

NEWCASTLE AND CARLISLE RAILWAY.

Accidents appertaining
to the Management.

Accidents at stations or
sidings from shunting
operations.

Railway Department, Board of Trade,
Whitehall, October 25, 1856.

SIR, In compliance with the instructions contained in your letter of the 16th instant, I have the honour to report, for the information of the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade, the result of my inquiry into the circumstances which attended the accident, that occurred on the 13th instant, near the Fourstones Station of the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway.

This station is 24½ miles to the west of Newcastle. It has for its protection two disc signals in front of the station buildings, the one which looks towards Carlisle being visible, though not very distinctly, for nearly half a mile. The gradient falls 1 in 50 towards Newcastle, and the station is situated on a curve of 60 chains radius.

As a cattle train was standing on the down line, or that which leads to Newcastle, with its last carriage, a third-class carriage conveying about 16 drovers, 30 yards to the east of the station platform, at half-past one in the afternoon of the 13th instant, it was run into by a mineral train, at a speed of 4 or 5 miles an hour. Eight of the drovers were in the carriage at the time of the collision, and five of them were unfortunately hurt.

The cattle train was one running every Monday. It was considerably after time, according to the time bills; but it is always an irregular train, depending to a great extent upon the arrival of the drovers with their cattle. It consisted of an engine and tender, 16 loaded cattle trucks, a van, and a third-class carriage; and 13 more trucks were in a siding waiting to be attached to it. The engine had left its train on the line, and was in a siding leading to the cattle wharf, preparing to bring out these last trucks, when the collision occurred.

The mineral train left Carlisle punctually at 10.55, and came into collision with the cattle train with equal punctuality at half-past one. It was composed of an engine and tender, 10 waggons loaded with hematite ore, 15 empty children waggons, 17 empty coke trucks, and a van. The driver saw the disc signal of the station "at danger" from a considerable distance, as well as the guard; but they both thought that it was "turned on" to intimate to them in the usual manner that they would be required to stop at the station to take on some waggons of lime, and not as an indication of any obstruction, and they accordingly prepared to stop their train in such a position that the tail of it should come in front of the points leading to the lime siding, or, in fact, on the very place where the cattle train was standing, though with the engine further to the front, in consequence of the greater length of the mineral train.

The driver could not see the cattle train until he was within 108 yards of it, on account of the curve in the line, and the situation of the buildings; and the guard was not in sight of it when the collision took place.

It is dangerous to excuse a driver for running past a red signal in almost any case; but when a signal is habitually used, for a length of time, as this signal was, to indicate to a man that he is to stop a train at a particular place for a special purpose, and when, on an accidental occasion, the same signal is employed as an intimation of danger at the same spot, then, such a signal, instead of acting as a warning to, becomes a trap for the driver, and, far from being a protection, is a source of danger, to the public. It is impossible, therefore, to impute much blame to the driver of the mineral train for producing this accident, although, as he freely admits, he ran 50 yards past a danger signal, which he saw from a distance amply sufficient to have enabled him to stop his train in time to avoid the collision.

There are a station-master and two porters at Fourstones; but they, as well as the guard, were busily employed, and were unable to proceed to the rear of the cattle train for its protection, or even to stand near the disc signals, and intimate by signs to the driver the danger he was in of running into the cattle train; and it would appear that another man is much wanted, at least for three days in the week, to enable the work of the station to be properly carried out.

In order to prevent the recurrence of an accident of this particular nature, a regular signalman should be established at the station, with signals worked by wires, to a distance of 500 or 600 yards, which should be used specially to indicate obstruction on the line; and this man should not be taken away to other work when he may be required to give the necessary instructions, by hand signals or fixed signals, to the driver of an in-coming train.

To the want of these ordinary measures of precaution the present accident must be attributed.

The Secretary of the
Railway Department, Board of Trade.

I have, &c.
H. W. TYLER,
Captain, Royal Engineers.

NORTH EASTERN.

SIR, In compliance with the instructions contained in your letter of the 21st instant, I have the honour to report, for the information of the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade, the result of my inquiry into the circumstances connected with a collision which occurred on the 17th instant at Hetton Station of the Durham and Sunderland Branch of the North Eastern Railway, between a portion of a train of empty coal waggons and a passenger train.

That portion of the Durham and Sunderland Branch between Murton and Shincliffe, consists only of a single line, with sidings at Murton, Hetton, Letch, Pitlington, Sherburn, and Shincliffe; and the traffic in both directions is worked by means of stationary engines at Murton, Hetton, Letch, Pitlington, and Sherburn. Loaded and empty waggons and passenger trains are hauled up and let down the inclines by means of wire ropes, per se means being provided for stopping the machinery by which the wire rope is moved and also for disconnecting the latter at any moment from the waggons and carriages.

It frequently happens that a portion of the empty waggons belong to one colliery and another portion to another, and it is usual to separate these portions, and to place them in different sidings at the stations contiguous to the various collieries. This is effected in the following manner. The man in charge of the empty waggons, termed the waggon rider, places himself on the last of the advanced portion of the empty waggons, which are intended to be diverted into one siding, and as he approaches the station he signals to the man in charge of the points that he wishes to be turned into a particular siding, and a short time before he reaches these points he withdraws a bolt, that connects the waggon on which he is riding with the next, and the train is thus divided into two parts, the aftermost being that which is attached to the wire rope. The first part of the train is thus turned into one siding by the pointsman, and as soon as it has entirely passed the pointsman changes the points and thus prevents the aftermost part of the train from following the other into the same siding; and he then forthwith takes the necessary steps, in conjunction with the waggon rider, for arresting the progress of the foremost part of the train. No action on the part of these men is necessary as regards the aftermost part of the train, as the machinery of the stationary engine is stopped when a certain part of the wire is run out.

On the 17th instant about 8½ a.m. a train of 34 empty coal waggons was in the act of entering the siding at Hetton, having been lowered down the incline of 1 in 68 from Murton, a distance of 14 miles, when, according to the waggon rider, the bolt or pin connecting the 20th and 21st waggon from the front was in some manner withdrawn and the train of empty waggons was divided into two parts, the first consisting of 20 and the latter of 14 waggons. The waggon rider, who was on the 20th waggon, states that it was the stopping of the machinery that caused the bolt to fly out, and that he did not himself withdraw it.

In accordance with a signal previously given, these 20 waggons, travelling at the rate of 8 or 10 miles an hour, were turned by the pointsman into the westernmost siding, and as soon as they had all passed he shifted the points and allowed the 14 aftermost waggons to continue in the intermediate siding, and he then ran after the 20 waggons and endeavoured to stop them by inserting spragues of wood in the waggon wheels. He states that he made use of two, and then applied himself to the break of one of the coal waggons; and the waggon rider states that he had also used two spragues of wood and applied the break on the 20th waggon.

The result of their united efforts was, that the train of 20 empty coal waggons was just stopped, standing partly across the main line, when No. 1 passenger train from Shincliffe to Sunderland, proceeding in an opposite direction to the coal waggons, was hauled into Hetton Station by the machinery of the stationary engine, and was travelling about 8 miles an hour when it came into contact with the empty coal train; two out of five of the passenger carriages had their ends knocked in, and two passengers complained of being hurt, and the others, 65 in number, being much shaken.

The total length of the siding is 244 yards from one end to the other.

With regard to the cause of the accident, I do not consider that blame attaches to the Company's servants, they work the line in the customary manner, and although I am satisfied that the bolt was withdrawn by the agency of the waggon rider, that has hitherto been done every time a train of empty coal waggons is required to be divided, and placed in two different sidings. But the whole responsibility of the accident rests with the North Eastern Railway Company, as it evidently was the result of the very dangerous manner in which the traffic is worked, and followed from the absence of proper regulations. Trains are continuously approaching each other in opposite directions, at very considerable speed (8 or 10 miles an hour each way) and yet the North Eastern Railway Company permit their servants to sever a train into two parts, and to shunt one part into one siding, and the other part into another without first stopping the train.

I beg therefore to suggest that their Lordships will be pleased to call the attention of the Directors of the North Eastern Railway Company to the propriety of extending their sidings at Hetton, so as to allow empty coal waggons to run on into a blind siding, in the event of the breaksmen not being able to stop them, and furthermore that they will direct the coal waggons to be stopped altogether before they commence shunting them into different sidings.

Captain Galton, Royal Engineers,
&c. &c. &c.

I have, &c.
W. YOLLAND,
Lieut.-Colonel, Royal Engineers.