

MOST DREADFUL ACCIDENT.—It is with deep concern that we record one of the most distressing and shocking events that have occurred here for many years.—On Saturday last, three tremendous explosions took place in Kells pit, near this town, belonging to the Earl of Lonsdale, and occasioned the death of twenty out of the twenty two unfortunate colliers who were working in it. Notwithstanding the most prompt assistance rendered by the stewards, aided by the introduction of air pipes, it was with the greatest difficulty that the bodies were approached; fourteen of which were removed on Sunday, and six to-day. The two survivors, Patrick Mc Avoy and his son were only rescued from their perilous situation early this morning, in a most deplorable state; but we are happy to add that sanguine hopes are entertained of their recovery. On hearing the melancholy intelligence, the Earl of Lonsdale sent twenty two guineas to be distributed among the relations of the sufferers—one guinea to each family—besides which, we understand, they will have dwellings rent free, and eighteen pence a week from the fund arising from the colliers' weekly subscription deducted from their wages. This dreadful occurrence demands the attention of all classes. Not an individual in this populous town and neighbourhood can be found who does not deplore the awful catastrophe. But of what avail is the sorrow which we all feel unless it produce some beneficial effect to the surviving relatives of the poor sufferers? As their present means are inadequate to the difficulties of their unhappy condition it has been suggested that a public subscription be opened for them, and a collection made in the churches and chapels. We trust the hint will not be neglected.—Of the cause of this lamentable event—whether it was owing to the temerity of the workmen, or to the natural dangers attending the re-opening of an old pit—we know nothing; but we do know that the town looks forward with considerable anxiety for the result of the Coroner's Inquest, the particulars of which we trust will be made public. Should any inaccuracy be discovered in this statement, we shall have great pleasure in rectifying it;—our readers in Whitehaven are aware of the mystery attempted to be cast over such accidents.

W. GAZETTE 8 NOV 1819

To the EDITOR of the WHITEHAVEN GAZETTE.

SIR,—In last week's Pacquet I observe a statement relative to the late dreadful accident in Kells Pit, which, I presume, is submitted to the public as the defence of the colliery stewards.

Without offering any opinions of my own, permit me, Sir, to notice those of very competent judges with whom I have conversed on the subject. It seems generally admitted that accidents in coal mines frequently occur from the improvident system of *robbing the pillars*, as it is technically called. Workmen employed on such occasions, and in fixing up props to prevent the roof from falling, are so annoyed with the fine dust which blocks up the *Safety Lamp*, that they are induced to remove the cylinder, or to have recourse to candles in order to see what they are about. It has been found too, that the plan of robbing the pillars, instead of occasionally opening fresh bands, causes the foul air to accumulate irregularly, and consequently renders the pit more dangerous. Besides, the system is alike injurious to the proprietors and to the workmen:—the time of the latter is so much taken up with removing the slate, rubbish, &c. that it diminishes their day's work; and in proof of the former assertion, I need only remark, it is well known that in consequence of robbing the pillars, the roof of old Scalegill Pit fell in some years ago.

However frequent such accidents may have been in Newcastle, and other places, it is equally melancholy to reflect that within the last three years, between forty and fifty labourers have lost their lives in coal mines near this town. Therefore, in common with every friend of humanity, I rejoice that you have so feelingly called the attention of the public to this distressing subject;—I rejoice, too, that the public have adopted your hint of subscribing towards the relief of the poor families of the sufferers.—Whatever may have been the cause—whether the workmen—the stewards, or both, or neither were to blame,—I rejoice that an opportunity is at length afforded to them, and to the rest of the inhabitants of this town, publicly to discuss all matters in which their interests are concerned. In truth where the heart alone is interested, and honestly interested, it imports little what the subject is, perfect concord must be the result of earnest inquiry, and of fair discussion.

HUMANITAS.

Our readers will be glad to learn that the statement which appeared in our last relative to Kells Pit, is incorrect. No further explosion has taken place, nor has any person suffered any injury there since the late dreadful accident.—As nothing material transpired at the inquest we think it unnecessary to publish the particulars.—The public are aware of the impositions frequently practised upon editors of newspapers.

W. GAZ 22 NOV 1819

MISFORTUNE IN KELLS PIT.

As independent and impartial journalists we promised in our Prospectus to record all events affecting the interests of the public at large, and particularly those more immediately concerning the community in which we reside. We were aware that such a course would subject us to the vindictive misrepresentations of the malignant and interested; because, though most men pretend to advocate theoretically the liberty of the press, many oppose it when their own public conduct is necessarily the subject of fair discussion. Before the establishment of the Gazette, the "repeated accidents" alluded to in the subjoined Rules were carefully concealed by a neighbouring paper (for what purpose we pretend not to judge) whilst others in Newcastle and elsewhere were as carefully made public.—From our having invariably maintained a consistency of conduct, it was deemed politic by the editors of the journal in question to notice the melancholy accident, and the deaths of the sufferers, in favour of whose destitute relatives we *exclusively* published an appeal to the generosity of a sympathising public. Soon after this event, a report prevailed that other ten men were more or less injured by a subsequent explosion in the same pit. Having heard this rumour from various persons whose veracity we have no reason to doubt, we stated it as such in our paper of the 8th inst. And here it may not be unnecessary to mention that it is extremely difficult on such occasions to procure accurate information. Persons most interested are the most reluctant, and, from agitation, perhaps least capable of relating correctly *above* what has happened *below* ground; and hence likewise the difficulty which juries, not composed of scientific men, experience in forming a conclusion as to the true causes of such a dreadful catastrophe.—However, should another unfortunate accident occur, we shall endeavour, by sending to the colliery-office, to obtain correctly at least one side of the question.

All editors are liable to be, and occasionally are, imposed upon. About a fortnight since an account was sent to us of a marriage between a gentleman and lady of this town; and had we not taken the precaution of sending to the clerk of St. James's church to inquire the truth, we might have undesignedly wounded the feelings of two respectable families. No editors with whom we are acquainted have oftener fallen victims to imposition (for none take less pains to seek information) than those, who in this instance, have impugned in an ill-bred, splenetic, vulgar manner, and without knowing them too, the respectability of our informants. But to return to the question. On Tuesday last, it was industriously reported, that no fund arising out of deductions from the colliers' wages "ever existed; nay, it never was even heard of before." But it is, and has been long known, that the Earl of Lonsdale allows the colliery accounts to be charged with *two* shillings per week, paid to the widow of each person who may have unfortunately lost his life in his Lordship's collieries.—Now this report is just as far from the truth as the other. Such widow receives two shillings per week for the first two years after the accident, and afterwards only *one* shilling per week. Besides, it is notorious, that such a fund *does* exist. Sixpence per month is deducted from the colliers' wages towards a fund for medical attendance. And that *such a fund does exist* is certain from the subjoined rules, where we learn from authority, that certain informers "will be entitled to the *thanks* of the AGENTS! and also to one half of the fine; the remaining half to be appropriated to the *Fund for the sick colliers and their families.*"

As to the subscription we know not the amount, but we know that we were the first to recommend it publicly, and have given our mite. But we are aware also that many respectable persons refused to subscribe because the collectors could not say whether his Lordship had given any thing, or how much—and others because they did not know how the subscription was to be applied. Some were of opinion that if the collection was to be distributed in small sums weekly to the sufferers, it was little better than the township of Whitehaven paying for the relief of Preston Quarter; and this appeared to them a hardship because his Lordship's collieries are not rated. Why should the Noble Earl in this respect enjoy an exemption from the general law of the land? The parish do not wish him to pay more than his share, nor is it likely that they can be satisfied

with less. Suppose the coal pits were only rated at £20,000 per annum, it is evident that the amount would exceed his Lordship's occasional donations and gifts of one or two shillings a week to the widows of the workmen who fall in his service. It is most probable that the Earl of Lonsdale is unacquainted with these things, as his Lordship declared, that it was only when "Proceedings were indirect and irregular" that he suspected the motives of any man.

It has been strongly asserted, indeed as strongly as if the fact had been publicly called in question, that the pit was properly ventilated. But the eagerness with which this assertion was first made, and again reiterated in a subsequent paper, seems to us to indicate a kind of consciousness in a certain quarter, that all was not as it should have been. We have been again and again informed that the workmen themselves had on many occasions expressed their apprehensions of the dreadful fate which at last overtook them; and we are also informed on an authority which will not be readily called in question, that a certain gentleman of high professional character, now in Russia, openly declared that this very pit was *not properly ventilated*, and that if no change took place in the system of working, it, an explosion which might lay the colliery in ruins would take place in less than two years. The result has lamentably fulfilled his prediction, not merely *to the letter*, but with many aggravating circumstances. It is remarkable that a similar opinion was pronounced by a professional gentleman who went down into the pit about six months since. Upwards of twenty industrious individuals have been in an instant hurried into eternity, and fifty-seven paupers left on the parish. It is easy to assert that the pit was properly ventilated, but how is the fact established? Has not the consequence been the very same as if it was *not* properly ventilated? Was it not known to a certainty that the pit contained an accumulation of carburetted hydrogen? What were the means, or were any means at all employed, to get rid of this fatal Gas? And would not an additional air-shaft put down in a judicious situation have prevented the sad catastrophe?

The adoption of this measure would in all probability have prevented the distressful results which the fears of the colliers (alas too well grounded) had anticipated: and if so, why was the precaution neglected? If it be answered, that it would have been too expensive an expedient, and that his Lordship would thereby have incurred a certain loss, with the prospect of only a contingent gain, we reply that if it was imprudent to expose his Lordship to the risk of an expense, which taking away the old workings might not counterbalance, it was infinitely more imprudent, to expose the lives of the workmen to so imminent and dreadful a hazard, for so trifling a benefit to his Lordship. Would not a fresh shaft have cost less than the support of these paupers even for a year?

In offering these observations we have no objects in view, but to promote the cause of humanity and the real interests of his Lordship and the town of Whitehaven. To shew the importance of free inquiry on such subjects we need only remind our readers that to this cause the world is indebted to Sir Humphrey Davy for the benefits arising from his Safety Lamp. We are in search of truth, and despise those who indulge in a grovelling and malignant disposition for *misrepresentation*. We know not what the 49th chapter of Genesis, particularly the latter part of the sixth verse,* has to do with the question, but we think it as ridiculous in certain men to assume exclusive *honour* as to arrogate to themselves exclusive *loyalty*. When we see a junto—one of whom runs about to injure private property, and then endeavours, with no more success than Sir Anthony Absolute, to convince people that he is not in a passion at the censure he has incurred—another refuse to take goods which he had ordered from a tradesman because he signed the County Requisition—and a third wilfully suppressing an advertisement which his clients instructed him to transmit—and for which (unless indeed he had fallen asleep over the pages of Lady Morgan's *France*) he ought to blush deep as SCARLETT.—We say that to see such a junto, whose modesty at least is no impediment to their advancement, boast of exclusive *honour* reminds us of Falstaff, who exclaimed—"why, ye rogues it's as much as I, even I can do to keep the terms of mine honour precise."—We conclude in the language of a celebrated author, "had you not better Mr. — leave Honour out of the question."

* "For ————— in their self-will they DUGGED DOWN A WALL"—or *robbed pillars* as it is technically called. The former part of this verse was quoted by the Cumberland Pacquet of last week.

