

AROUND THE COLLIERIES

An exchange places the Vale explosion as occurring in 1885. If we are not in error the Amalgamation took place in 1886, and the explosion two years later, in 1888.

The number of dependents of victims of the late disaster is placed at three hundred. The number of widows is given as sixty. That means that on an average there are four children to each family. The average may be said to be high. One who is interested in relief work put it thus, "This is a case of 'big' families and 'little' children."

The heavy falls in the Allan Shaft are scarcely sufficient to justify the assertion made by some that the explosion was a most violent one. Owing to the heavy inclination of the seam, and the fact that the shafts are sunk in disturbed, indeed a better word might be distorted, strata, very little concussion or other disturbance is necessary to induce a fall. Nor should it be forgotten that the mine is affected by heavy lateral as well as superincumbent pressure.

In a talk between several men the other day one declared that the snow which covered the earth was responsible in part for the late explosion. That can scarcely be, as the Drummond explosion occurred the middle of May, the Foord Pit on a bright day in early November and the New Waterford in mid-summer. There may have been a covering of snow over the earth at the time of the Springhill explosion in February. The months of the explosions were May, November, January, February and July. This is proof that mine explosions are no respecters of months. Mid-summer or mid-winter matters little.

Some time in the eighties, after the Foord and Cage Pits were found to be, beyond doubt, on fire, the then General Manager, the late H. S. Poole, made an attempt to extinguish the fire in the latter mine by the manufacture of carbonic acid gas, which is one and a half times as heavy again as air, and sending it down the pit through a bore hole. The plant was not an elaborate nor a large one. Too small to make a success of the experiment, in the writer's opinion. The gas was made by an admixture of lime or chalk, sulphuric acid and water. It was sent down the mine, of course, in the form of gas. After a time the attempt to extinguish the fire in this manner was abandoned. The plant for the manufacture of the carbonic acid gas was far too small for the work expected of it. There had been heavy falls to the west of the Cage Pit shaft, which probably admitted air; and then again there was open connection with the Foord Pit. Coal mine fires have been subdued by this gas, and if all efforts presently being tried to smother the fire, assumed to be in the Third seam, it might be well to try, on a fairly large scale, the employment of this heavier than air gas.

Messrs. T. J. Brown, Malcolm Beaton and G. Greenwell, and also three representative workmen examined the McGregor Mine and said in substance that there was no danger in working it. The men's representatives advised that the under seam should not be worked until all places had been freed from gas. On Wednesday morning a few men only went down the McGregor, but on Thursday the force had increased to sixty and the increase since has been gradual. The leaders of the A. F. L. are to be commended in advising the men to resume work, so far as possible, in order to prevent the public and the industries generally from suffering from a shortage of coal.

Wm. Maxwell, General Manager of the Intercolonial Coal Co., is one of the jurymen on the inquest on the bodies of those who fell in the disaster. If the Record is not suffering from an unpardonable lapse of memory this is the first occasion on which a G. M. formed one of the jury in an inquest relating to deaths in the mine in Nova Scotia. Simon Lott, former superintendent of the Allan Mine, is also a member. It is possible there may be interesting discussion after the jury has retired to consider the verdict. There is at least one outsider who would like to be a listener.

On high authority it is told us to "Muzzle not the ox that treadeth out the corn." That carries the double meaning that if good work is to be done the ox must be well fed; and further, that an ox should not be tantalized like the man in the fable, dying of thirst when his body was up to the neck in water. So far so good. We are not told, on any known authority, what should be done to the ox who advises other oxen to cease treading at a time when food and fuel are scarce, to cease treading on two days each week, on occasions. Would it be not an unwise but a commendable act to have this ox muzzled?

In last issue the Record commended the action of the officials of the A. M. W. in setting out on a propaganda whose object was to advise the colliery workers to lose as little time as possible, and to work with more regularity on the Mondays succeeding pay days. Again the Record commends the officials in urging the men not to cause the pits to be idle on occasions of funerals. The Record has ever bewailed this action as not an excellent way to display sympathy. The experience of the writer constrains him to say that better respect would be paid to a dead comrade by working, then by idling nine-tenths of a day on which a funeral is held. Practical respect could well be made by working and giving the day's wage to dependents of the deceased, when in need. This would be surely better than remaining idle and giving no substantial aid. Old customs, or may it better be said old superstitions, die hard.