

The Great Railway Catastrophe

OF THE 12th MARCH, 1857

On the Desjardins Canal Bridge, Hamilton

ON THE LINE OF THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY.

Hamilton, March 17, 1857.

It may be said surely a national calamity has befallen us. Men who have ever stood in the foremost ranks — capitalists the most shrewd, speculators the most keen, merchants the most far-sighted, clergymen the most earnest—have at one fell swoop been taken from amongst us. The brain wanders and the pen almost refuses to do its accustomed duty when attempting to describe the heartrending scene we have witnessed.

Yesterday being observed as a day of humiliation and prayer, in accordance with the proclamation of His Worship the Mayor, we issued no paper; but as the excitement occasioned by the disaster still continues, and every one appears anxious to learn the latest particulars relative to it, and the investigation of the Coroner's Jury, we issue a supplemental sheet, containing all the particulars of the accident, including the funeral obsequies and the investigation so far as it has gone.

The train from Toronto, due in this city at a quarter to six p.m. on the 12th inst., had come from Toronto as was usual, and was proceeding at a moderate rate of speed to pass the swing-bridge across the Desjardins Canal. Those residing at a distance may not know that a cutting has been made as an outlet to this canal through the Burlington Heights, and that the railway crosses it by a swing-bridge, 60 ft. at least above the level of the canal. At this time, of course, the water below is covered with ice about two feet thick.

Just before the train reached the bridge the engine ran off the track,

owing, it is supposed, to some defect in the axle. This, however, is a mere surmise, founded only on the observation of some marks on the road for some distance on the other side of the spot where the accident occurred. The immense weight of the engine, cutting through the timber of the bridge, produced the effect naturally to be expected. The whole structure gave way, and, with one frightful crash, the engine, tender, baggage car and two first-class passenger cars broke through the severed framework and leaped, headlong, into the canal below. The engine and tender crushed at once through the ice. The baggage car, striking the corner of the tender in the act of falling, was thrown to one side, and fell some ten yards from the engine. The first passenger car rushed after, and turning as it descended, fell on its roof, breaking partly through the ice, and being crushed to atoms, while the last car fell endways on the ice; and, strange to say, remained in that position.

The loss of life was of course frightful. There were 95 or 96 passengers on the train, and the list of those who escaped only numbers about 20. As far as we can yet learn, every one in the first car was killed; those who were not crushed being drowned by the water which nearly filled the car. About thirty were in the last car, of whom ten were taken out dead, and most of the others were fearfully mutilated. The conductor, Mr. Barrett; the deputy superintendent of the line, Mr. Muir, and Mr. Jessop, one of the auditors, who were on the hind platform, jumped off and escaped. The express messenger, Mr. ———; Mr. Richardson, a conductor on the road, and