

Dreadful EXPLOSION

Of the new PIT at WALLSEND COLLIERY, on Tuesday Morning, October 23, 1821.

By which Melancholy Accident FIFTY-TWO Lives have been lost.—With the Names of all the Sufferers.

It has become the melancholy task of the writer to record one of the most distressing accidents which has happened in this part of the country for some time past, and which has involved in one grand calamity several hundreds of human beings, our neighbours, and some of them perhaps our friends. Here we find awfully verified, the sublime and admonitory language of the funeral service, viz. "In the midst of life we are in death." In a moment, without any of those intimations with which we are usually favoured when any of our friends are summoned to the grave, kindly to prepare us for the fatal stroke, wives and mothers have become widows, and their children orphans, all stripped of their earthly comfort and support, and "robbed of every stay save heaven," left, unprovided for, to the cold hand of charity. Fathers and mothers too now wail the loss of children on whom they depended for the support of their declining years, and fondly hoped that their friendly hands would, on the approach of the last enemy, have closed their eyes, and conducted their mortal remains to the house appointed for all living. Sisters and brothers, and unnumbered relatives, distinguished by all the endearing epithets and titles which kindred claim, and which draw closer the social and domestic ties—all these now mourn and lament the loss of friends, who, in some greater or less degree, administered to their comforts or contributed to their happiness.

On Tuesday morning, about eight o'clock, a new pit or shaft called New Belcher Seam, in Wallsend Colliery, on the river Tyne, blew up with a most tremendous explosion, which was heard at the distance of several miles round. It is not known with any certainty how the accident originated, but it is supposed to have been occasioned by the ignition of the hydrogen gas. We do not hear that any person has been blamed on account of it. The report of the explosion having alarmed the people belonging to the collieries in the neighbourhood, hundreds instantly came running to the fatal spot, wishful to ascertain the extent of the calamity. In the great concourse of persons thus brought together on this melancholy occasion—from motives alike of curiosity and common sympathy for the sufferers, we should in vain endeavour to describe the anxious, frenzied looks of grief and sorrow which marked the countenances of those who had friends and relatives in the pit. It was indeed mournfully affecting to hear from some the broken sighs and observe the falling tears; whilst others, weeping and wailing aloud, refused all comfort and consolation.

As soon as possible endeavours were made to render assistance to the sufferers, at least such of them as might have survived the accident.—In the pit, out of fifty-six men, it was found only two had escaped unhurt—four more were got above ground alive, but in a very weak state, two of whom are since dead.—The rest, to the amount of fifty souls, had all perished! The bodies were brought up one after another, as soon as they could be discovered, in a most awful state, amidst the frenzied, heart-rending shrieks and tears of their distressed relations and friends, who were anxiously waiting, at the mouth of the pit, the fatal announcement, which was to seal their sorrows, and consign them, their families, helpless orphans and dependents, to lasting misery and mourning. The bodies were found in various postures and positions; some with arms and legs extended, others variously bent, but all quite stiff: the flesh hanging loose on the bones. Two boys were not found till next day; one of them was horribly mangled.

Among the dead are two Overmen, Michael Moon and William Bell; also all the Wastemen; among whom is distinguished the body of Thomas Holt, who was also a schoolmaster of some justly acquired eminence in the place.—By a singular industry and attention during his hours of leisure and relaxation from severer duties, he had acquired a wonderful proficiency in Algebra, Fluxions, and the higher branches of the Mathematics, accompanied with a competent share of general knowledge, which enabled him to acquit himself in general Society with equal credit to himself and advantage to those with whom he casually associated. Whilst labouring with his fellow workmen in the pit, he was at the same time employed

in directing their studies and communicating to them useful instruction; and they, in return, wisely confided to his care the education of their children. He was also the Clerk of several Benefit Societies. The loss of this man will be severely felt by the neighbourhood; as it will probably be long before his place be filled by a person of equal industry and talents. We lament to say he has left a widow and a large family wholly unprovided for; but hope the humane and charitable who are acquainted with the calamity which has befallen them, will prevent their wants and alleviate their sufferings.

Unfortunately a number of the deceased have left large families, some 7 and some 8 children, wholly destitute.—Several of them were members of Benefit Societies, and their families will, of course, be entitled to a little temporary relief from that source. But the demand upon some of these useful institutions, from this melancholy accident, being so large, from the great number of deaths, it is feared they will either not be able to meet the sudden and extraordinary demand, or be altogether broken up and destroyed, by the total exhaustion of their funds.—This would be a subject of very deep regret, as it would cut off the hopes and dependence of numerous families in times of domestic trouble and distress, and deprive enfeebled age of its last refuge from want. That spirit of honest manly independence, which these institutions tend to cherish among the poor, ought not to be lightly esteemed—it is the parent of many virtues, and tends to arrest in some degree the progress of a demoralizing system of pauperism, by which the poor are degraded infinitely beneath the rank of brutes. Ardently do we hope therefore that a portion of the public bounty will be directed to the purpose of enabling those benefit societies on which the pressure of the misfortune has principally fallen, to meet the present demand, and to make good their engagements with their poor members who may be dependent upon them.

The village, in consequence of this calamity, presented a scene more melancholy, if possible, than that of Egypt, when the first born were smitten by the destroying angel. In the house of one man, named Hutton, three of his friends lay dead on one bed, whilst others in the village had one, two, and some three corpses.

The owners of the Colliery provided coffins for all the deceased, and also contributed one guinea towards the funeral charges of each. Their liberality, we hope, will not stop here. They will, it is confidently expected, set on foot a subscription, in conjunction with other coal-owners and opulent persons, for the relief of all the widows, orphans, families, and surviving sufferers by this awful catastrophe.

On Thursday afternoon, 48 of the bodies of the sufferers were interred at Wallsend, and 3 at the Ballast-hills, Newcastle.—Another of those brought up alive died on Thursday, and was buried on Friday, making in all 52 dead.

The collieries in the neighbourhood were laid in, for the purpose of allowing the workmen to attend the funerals.—Several thousands were present at the solemnity, and the church-yard and walls of the burying ground were filled with one dense mass of people, whilst every one behaved with the greatest propriety and decorum.

The NAMES of all the SUFFERERS.

Mich. Moon, father; Mich. Moon, jun. and Alex. Moon, sons of the above—Edw. Shotton, John Shotton, brothers—Rich. Heppell, father; Richard Heppell, son—Wm. Hutton, John Hutton, brothers—David Smart, Wm. Smart, brothers—John and Wm. Johnson, brothers—Tho. and Chris. Waggot, brothers—Geo. and John Penlington, uncle and nephew—Edw. and Wm. Wilson, brothers—Henry and Robt. Bowdon, brothers—Wm. Bell, sen. and jun. father and son—John Norman, Wm. Jackson, Wm. Rogerson, Roger Buddle, Henry Bolam, Geo. Kyle, James Walker, John Gordon, Geo. Mason, Thos. Lowrie, Thos. Davidson, John Birtley, James Kelly, Geo. Thompson, Sam. Garratt, John Elliott, Geo. Longstaff, Nich. English, Edw. Campbell, Wm. Coxon, Thos. Holt, Peter Hay, Robt. Delap, John Robinson, Robt. Bainbridge, James Jobling, John Farry, John Smith, Geo. Roseby

Thomas Huggup, and Robt. Bell were severely burnt, and are dangerously ill.

Edw. Comby and Wm. Johnson escaped unhurt.

J. Marshall, Printer, Newcastle.