

Prior to November, 1915, explosive was sold to the workmen in the State mines at 1s. 1d. per pound, and "electric detonators" at 2d. each, but owing to the price of the explosives being increased by 10s. per 50 lb. case the rate to miners was increased correspondingly. The miners have therefore been paying since November, 1915, 1s. 3d. per pound for explosive and 2d. per detonator. Although the price of explosives and detonators has increased considerably of late the increased rate has not been passed on to the men. The Department of Mines is therefore bearing a loss of £1 7s. 6d. per 50 lb. case on explosives, and 13s. per 100 on detonators. On an average twenty 50 lb. cases of explosives are used weekly, and about one thousand one hundred detonators. The present price of explosive is £4 10s. per 50 lb. case at Greymouth, to which must be added freight and handling, equivalent to about 1s. a case. It is retailed to the miners at 1s. 3d. per pound. Electric detonators cost at Greymouth £1 9s. 8d. per 100, and are retailed to the miners at 16s. 8d. per 100.

Generally speaking, the increased cost of explosives over the period has been shared between company and miner; the companies have raised the price to the miners, but not to the extent to which the price has been raised to them by the manufacturers—e.g., at one mine the price to the company has been raised from 9d. to 1s. 8d. a pound, the miners getting their supply for 1s. The deterioration in the quality of the explosives has, of course, operated as a further rise in price. It is the custom for the charge for explosives to be deducted from the miner's fortnightly pay. In the statistics of wages quoted in this report this deduction has already been made, only net wages being quoted. The rise in the price of explosives to the miner may in some cases have involved an additional expense of as much as £12 a year, but the cost varies from mine to mine over such a wide range that the increase in some cases is trifling; on the average for the Dominion it would probably not exceed £4.

The change from blasting-powder to permitted explosives, which was made compulsory in some mines, was alleged by the miners in one case to have reduced their wages. The records of cost of explosives per ton, however, show a very slight alteration after the introduction of the permitted explosive and in the direction of a decrease, not increase. The Chief Inspector of Mines is of opinion that, since the permitted explosives are not such powerful disruptive agents, the men do not get so much coal in a day by their use as they got formerly. Considerations of safety, however, demand the rigorous enforcement of the law, making their employment compulsory in most of our bituminous mines, as is done in Great Britain and Australia.

It is clear that in earning the net wage paid him by the companies the coal-miner, and to a less degree the other mine workers, have been put to increased expense for working-gear during the war period. This increase may be assessed as being at the least at the rate of about £10 per year for the latter part of the period.

(v.) *Finally, there is a group of important factors that influence every intelligent worker in assessing the sum total of the real remuneration of the employment open to him and deciding whether to enter it, or, being already in the occupation, to continue in it. These are no less powerful because they are many of them difficult to measure in terms of money. Such are—the agreeableness or disagreeableness of the work in itself; the length of the working-day; the amount of leisure available in the year; the chances of success, and the opportunities for promotion; the degree at which the occupation stands in public esteem; its effect on the worker's health and on the length of the effective working-period of his life; the extent to which it cramps or enlarges the worker's sense of personal freedom; and the opportunities its pursuit affords for the exercise of the faculties which the average man delights in using, and for the enjoyment of those pleasures, high and low, which the social standards of the day approve as worthy objects, whatever may be their value in the eyes of the moral philosopher. It is in respect of many of these that the life of the miner appears to the ordinary worker to be at a disadvantage, when compared with the generality of occupations open to himself or his sons, and to require high money earnings in order that its real wages may tend to equality with those in other callings that appeal to him.*

Underground work in itself tends to repel the normally constituted man, who will demand some compensation in the rate of pay for his loss of sunlight and pure air. Though coal is a "clean dirt," working in it, especially in wet places or on fields with a wet climate, is attended by many domestic inconveniences which the installation of roomy and properly equipped bathhouses at the mines is only now beginning to remove. It is unfortunate that in many cases the erection of these has been retarded by the shortage of plumbing and other necessary materials. Miners work in pairs, and are in close touch with one another and with the truckers, and this circumstance tends to alleviate the drawbacks of underground work, satisfying the natural gregarious instinct of man. There is no doubt that the fact that mining brings men to dwell together in numbers, with interests that are common beyond the average degree of community of interest reached by our townships in general, tends to make it attractive, as well as accounts for some of the strong corporate spirit shown by mining populations. Mining, too, is an operation which demands certain qualities of skill, physical strength, endurance, and of character, the development of which is congenial to a vigorous healthy man. Hand, eye, and brain are constantly exercised; there are problems to solve calling for some initiative and resourcefulness; and the hour of peril evokes some of the noblest examples of self-sacrificing courage and generosity. That the occasions for these occur almost daily in our mines and never fail to provide examples is unknown to the public, whose attention is occasionally drawn by the more spectacular, the "explosions" and "disasters," but passes unnoticed the simple "nameless unremembered acts of kindness and of love."

The *hours of labour* are such as to allow a fair share of daily leisure to the miner. Though the miner spends eight hours in the mine, his time at the coal-face varies from six to seven hours.