

LANCASHIRE AND YORKSHIRE RAILWAY.

Board of Trade (Railway Department),
8, Richmond Terrace, Whitehall, S.W.
7th April, 1910.

SIR,

I HAVE the honour to report for the information of the Board of Trade, in compliance with the Order of the 16th March, the result of my enquiry into the causes of the fatal accident which occurred on the 6th March to Mrs. Eleanor Alderson and Harry Alderson at Townley Station level-crossing on the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway.

In this case the two deceased persons were knocked down and killed while going over the level-crossing from the public road to the down platform by the 9.5 p.m. down passenger train from Todmorden to Accrington by which they were intending passengers.

The accident occurred on a clear but dark night at 9.28 p.m.

Description.

Townley Station is a small station near Burnley, on the line from Burnley to Todmorden.

The lines run east and west, the down line being on the south of the up line. There is a public road level-crossing at the east end of the station. The road gates are worked by a gate wheel in the signal-box, interlocked with the signals in each direction. There are also small wicket gates at the side of the road gates next the platform, which are controlled by separate levers in the signal-box.

The lines to the east are quite straight, so that approaching down trains, or their head lights, can be seen in ordinary weather for half a mile.

The wicket gates on either side are just at the foot of the platform ramps, and form the only means of access to the platforms and to the booking-office which is on the up platform. There is a lamp near each wicket gate and nine lamps on each platform, placed about 50 feet apart.

There is no overbridge at the station and passengers have to reach the down platform from the booking-office and from the direction of the town, by the level-crossing at the foot of the platform ramps.

General Rule 117 applies to this case :—

117. Where Hand Gates are controlled from a Signal-box, the Signalman on duty must apply the controlling arrangement whenever it is necessary to prevent persons from crossing the Line.

Evidence.

F. Kenyon states : I have been 20 years station master at Townley. I was on duty and in charge of the station on Sunday, March 6th, and am in charge of the station all day. I crossed from the up to the down platform at 9.27 p.m. in readiness to attend to the 9.5 p.m. passenger train Todmorden to Accrington, and when doing so looked in the direction of Todmorden and saw the head lights of the engine about opposite Townley Colliery box which is between 300 and 400 yards away. At that time there was no one on the crossing. On getting on the down platform I went to the gas box and turned up the platform lights, and by this time the engine of the train would be about 30 or 40 yards away, on the Todmorden side of the signal-box. At this time I observed a woman with a child, get on to the up line and come in the direction of the down platform. I called out several times to the woman to keep back but the warnings were unheeded. The woman was hurrying across and dragging the child. I saw the engine strike the woman and the child and I then lost sight of them but afterwards saw the body of the boy between the wall of the down platform and the rail next to it. The body of the woman was found by guard Hindle, whom I advised of the circumstances, under the front van of the train. The two lamps on each platform nearest the crossing were lighted and were burning at full. They are not connected with the bye-pass tap. There were five or six lamps burning on the down platform, in addition to the

lamps at the level crossing, but there were none on the up platform. The signalman has no definite instructions as to closing the wicket gates on the approach of trains, but it is left to his judgment to do so when he thinks it necessary. The level-crossing is not that of a main road. I have only one porter to assist me with the platform work ; he also assists me in the booking office. We get an electric signal in the signal-box on Sundays just when the train is emerging from the tunnel, half a mile away, and then the booking office is closed, and the person there comes on to the platform. On weekdays we get the signal from Cliviger Colliery signal-box, which is further away. Townley Colliery signal-box is 624 yards from Townley West signal-box. We had booked seven passengers on the night of March 6th, to go by the 9.27 p.m. down train, and these were all at the waiting room on the down platform when the train arrived. On Sundays there are five trains in each direction that stop at the station. On four days of the week there are 13 down trains and 12 up trains ; on Saturdays there are 15 down trains and 13 up trains ; and on Mondays, 14 down trains and 13 up trains. No previous accident has occurred either to the staff or to the public at this crossing during the last 20 years.

S. Barnsley states : I have been in the service two years, the whole of the time at Townley. I commenced duty on March 6th at 8.30 a.m. to work till 9.30 p.m., and had intervals between

trains. I resumed after one of these periods of rest at 7.30 p.m. having been off duty since 4.30 p.m. I work on alternate Sundays. In addition to porter I was acting as booking clerk, there being no booking clerk employed at that station. The booking window was open the recognised 15 minutes before the train was due. I booked some passengers for this train but this was done in good time and no passengers appeared at the window for tickets within five minutes of the train being due. I received the usual two rings on the bell to intimate that the train was approaching when I closed the booking window and the office door, and went outside on to the up platform ready to cross to the down platform. I then remembered I had not got my stick to turn out the gas lamps with, and returned to the office for it, and then as I got on to the up platform I saw the train and the engine which would be about opposite the station signal-box and observed a child on the crossing. I was just stepping on to the up line. I also saw the form of a female just stepping on to the down line and the latter was apparently dragging the child. There was no chance for me to get near to them, and almost simultaneously the child was knocked down and thrown between the wall of the down platform and the rail nearest to it, but I could not see anything of the woman. After the passage of the train I picked the little boy up and carried him into the booking office. He appeared to me to be dead but I immediately went for Doctor Slaine, and after advising him returned to the station. The train had not then departed and I assisted guard Hindle to get the body of the woman from underneath the front van. When I saw the woman and the child on the crossing directly in front of the train I called out "look out" and I also heard Mr. Kenyon shouting "stand back." The whole of the trains had departed from the up platform and the lamps had been extinguished with the exception of the one at the crossing. On the down platform the lamp nearest the crossing was lighted, and both it and the one on the up platform were giving good lights. In addition to the crossing lamps the five lamps next to it on the down platform were lighted and burning at full. The woman had not booked for herself or the child. I have instructions to stand at the crossing to prevent people crossing should a train be approaching but on the same platform as the train, so as to be ready to collect the tickets.

C. Medley states: I have been in the service 14 years and a signalman for 11 years, and at Townley West box nine years. I came on duty on the 6th March at 6 p.m. to work till 6 a.m. on the 7th. I had previously left duty at 10 p.m. on the 5th. On March 6th the 9.5 p.m. Todmorden to Accrington passenger train was signalled to me at 9.16 from Copy Pit, and I acknowledged it at the same time. I received the "train entering section" signal at 9.21 and the "is line clear" signal was acknowledged from Burnley, Manchester Road, at the same time. I closed the large gates at 9.21, but I did not lock the small gates. I have never made a practice of locking the small gates when a stopping passenger train has been entering the

station, as it is only through the small gates that the passengers can get on to the platforms. Whenever there have been other trains of any description I have always locked the gates shortly after receipt of the "train entering section" signal, but before the trains have come in sight. I did not see either Mrs. Alderson or the boy who accompanied her, nor did I see the accident at all. I cannot say whether they came from the roadway direct on to the crossing, or whether they had been to the booking office. The train was running a little late as it arrived in the station at 9.28 p.m., whereas it is due away at 9.27 p.m. On the up and down platforms the lamp nearest the crossing was lighted and burning at full, and in addition on the down platform the five lamps nearest the crossing lamp were lighted and burning at full. The head lights of an engine coming on to the down line can be seen half a mile away. If I see some of the staff at the crossing, I do not as a rule close the wickets for a stopping train.

E. Hindle states: I have been 19 years in the Company's service, 11 years as guard. I came on duty on the 6th March at 4.20 p.m. to work till 7 p.m. I had left duty at 3 p.m. on the 5th March. On March 6th I was in charge of the 9.5 p.m. passenger train Todmorden to Accrington. My train was composed of four bogies and was worked by engine No. 1575. I was riding in the rear van. The night was clear but dark. I did not see anything of the accident or know that one had occurred until my train had come to a stand. My train came to a stand at the Burnley end of the down platform. I looked along it and could not see any of the staff, and I then proceeded towards the engine closing doors. On returning towards my van I met Mr. Kenyon and asked him if it was right, when he replied "You have knocked a lady and her child down as the train was entering the station." I said where are they, and he told me that the child had been picked up and taken into the office. He also said that the child was dead, but there were no signs of the woman. I then proceeded along my train and found the body of the woman underneath my front van. I afterwards asked my driver if he had seen anything of the woman and the child on the crossing and he said "No," but added that he had noticed Mr. Kenyon step back, but in which direction he did not say. In addition to the crossing lamps on the up and down side of the line which were lighted and giving good lights, five lamps on the down platform nearest the crossing were lighted and burning at full.

W. Simm states: I have been 19 years in the service of the Company, for three years of which I have been a driver. I came on duty on the 6th March at 6.30 p.m. to work till 5 a.m. on the 7th. I had previously left duty at 7.5 a.m. on the 6th. I was driving the 9.5 p.m. passenger train from Todmorden to Accrington. My engine was a four-wheels-coupled, radial, tank engine. I saw nothing of the accident, and did not know it had occurred until I was told of it. I gave one long whistle when passing the Townley Colliery Offices, about 150 yards from the crossing. I was running at the usual speed into the station, preparing to stop.

Conclusion.

All that is known of the circumstances attending this sad accident is given in the evidence of Mr. Kenyon, the stationmaster, which is to the effect that, on hearing the signal that the train in question was approaching at 9.27 p.m., he crossed from the up to the down platform, turned up the lamps on that platform, and, on turning round, saw Mrs. Alderson and the child just commencing to cross from the up wicket gate to the down

platform—the train being then only 30 or 40 yards away. He was standing just on the down side of the crossing, and in spite of his shouts of warning to keep back, she kept on her course, and both she and the child were knocked down and killed.

She appeared to be hurrying and dragging the child along, and no doubt in her anxiety to catch the train—which was the last one on a Sunday evening and about a minute late—she did not notice that it was so close at hand. Thus, the accident appears to have been due entirely to misadventure on the part of Mrs. Alderson. No previous accident is known to have occurred at this crossing—certainly none in the last 20 years.

The crossing in question is an ordinary public road level crossing with double gates worked from a gate wheel in the signal-box, interlocked with the signals in each direction. There are also wicket gates on the west side of the road gates controlled by separate levers in the signal-box, which give access to the crossing for foot passengers and also to the platforms. There are no other means of access to the platforms, and there is no overbridge or subway at the station.

Townley is a small station with a small traffic. On Sundays five passenger trains stop in each direction.

On week days there are 13 down and 12 up trains on four days; 15 down and 13 up trains on Saturdays, and 14 down and 13 up trains on Mondays.

The total number of passengers booked in 1909 was 27,061, averaging 74 per day, or between three and four per train.

The stationmaster has one porter to assist him with the platform work and the booking office, and it is the usual custom to close the booking office a short time before the arrival of the train, and for both stationmaster and porter to go on to the platform at which the train is arriving, and for one or other to stop at the side of the level crossing to warn people and be ready to collect the tickets at the wicket gate.

It will be seen from the evidence of the signalman that it has not been the custom to lock the wicket gates on the approach of stopping trains, as these gates are the only means of access to the platforms, but they are locked when non-stopping trains are passing, or if one train is arriving just after another has arrived on the other line, as people might be crossing the line on leaving the station.

On the evening of the 6th March, as only one train was approaching, and that a stopping one, the signalman did not lock the wicket gates, and as mentioned above, the stationmaster was at the down side of the level crossing, and did his best to warn Mrs. Alderson, who was crossing from the up side wicket gate. The porter, who, in ordinary circumstances would have been also on the down platform (but who had returned to the office to get his stick for turning out the gas), was on the up side of the crossing, but saw Mrs. Alderson too late to be able to stop her trying to cross the line.

There are two lamps always burning one on each side of the crossing on the platform ramps, near the wicket gates. These are of the ordinary pattern, and not incandescent; the Railway Company think the former are better than the latter at the crossing, as with a brilliant light, it is not so easy to see the headlights of an approaching engine.

As the Company do not consider that the amount of traffic at the station warrants the cost of the erection of a footbridge at the crossing, which, though possible, would be attended with some difficulty owing to the restricted space available on the platforms, I think they should consider the advisability of having the wicket gate locked on the approach of all trains until they have passed over the crossing, or come to a stand at a platform, so as to prevent people trying to get across just in front of an incoming train. The rule quoted above is, I think, intended to apply in such a case as this.

I have, &c.,
E. DRUITT,
Lt.-Col.

The Assistant Secretary,
Railway Department, Board of Trade.