

THE PENSHURST RAILWAY ACCIDENT.

(Abridged from the Melbourne Argus of 6th
March.)

The shocking tragedy which occurred on the railway line near Peshurst on the evening of Saturday, 1st instant, naturally caused a great and painful sensation in the district. Peshurst was crowded with people all day on Sunday, and visitors to the scene of the mishap, situated about two and a-half miles from town on the Hawkesdale-road, were numerous. The navvies employed by Messrs. McNeil on the Peshurst to Koroit line are a splendid lot of men, strong, hardy, and well-behaved fellows, and a large proportion of them are young, as the sad record shows. All those killed were quite young men, and amongst the injured there is only one over 30 years of age—namely, Burns, a man of 50, who, though terribly injured about the head, actually walked into Peshurst after the accident, a feat which fairly astonished the experienced physicians who saw his wounds. It is quite clear that the primary cause of the accident is to be found in the circumstance that the truck on which the unfortunate men were being conveyed was pushed before the engine instead of being drawn after it. Such a proceeding would not be permitted on a line working under the regulations of the Victorian railways, but on a line in course of construction and still under the management of the contractors it may, it appears, be done without transgressing any known rule, and it is almost inevitable that trucks should sometimes be propelled in this manner. The line is a single one, and as yet there are only a few shunting places. The truck that conveyed the men to the scene of the accident on Saturday evening was intended on the return journey to bring to Peshurst a number of married men who are employed near Hawkesdale, and whose camps are pitched near Peshurst township. The intention was that going to Hawkesdale the truck should be pushed ahead of the engine, and on the return journey it was to have been drawn behind. The number of men who entered the truck at Peshurst is variously stated at twenty and thirty, and it is hard to obtain information as to the right number. The truck contained about twenty bags of chaff, and the evening being chilly the men made themselves comfortable upon it, getting into snug corners of the vehicle. The truck was of the ordinary light kind used for the conveyance of ballast, the side being very shallow, not more than 12in. or 14in. high. The engine had been lent to the contractors by the Railway Department, and was under the charge of Driver James Edward Simpson, strange to say the same man who drove the engine by which a woman was cut to pieces at a gate on the Braxholms line a few weeks ago. Charles Cogan was the fireman and Patrick Pearce the guard. It is usual for the guard to travel on the last truck in a long train, and to keep a lookout from that position, but for some unexplained reason the guard of this train travelled on the engine. It is presumed that the truck being crowded, he did this as a matter of convenience.

crowded, he did this as a matter of convenience. On leaving Peshurst the train went off at the rate of from twenty to twenty-five miles an hour. It was about two and a-half miles out from the town when the catastrophe happened. The engine-driver admits that he saw some cattle on the side of the line, but not on the rails. They were running down an incline of about 1 in 60 in Heale's paddock. Suddenly a curve in the line was reached, and a few yards beyond the curve a big white bullock crossed the track. No one on the truck or the engine appears to have noticed the animal, and there was no suspicion of any danger until the truck was within about twenty yards of the beast. Then the engine was reversed, and the tender-brake applied. The steam brake had been broken during the day, and, although the speed of the train was materially reduced, still it must have been going at a high speed—probably fifteen miles an hour—when it dashed into the bullock, which it fairly lifted from the line and threw a distance of about sixteen yards. The truck rebounded with the shock, but the impetus of the engine forced it forward; the truck rose sideways, and the wheels on the right side ran for about twenty yards on the rails and sleepers. For an instant it was doubtful to which side it would swerve; then it mounted the bank and toppled to the left, carrying its living freight with it. There was a terrific crash, amid which was heard the death-cry of doomed men, and the truck was seen to have turned completely over, with the engine partially upreared on the top of it. There was a rush of steam, and agonised cries for help from a dozen or so of men, struggling among the debris. Those who escaped injury promptly went to the assistance of their less fortunate companions. There were screwjacks on the engine, and these were speedily got out, and a party of half-stunned, horrified, but willing and anxious men set to work. Driver Simpson ran over to the Peshurst-road, where he met a young man named Christopher Madding, who, having heard his story, galloped into the township. He gave information to Dr. Sweetman and to Constable Hall, and these, with Mr. George, the general manager, and a number of other Peshurst people, were promptly on the scene of the disaster. The engine was moved back, and the truck lifted from the men whom it held imprisoned. One poor fellow (Dillon) had been crying pitifully for help, and the workers tried hard to save him, but unhappily they were too late in reaching him and he was taken out dead. The killed and wounded were laid on the bank at the side of the rails, and the terrible immediate result of the calamity was ascertained—seven men dead, some of the bodies being frightfully mutilated, and eight others more or less seriously injured. Two of the victims had met their fate under the wheels of the engine. These were John O'Donnell, who was cut completely in two, and Patrick McGee, over whose neck the wheels of the locomotive passed, his head being completely severed from his body. John Dunphy was thrown clear of the truck, but fell heavily on his head and broke his neck. William Walters and James Stanley, alias Donnelly, alias O'Callaghan, were caught under the edge of the truck as it fell on its side. Their

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the edge of the truck as it fell on its side. Their
skulls were fractured, and their bodies shock-
ingly mutilated. Two of the other men killed,
John Dillon and James O'Brien, were smothered
under the truck, which appears to have fallen
over completely on top of them.