

NORTH-EASTERN RAILWAY.

Board of Trade,
(Railway Department),
Whitehall, 24th November 1874.

Sir,

I HAVE the honour to report, for the information of the Board of Trade, in compliance with the instructions contained in your minute of the 17th inst., the result of my inquiry into the circumstances connected with the collision which occurred on the 12th inst. at Stainmoor Summit, on the Barnard Castle and Tebay branch of the Darlington section of the North-Eastern Railway.

In this case, the engine of the 11.15 a.m. down passenger train from Tebay to Darlington, when passing the junction of the double and single line at Stainmoor Summit, took the wrong side of the facing points, and came into sharp collision with the tender of a pilot engine, which was standing on the up line near the points.

Twenty-three passengers, the guard of the passenger train, and an inspector of the permanent way who was travelling in it, were more or less injured with cuts, shakes, and bruises.

The front of the engine of the passenger train was considerably damaged, and all its wheels and the two front wheels of the tender were thrown off the rails; the leading wheels of the carriage next the engine, and all the wheels of a horse-box at the tail of the train were also thrown off the rails, and the buffers of all the vehicles composing the train were damaged.

The tender of the pilot engine was knocked off the rails, and had its tank stove in, and the fire-box of this engine was damaged. Two waggons attached to the pilot engine were driven back upon a goods engine standing close behind them, and broke its buffers.

In the permanent way, two rails and a check rail were broken, five rails were bent, 27 chairs and seven sleepers had to be replaced, the sole of the chair at the toe of the left tongue of the points was cracked, and one of the connecting rods broken.

The points at which this collision occurred are those in which the double line from Barnard Castle at present ceases, the line thence to Kirkby Stephen being single; a steep rising gradient of 1 in 60, which prevails from Kirkby Stephen, ceases close to these points. At the time of the collision they were worked from the ground, were not interlocked with any signals, and in their normal position were, by means of a weighted handle, kept lying open for trains proceeding from Kirkby Stephen to Barnard Castle (*i.e.*, for what is called the down line). The signal cabin, which is a stall station for trains running on the single portion of the line, is situated close to the points, and is raised a few feet above them.

At about 12.15 p.m. on the day in question, a pilot engine which had pushed a goods train up from Kirkby

Stephen to Stainmoor Summit, brought two trucks along the down line past the signal cabin, and then pushed them back through the points, which were held over by the fireman, into the up line against the engine of a goods train which was already standing on that line; here the pilot engine remained (tender first) about 60 yards from the points, until it was run into, at 12.30, by the down passenger train. The fireman declares that after holding the points, the handle, on his letting it go, dropped down into its usual place; that he then went to his engine for a short time, but returned to the cabin before the passenger train arrived; that there were in the cabin, in addition to the signalman, two signal fitters; that he did not happen to look at the points, but watched the train approach at a usual speed of 20 to 25 miles an hour; and hearing an unusual noise just after it had passed, he turned round and saw the front wheels of the engine taking the right road and the hind wheels the wrong road, and immediately afterwards saw the collision take place. He had not seen anyone go near the point handle after he had left it.

The 11.15 a.m. train from Tebay to Darlington left Kirkby Stephen at 12.5, 13 minutes late, consisting of engine, tender, coach, break-van (with guard), three coaches, break-van (with guard), and two horse boxes, eight vehicles in all, coupled in the order stated. The front of the engine was carried on a four-wheeled bogie.

The driver, who had served in that capacity for about 23 years, states that he proceeded with a ticket from Kirkby Stephen, stopped at Barras station, and started thence, having next to stop at Bowes (on the Darlington side of the summit); that on approaching the summit he found the distant-signal lowered for him, and that when a few yards short of the facing-points, his speed being about 20 to 25 miles an hour, he saw them standing half open; that he seized the regulator, pulled it over and kept tight hold of it, telling his fireman to hold fast, as the latter was in the act of throwing the ticket to the signalman, who was standing on the raised platform outside his cabin waiting to receive it; that the bogie wheels of the engine then seemed to take opposite sides of the points, and the other wheels the wrong or up line, after which it left the rails altogether, and came into collision with the tender of the pilot engine, after running 60 yards from the points; that he was thrown down on the footplate and slightly hurt; that he at once went back to examine the points, and found them held open for the up line by the wheels of a carriage which was on them; that the signalman at this time declared that they had been all right, but that half an hour afterwards he said they were always so much (showing a considerable distance on his fingers) open; that he (the signalman) had often complained of them,

but that nothing seemed to be done to them; that he (the driver) had never previously noticed them as they had been on this occasion.

The fireman corroborates more or less the driver's statement. On his mate shouting "Hold fast," he took hold of the break handle, but had not time to do any good before they struck; the collision threw him down, and he was slightly injured.

The signalman in the Summit cabin had served in that capacity for 18 months, having been previously a platelayer; he had come on duty at 6 o'clock a.m., for a 12 hours shift; he had the passenger train telegraphed to him from Kirkby Stephen at 12.10, and from Barras at 12.25; he states that on receiving the latter message he took off his distant-signal, and stepped down to examine the points, which he found lying right for the down line; that he then went on to the platform of the cabin and watched the train coming; that the fireman threw him the ticket as the engine passed at a speed of 20 miles an hour or more; that then, hearing a noise, he turned round and saw the engine off the rails, and in collision with the pilot engine; that he cannot account for the engine leaving the rails; that the signal fitters, who were at work near the spot, had had nothing to do with the points. This signalman, in his evidence before me, said nothing about the points having been in bad order.

The ganger of the length had last seen the points the night before the collision, when they were working properly; on the following day the weather was frosty, which would make them likely to stick; they had been complained of about a fortnight previously by the signalman, and had been attended to, and a week after the signalman had said they were in first-rate order.

A ganger over extra men, who were working on this part of the line, reached the points five minutes after the collision, and found the wheels of the last carriage holding the switches open for the up (or wrong) line. He asked the signalman how the accident had happened, who replied that the wheels of the engine had struck the switches, and that he had forgotten to examine them before the train came up (this conversation the signalman denied having taken place); this ganger could find no reason for the points not having closed properly, and said that they worked freely after they were liberated.

The state of the train after the collision was as follows:—All the wheels of the engine and the front wheels of the tender off the rails; the four hind wheels of the tender on the rails of the up (or wrong)

line; the front wheels of the first carriage off the rails, and the rear wheels of this and the wheels of all the following vehicles, except the last, on the rails of the up line, or of the single line; the last vehicle, a horse box, was also off the rails with all its wheels. The toe of the left tongue of the facing points had received a blow on its left side, and the chair immediately under this toe was cracked in the sole; the chairs on the inside of the right rail and on the outside of the left rail of the up line were all chipped; the guard rail at the crossing of the inside rails of the up and down lines was broken, and two rails next this crossing were also broken, together with several chairs.

There is but little reason to doubt that the cause of this accident and consequent collision, is to be found in the fact that the facing points at the junction of the double and single lines at Stainmoor Summit were not properly closed for the down line when the leading wheels of the engine of the passenger train reached them, and that in consequence these wheels took opposite sides of the points, and the remaining wheels of the train, owing to the points having been then forced open for the up line, took the wrong side of them.

It was not the signalman's duty, as I am informed, to hold these points, but it was undoubtedly his duty to see that they were lying right for the approaching train, before allowing it to pass them; and this duty he appears to have neglected.

As the signalman had no train staff or ticket to deliver up to trains passing these points, as facing points, there is no reason why he should not,—but every reason why he should,—considering the high speed at which trains pass them, have received positive instructions to hold them.

In carrying out alterations now in progress at the Summit, these facing points had not long been removed to their present position from a spot about 40 yards nearer to Kirkby Stephen, and when in their former position, as being away from the signalman's immediate view, it had always been a man's duty to hold them. The points are now (and would have been two days after the collision, as the arrangements were nearly completed,) worked from the cabin and interlocked with the signals, and will shortly be provided with a locking bar. It is to be regretted that these improvements had not been carried out at an earlier period.

I have, &c.,

*The Secretary,
(Railway Department),
Board of Trade.*

*C. S. HUTCHINSON,
Lieut.-Col. R.E.*

Printed copies of the above report were sent to the Company on the 14th December.