THE FLOYD COLLINS'S OF OUR MINES

If that pitiful Kentucky tragedy which dragged its hopeless way through seventeen days of the month of February will turn the minds of but a fraction of the hundreds of thousands of men and women, whose first thought in the morning, during those days, was of Floyd Collins' plight, why, then, the boy will not have perished in vain.

Floyd Collins was pinned down by a falling rock while exploring the narrow passages which run like spider legs from the caves below the surface in the sandy soil near Cave City, Kentucky.

Everything that men - and resourceful men - could do was done to extricate him, but the case was hopeless from the first. - The shifting earth claimed its prey.

Floyd Collins died the victim of his love of adventure and discovery.

Every year over NINE HUNDRED bituminous coal miners are entombed in American mines as he was. Falling earth, rocks, timber, coal, trap them. They die victims of industry - part of the price we pay for warmth and flying wheels.

Nine Hundred Floyd Collins' a year - nine thousand in ten years - and we treat the awful toll as a necessary incident to keeping the world runing. Yet each one of these trapped miners died as Floyd Collins did - unless the engulfing earth is merciful and kills by a blow. "A lonely, black death" - one who sat at the mouth of the pit through those seventeen days described it.

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"Entombed alive far down in the earth, with no human voice nor hand to comfort him, no human ear to hear his futile, frenzied cries - the rocks held him so jealously even in death that it meant death itself to take him from their clutches.

Can the death list of miners from their cause be cut down? Must we engulf nine hundred men yearly in taking out soft coal? We need not. A careful and scientific testing of the veins which are to be opened, followed by timbering adequate to the risk revealed - timbering which all careful and responsible mine owners use and which in some states the law requires and at least partly enforces, would cut the nine hundred in half.

Why do we not save these men then? Why? Careful testing, proper timbering cost money - take time - they interfere with quick, cheap production. "We'll risk it!"

But it is not a jealous earth, resenting man's interference that destroys all the Floyd Collins of the mines. The nine hundred a year engulfed are but half of the lives spent yearly in the United States in getting out bituminous coal. For ten years, 1912-1922 - the yearly average, so our best authority, the United States Bureau of Mines, reports was 1,824 - forty -three men out of every thousand employed. That is fully three times as many as they kill in Great Britain.

What is the matter with us that we endure this? Is it ignorance? Perish the thought! An American mine owner will resent the imputation with scorn. I have heard them myself. What

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Bulletin can tell him anything about mining! He knows; and moreover our United States Bureau of Mines is the best in the world - and there is nothing about mining it doesn't know and it is a nuisance in its insistence on safety devices.

There is only one answer then, for we certainly do kill three times as many per thousand as Great Britain does. If my mine owner friend is right and we know, it follows we don't practice what we know - that we take the chance in other things as well as in proper tunneling.

That is it - knowing but not doing - is what is killing men in our mines at this awful rate. "Tardy adoption of safeguards, lagging years behind engineering knowledge of what can and ought to be done", declares John B. Andrews, the active head of the American Association for Labor Legislation, who has studied the methods of mining both in Europe and in this country, who co-operates with mine owners and mine bureaux, and whose only interest in the work is saving lives.

Take the matter of explosions - dangerous things at best, explosions - but you can't mine without them. They blast the rocks - open the veins; and some are less dangerous than others. That has been proved by scientific trials. Indeed, our Federal Bureau of Mines has worked out a table of what is called "permissible" explosions - those that properly handled are comparatively safe.

Do you think the mine owner confined himself to these "permissibles"? Not at all. Last year only about eighteen percent.

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of the explosions used were in the safe list. Nobody knows how many Floyd Collins' of the mine met "a lonely, black death", because a reckless overseer employed black powder - a thing which all those who have had mining experience say should rarely, if ever, be used, and for which there are "permissible" substitutes recommended by the Bureau of Mines, and used with satisfactory results by those mine owners who do care and who not only systematically do everything they know to make things safe, but who are constantly searching better methods, experimenting with new devices and materials.

Thank God it is men of their type that have proved beyond a doubt that there is a way of preventing one of the terrible, sweeping disasters that from time to time have desolated villages and shocked the land.

Explosions from coal dust killed more than four hundred men in American mines last year. At the Castle Gate mine 172 men were killed at one blast. When the community began to count the loss it found 868 widows and children to be cared for.

But explosions from coal dust are unnecessary; that is, there is now in existence a cheap method of prevention worked out by scientific experiments - a large part of which has been under the direction of our Bureau of Mines - successfully applied by law in Great Britain and France for some ten years, but only used in this country by perhaps fifty of our enlightened mine owners, and not by any means yet generally required by law. It took 172 lives and the making of 868 widows and orphans to bring Utah to require by law that the method be enforced there.

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And what is it that will prevent these appalling catastrophies? The simplest of things. Everyone can understand the volumes of fine dust which must arise in mining coal. This dust "settles on everything" as a housewife says, - over walls and roofs and floors and cars; but let it be stirred - thrown into the air by the local explosions of the mine and it is easily ignited with results as awful as from the explosions of gas.

Miners have long studied the problem, tried water to "wet the dust down", but it was useless - even dangerous some say. Finally they tried the medical dictum: "like cures like". Grinding rock with fine dust they blew it over the surfaces of the mine. Every layer of coal dust was overlaid by one of rock dust. Rock dust and coal dust mixed are non-explosive. Coal dust explosions, so it is claimed, have passed forever from the mining history of England. The law compels all mines to be regularly dusted with ground rock.

In the United States where we have helped prove that this method of treating the dangerous dust is effective, we allowed four hundred Floys Collins of the mines to be killed last year because we did not use our knowledge.

There are enlightened American mine owners who are using the rock dusting process - there are States like Utah adopting it - but in a matter of this kind, uniformity is essential - all states must act.

If at any moment of those seventeen days that young Floyd

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Collins lay pinned down by rock in his Kentucky cave, legislation could have saved him, can we doubt we would have had it? An extra session, if necessary!

Rock dusting legislation enacted <u>now</u> in every state which counts coal mining in the industries will save from a wretched death in the next twelve months literally hundreds of the Floyd Collins of our mines.

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