

The Ohio Disaster.

Everybody, that is to say, all the newspapers, are "hoping that a thorough investigation will be made into the causes" of the terrible collision on the Ohio River, by which so many lives were lost the other day. What good will it do? We have had scores and hundreds of similar accidents on our rivers and railways, and thousands of lives are frequently lost in consequence of them. Official investigations are made into them all,—their causes are perfectly well understood,—yet we believe *there is not a single instance on record in which any person has been held responsible or been punished.* Coroners' inquests, under which form of law these investigations are usually held, have come to be universally regarded as the emptiest and most useless of all formalities; but even *their* verdicts never lead to any action, and are generally forgotten within a week after they are rendered. What is the reason of this strange and disastrous neglect to enforce the law? Is nobody interested in it? Are there not officers appointed or elected for the express purpose of doing that very thing? Then why, in the name of all that is sensible and safe, is it never done?

There is a constant clamor for new laws on these subjects. Whenever a railway or steamboat disaster happens, there is a loud demand for new legislation on the subject. But this is not what is needed. We have plenty of laws,—some of them good and some very bad,—laws on every conceivable subject and for the accomplishment of every imaginable object. The trouble is, they are never

enforced. They are dead letters on the statute-book. Not one man in a thousand knows of their existence, and not one in a million shows, by practical action, any care for their enforcement. There are prosecuting officers everywhere whose special business it is to see that the laws are enforced, but they require a complaint to be made by somebody of their violation, and nobody takes the trouble to make it. Now and then the widow or the children of some poor man who has been crushed by some illegal railway collision, or blown to pieces by the explosion of a steamer's boiler, or a cargo of petroleum, both of which were forbidden by law, sues for damages and gets them. But the chances of such a contingency are comparatively small, and some companies, we understand, make them the subject of calculation, and conclude, on the whole, that it is *cheaper* to run the risk of them, than to go to the expense of such precautions as would prevent the accidents out of which they grow. This is rather a cold-blooded view of the subject, it must be confessed—but it is strictly a *business* view, and our great corporations cannot, in these days at all events, be expected to take any other.

We hope that the Ohio disaster will be "investigated," by all means. It will be some comfort to all parties to see a little fuss made about it. It will look as if somebody cared something about it, and will engage public attention for a week or two until the whole thing can be quietly and comfortably forgotten, as so many similar slaughters have been before it. And what more can any good citizen, who appreciates the blessing of a quiet life and hates excitement, ask or expect? Let it be "investigated," certainly; and let the investigation be "searching" and "exhaustive,"—for then it will take longer and will thus give more time for the public feeling to die away.