

THE BELGIAN BLACK COUNTRY

PEN PICTURES OF A RICH COAL REGION LARGELY WORKED BY WOMEN.

(Special Correspondence of the Deseret News by Frank G. Carpenter.)

WASMES, Belgium, Dec. 19.—I am in the heart of one of the richest coal mining regions of Europe. Belgium is only about one-third the size of Indiana, but it has deposits of coal and iron which make it hum like a bee hive. It is the busiest workshop upon the continent, and it supports about as many people to the square mile as any country of the world. Its annual production of coal amounts to 22,000,000 tons, and the greater part of this it exports to the United States, Germany and England. At present the people are looking to the United States as a possible source of manufacturing fuel, and the day may yet come when the mills here will be largely run through coal from the United States.

THE BLACK COUNTRY OF BELGIUM.

The Belgium mining conditions are entirely different from those of our country. Our mines are near the surface, and it costs but little to get the coal to the cars. Those of Belgium are far down under the earth, and every ton has to be lifted by machinery to the surface. Some of the mines which I visited today are more than a half mile deep. The water has to be fought at every turn, and mighty pumps are employed to keep the works dry. There are tunnels cutting the earth this way and that at a depth of 2,000 feet. Over them are other tunnels, and the whole thing is a catacomb, made by getting out the coal. The mines have to be timbered. The wood is cut from the forests near by, but the most of it is not over six inches thick, and as it grows to a point at the end, such timber stands in great stacks about each mine. It is unloaded from the cars by women, who handle the poles like so many Amazons.

BELGIUM'S COAL PYRAMIDS.

This coal region is far different from those of Pennsylvania, Ohio or Tennessee. There it is mountainous. Here it is flat, and the only elevations are from the dumps of the mines. The coal here is filled with waste. It has to be stored and the refuse is carried out upon cars. There is so much of it that a pyramidal mountain rises up beside each mine, standing out like a black cone against the blue sky. There are such pyramids everywhere in this part of Belgium. Some of them are dead, and some are worked out and abandoned. Others have ladders up their backs and a framework on the top where women push the cars along and with a rattling sound empty them. Some of these pyramids are smoking. There is much sulphur in the coal and spontaneous combustion often starts a fire which burns on for years. Instances are known of people going to sleep on the dumps and being suffocated by the fumes and gases.

Take your stand with me on one of these coal mountains just outside the mining town of Wasmes and look about you. See the farms covered with rich crops, with these coal mounds rising above them. There is one at our right with great bug-like bags crawling over it. Take your field glass and look at them. They are not bugs. They are women who are picking up the coal that has been left in the waste. There comes a car along the coal mountain. Two women are pushing it and with the glass you can almost see their muscles swell as with bare arms they cast it on the dump.

Now look at that mound at the left. It is hundreds of feet high, and, like the others about it, it is an evidence of the enormous waste that the miners have to contend with. Every bit of coal that is brought to the surface has to be picked over and the waste is evidently more than the coal itself.

Near every mound you see the huge buildings of the coal workers. They are not unlike those of the United States, but the scenes about them are different.

TIGER LILIES AND BLACK DIAMONDS.

In the United States the work is done altogether by men. Here most of the labor above the surface is performed by women. And such women! Lusty

young girls of from 16 to 20. Pretty girls! rosy cheeked! round armed and plump, with faces smutty with coal dust, but at the same time comely! Their eyes are bright and their beauty is accentuated by the coal dust on their faces, through which the red flames forth like that of the dark moss rose. They are very tiger lilies set in a background of black diamonds.

Come with me and let us visit one of the mines. We enter the great works where the mighty shaft is jerking up and down raising the coal to the surface. At the mouth of the opening stand a half dozen of these Belgian girls, their heads done up in blue and white handkerchiefs, turbans, their sleeves rolled up high above the elbows and their shapely ankles plainly showing between the ends of their skirts and their white wooden clogs. See them grasp that car as the engine stops and shove it over the rails to where it is to be dumped for the sorters. As they do so another gang of girls takes their places to handle the next car and others shoot the empties back to the other side of the shaft. There is no fooling about this. The women work like bees, and with the strength of horses. They do more than the men, and they are, I am told, more conscientious in their work.

SORTING COAL.

Leave the shaft and come with me to the sorters. The coal rolls down a chute into the cars. Women stand at the side of the chute and help it onward with hoes. Girls of 14 to 20 sit further down picking the refuse and slate out of the coal with their hands. Still further on there are more turbaned, bare-armed maidens, sooty and dirty, working away as fast as their fingers can move, and in the railroad car itself, women hoeing the coal this way and that, sorting the waste. All the work is done by the piece, and the girls are paid in proportion to the amount they perform. I asked as to the wages, and was told that the rate is 2 cents a basket, and that the best workers can pick about a basket and a half every hour, thus earning as much as 30 cents in their day of 12 hours.

AMONG THE WOMEN MINERS.

And still the women miners of Belgium are far better off today than they have ever been in the past. Their condition has been notoriously bad. For a long time little children were employed in the mines. They were harnessed to carts and coal cars with straps and chains so that they crawled along on their hands and knees dragging the coal to the mouth of the shaft. Now women under 21 are prohibited by law from working underground, and hence those whom you see on the surface are young girls. They could get better wages down below, and many of them will leave the surface work and go in to the mines as soon as they are old enough.

As a result, the surface girls are not bent and broken, and those I saw were

Pretty Girls Who Act As Miners—They Look Like Tiger Lilies Set in Black Diamonds—Low Wages and Long Hours—Girls Who Pick Coal For Thirty Cents a Day—Belgian Labor Associations and How the Government Helps Them—How the Miners Live—Little Belgium's Big Drink Bill and Its 200,000 Saloons—The Bee-Hive of Europe—Chances to Sell American Coal.



Photographed for the Deseret News by Frank G. Carpenter.

BELGIUM GIRLS LOADING BRICKS.

as well developed physically as the prize golf girls of the United States. And still they were toiling like so many horses, pushing the cars this way and that. Some were lifting great pumps of coal weighing from 15 to 20 pounds each, and others were doing all sorts of work which in America would be done by men.

In one place a ditch was being dug and lined with brick and cement. A girl of 15 was mixing the mortar with a hoe, and a little further on at a brick pile three sturdy girls were loading

bricks upon a wheelbarrow which a fourth girl pushed upon the car when I was full. They were working hard, and the perspiration stood out in white beads upon their dusty faces. I took a photograph of them, and my heart came into my throat as they smiled.

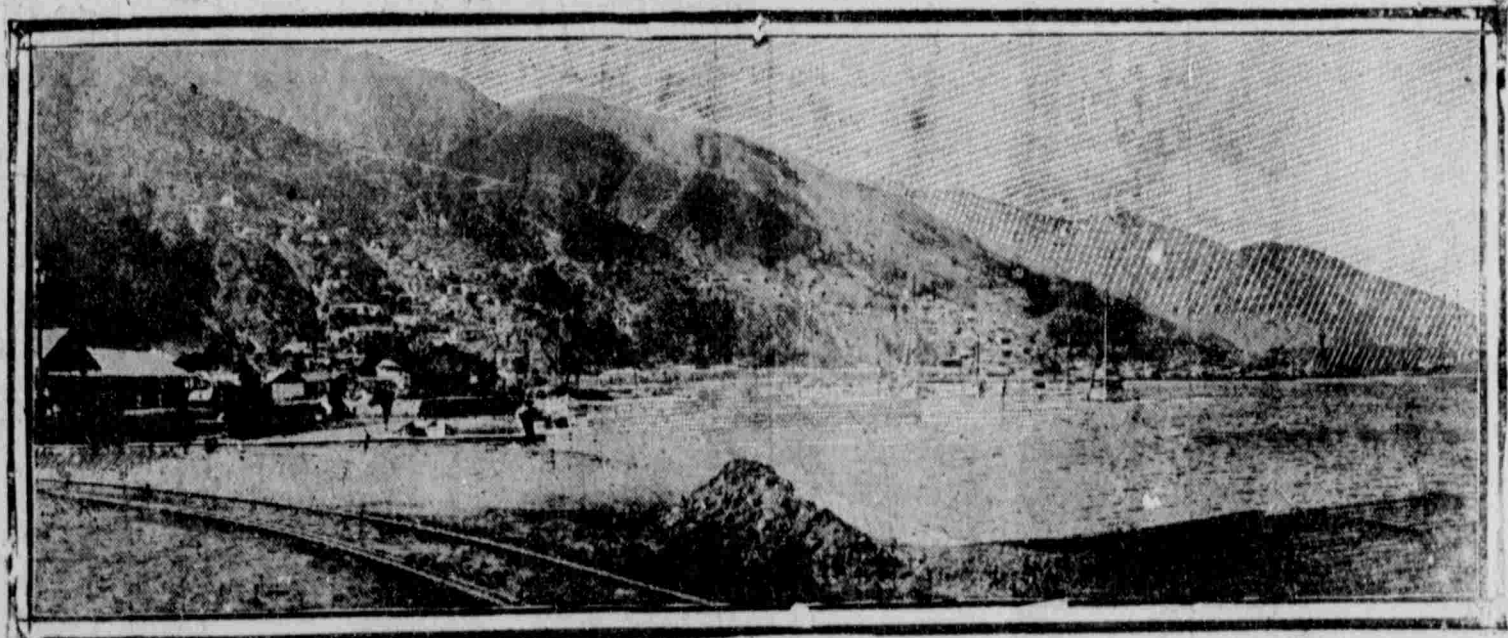
WAGES IN BELGIUM.

I have said that the women who sort the coal earn about 30 cents a day. Some get less, but there are others who make as much as 40 or 45, and in the mines they are paid as high as 46 cents. Men miners get 75 or 80 cents under-

ground, and about 50 cents at the surface. Boys of 14 and 15 are paid 42 cents, and children about 20 cents and upward. Altogether, there are 124,000 miners in Belgium, and of them all I doubt whether 10 per cent make a dollar a day.

And still the Belgian working day averages from 10 to 12 hours, and the average number of working days every year is more than 300. Low wages and long hours are the rule. There are 750,000 working people here, and of these nine-tenths work 10, 11 or more

WHERE THE NAVAL DEMONSTRATION OF THE ALLIES GRIMLY INSURES SUCCESSFUL CARRYING THROUGH OF VENEZUELA'S LATEST NEGOTIATIONS.



While peace negotiations are now in the air, the warships of the combined fleets of England and Germany maintain their position in Venezuelan waters. Their presence outside La Guayra is a grim reminder to President Castro that the powers will brook no dallying in the present negotiations. The above snapshot shows La Guayra, the principal scene of the powers' naval demonstration.

VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT AND HIS CHIEF ADVISERS CONSIDERING NEXT MOVE IN THE GREAT INTERNATIONAL CRISIS



As men holding the paper in the rear of the group is President Castro of Venezuela. Around him are the chief diplomats of Venezuela, Castro's chief advisers, who are the chief advisers of the carlike president. These are the men who are now considering the latest phase of the Venezuelan crisis. The situation is largely in their hands. This halftone is made from an authentic original snapshot photograph never before published.

hours per day. Of all the workers one-fourth make less than 40 cents per day; one-fourth from 40 to 60 cents; and another fourth from 60 to 80 cents per diem.

WOMAN'S WORK AND WAGES.

Women are everywhere paid less than the men, and about half of the female workers make less than 30 cents a day, while in the whole country of more than six millions, half of whom are women, only 205 women get as much as 50 cents a day.

Among the best-paid women here are those who work underground in the mines. The work is hard and degrading. It unsexes those who are thus working away day after day in the semi-darkness, and in time makes them animals. In old age they are little better than the horses and donkeys which work with them and which stay in the mines until they die. Some of the horses will live from 10 to 20 years after going down underground, but they become perfectly blind at the end of three years.

HOW THE MINERS LIVE.

I have been interested in the life of the people. Every great mine has its dwelling houses about it, a collection of little two-story bricks built together in blocks. Each house has five rooms, two on the ground floor, two above and a little attic under the roof. The families are large, and the average number of children is six or seven. The miners are miserably poor. Nearly every one pays a rent of \$10 or \$20 a year for his home, but only the fewest save money. The people are great drinkers. In this region every third house is a saloon, and the most of the wages go for drinks. The people drink alcohol, and the women drink as well as the men.

Belgium spends more than eight times as much for liquor as it does for schools, and its annual drink bill is about \$5 per head, or \$25 per family. I am surprised at the number of saloons. They are known as "cantinets," and you see them everywhere. There is hardly a block in the city without one or more, and they are scattered along

the country roads. There are more than 200,000 saloons in Belgium, and it is said that one person in every 30 of the whole population is employed in selling intoxicating drinks.

Many of the workmen get drunk on Saturday and lay off over Monday. Similar conditions prevail in England, where drunkenness is, if anything, worse than here.

WORKINGMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS.

There are a number of workingmen's associations in Belgium. The men have their trades' unions and their co-operative societies. There is one kind of organization, known as "Mutualities," which has over fifty thousand members. There are societies for mutual help so formed that the members support each other in times of trouble, providing medical attendance and other such things.

Many of the societies are protected by the government, and to some the state gives subsidies, increasing their funds for medical attendance and support in time of sickness. The government now has pensions for such working men of over sixty-five who need them, and also associations which insure the lives of working men at low rates.

Belgium has a ministry of industry and labor which has to do with matters relating to workingmen, and there is also what is known as the superior council of labor, organized to consider labor interests and prepare measures regulating them for presentation to the parliament. This council is composed of sixteen workmen, sixteen manufacturers and sixteen scientists. It is said to be of great value to labor interests.

The governments are becoming more and more paternal in many of the European countries. They are taking the place of a father to the people and trying to benefit them in a variety of ways. In Belgium the state has erected dwellings for workmen in certain localities, and has arranged so that they can buy them on easy terms. It is helping the farming interests by schools of agriculture, and through its railway service is reducing freight rates and facilitating the marketing. I have spoken of the postal arrangements of Switzerland and France, whereby the farmer can express his goods to consumers through the postoffices. Here in Belgium the government has put on fast trains for England for the shipment of dairy products. It facilitates trade and it seems to be on the outlook to help the producing classes.

THE BEEHIVE OF EUROPE.

I am surprised at the enormous manufacturing industry of Belgium. The country is a very beehive of work. It has about 6,000,000 people, and fully 750,000 of them are at work making something to sell. The factories are as thick as in the black country of England, and the land teems with house industry. There are about 23,000 workshops which employ on the average only three hands each, and are enormous amounts of cotton and linen cloth is woven at home.

On the eastern edge of the Belgian coal field is Liege, which has 170,000 people, and which was built up out of manufactures of iron. It is the Sheffield of the country, making vast quantities of firearms for home use and export. It has 30,000 workmen, who make nothing but guns, and most of these work at their own homes. The manufacturer furnishes the material, and the workmen take it home and make the different parts of a gun. One man may be employed upon locks, another on barrels, getting from two to three cents for his work on each gun. It is only recently that much machinery has been introduced, and this is used only with the cheaper kinds of firearms.

Parts of guns are also made for export. We get many of our steel gun barrels from Liege, and also the Damascus gun barrels, which are made nowhere else in the world. The secret of making the Damascus barrels is carefully guarded, being handed down from father to son. Only the most skilled of the workmen can make these barrels. The ordinary rough-honed barrels are turned out in great quantities; they cost from 20 to 30 cents apiece, even ready for export.

AMERICAN COAL FOR BELGIUM.

When the United States has finally settled its mining troubles over exports can study the Belgian market with profit. The country imports something like 2,000,000 tons of coal a year, the most of it coming from France, Germany and England, and necessitating comparatively heavy freight charges. There are six lines of steamers sailing between Antwerp and the United States, and American coal should be landed there at low rates. The freight rates of the present are based upon

the grain rates, and are consequently high.

The Belgium coal will not compare with the best grades of our coal. The anthracite here has not the hardness nor brilliancy of the Pennsylvania product, and it is lighter in weight. Some of the Belgian bituminous coal has 75 per cent black, so that it is used for the making of briquettes rather than for export.

Some of the Belgium mines have given out, and as the coal area is limited, the country will eventually have to import more than it does now. Not only here, but in all parts of Europe there should be a market for American coal, and if carefully nursed a business can be built up which will materially increase the balance of trade, which is already in our favor.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

NOTED MEN AS RIVALS.

Because the Whitney and Vanderbilt families are trying to outdo each other in the matter of a country estate near Great Neck, L. I., real estate in that section of Long Island, for years a drug on the local market, is now quoted at high figures.

Ever since William K. Vanderbilt obtained the Vanderbilt success lake and other property the Whitneys have been active in their effort to buy up all farm land that is at all picturesque. Within a short time Payne Whitney, whose wife was Miss Helen Hay, has bought a number of farms in and around Manhasset and Great Neck, and it is now estimated that he owns more land than William K. Vanderbilt.

The rivalry between these two families has become so intense that there is a strong prospect that each will have its own private railroad station from which to board the trains of the North Shore division of the Long Island railroad, which runs from Port Washington to Manhasset, Great Neck and Long Island City.

The site for the Vanderbilt private station has already been selected, and the work of building it will, it is understood, begin right after the holidays. Architects are now at work upon the plans.

The station was decided upon by Mr. Vanderbilt after his wife had to go through a disagreeable experience at the Great Neck depot, where they have gone to board the trains since taking up their residence on their country place near Manhasset.

It was on a rainy day, and Mrs. Vanderbilt had a few minutes to wait for a train and covered the staff for protection from the rain. While she was in the place a negro made himself so disagreeable that Mrs. Vanderbilt and others sought the rain to get beyond the range of his remarks.

A day or two after that disagreeable incident it was reported that Mr. Vanderbilt would try to have his own station. That he was successful in his negotiations with the Long Island railroad is shown by an official of that company going over the ground with Mr. Vanderbilt, and they selected a site for the private station. It will be a short distance west of the Great Neck station, and will be a brick building heated by steam and lighted by electricity, and perfect in all its appointments.

The station will not be as large as the regulation stations on that branch of the railroad, but it will be sufficient for the use of the family and their guests. It is understood that the grounds around the building will be laid out and that Mr. Vanderbilt pays all the cost, and from what can be learned the rates of transportation for him will be increased to meet the cost of stopping trains at this private station.

One thing Mr. Whitney has outdone Mr. Vanderbilt in is the control of his own lake. The Whitney lake is located on the Mitchell farm at Manhasset, which Payne Whitney purchased a few days ago. It is a large body of water and is in reality the old millpond. One end of it is formed by a causeway, which is now part of the highway. The lake covers a large area and its shores are very pretty.—New York Herald.

HIS ARGUMENT.

The old gentleman showed his displeasure plainly.

"It seems to me," he said, "rather presumptuous for a youth in your position to ask for my daughter's hand. Can you advance any good reason why I should give my consent?"

"Yes, sir," replied the young man promptly.

"What?"

"I am comparatively modest and economical in the matter of personal expenditures, and I think you will find me less costly to maintain than any other son-in-law you could very well pick out."—Chicago Post.

PRESIDENT CASTRO'S LATEST PHOTOGRAPH.



PRESIDENT CASTRO.