

THE DEWSBURY COLLIERY ACCIDENT.

SIX LIVES LOST.

As briefly reported in yesterday's "Mercury," an accident of a lamentable character occurred late on Thursday night at the Ravens Lodge, or, as it is better known, the Ravens Wharfe Colliery, Huddensfield-road, Dewsbury. The pit, which has been continuously worked for nearly thirty years, is the property of Messrs. J. and G. Haigh. It has three shafts, viz., the drawing shaft, by which the coal is drawn up; the pumping shaft and the "up cast," by which the foul air in the workings is expelled. The first seam of coal was struck when the shafts had reached the depth of 70 yards—a seam known as the Cromwell bed. This having been worked out, a seam of lime coal was found at a depth of 100 yards, but that was not worked. Ten yards below this was a seam of "blocking bed" coal, and this has also been worked. About twelve months ago the shafts were sunk to a depth of 281 yards, where "black bed" coal was discovered. Whilst this was being worked it was determined to go still deeper. At a depth of 321 yards the sinkers came to a second seam of "black-bed" coal, but this has not been worked. Between the original workings at 110 yards deep and the first "black bed" at 281 yards there is a distance of 171 yards. The "black-bed" workings were regarded as exceptionally free from water, and only a fortnight ago the pumps, which had not been used for nearly two months, were removed. Messrs. Haigh, however, took precautions to prevent an inrush of water into the shafts from the old workings. They went to the expense of "tubbing" or placing semi-circular iron sheets around the shafts, commencing 41 yards from the surface, and continuing down to 111 yards. They had thus, as they thought, made it impossible for water accumulating in the old workings to find its way into the newer workings. Twenty-five yards of tubbing remained to be put in on Thursday, and four men were on that day engaged in putting in wedges to tighten some of the iron sheets already fixed. These men say that they noticed nothing unusual whilst at work in the shaft. On Thursday night five labourers, with their foreman, Richard Swallow, and the man who looked after the fire at the bottom of the "upcast," descended into the mine. On reaching the bottom the labourers, or, as they are termed, bye-workers, went about five hundred yards into the workings for the purpose of preparing the roads for the colliers next morning. Swallow and the furnaceman, whose name is William Lund, stayed near the bottom of the "up-cast." The latter lit his fire, but could not get it to burn properly owing to a down-draught. Looking up the shaft, they discovered a greater trickling of water down it than was usually the case. This appeared to account for the down-draught. They perceived also that the atmosphere was very chilly, and these circumstances caused the two men to be somewhat alarmed. Lund suggested that they had better proceed as fast as they could to the drawing-shaft, situated some twenty yards off, and be taken to the surface. Two of the bye-workmen who had gone into the mine were sons of Swallow, and on this proposal being made to him he naturally thought of the safety of his lads. He replied that he must first endeavour to warn the bye-workmen, and away he went into the workings in search of them. Lund hastened to the bottom of the drawing-shaft, and jumping into the cage was drawn to the bank. Hardly had he arrived at the top when he heard a rumbling noise and subsequently a crash, the sound apparently coming from the upcast shaft. He soon ascertained the cause. Water was rushing into the "black-bed" workings in great volume, and making the roaring noise. It was evident that a great quantity of water had accumulated in the old works and burst through the tubings. The water rose in the shafts with amazing quickness. Yesterday morning it was no less than fifty yards deep, and before evening there was a depth of at least ninety yards. Swallow and the five bye-workmen were, of course, drowned. That is the fate which everybody believes they have suffered. Having no pumps at work, the firm had no means of coping with the flood save by lowering large wooden tanks down the upcast and drawing shafts, and lifting them again to the surface full of water. The workings, however, are connected with a disused pit known as the Ravens-thorpe Colliery. The pumping apparatus here has been kept in good order, and is now being used for the purpose of clearing the flooded pit, and it is estimated that between eight and ten thousand gallons of water per minute are being drawn up. This, however, has but little effect, for water can still be heard rushing into the mine. A gang of men worked all yesterday at fixing another pump in the pumping shaft. It is expected that this will be partly available to-day, and a few days hence in full working order.

The tubbing in the up-cast shaft is believed to have given way, not at the old workings, but near the lime coal, 105 yards from the top of the shaft, and 180 yards from the black bed seam. The exact point, however, cannot be definitely ascertained until the water has been pumped out. When this will have been accomplished it is difficult to conjecture, but a month or two, at any rate, must elapse before the bodies of the unfortunate victims can be recovered. After the accident, the gas which arose from the drawing shaft rendered it impossible for some time for any one to descend to the surface of the water. Towards midnight, however, three men descended, but they could see nothing but the water rising. Soon after the catastrophe, a crowd collected on the pit-bank, and the news rapidly spread into the town. The Chief Constable (Mr. Weatherald), with a number of his men, was soon upon the scene. Mrs. Swallow was not informed of her terrible loss until yesterday morning. She was then prostrated by grief. Much sympathy is felt in the district for her and the relatives of the other men.

The following are the names of the six who are believed to have been drowned:—

Richard Swallow, aged 48, Prospect-yard, Staincliffe-road, Dewsbury. He leaves a widow and seven young children.

James Swallow (23) and John Swallow (17), sons of the above.

John Swallow (16), Peel-street, Heckmondwike.

Joseph Beaumont (26), Staincliffe-road, Dewsbury Moor, single man.

John W. Hirst (19), Staincliffe-road, Dewsbury Moor.

Had the accident happened during the day-time the loss of life would no doubt have been very much greater, for 125 colliers have been employed daily in the workings. Yesterday Mr. Wardell, Her Majesty's Inspector of Mines, visited the scene.

William Lund, who lives in Farnley-street, off Huddersfield-road, Dewsbury, states that he went down the mine about nine o'clock on Thursday night along with the others. He had charge of the fire-pan. Richard Swallow remained with him, while the others went off to their work. At ten o'clock he lit his fire. Ten minutes afterwards he detected a foul smell, and calling to Swallow, asked him if he would go to the drawing shaft and be taken to the surface with him. Swallow said, "Put your fire out, and I will go and look after my lads." He then went off to the drawing shaft, and was taken up, Swallow going into the mine.