A Thunder-Storm in the Oil Country.

The past week had been unusually hot, and that day surpassed all before in sultriness. About noon distant thunder was heard, and, looking toward the west, we saw a low, straight line of black cloud-mass rapidly approaching. As the dark curtain swept over our heads, the accompanying wind-storm, from a breeze, suddenly increased nearly to a hurricane and threatened to overturn our carriage. We had no need to urge our horses, as they had shown uneasiness even before we had noticed the clouds, and, in spite of the heat, had pressed on with unusual vigor. In going over a little ridge, the road passed close to an old derrick. Its guy-wires, which should have been fastened to a stump, were hanging loosely, probably untwisted by some careless teamster, who wished to pass close to the engine house. From a little distance we could see that the top of the derrick swayed as the gusts of wind struck it, and we felt some hesitation about getting near. However, in the increasing uproar of rushing winds and cracking trees, the horses were almost unmanageable, and we dashed by. Looking back, we saw the whole framework, struck by a sudden gust, start forward and fall with a crash into the travelled way.

An unusually sharp flash of lightning, immediately followed by a terrible report on our right, caused us to look toward the south, just in time to see the roof boards of a tank-house flying in all directions. The lightning had evidently struck a derrick and had followed the connections into the tank, igniting the gas, which always is rising from the fresh oil. Immediately following this flash, the black smoke began to roll out sluggishly, and little red flames crept out of every crack. Eager to see the fire, we turned our horses down the valley and left them at the nearest barn. By the time we got to the well the oil was running down hill in a flood, as though the tank had burst. The burning oil was pushing on directly toward a ravine which, usually dry, was now filled by a miniature torrent. A man was making ineffectual attempts to turn the course, but the oil, halting for a moment behind his little dam, would burst through, and, by its intolerable heat, drive him from his unfinished work below. The tank was of two hundred and fifty barrels' capacity, and, judging from the amount of oil running down, must have been full. Soon the fiery fluid reached the water, and seemed to burn with added vigor, converting the brook into a stream of fire. Without stopping to watch the burning tank-house and derrick, we followed the oil to see where it would go. By some mischance the mouth of the ravine had been blocked up, and, instead of flowing into the low marsh, the stream turned abruptly to the right and spread out over the alluvial plain. Here, on a large smooth farm, were six iron storage tanks, about eighty feet in diameter and twenty-five feet high, each holding 30,000 barrels of oil. The burning oil spread with fearful rapidity over the level surface, and finally touched the sides of the nearest tank. At first it seemed to have no effect on the iron plates, and we hoped that the fire would burn away; but soon the thick oil on the surface of the plates and along the riveted seams began to smoke, and a little line of fire crept up to the top, then disappeared for an instant. Suddenly, with loud explosion, the heavy plank and iron cover of the tank was thrown into the air, and thick smoke rolled out. The sight was grand. The storm having done its mischief had passed over, and the heavy billows of black smoke rolled up into the clear sky in an almost vertical column, about one hundred feet in diameter and probably one thousand feet high, at top spreading out into a huge umbrella, or, at times, driven by a gentle upper wind, trailing off in a sinuous line.

Already the news of the fire had been telegraphed to the central office of the Pipe Lines, and all its available men and teams in the neighborhood ordered to the scene. The foremost now began to arrive, and before long men were swarming in from all directions.

The old ditches and mounds around the tanks had become almost levelled by time, so several gangs of men were set to work throwing up earthworks around the tank, and another gang