

# SMASH AT HEST BANK.

## MIDNIGHT EXPRESS IN PERIL.

### MIRACULOUS ESCAPE.

Just before the stroke of midnight on Monday an alarming accident occurred on the main line of the London and North-Western Railway south of Hest Bank Station, which endangered a holiday "flier" on its maiden run from Manchester to Carlisle. Those who have seen the expresses run during the night will appreciate the gravity of the situation when a thunderer dashes on and is suddenly obstructed by a goods van and a number of wagons on the main line.

The explanation of the collision was given to our representative by a courteous and responsible official of the L. & N.W.R. Co., just after his return from the scene of the accident. To understand this it should be mentioned that the exact locale is just north of the bridge which crosses the occupation road on Mowbreck Farm, Hest Bank. The Hest Bank to Morecombe branch line runs alongside the main metals from Hest Bank Station, and after crossing the little bridge which carries three sets of rails, the Morecombe branch curls away to Bare. Within about 200 yards to the north-west is the Ambler Holiday Home, and there are bungalows between the railway and the foreshore. There is a signal on the right below Mowbreck bridge, and two others on the left at the curve just out of Hest Bank Station. Signals have an important bearing on this accident.

It appears that a new express from Manchester to Carlisle started on Monday night to meet the extra holiday traffic to Scotland, leaving Manchester at 10-15 p.m., and Preston at 11-28 p.m. The train was a light one, there only being 11 passengers in the eight corridor coaches when it departed from Preston. Nearly all were asleep or dozing when the express passed through Lancaster about 11-53 p.m.

The express had been preceded by a goods train from Manchester to Carlisle, which departed from Manchester at 8-50 p.m., and left Lancaster within three hours of that time. It had been accepted and passed at Morecombe Junction by the signalman there, but by some means, after passing over Mowbreck Bridge, and within sight of the crossing from the shore at Hest Bank, the latter portion of the goods train broke away from the rest. It was a long train consisting of about 50 wagons, mostly empty "Caledonian" stock, returning to Scotland from Manchester. J. Locke, the signalman at Hest Bank box, had gone on duty at 11 o'clock, and received the goods train into his section, and passed it on towards Carnforth, never dreaming for a moment that the latter portion of the train, about 14 wagons, and the London and North-Western Railway brake van No. 732 had become detached, and been left on the main line—a menace to the express traffic. There were three lights on the rear of the guard's van.

The engine of the express train was now dashing along at the rate of a mile a minute. It was in charge of one of the most reliable and experienced drivers in the Company's employ—William Chalmers, a finely built, married man, with three children, residing at 8, Hassell-street, Carlisle. He was accompanied by a fireman, Byron Chambers, of 1, Regent-street, Boundary-road, Carlisle, a married man with five children.

Chalmers saw the distant signal admitted them to the section, but when he got further on, while on the look out, he noticed lights on the left, and thought a train was standing on the loop line running between Morecombe and Hest Bank. He had checked the speed of the train, and was then startled to see three lights on the track ahead. He grasped the import of the three red lights, and knew there was something wrong. With commendable bravery and presence of mind he reversed his engine, applied the vacuum brake, and his mate shot down sand. The effect of these movements, done in a twinkling, was to reduce the speed of the great locomotive from 60 miles an hour to about 30. It was impossible to avoid the collision, and the fireman, Chambers, when all had been done that was possible in the short space of time, jumped from the engine. Later, he was found on the line insensible with a wound on his face and a fractured left arm.

Chalmers, however, stuck to his post, and was rewarded by coming through a trying ordeal practically unscathed. The brake van was struck by the buffers of the engine, which bored holes through the van, and splintered the lower portion. One of the buffers was broken clean off, and the van was derailed. The impact scattered the four wagons adjoining, smashing two to pieces, and breaking the others beyond utility, as they turned topsyturvy in the rail-road, and blocked three lines—the main metals north and south, and also the branch line Hest Bank to Morecombe.

The engine lost its buffers, and the buffer plank was doubled back at either end bearing against the wheels, which did not leave the rails. All the eight coaches, fortunately, kept on the metals, and were only slightly damaged, windows being broken, and the coach nearest to the engine will require other repairs.

The guard of the express, Valentine Charles McLennon, of Hoyton-street, Liverpool, fearing the worst from the cries of lady passengers, rushed off in the darkness to the nearest signal-box to prevent other expresses being involved. Information was thereby conveyed to Lancaster Castle Station, where the gravest view was at once taken of the collision.

Telephone messages were sent to the Royal Lancaster Infirmary, and urgent calls were made on medical gentlemen at Lancaster and Carnforth, who used their motor-cars to advantage. Dr. C. W. Dean and Dr. F. Bingham (the official surgeons of the L. and N.-W. Railway Company at Lancaster) were joined by Dr. W. D. Barrow, Dr. W. George (Lancaster), and Drs. E. S. Jackson and Wrightson, of Carnforth. Within the Infirmary the nurses hurriedly prepared for probable casualties to the extent of 13 beds and five couches, and 12 nurses were ready to assist the doctors. Then the welcome news came through that not a single passenger was killed, and none were in a critical condition; in fact some of the passengers had alighted from the train and rendered "first aid" to the fireman Chambers, who was found to be suffering from shock as well as a broken arm. A lady lent a woollen scarf to keep the splints in the right position.

Only one passenger complained of being hurt. Mrs. MacLean, of Cross-lane, Salford, had a slight bruise on the forehead, which was not considered sufficient to prevent her continuing her journey north.

When the guard McLennon returned from the signal-box he was in a state of collapse through severe shock, and he was taken with the fireman Chambers to the Royal Lancaster Infirmary.

A search was made for the guard of the goods train, but it transpired he was not in his van at the time of the collision, having gone to the signal-box to inquire where the majority of his train was.

The accident is certainly a tribute to the strength of the rolling stock of the L. and N.W. Railway, who have always adopted the principle of heavy under carriages, which lessen the danger of derailment.

Mr. J. Brooks, the Stationmaster at Lancaster (Castle) Station, arrived with a relief train within 20 minutes of receiving the intimation. The engine of the express was *pro tem.* left amongst the debris, and the coaches were taken back to Lancaster, the passengers being cared for, and transferred to the morning mail train, in which they continued their journey to Carlisle later. The coaches were kept in the siding near Carlisle Bridge on Tuesday.

Breakdown gangs from Tobay and Preston were summoned. The Preston gang was first to arrive at 3-10 a.m., and under the direction of Mr. B. C. Humphreys, Assistant Superintendent, Lancaster and Carlisle District (Mr. Stones being ill); Mr. J. H. Thurstan, resident engineer, Lancaster District; and Mr. Louis, locomotive superintendent, Preston, the gang worked vigorously, and cleared the down line by 4-51 a.m. The Tobay gang came on the scene about 4-15 o'clock, and the combined efforts were directed to clearing the up-line, while traffic was being partially worked on the down line.

Great inconvenience was, of course, caused through mail trains and newspaper trains being held up at Lancaster and Carnforth. This was, however, a small matter compared with the miraculous escape of the express and her passengers, who were loud in their praises of the driver of the engine, Chalmers, when the facts became known, and commended his pluck to the officials. By seven o'clock the permanent way had been cleared, and all that was left to tell the tale of the midnight adventure was a bundle of splintered timber and a number of crowbars lying on the line side. A quarter of a mile further north, in the Heest Bank siding, were the damaged brake van, wrecked in the rear and at the base, and the remains of the four Caledonian wagons, returning from the Manchester Ship Canal Dock.

Mr. Cooper, Stationmaster at Heest Bank, who was called out at 12-5 a.m., had little to add to the above story, but he said he understood from what Signalman Locke stated the signals were not off for the express, as the line was not clear to Carnforth, and expresses cannot go through Heest Bank at full speed unless the metals are clear up to Carnforth, a distance of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles. This fact explained that the express was travelling slower than it otherwise would have been, and doubtless tended to avert a great disaster.

On Tuesday afternoon many visitors from Morecambe made a call at Heest Bank, and inspected the wrecked van and remains of wagons in the siding. It was noticed that a number of

railway employees were repairing the wires from the signal box at Hest Bank Station, one of the wires having been found to be broken by Locke just at the time the accident happened.

The leading officials of the Company held an inquiry into the accident at Lancaster Castle Station on Tuesday afternoon, when the fireman, Bryan Chambers, was brought in a ... from the Lancaster Infirmary, with his face plastered and his left arm in splints. He gave evidence, and the driver, W. Chalmers, also told his story; while the signaller, J. Locke, was questioned in regard to his work.

After the inquiry our representative had brief interviews with the driver and fireman.

William Chalmers, the driver, stands 6ft., and is of strong physique, just the sort of man one has confidence in during the hour of peril. He has been in Australia, but returned to the Mother Country and found his job was available again. He said "When I saw the distant signal I checked the speed of the train. When I got further on I saw the lights of what I took to be a train standing on the loop line between Morecambe and Hest Bank. When I saw for certain that the lights were on my road, I reversed the engine, put steam against it, and applied the vacuum brake. I was in that position when the engine struck the portion of the train and turned the wagons off the road. We had both been on the look out, and that enabled us to act promptly. I'm glad to say that I feel very little different as the result of the accident, but am thankful no lives are lost."

Bryan Chambers, the fireman, mentioned that he is married with five children, his wife having presented him with the fifth on Saturday night. He said "I stuck to the engine and did all I could till it was a few yards from the van, and then jumped off. As I did so I thought my last moments had come. I remembered nothing more after striking the metals till a lady was standing over me. Then I felt silly in the head and knew my left arm was broken. I've been fireman for Chalmers for a long time, and consider him one of the most competent men on the line. We were both on the look out, and that is the reason we saw the danger when we did." Chambers was still suffering from shock, but anxious to get back to Carlisle to his wife and family.

#### A PASSENGER'S ACCOUNT.

Mr. R. Ball, junr., of the firm of Messrs. R. Ball and Sons, wholesale potato merchants, Preston, who was a passenger in the train, has given some particulars of the collision. He states that at the time of the impact he was lying asleep in a compartment by himself, and he was roughly thrown against the opposite seat. Recovering himself, he dropped the window, and saw the driver coming with a light. The driver shouted that he was going to the down cabin to stop any oncoming trains. Mr. Ball got on to the permanent way, and fell over a broken buffer lying on the railway side. He got up, and found the fireman staggering in a dazed condition. Mr. Ball examined him, and discovered that he had a badly bruised face and damaged shoulder. He rendered first aid, and then proceeded towards the engine to see the extent of the damage. He found the brake van lying across the main line, and four other wagons lying wrong side up. On meeting the guard the latter asked him to see the passengers, whilst he placed signals on the line. He found several passengers very excited, who had had a bad shaking. That the impact was one of considerable force was evidenced by the doors of the carriages, which were damaged. Beyond a severe shaking, Mr. Ball is little worse for the experience.

### The Railway Smash.

The sensation of the week in Lancaster and district was the collision on the railway at Host Bank on Monday night. Happily the alarming rumours which at first found currency proved to be greatly exaggerated, but all the facts go to show that a very serious catastrophe, the magnitude of which can hardly be estimated, was only averted by the presence of mind and promptitude of Chalmers, the driver of the express train, and his fireman, Chambers. The collision itself was the outcome of one of those mysterious and unforeseen accidents which sometimes do occur on the railway. Possibly the division of the goods train running in front of the express was due to a defective coupling, or some other cause, but it is certain that once the latter part of the goods train had become detached, no power on earth could have prevented a collision. The driver of the express, perceiving the danger, did what he could, nobly assisted by his fireman. By reducing the speed of the train and spraying sand on the rails they considerably minimised the force of the collision, and thereby probably saved several lives. Fortunately the night was clear, which enabled the driver to obtain a good view of the line some distance ahead, but too much praise can hardly be bestowed upon him for the courage and nerve he displayed under circumstances exceptionally trying and dangerous.