

that there was at least a possible chance that a sufficient number of men, with necessary material, might have so dealt with the fire as to render it easy to subdue subsequently, and had there been human life to save, or perhaps even a valuable property, we believe that Mr. Tennent would have acted much more vigorously than he did. We have been careful to set out the conditions and prospects of the company and its mine, in order to fairly weigh the action of Mr. Tennent and those who subsequently endeavoured to deal with the fire. The local agent of the company, Mr. Bayfeild, communicated with the Westport Coal Company, and the latter placed at the disposal of the Westport-Cardiff Company the services of Mr. Dixon, mine-manager of the Granity Creek Mines. Mr. Dixon proceeded to the Westport-Cardiff Mine, arriving there at 9 a.m. on Monday, the 29th January. It is unfortunate that we cannot procure Mr. Dixon's evidence, but he has been a resident for some time at Newcastle, New South Wales, where he holds a position as Government Mine Inspector. We hesitate, in the absence of any evidence from him, to criticize the means he took to deal with the fire; we feel convinced that he acted with perfect good faith, and the suggestion that he was not anxious to save a rival company's property is an unworthy one. If there was any lack of enthusiasm on his part, it was rather because he believed the mine was no longer worth calling a rival, or risking much to save.

On Mr. Dixon's arrival on Monday, 29th January, he took charge, and it seems to us that Mr. Tennent was not authorised to interfere, unless he was very strongly of opinion that wrong measures were being adopted. Messrs. Dixon and Tennent conferred together, and they entered the mine for a distance of 16 chains, until the air-current reversing, and rendering it impossible for them to proceed further, they turned back and went to the bridge end of the tunnel, where they entered the tunnel, and got in about 10 chains, but on account of gases could proceed no further. They ordered the trucks to be taken out of the mine, and the tunnel to be bratticed off. They decided that a fan must be erected, which would take some days, and Mr. Tennent then left for Reefton, in order to attend an examination of candidates for mine-managers' certificates, and Mr. Dixon left with him, but returned on Wednesday. We are of opinion that they ought to have stayed at the mine, postponing the examination if other arrangements for holding it could not be made. The proportion of importance between the two claims of duty seems to be altogether in favour of their staying by the mine.

Before leaving the mine on the 29th January, 1900, Messrs. Dixon and Tennent made a report, in which they say: "We have this day endeavoured to locate position of the fire, but owing to the unavailable (*sic*) ventilation, which is natural, and the current thereby reversing every few minutes, we were unable to reach the affected part without incurring undue risk. We have therefore decided that no further risk to human life shall be incurred, and that a reliable current of air must be established to obviate this. To secure such current we decided the fan shall be removed from its present position, and temporarily set at opening to Chasm Creek from first section of the mine. Further, in the meantime all openings to-day are to be sealed up by close bratticing, and no workmen are to enter this section of the mine until authorised by the person in full control of operations.—R. TENNENT, Inspector of Mines; JONATHAN DIXON, Mining Manager. 29th January, 1900."

It will be seen from this report that these two gentlemen were of opinion that nothing could be done until a reliable current of air could be established, and men were at once set to work to erect a fan and establish such current. On the 30th January Alexander Mitchell, the foreman or deputy employed, reports: "We are vigorously pushing forward the removal of fan to the place indicated. All necessary hands are engaged working night and day. At 1 p.m. we were obliged to suspend work for four hours at the close entrance (Bridge) owing to smoke oozing through bratticing. Current changed then, and the bratticing was more tightly secured, and no change occurred in current till 4 a.m. on the 31st January."

Mr. Tennent's opinions may be taken from his report dated the 19th February, in which he says: "From personal knowledge of the workings I may state that, had the fire been detected in its earliest stage, great difficulty would have been experienced to locate and seal off the affected district in order to save the main roadway, as the work would have required twelve permanent stoppings to be built, and under most unfavourable conditions amongst the crushed pillars, when, had it been possible to accomplish, this fire would probably have broken out afresh at a future day. Viewing the position from every standpoint, it was imperative to watch and study every condition of safety on behalf of the workmen. . . . My opinion is, spontaneous combustion has been slowly and surely carrying out its destructive work under the mass of fallen rocks in the pillared ground, and making its way very gradually towards the fresh air on the outskirts of the falls when it was discovered."

If this opinion of Mr. Tennent's was well founded, the conclusion he arrived at was justified; but we are not dealing under this heading with Mr. Tennent's action so much as Mr. Dixon's, who represented the mine-owners, and whose operations are under consideration. The point under the present heading being the conduct of the occupiers of the mine upon the discovery of the fire, and the occupiers having intrusted their interests entirely to Mr. Dixon, what he did covers the question of what the occupiers did at the crisis. Mr. Dixon might fairly be presumed by the company to be the best person obtainable at the moment to advise them, and to overcome the danger if it could be overcome; but, whether Mr. Dixon's operations can be adversely criticized or approved, it seems to us clear that so far as the occupiers were concerned, they could do no better under the circumstances than they did in engaging Mr. Dixon to proceed to the mine and take charge, but Mr. Dixon should have remained on the spot, and not have left from Monday till Wednesday. It is practically conceded that the only time when there was any chance of the fire being sealed off and kept from the main haulage-road was at the moment of its discovery, and perhaps on the following day. There are so many openings on the surface on the Chasm Creek slope that the fire within was obtaining full air vent, when once communication had been made from the pit to the outcrops.