MIDLAND RAILWAY.

Board of Trade
(Railway Department),
Whitehall, 21 *October* 1867.

SIR,

I AM directed by the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade to transmit to you, for the careful consideration of the Directors of the Midland Railway Company, the enclosed copy of the report made by Colonel Rich, R.E., the officer appointed by their Lordships to inquire into the circumstances connected with the double collision which occurred on the Rowsley and Buxton Extension of the Midland Railway on the 9th ultimo.

My Lords cannot doubt that the Company will see the necessity of making improved arrangements for conducting the traffic on this portion of their railway, and for ceasing to employ, in positions for which they are unfit, those servants whose incompetence and serious misconduct this inquiry has exposed.

I have, &c.

The Secretary of the Midland Railway Company.

R. G. W. HERBERT.

Board of Trade
(Railway Department),
Whitehall, 12 *October* 1867.

SIR,

IN compliance with the instructions contained in your Minute of the 13th ultimo, 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 two collisions that occurred on the 9th September 1867 on the Rowsley and Buxton Extension of the Midland Railway.

Three men and a little girl were killed. A fourth man died soon after from the injuries he had received, and several others were more or less hurt.

A ballast train, which consisted of an engine and tender, nine waggons loaded with ballast, and a guard's break van at the tail of the train, left Chapel-en-le-Frith station to proceed eastwards, about 5.20 or 5.25 p.m., on the 9th ultimo. The ballast was to be laid in the Dove's Hole tunnel, which is situated between Chapel-en-le-Frith and Peak Forest stations. There were about 36 contractor's ballast men with the train besides the driver and guard, who were servants of the Midland Railway Company.

Most of the ballast men were riding in the guard's break; and a little girl, who wished to return to Peak Forest station and had missed the passenger train, was also riding in the van.

It appears that the guard of the train got *on to the engine* on leaving Chapel-en-le-Frith station instead of getting into his van. One of the ballast men, who was supplied by the contractor to act as a flagman under the guard's orders, also rode on the engine, and so did the ganger and the driver. The fireman left the engine while the ballast train was detained at Chapel-en-le-Frith and went into the village, where he got drink. He did not return till he was sent for after the accident, and came back intoxicated. Before the ballast train left Chapel-en-le-Frith the ganger who was in charge of the ballast men and the guard of the train received distinct orders to proceed through the Dove's Hole tunnel on the up-line, and to return into the tunnel and to unload on the down line.

These orders were given, as a cattle train was expected to follow immediately.

Instead of obeying these instructions the guard of the train, while travelling on the engine, arranged with the driver to stop and unload on the *up* line.

The Rowsley and Buxton Extension of the Midland Railway falls on a gradient of 1 in 90 from Peak Forest station to New Mills, where it joins the Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire Railway; and the latter line falls from thence to within a mile of Romiley station on gradients of 1 in 100 to 1 in 140.

Romiley station is about 5¼ miles to the West of New Mills, and New Mills is about 8 miles to the west of the place in the Dove's Hole tunnel, where the ballast train stopped to unload.

This section of the Midland Railway is worked on the block telegraph system; and the Manchester, Sheffield, and Lincolnshire Railway, from New Mills westwards, is also worked on the block telegraph system.

Dove's Hole tunnel is about 1¾ miles long, and is situated about 1 mile east of Chapel-en-le-Frith. When the ballast train got about 2¼ miles east of Chapel-en-le-Frith, and was about two-thirds of the way through the tunnel, the driver brought his train to a stand, and the men commenced to unload on the up line.

The regulations of the Midland Railway Company provide that when a train is stopped on the main line, the guard shall go, or send a competent person, 800 yards back, to protect the train, and that he shall place detonating signals on the rails at 400 and at 800 yards from the train.

The flagman provided by the contractor was supposed in the present case, to be a competent person; but it appears that he did not receive any instructions from the guard to go back, and he did not do so, but remained on the engine. The guard also remained with the ballast train. According to the evidence of the man in charge, this train had been standing for about five minutes, when a train (composed of two engines coupled together and drawing 27 waggons loaded with cattle, a third-class carriage, and a guard's van at the tail of the train, which was started from Chapel-en-le-Frith about 5.33 p.m.) ran into it at a speed of about 15 miles per hour.

The ballast engine was unhooked and three of the ballast trucks were thrown off the rails by the collision; two of them, and also the guard's van, were broken to pieces. Three or four of the ballast men were slightly hurt, and the little girl, who had remained in the guard's van, was killed.

The two engines of the cattle train were damaged and thrown off the rails. The coupling between the second engine and the cattle waggons was broken, and the whole train, except the engines, commenced to run back down the incline of 1 in 90.

The guard, who was in the rear van of the cattle train, finding that he had no power to stop the train, jumped off, as the train got out of the tunnel, and four of the cattle drovers followed his example. These men escaped with but little injury. The drivers and firemen of the cattle train were not hurt. The cattle train ran past Chapel-en-le-Frith station at a speed of about 30 miles per hour, and probably attained a speed of 50 to 60 miles per hour on its way towards New Mills station. The up passenger train, which consisted of an engine and tender, a van, three carriages, and another van at the tail of the train, which is due to leave Manchester at 5.25 p.m., was standing at the telegraph station about ¼ of a mile to the east of New Mills station. It had fortunately been stopped there by the telegraph signalman.

The driver perceived the cattle train coming towards him. He had just time to reverse his engine, put on steam, and jump off, before the cattle train came into collision with his engine.

13 or 14 cattle trucks were broken up by the collision, and all except three were thrown off the rails. Three of the drovers were taken up dead, and a fourth man died from the injuries he had received.

13 cattle and 120 sheep are reported to have been destroyed.

The engine of the passenger train, which had moved about 10 yards back before the collision occurred, was damaged; but neither the engine nor any of the vehicles left the rails, and the whole train moved back down the incline towards Marple, at a speed which increased as the train moved back.

The signalman at Marple having received notice by telegraph that a train was coming towards his post in the wrong direction, on the *up* line, turned it on the *down* line as it passed his station, and the engine having exhausted itself, the train came to a stand, about 5 miles west of New Mills, where the gradient rises towards Romiley station.

The passengers in this train are reported to have been only slightly shaken. The fireman jumped off his engine with the driver. The guard was not in his van when the collision occurred, as he had got out to see what was the matter when the train was stopped near New Mills station.

The causes that led to this accident, the consequences of which might have been much more sad, are various.

The telegraph instruments used by the Midland Railway Company to work the Rowsley and Buxton Extension are the double needle speaking instruments. Each telegraph signalman has a pin, by which he can pin over the needle, to show that there is a train on the line, when he receives notice to that effect from the telegraph stations at either side of him; but in case of unexpected delays he has no means of communicating with the adjacent stations, except with the same instruments that he has to use for working the block system.

On the 9th September the Chapel-en-le-Frith signalman telegraphed the departure of the ballast train to the Peak Forest signalman, who pinned over the needle of the instrument. The latter signalman shortly afterwards left his box to carry a note from the station master to the adjacent lime works, and after executing his commission, he returned to tea with the station master.

He returned to his signal box about 15 minutes after he left it, and he states, that he found the up line needle (that was pinned over) was shaking, which he understood to mean "that the Chapel-en-le-Frith signalman wanted him to release the needle." He therefore took out the pin for a minute, and then replaced it.

The signalman at Chapel-en-le-Frith states that he was calling the Peak Forest signalman with the down line needle, and that when he found the up line needle free he understood that the up line was clear. He then appears to have started the cattle train without getting "line clear" from Peak Forest, and acknowledging it, which he should have done, according to the Company's regulations.

There was no excuse for the Peak Forest signalman having released the up line needle, and his having done so, showed his total ignorance of the first principle of the duty that he was put to perform. This man had not been a month in the Company's employment, and had been a gentleman's servant previous to his being taken into the Midland Railway Company's service.

He had been placed at Matlock Bridge and at Monsaldale stations to learn the telegraph signalling, but the only time that he was examined by the Company's inspector previous to his being placed in charge at Peak Forest he had made two mistakes, and had therefore shown himself quite unfit for the responsible situation in which he was placed at Peak Forest.

I must add, that the whole system of telegraphing on this section of the Midland Railway appears to be bad. The instrument should be simple block instruments, and each signalman should be provided with a speaking instrument, in addition to the block instruments, to prevent his using the block instruments to communicate his wishes to the signalman at the adjacent posts. A registry of the hours at which trains pass, should be kept at each station, instead of only here and there, as at present.

The accident could not have happened if Tooth, the guard of the ballast train, had done his duty.

This man appears first to have disobeyed his instructions by travelling on the engine instead of in his van.

I understand that he stated at the coroner's inquest that he travelled in his van, whereas it is satisfactorily proved by the ganger and one of the ballast men that he left Chapel-en-le-Frith on the engine.

Secondly, he arranged with the driver to stop on the *up* road, although he had been ordered to go through the tunnel on the up road and to return and stop on the *down* road to unload the ballast.

Thirdly, he neglected, in direct disobedience to the Company's regulations, paragraph 21, to take any precautions to protect his train when it came to a stand.

Regulations 7, 8, 19, 21, 22, 37, 41, 47, 50, 51, and 59 appear to have been disregarded by the various servants of the Company connected with this accident.

The evidence of the driver, fireman, and guard of the ballast train appears to have been altogether false, and many of the other servants of the Company appear to have been anxious to keep back all information which would lead to the discovery of the guilty parties. I should have been quite unable to arrive at the truth had it not been for the assistance of Mr. Hudson, the Superintendent of Police at Chapel-en-le-Frith.

A great deal of irregularity appears to have been going on at Chapel-en-le-Frith. The fireman of the ballast train engine was absent from his post, and was drinking at the time of the accident; and the Company, who could command much more evidence than I could, had not become aware of the fact, till the close of my inquiry. The flagman appears also to have been the worse for drink. He was not produced as a witness.

In conclusion, I consider it most unadvisable that any railway company should require contractors to maintain their line when it is opened for passenger traffic, or to entrust the safety of the public to a chance labourer supplied by them. There was a great deficiency of break power with the cattle train. I would suggest the desirability of the Midland Railway Company adopting a more improved system of telegraph signalling, and that they should employ competent men to work it.

The system of instructing the men in the working of the telegraph instruments at the permanent stations of the Company, is also prejudicial to the safety of the passengers. The men should be taught the use of the instruments and the system of working in places set apart for that purpose, and when they have shown themselves thoroughly acquainted with the working of the instruments, they might be sent to one of the permanent stations, to work the instruments at fixed periods under the direct supervision of an experienced signalman.

I have, &c.

The Secretary,
Board of Trade,
Railway Department.

F. H. Rich,
Lieut.-Col .R.E.