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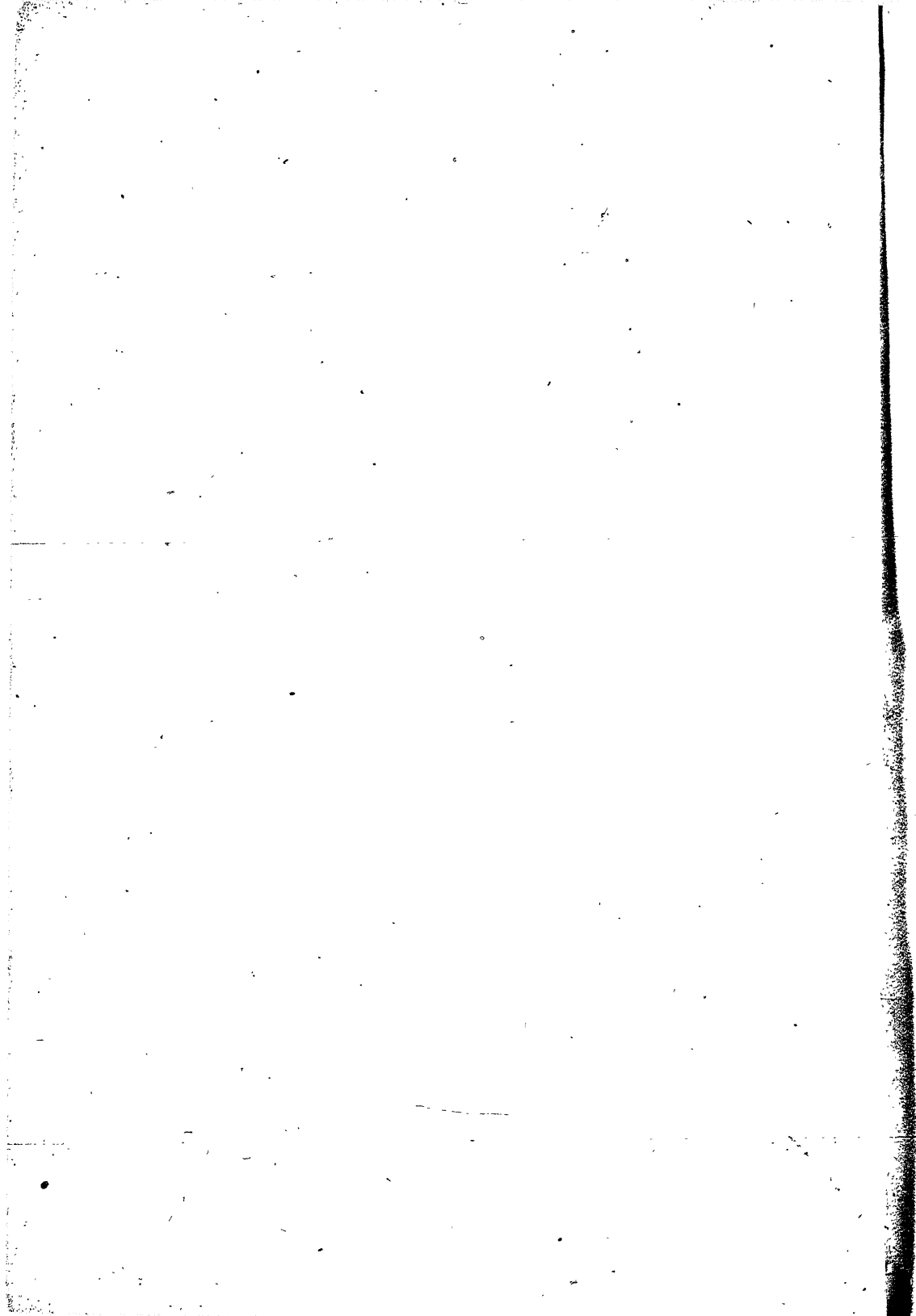
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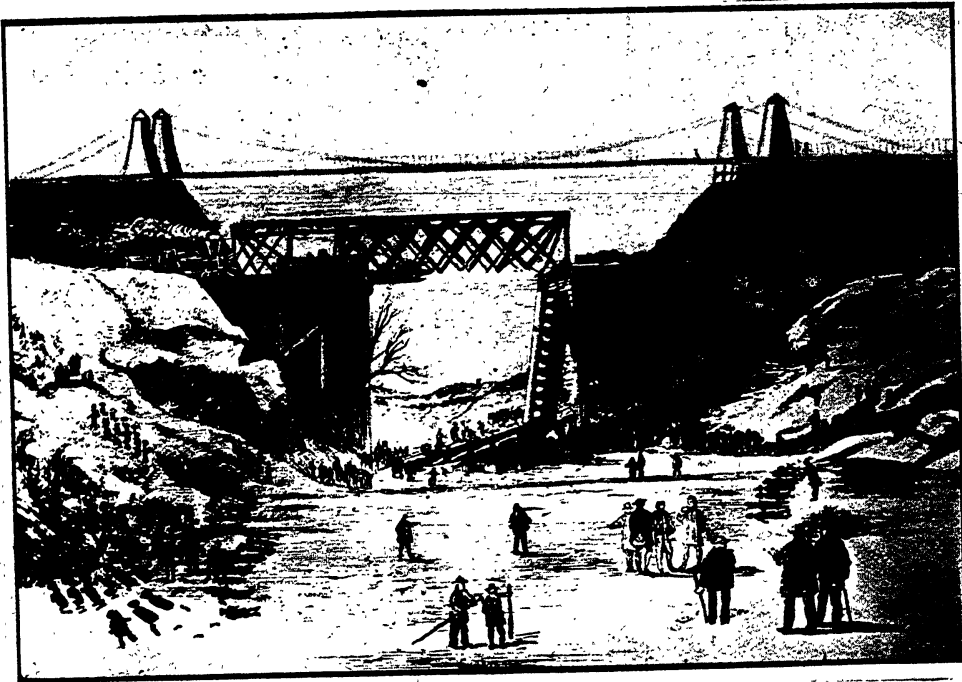
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THE GREAT Railway Catastrophe

OF THE 12th MARCH, 1857

ON THE DESJARDINS CANAL BRIDGE,
ON THE LINE OF THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY



View of the railway bridge at Hamilton during the evening and night of the disaster of March 12th and morning of the 13th, 1857, at which 70 lives were lost.

WE ARE INDEBTED TO

J. C. VANDECAR, Commercial Traveller, London, Ont., for a
Reproduction, who was in the employ of the Great
Western Ry. at the time, as telegraph operator.

185th

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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

the mail conductor were with the baggagemen. The latter jumped over the baggage he had piled up ready for delivery, and escaped with but slight injury, while the three others went down, but miraculously enough were not much hurt. The engineer and fireman went under the ice with the locomotive, and their bodies have not yet been recovered.

The excitement in the city, directly the news spread, was intense. Hundreds swarmed towards the Great Western depot, and streamed along the lines to the fatal spot. There the scene presented was such as to baffle description. Large locomotive lamps were speedily brought; fires were kindled, and a lurid glare was thrown over the shattered remnants. Special trains were despatched to the bridge to bring home the wounded. It was no easy task to descend the steep slope to the canal. Ropes were lowered and ladders attached to them, on which the dead and wounded from the car which stood endways were first drawn up. Then the bottom of the car which had partly sunk through the ice was hewn away with axes, and the unfortunate passengers, some sadly mutilated and even cut in pieces, and all saturated with water, were taken out. Many worked with energy and vigor; but who was that noble fellow that everyone must have seen, stripped to his shirt sleeves, standing up to his middle in the freezing water; who, himself a host, did more than all the rest? We watched him long from the height above, as he hewed away the fragments and extricated the bodies. If ever man deserved a reward, it is he.

As soon as the dead were drawn up the slope they were either put in the cars for conveyance to Hamilton, or were laid in a small house near the bridge, or on the ice, as shown in the photograph. It is said that of one family in the cars, consisting of a father, mother and four children, only one of the children escaped. One of these little ones, a girl, about four years of age, was brought into the house alluded to when we were there. The poor little creature was

smiling prettily, as if she had been sleeping and dreaming of sweet things when the accident occurred, and had been launched into the long sleep of death before the dream had vanished from her mind.

At the railway depot, when the sufferers were brought in, crowds assembled anxious to hear who was dead, and to know if any of their friends were there.

The corpses were taken into one of the large baggage rooms, where Coroners Bull and Roseburgh proceeded to have them examined, and, when possible, identified. We give below the list as complete as possible.

The mails, of course, have been delayed. Half the bridge is destroyed, and freight traffic must suffer interruption until it is restored, before which, we should imagine, some weeks will elapse. Arrangements have been made for the interchange of passengers.

As soon as intelligence of the catastrophe reached the city, Major Booker and Captain Macdonald's companies of volunteers marched to the scene. They did so, and every credit is due to them for their conduct. The pressure of the crowd had all but forced in the strong doors of the depot when the artillery company arrived. They formed a cordon around the room, which was respected. The Rifles marched on to the bridge. But few at a time were admitted to view the bodies. On entering, the first we remarked was that of poor Donald Stuart. Several of those who have sat in the city council with this estimable man were around him, and in tears. This is stronger evidence of his worth than anything we could say. Next lay the Brantford contractor, Mr. Russell, on whose person was money to the amount of several thousand dollars. In the row opposite was Samuel Zimmerman, to whom railways have at length proved fatal; and near him two children, aged one and three, respectively, and her who seemed to be their mother.

The injured are: Mr. Curtis, of Ingersoll, who was very dangerously injured. Mr. John K. Clare, merchant, of Hamilton, severely injured.

A man who lies injured at the hospital, states that he sat in the same seat with Mr. Stuart, and had hold of his hand up to the time he himself was rescued, and broke his arm in attempting to save him.

A number of other persons belonging to the city are supposed to have been on board, but nothing definite. Men were working up to a late hour with long poles and hooks, endeavoring to raise bodies out of the water. Their labors continued through the night. The cause of the accident will not fully be ascertained until the engine and injured are raised from the canal. No doubt it was a broken axle.

Five minutes before the accident, the heaviest type of freight engine known at that time, passed over the bridge in safety. Many were standing at the station, a mile and a half distant, watching for the Toronto train to come in, and saw it all disappear, which caused a speedy action to find out the cause. Mr. Hardiman, of the heavy freight engine, went right back to the scene of the accident and found out the cause. There were no less than thirteen ministers on that train, who had been attending a convention in Toronto.

More injured:

Dr. Macklin, of Chippewa, injured in the head.

Mr. Wood, of Woodstock, arm broken.

Captain A. McBride, Port Burwell.

Mr. Barton, of Stratford, injured in the head.

Owen Doyle, slightly injured in the head.

Undoubtedly, the engine must have been broken, as the left wheel left the rail and marked the sleepers, and so forth, on the track for some fifteen yards before it reached the bridge.

The cause of the accident will not be fully ascertained until the engine

is raised. We learn, however, that the reason above given (breaking of the axle) is correct, as far as can now be ascertained.

The engineer, who in his humane effort to stop the train, he and his brakeman went down with the engine. Many injured from many States and foreign lands. Among these were Mr. Sturdy, dry-goods merchant, London; John Wilfrid, Buckingham, England. The coroner, reporters, and several others interested, then proceeded to the board room of the Great Western, where the following jury was sworn in:

1. James Osborne.
2. Joseph Lister.
3. John Moore.
4. John Galbraith.
5. Mr. Freeman.
6. Robert Roy.
7. Jesse Nickerson.
8. Thomas B. Harris.
9. Robert Osborne.
10. William J. Kerr.
11. Alex. Hamilton.
12. Lewis R. Crbey.
13. Charles Magill.
14. James McIntyre.
15. Horato Case.
16. James Cummings.
17. Adam Brown.

James McIntyre was then elected foreman, and the jury were directed "to inquire how Donald Stuart and many others came to their death."

Towards eight o'clock the moon rose nearly full, and all the night persevering efforts were made to extricate the bodies from the wreck. Rafts were formed on the ice to enable the men with long poles and hooks to proceed with their mournful task in safety. Immediately after the accident, strange as it may seem, an Irish girl on board had got out of the first passenger car, she did not know how, and was seen climbing up the south bank of the canal.

When everything possible had been done to identify the bodies, the coroners gave permission for them to be

removed, while a body of constables were placed to guard from intrusion the rooms in which the dead lay.

The complete list of the dead who have been identified are :

1. Donald Stuart, merchant, Hamilton.
2. A. Grant, probably of Toronto.
3. J. Russel, contractor, Brantford.
5. James Barr, merchant, Niagara.
7. James Gannon, unknown.
8. Samuel Zimmerman, of Niagara Falls.
9. Thos. Benson, Port Hope.
10. John Sharpe, book peddler at Hamilton.
11. The Rev. A. Booker, Hamilton.
12. Erastus W. Green, Hamilton.
13. Thomas Doyle, about 3 years old.
14. John Henderson, Hamilton (brother-in-law to C. J. Brydges, Esq.).
18. Edward Duffield, late of the Europa.
19. Mahaly Clare, two years old (daughter of Mr. Clare, merchant of James Street, Hamilton).
20. Capt. Jas. Sutherland, Hamilton.
21. Adam Ferrie, Jr., Hamilton.
23. Mr. Jas. Ross, of Toronto.
25. John Wilford, a miller, late of Buckinghamshire, Eng.
26. Alex. Burnfield, engineer of the train.
27. Mr. Barton, Sr., of Stratford.
28. Robert Crawford, of Saltfleet.
29. — Strudy, Esq., dry-goods merchant, Dundas St., London.
30. Hugh McSloy, St. Catharines.
31. Timothy Doyle, from Dumbarton, shoemaker.
32. Patrick Doyle, laborer, brother to the above.
33. James Harkness, formerly bandmaster of Toronto, late in the Rifles.
34. Chas. Brown, firm of J. & C. Brown, Galt.
36. Mr. Kendal, Toronto.
37. Diana McFiggan, servant of Mr. Irvine, Galt.
38. Mr. Bradfield, Suspension Bridge.

39. and 40. Ellen and Mary Devine (sisters), 15 and 17 years.
43. G. S. Sloan, Caistorville, C.W. (supposed).
44. James Forbes, farmer, of Nelson, C. W.
45. David Carks, Ingersoll.
46. D. Witter, Markham.
47. Mrs. Bradfield.
48. Duncan Campbell, Campbellsville, C.W.
49. Ralph Wade, of Cobourg.
50. Charles Caldwell, of Albion.
51. Geo. McDonnell, supposed of Toronto.
52. Geo. Dorris, Port Nelson.
53. Mrs. Duffin (supposed), Toronto.
54. Mr. Joseph Major, Two Rivers.
55. Mr. Beck and two children, of Hamilton.
56. Mrs. Stevenson, Hamilton.
57. Mr. Morrey, Thorold.

At the Burlington Hotel is Mr. L. Hamlin, of Newcastle, C. W., not much hurt. He was in the last car. He says he felt the first shaking of the train, and then a shock, which must have been at the time when the engine went through the bridge. He saw the car losing its horizontal position, and was pitched head foremost to the bottom. He was the first rescued. He describes the agony of the scene as intense. His clothes were completely covered with blood.

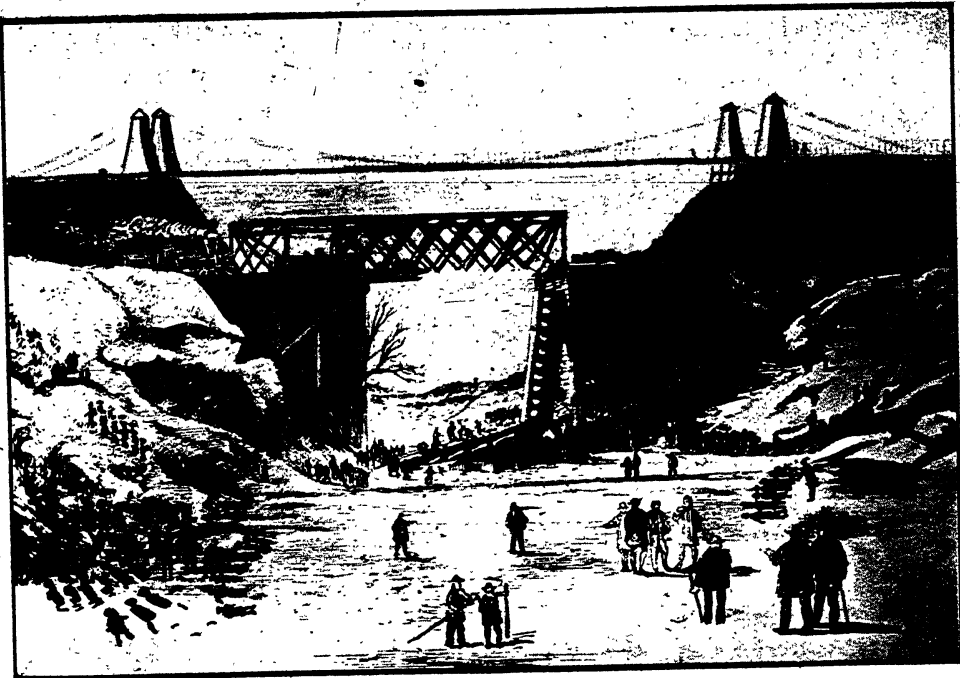
There were 95 or 96 on board, all told, so that from 8 to 9 are under the ice, not including those that were taken away before. The rescued and injured would number twenty or thirty, some out of each car. The current of the canal sets towards the bay, so that these still under the water may not be found until the breaking up of the ice in the bay.

No blame is attached to the switchman or the engineer. The front axle of the locomotive seems to have broken. The engineer, brave fellow, whistled on the brakes, while he endeavoring to avert the catastrophe, went down with his engine.

A little girl about eight years old, named Susan Garvin, of Dumbarton,

C. W., states that she, her mother and two brothers were in the last car but one. She escaped, she knows not how, slightly injured. One of her brothers is also alive. Her mother and other brother are doubtless among the victims in the first car, submerged, making a total of from 70 to 72 deaths at one fell sweep. Many in sight of their homes, in anticipation of reaching home where the tea was spread, to rejoin their friends. It cannot be

Undoubtedly, the axle of the engine must have been broken, as the left wheel left the rail and marked the sleepers for some ten yards before the train reached the switch. Instead of jumping from his engine, the engineer did all that he could; reversing his engine, and stayed at his post until the engine was precipitated into the canal, reversing the engine, endeavoring if possible to prevent the fatal accident. He and his fireman went down with the engine.



denied many of the victims were in the lap of luxury. Samuel Zimmerman had in his pocket the charter for the Canada Southern Railway; J. Russel, contractor, Brantford, had thousands of dollars on his person; yet it cannot be denied that many also are of a humbler rank, and that many a disconsolate widow, many a bereaved orphan, have to mourn the loss of those upon whom they depended for support. Who of his abundance will not contribute a mite for the relief of these?

THE RESCUED.

Those who were on the train and were not killed on the spot are as follows:

- W. K. Muir, superintendent.
- Mr. Urquhart, auditor.
- Mr. Richardson, the mail conductor.
- Mr. Doyle, and two cousins.
- Mr. Barton, Hamilton.
- Mr. Macklin, Chippewa, seriously injured.

Mr. T. C. Street, Niagara Falls, arm broken.

Mr. Curtis, Ingersoll, dangerously injured, back broken.

John Clare, merchant, Hamilton.

Mr. Woods, Hamilton.

Captain A. McBride.

Mr. Hill.

Mr. Williams.

Edward McFilly, Toronto to Buffalo.

C. Foster, Toronto to Suspension Bridge.

John Henderson, Toronto to New York; slightly injured.

James Barr, Waterdown to Hamilton; collar bone broken.

Ferdinand Bigner, Toronto to Buffalo; slightly injured.

Henry August, Toronto to Buffalo, who leaped from the passenger car about three yards before it broke down; not hurt.

R. L. Hamilin, Newcastle. He was in the last car; not hurt much. He was the first one rescued from the last car. He describes the agony of the passengers as horrifying; his clothes being literally covered with blood.

W. W. Reid, Clifton; John Smith, Michigan; both slightly injured.

H. M. Garrington, Port Stanley; severely hurt.

Lawyer Hill, who escaped unhurt.

Mr. Farr, of Hamilton, removed to his own home; dangerously injured.

Mr. George Havil, Paris.

John McLellan; legs seriously injured.

Up to the present 59 or 60 bodies have been recovered, leaving 8 or 10 yet under the ice, who may not be recovered until the breaking of the spring.

STATEMENT OF MR. MARSHALL.

W. R. Marshall, of Woodstock, was one of the few fortunate persons who were not killed by the late fearful accident. From his statement, which appears in the Spectator, we make the following extracts :

“There were no incidents of a striking nature on the trip from Toronto to the junction with the main line near Hamilton. When within sight of the Hamilton station, Mr. Beatty asked me ‘what time it was.’ I looked at my watch and told him it was a quarter to six. About this time the train began to go slower. Nearly half a minute afterwards I perceived quite a consternation in the cars, passengers running to and fro, apparently much excited. At the same time, I felt a strange sensation, as if caused by something impeding the motion of the train. It was not a shock, but at the same time every one seemed to think that something was wrong. As I was not aware of the dangerous character of the place we were approaching, I retained my seat, and advised others to do the same. A slight pause ensued, myself and those sitting with me remaining still, but anxiously waiting the result, when with one jerk we were precipitated into the yawning abyss below. While descending I retained perfect consciousness, and felt we were going down some awful precipice; not a voice was heard in the descent. On reaching the bottom there was one general crash, after which I found myself in total darkness, hemmed in on every side; and crushed almost to suffocation by human bodies and broken seats. The blood oozed from my mouth, and it seemed as if every breath I drew would be the last. The next few minutes were the most awful I ever witnessed; oh, that it may never be my lot to experience the like again. Some prayed, others called upon the saints, others swore fearful oaths, and all seemed writhing in the deepest agony. I can only liken the place to a slaughter-house. The blood streamed down over my face and clothes as if some huge beast had been slain above me. In this fearful situation were placed 80 or 90 human beings, who, a few moments before, rejoiced in excellent health and spirits, their minds occupied with worldly cares or pleasures; little thinking they would be so soon called into the presence of their

Eternal Judge. What an awful lesson does this shocking event teach those who habitually put off making their peace with God to some future day, or to a death-bed? The writer of these few lines will consider himself amply repaid if his description succeeds in persuading one sinner to seek for refuge in Him who promised to be a present help unto His people in every time of trial. We remained in the position above described for about ten minutes, during which time I spoke to several around me, advising them to be patient and wait for help. The top of the car was then knocked in, giving us light and air, and enabling us to breathe more freely. At this instant a crowbar or something of the kind from without grazed my temple, and the blow was about to be repeated, when, by a sudden effort I grasped the instrument, and called upon the person to desist or he would kill me. Immediately afterwards, a hand (from the size, I should think it was a woman's) was placed completely over my mouth, so as to nearly suffocate me. With great exertion I removed it, and shortly after, being relieved from the pressure above, I succeeded in dragging myself from the wreck and reaching the edge of the canal, whence I was raised to the top by a chain fastened under my shoulders. On arising there, I was carried to the switchman's house, and received much kindness from the doctors in attendance, and also from many of the company's servants, who were anxiously and actively rendering every assistance in their power to the unfortunate sufferers."

Notwithstanding that Mr. S. Zimmerman was under the water 23 hours, his faithful watch was still going.

THE SCENE AT THE BRIDGE AND CLEARING OF THE WRECK.

The scene which was presented the instant after the terrific wreck had been consummated, beggars all description. The locomotive, with its brave driver and fireman, completely submerged; two passenger cars, freighted with precious souls, and a

baggage car, shattered in every conceivable form of destruction. But if this ruthless material destruction was appalling, how terrific, how awful, was the crushing out of human life which attended it! From the splintered ruins of those cars arose cries and shrieks, groans and oburgations of unearthly intensity; while through their ruptured sides and floors protruded the limbs and bodies of scores of the dead, wounded and dying, who but a moment before were in the heyday of happiness. Palsied for a few moments, the bewildered survivors could only gaze helplessly upon the horrors before them. A reaction ensued, and then each flew to the rescue, impelled by a common instinct. Immediate assistance was had from the different shops, and persons engaged on the works at the depot. All night persevering efforts were made to extricate the bodies from the wreck. Rafts were formed on the ice, to enable the men with long poles and hooks to proceed with their mournful task in safety. All night and all next day the wreckers persevered in their humane efforts until all the bodies were removed, and the debris of the bridge and the cars was cleared.

Neither wealth, nor power, nor skill, nor learning, nor courage, nor worth, nor experience, could help or save at that dread moment! In that assemblage were men who had run the gauntlet with death by flood and field; had passed through many trials, and had experienced some successes; men who had grown rich in worldly goods, amid the strife of life and in opposition to many discouragements; had had cause to mistrust a stout heart, and yet had outlived trying difficulties. But now they mingle once more with that dust from whence all sprung, and to which all must return; for

Death hurls the monarch from his throne,
Death claims all living for his own!

Turn we now to a closer examination of the results of this sad calamity. It may be better imagined than described, how tremendous was the frenzy of the populace as the news

ran through the streets, and the names of beloved friends and relatives were repeated in the lists of victims.

The number of narrow escapes is very remarkable, and worthy of a passing reference. One gentleman paid a cabman handsomely to gallop to the depot in Toronto, but arrived just too late; another was on the cars, but got off for some trifling purpose at the suggestion of a friend and was left; another was detained by an invitation to dine with a Cabinet Minister; another procrastinated, he knows not why, till it was too late, though he desired to take that train; others, again, stayed over to see Miss Nickinson perform at the theatre; another missed the cars by half a minute at Port Credit; another, the same at Waterdown; another got off and was left behind at Wellington Square. A lady who was killed was taken on in the morning on her way down, after the train had started. Such are the trifling circumstances by which life's tenor is held, or forever snapped asunder.

On the Recent Calamity.

Written by request.

Tears for the dead—sad tears,
For broken hearts are lying in our
way;
Behold the "Princess of the Provinces"

Weepeth to-day,
Warm hearts were beating high,
Their chosen city was within their
sight,
And schemes, and hopes, and love's
sweet lamp
Were burning bright.

Tears for the dead—sad tears,
One fearful crash, and, hark! one
woeful scream,
The falling car of Juggernaut had
reached
The ice-wrought stream.
Could nought have stayed thee, foe?
Riches were with thy victims found,
O Death,
And who would not have gladly
changed with thee
Their gold for breath?

The mother prest her babe,
And smiled to see it smiling in its
sleep—
And gentle sisters side by side went
down
Into the deep!
The man of God who stood,
But one short hour before his solemn
change,
And said, "Heaven's beams should
lighten mysteries
That here were strange."*

The youthful barrister,
Who in his sky beheld no cloudlet
dim,
And thought upon his young and
loving bride,
Waiting for him.
Masonry could not save;
Low, brethren of the solemn, mystic
tie,
Who kneel and pray, for the Knight
Templar's hands
In silence lay.

The fire was on the hearth,
The sun was set, the evening meal
was spread
When 'round the city rung the dire-
ful sound,
"Thy loved are dead."
Tears for the dead—sad tears,
Yet doth the rainbow glimmer on the
cloud,
And hues of Paradise doth brightly
beam
On pall and shroud.

Tears for the dead—sad tears,
Widows and orphans weep heart-
broken now,
Why did the storm beat down upon
their heads?
In grief they bow.
Ah! humble be our plea,
His love to ask upon our heart's
plowed sod,
Our answer to the mystery must be,
The will of God.

*The last discourse delivered by the lamented Rev. A. Booker, on that fatal afternoon, was from these words, "What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter."

HARRIETT ANNIE.

Monday, March 20th, 1857.

