

CHILWORTH.

SERIOUS ACCIDENT ON THE SOUTH EASTERN RAILWAY.

The unfortunate succession of accidents which have occurred this year on the South Eastern Railway received a further addition on Tuesday morning, by a very serious smash which happened near Chilworth Station, and resulted in the loss of one life and great damage to rolling stock and the permanent way. From particulars gleaned on the spot it appears that a heavily loaded goods train, consisting of 51 waggons drawn by two engines, left Redhill on Monday night for Reading in charge of the engine driver and stoker and two guards, the two latter occupying vans, one in the fore part of the train and the other at the rear. All went well until the steep decline stretching to Chilworth Station was reached, and here, just before the train commenced the descent, a coupling seems to have broken, with the result that the train separated into two parts. On the front portion reaching the bottom of the decline, where its speed was checked by the engine brakes, it was overtaken by the latter part of the train which dashed with terrific force into the few trucks and the guard's van which had remained attached to the engine. The impact was tremendous, and in an instant some 30 trucks were buried in a confused mass of shapeless wreckage over the steep side of the embankment, which at this point is very high. Henry Hicks, of Reading, the guard in the front van, which was next to the engine, was killed on the spot, his body being shockingly mutilated, and the van was simply smashed to splinters. Hicks had only taken the train to replace a fellow guard who was absent. The tender of the second engine was thrown from the rails, but fortunately the locomotive itself kept to the metals and both driver and fireman escaped unhurt. As soon as the men in charge realised what had occurred assistance was at once sent for and Mr. Smith, the stationmaster at Chilworth, was soon on the spot. Until daybreak little could be done, and then an extraordinary scene met the view of the men. Thirty or so trucks lay piled from the bottom of the embankment to a height far above the level of the line, and their contents, which included bricks, barrels, pipes, sacks of cement, furniture, and other goods, were scattered about in the greatest confusion. Two trucks on the top of the wreckage stood up on end leaning against one another, and almost uninjured, while others lay at the bottom of the pile crushed and broken into countless fragments. Barrels had rolled loose into the meadow below, and a pair of wheels, released from the axle boxes, had found their way to a point some hundred yards towards the brook. Huge iron bars were twisted like straws, and the rails were bent and torn up for about 150 yards. The telegraph connections were utterly demolished, two poles going down in the general wreck, and the whole scene presented a most remarkable appearance. It was found that the guard was missing, and after some time spent in searching, his lifeless body was discovered by the brakeman White lying on the embankment quite clear of the wreckage. He had evidently been instantly killed. He was a married man, and leaves a widow and family. Amongst the splinters of the van was found a copy of "Forget me Not," which the poor fellow seems to have had with him at the moment of the crash. The body was at once taken to Chilworth Station to await the inquest, and telegrams were immediately despatched for assistance. Soon a very large break-down gang from the Bricklayers' Arms Station were on the spot, and the work of clearing the up line, which, as well as the down line, was blocked, was at once commenced. It was ten o'clock before this was accomplished, and then the traffic had to be worked on one line, the down road being utterly destroyed. Out of the wrecked train only about 16 or 20 trucks were found to be intact. The accident occurred about three-quarters of a mile from Chilworth Station, near Postford crossing. Judging from the confusion of the wreckage the train must have been travelling fast when the accident took place, and looking at the length and steepness of the decline this seems most probable. The work of clearing away the wreck was energetically proceeded with, but it was Thursday evening before the down line was restored, and some time must necessarily elapse before all the debris can be removed. The post-office wire from Guildford to Gomshill, Shere, and Albury was restored by about twelve o'clock. The engine driver states that he was not aware that the train had broken in two until the shock of the collision warned him of what had happened.

THE INQUEST.

The inquest on the body of the guard, Henry Wicks, was opened on Thursday morning, before Mr. G. F. Roumieu, at the Percy Arms. Mr. Joseph Cooke was chosen foreman of the jury. Mr. Smith, the stationmaster, represented the Company.

Joseph Frederick Wicks, of Reading, son of the deceased, said his father was 52 years of age, and had been in the employ of the Company for about 30 years.

Henry Forbes, driver of the second engine of the wrecked train, said the train consisted of 52 vehicles—49 trucks and 2 break vans. The train was heavily loaded, though there were some empty trucks. The train, which left Redhill at 10.40 p.m., usually ran from Redhill to Shalford without stopping. On Monday night they passed through Gomshill station safely, and as far as he understood the drawbar of the truck broke as the train was going up Shere Heath bank. He did not notice anything until they were going down the Chilworth bank, when he felt the rear portion of the train collide with the front part. The shock was very great, and knocked him under the cab, where he struck his head, rendering him insensible for a moment. He stopped the train and sent the first engine to Chilworth to block the up line, as he knew a bad accident had occurred. The tender of his engine left the line. The guard's van came unhooked from the engine in the collision. The train was not an unusually heavy one. The proper load for a single engine was 35 trucks.

The Stationmaster stated that the proper load for a single engine over the Dorking to Shalford section would be 30 loaded trucks. For two engines it would be three-fourths more, so that proper load for two engines would be 45 loaded trucks. Three empty trucks counted as one loaded one, and on the wrecked train there were 15 empty trucks, so that the load was under the regulations. The spot where the draw bar broke was quite two miles from where the accident occurred. When the collision occurred the front of the train was going about 16 miles an hour.

George White, brakeman, of Reading, who was cautioned by the Coroner as to his evidence, said the deceased was actually in charge of the train. Witness was in the hind van. Before they left Redhill Station witness saw that the train was properly hooked up. He examined each coupling. Some of the safety chains were hooked up, others were hanging down. He coupled up all the safety chains where there were corresponding chains on the adjoining trucks to hook them to. When they left Redhill he was satisfied everything was all right. Witness noticed nothing wrong until the collision took place. The train was going about 20 to 25 miles an hour up Shere Heath Bank. As witness applied his brake going down Chilworth Bank the brakeman and guard of a passing train shouted to him, but he did not understand what they meant. The collision took place three or four minutes after that. Witness found the deceased lying on the embankment, his body almost covered by the earth. He could not say whether the safety chains would, in the event of a draw bar breaking, be strong enough to take the train up the bank. The ordinary draw bars were enough to take a train up the bank, and he had never known one break in actual use.

The inquiry was adjourned until Friday next at eleven o'clock.

CHILWORTH.

ADJOURNED INQUEST ON THE GUARD WICKS.—At the adjourned inquiry, held yesterday (Friday) at the Percy Arms, into the death of Mr. H. Wicks (goods guard), the evidence of the night inspector and examiner of carriages at Redhill, showed that all reasonable care had been taken there, and that the train was by no means overloaded. Technical evidence showed the material of the draw-bar and pin fixing it to be of the best, and the truck which had caused the accident had been overhauled at the Ashford works as recently as September last.—The Coroner (Mr. G. F. Roumieu) pointed out that no verdict but "accidental death" was possible, and that the jury found, with the recommendation that some means should be devised for communicating between the guards and drivers of a goods train.—The jury gave their fees to the widow, and it was stated that the South Eastern Railway Company had granted her a weekly pension of 10s. for life.