

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 Morecambe 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 Morecambe 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 Morecambe 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 Morecambe.

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