificate of inspection went. It is probable that hundreds of this same class of risks, which we should deem extraordinarily hazardous, do exist to-day, and that hundreds of this class of men are in charge of steam plants, when they should be carefully resting at home or breaking stone on the street, shovelling coal or snow; but they should never be permitted to have charge of a steam boiler under any circumstances or conditions. It is like an electric spark and a nitro-glycerine cartridge, we never know when the explosion is to take place. If it does take place, then we shall be treated to a digest of supernatural, providential, and the profanity of visitation. We shall be told that some "occult," "mysterious," "invisible," "gaseous," "detonation," or some other ridiculous subterfuge to avoid personal and criminal responsibility, is the cause, when, if the true fact should be rendered, it would be two brief but emphatic words—avarice and ignorance.

In many cases like this there is no doubt whatever that human life is frequently the penalty, and all too often a working man, who has not much choice of where he works, and who is generally the mainstay of a little family, is killed, crippled, seriously injured, and from two to a half-dozen people are left to the cold charity of the world, or the colder charity of employers who assume no responsibilities, in too many cases, entirely. There may be some day a change in public opinion, and a change in practice, and while intelligent men have settled all these questions in their own minds, it seems to be a farce on information and scientific investigation that men are still found that are so heedlessly negligent, who are so criminally careless that they will allow avarice to enter into their plans, while their own property and the lives of their workmen, as well as others, are prejudiced by their own ignorance, stupidity and cupidity.

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