

WORKMEN WHO COURT DEATH

BY DANIEL P. WILES

HOW many of the "men in the street," the men who are the bread winners of the community, live and work day after day in more deadly peril than the soldier on the firing line or the buckskin-shirted pioneer of the old Indian fighting days? Modern commercialism has made human life the cheapest of all raw materials. For the proof of this assertion it is unnecessary to go among the coolies on the great embankment contracts of the lower reaches of the treacherous Chinese rivers or among the Hindu railway gangs of the deadly lower Indian plains, where scanty food, foul water, the lurking cholera germ and the strange machinery of the "foreign devil" all conspire to count their victims by the score. In reality the greatest toll of human life and limb is taken right here in America, in the steel mill, the mine, the railroad yard and on the towering steel structures that dot our cities and span our rivers.

On the books of many life insurance companies there are lists of certain occupations, ominously marked as "extra hazardous." On this list none is more dangerous than that of the "shot-firer," or the man who tamps and fires the blast in the mines. The ordinary miner faces the menace of the deadly "damp" that flows like an invisible poison stream through the lower mine levels; he faces the danger of explosive gases that may drive the life from his body; the fear of the cave-in that may flatten him under tons of coal and slate is always with him. All these fall to the lot of the "shot-firer," as well as the dreadful risks of handling a high explosive in the close-walled caverns and underground passages, where its force is confined and intensified. Such explosives are notoriously unstable, a stick of giant powder may have withstood the jars of transportation for long distances and yet when placed in the drill hole by the "firer" may prematurely explode under the soft blows of the tamping iron on the "fill" above it. Many fatalities occur in similar ways.

A never-failing source of interest to the street crowd is the movements of the structural iron worker. Undoubtedly his work is the most dangerous of all the building trades. It certainly is the most spectacular. With the increasing ground values of the downtown districts forcing the buildings higher each year, he frequently finishes his work in the free spaces of the upper air with all the neighboring buildings far below him. He rides the steel beams as they are swung from the lower to the upper stories, holding to the cable and balancing them to make sure they do not slip their tether and shoot downward through the completed floors and create more havoc than a 12-inch shell.

On the steel beams hundreds of feet above the street traffic he runs back and forth about his labors, as sure-footed as those dizzy heights as a mountain sheep. A single false step, a momentary dizziness and he would plunge to his death a dozen stories below. Every minute of each working day his life is in the hands of his fellow-workmen. A heavy bolt dropped from above, a loosened plank, an unshipped cable or a flying block and the structure has taken its toll of human life. The structural steel worker is rarely crippled, as his injuries are usually such as to cause immediate death.

Very similar to the risks of the steel man's work are those of the steeple-jack. Moving like a fly along the face of a factory chimney, a water tower or a church spire, his daily bread is gained at the daily risk of life and limb. The fear of high places is not his particular dread, as that is all in a day's work, but every time he is hoisted aloft he gambles with his life on the strength of a strand of cable and the coolness of his assistant.

It is the assistant's duty to raise and lower and shift the man in the chair's position as he moves up and down and sidewise on the face of the building upon which they are engaged. Many wonderful escapes are recorded in the annals of these workers between earth and sky. Only a few days ago a steeple-jack, working on a factory chimney in North St. Louis, saved himself when his tackle gave way by grasping a hook at the end of a rope suspended from the chimney top and arrested his fall in midair, where he clung until rescued by his thoroughly frightened helper.

Have you ever noticed the window-washer going about his business, 15 or 20 stories above the street level? He stands on a narrow ledge and his work compels him to lean far back over the crowded street, many feet below, as he reaches upward to clean the upper part of the glass. A slip of the foot on the wet stone of the ledge, a single stumble and the crowd of downtown shoppers would see him dashed to his death on the paving at their feet.

Volumes have been written concerning the terrible life-destroying implements of modern warfare, but the government statistics, compiled by the Interstate Commerce Commission, show that the railroad switchman's work is more dangerous than that of the professional soldier. A military movement in modern warfare lasts only a few months at the longest, but the switchman's campaign is every working day. In a great terminal the noise of tugging engines and rolling coaches and box cars never ceases. On the procession of cars moving steadily in and out depends the business activity of the city and its surrounding territory.

Day and night the yard crews dodge back and forth in this scene of tireless activity, clambering over and between moving cars, making flying couplings and cutting cars out of strings on the tracks as the cowpuncher

cuts a steer out of a herd. He leaps from moving cars, boards a flying gondola or an engine pilot where a miscalculation of an inch in his movements would send him to his death under the wheels. Open switches, "dead" switch lamps, derails and the ever-present switch frog lie in wait for his unguarded moments.

A few days ago a veteran switchman in the Frisco yards leaped from a moving yard engine and started across a passing track to make a coupling. His foot caught in a switch frog. Another crew had just "kicked" a car in on this spur, and it came rolling down the track upon him. He hurriedly tugged and pulled with all his strength to loosen his foot. As the car came closer he kicked and shoved with the free foot, a surer method, but it failed him now. The car was now close upon him as he rolled as far from the track as his iron grip upon his foot would allow and watched the heavy wheels roll over his leg and ankle. His effort was in vain, as he died on the operating table. Of all the dangerous positions in railroad work, the switchman's is the worst. This is so well known among railroad employes that "only a switchman killed" has become a railroad saying.

Dozens of laboratories are scattered over the city, where men work day after day in the noxious fumes of the strongest life-destroying gases known to science. Educated men of undoubted scientific attainments work for hours in the interest of commerce or the arts in order to solve some elusive problem. With rubber masks and gloves the chemist tries to protect himself and succeeds in a measure, but the laboratory has a long list of victims to answer for. Sightless eyes, defective hearing, twisted limbs, paralysis, paresis, insanity and death make up the counts in the long indictment.

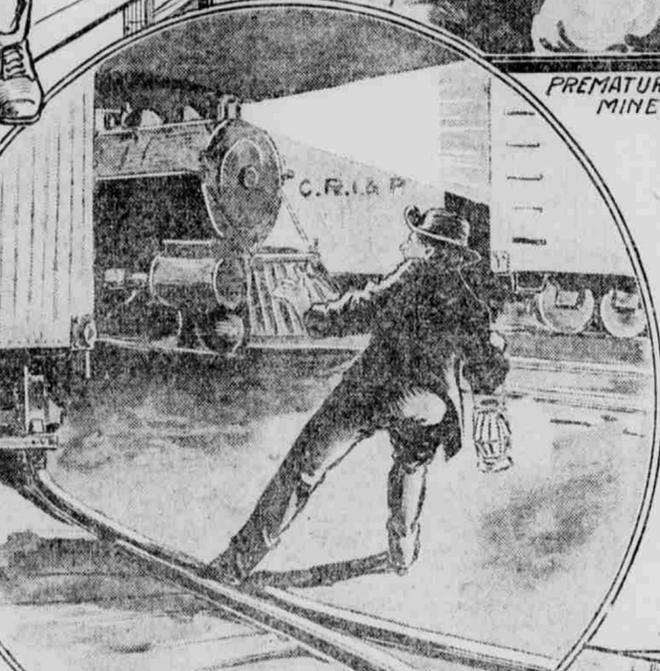
The list of occupations of more than ordinary peril is a long one. The tool grinder, the man who puts the first rough edge on all cutting implements, stands hour after hour in front of a heavy emery wheel revolving at a tremendous speed. A fault in the wheel, a sudden acceleration or stoppage in its speed may cause the wheel to burst with the report and dread effect of a six-inch shell. The flying pieces rend walls and ceilings like paper and crumple heavy pieces of machinery into shapeless masses. No employe in the line of his force can hope to escape.

The powder mill employe works in a walled inclosure within whose bounds lie sufficient explosives to shatter the mighty pyramid of Gizeh to a shapeless mass of rubble. The worker in this place is under stricter supervision than the Kafir in the South African diamond mines. The utmost caution is observed, "danger" signs are nailed up everywhere; the grounds are picketed by watchful guards; no matches are lighted and a



PREMATURE EXPLOSION IN MINE

FOOT CAUGHT IN A SWITCH FROG



FALLS THROUGH BREAKING OF SAFETY BELT

DANGEROUS WORK



special felt-soled shoe is worn, as the chance spark struck by a steel shoe nail might cause disaster.

So, in the midst of dangers, some of them imminent, some less threatening, the bread-winner in many occupations follows his calling year in and year out. In many lines of craftsmanship and efficiency the supremacy of American skill is unquestioned. And to paraphrase our Kipling just a little:

If life be the price of supremacy, Lord God we are paying full.

Cuba's Grievances Stated.

The Cuban Opinion, a fortnightly review, devoted to Cuban affairs, has made its initial appearance at Havana. While it disclaims a feeling of hostility toward the government at Washington and expresses a willingness to "draw closer the ties of friendship and cordiality between the great American nation and the young Republic of Cuba," yet the tenor of its contents is skeptical as to the good faith of the American people and its tone is anything but friendly. It declares a purpose to defend the national status, the material interests and the good name of the Cuban people, a laudable undertaking in itself, yet it charges that there "is a disposition in the United States to look down upon the Cubans as an inferior and degenerate racial product from which nothing worthy or enduring is to be expected." It also says that "it is this spirit which constantly meddles with our internal affairs and attempts to dictate to our government; in short, which really considers Cuba as in reality nothing but an American colony, without any rights of her own, temporarily and somewhat nominally in possession of a race unfit to survive, and in time to be supplanted by Anglo-Americans with their ill-concealed hauteur and their utilitarian civilization."

The Opinion admits, however, that a series of unfortunate circumstances has given the United States an intervention in local affairs quite out of proportion to the moral influence

WHERE WOMEN RULE

Fine Sight for Suffragists at Cancale in France.

Feminine Police Keep Order and Feminine Labor Carries on the Oyster Industry That Makes the Place Famous.

Cancale, France.—In these days of discussions of suffragist movements, women's rights and feminine business acumen, anyone in search of an example of an unusual sort might drop in upon this French channel port of some 15,000 souls when they are all at home and see a truly woman run town.

There is no woman mayor, no woman in the town council. The offices are left as a mere matter of form to the men, who are seldom there to fill them, but the women are a law unto themselves; they make up the whole town, transact all the business, police the place, maintain order and strict sanitary conditions, manage the schools, and at the same time carry on the most famous oyster industry of France, doing the entire cultivating and selling and transporting the product of the ocean beds, even loading and unloading the seagoing ships that come and go at the port.

And what is still more interesting to their sisters in other parts of the world, the girls of Cancale are the first to be married of all the girls of north and central France. Ask a French sailor where of all ports—excepting of course out of chivalry his own native town—the most beautiful of French fisher girls are to be found and he will tell you at Cancale. You will believe him, too, when you walk along the quays and the narrow streets and see the pretty faces and neat trim figures set off to the best advantage in the Breton dress and clean white caps, or watch the little groups in the shade of the street in the afternoon or within the deep set stone



Oyster Girls of Cancale.

doorways mending nets and gossiping as fast as their French tongues can wag.

The conditions that make this a woman run town come about in the most natural way in the world. All the men are fishers and they spend the greater part of the year at sea. They are good sailors and they man the craft that venture across the Atlantic to the French fishing grounds along the Newfoundland coast. It was their rights that used to come up frequently for adjustment by fishery commissions, and it is the loss of their vessels that almost every year brings sorrow to Cancale and the neighboring coast.

When the men do return they find that the town has been managed so well in their absence and the thrift of the women has been so well exercised that they are content not to meddle and to let things go on as they have been going. There are proportionately more widows, and young widows, too, in Cancale than in any other town of France. A fisherman's bride waits for four years after she has heard that the boat her husband sailed away upon has not been reported and then she puts on her mourning. It is this uncertainty as to the fate of the men, thrown helpless and homeless upon their own resources, that makes the women of Cancale self-reliant and that leads them early to seek some means of their own for an honest livelihood.

For the men that remain in the town the women do not seem to entertain the greatest respect. Most of them have become incapacitated for work or are shiftless and idle. So the women run matters themselves.

The thrift that the conditions mentioned inspire is something of a passion among the women. It seems that there is a constant struggle with each one of them to make more money than the man who goes to sea. They frequently accomplish this, too, for the returning fisherman finds frequently that his yearly gain of \$150 or \$200 got after a hard battle from the sea is more than equalled by the patient and careful homewife that he left at home.

Desert Plants Store Water.

The problem of storing a supply of water for their own use and of preventing it evaporating has been solved by the desert plants in many most ingenious ways. Perhaps the most noteworthy example is the so-called "water barrel," which, of about the size and shape of an ordinary beer keg, is, in fact, nothing more nor less than a living water tank. Its whole interior is composed of storage cells so admirably arranged that the pulp which they form contains something like 96 per cent. of pure water.

Not Interested.

"Have you heard the latest news?" inquired Mrs. Bigelow.
"Yes," answered Miss Cayenne. "It's very shocking, isn't it?"
"Do you know them?"
"No. I haven't the slightest idea as to the identity of the people. Scandals are like humorous anecdotes about celebrities; the same old stories with different names introduced."