IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE GEORGIA RAILROAD NEAR SOCIAL CIRCLE, GA., ON OCTOBER 18, 1920.

January 18, 1921.

On October 18, 1920, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Georgia Railroad near Social Circle, Ga., which resulted in the death of 1 passenger and 1 employee and the injury of 13 passengers and 3 employees.

After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety submits the following report.

The accident occurred on the main line of the Georgia Railroad extending between Atlanta, Ga. and Augusta, Ga., a distance of 171 miles. The line is single track, and the movement of trains is governed by timetable and train orders. No form of block signal system is in use.

At the point of accident the line extends east and west and is tangent for a considerable distance in each direction. Approaching from the west there is a descending grade of .7 per cent for about 1 mile. The accident occurred at a point about 1 mile east of Social Circle at a facing point switch leading off from the main line toward the south to the plant of the Virginia and Carolina Oil Mill. Approaching from the west there is an unobstructed view for more than 1,000 feet. The weather at the time was clear.

The train involved was eastbound passenger train No. 4 operating between Atlanta and Augusta, and was in

charge of Conductor Haslett and Engineman Partee. It was hauled by locomotive 207 and consisted of 1 baggage-mail car, 1 baggage-coach, 1 coach and 4 Pullman sleeping cars. The second car from the engine was of wooden construction, the first, third, fourth, and sixth were of steel underframe construction, while the second, fifth and seventh cars were of all-steel construction. The train left Atlanta at 8.55 p.m. 15 minutes late, arrived at Social Circle, the last open telegraph office at 10.30 p. m. met eastbound extra 134 and departed at 10.37 p. m., 13 minutes late and was derailed at the switch leading to the Virginia and Carolina Oil Co's track at 10.40 p. m., while running at a speed estimated to have been between 30 and 35 miles per hour.

The engine and two forward cars continued on the main line and came to a stop with the rear of the second car 750 feet east of the point of the switch. The wheels of the engine, first car and forward truck of the second car remained on the rails. The second car came to rest with its front end on the main line coupled to the first car, its rear end swung to the south of the main line resting against a loaded freight car standing on the siding. The rear truck of this car has been torn away and half of the right side ~~was~~ were torn away, the car being and partly filled with sulphuric acid in pulverized form which the freight car contained. The third car came to rest on the siding, about 100 feet behind the rear of the second car with its right side badly damaged and both trucks missing. The fourth car was

immediately behind the third car with its forward trucks missing, its rear truck on the rails of the siding practically undamaged and the remainder of the train was on the siding with all wheels on the rails except the forward truck of the sixth car.

The track in the vicinity of the accident is laid with 80 pound rails, 33 feet in length, with pine and cypress ties, 18 to 30 to the rail. These are single spiked, no tie plates being used. The track is ballasted with cinders, in good condition and well maintained.

The switch involved is known as the L. & N. standard, this type of switch being in general use on the Georgia Railroad. It is of the "Weir type and make, the stand is of the "medium" height with target and oil lamp 7 feet above the head block, no springs are used. The operating lever when in motion travels on a table or guide with suitable notches to receive handle or lever when set for main line or side track. The handle or lever is a solid bar of iron 2½ inches in diameter and about 20 inches in length with a hinge or knuckle at the outer end of table or guide to permit it to hang in a vertical position parallel with the switch stand when set for either main line or siding. The handle is slotted to fit over a lock post secured to switch stand, the post having an eye-hole to receive the lock. When the lever is moved to either main line or siding position the handle will drop of its own weight into the notch on table or guide and over key post.

Two efficient stops or latches are thereby provided, one of which is the notch on guide or table and the other being the lock post extending through the slot in the handle. A slight upward movement of the handle will free it from lock post, but the handle must be raised to the horizontal position before it is free from notch in guide or table. The bridle rods are below the surface of the switch timbers to protect them against damage from anything dragging on a moving train. All timbers under switch and frog were renewed within 30 days prior to the accident and were in first class condition. The switch frog and all switch connections were found in first class condition and undamaged except that one of the two spring boxes on rod ings on frog was broken.

The first marks of the derailment were found about 87 feet east of the switch points apparently being made by one pair of wheels. These marks continued up to the a point of frog, where the ties were badly splintered and track torn up.

Engineman Partee of train No. 4 stated that as his train approached the switch he saw that it displayed a white light which indicated that it was set for the main line. He noticed nothing unusual in passing over it, at that time he believed he was running about 30 or 35 miles per hour. He thought his engine was about opposite a freight car which stood on the siding, about 400 feet east of the point of the switch, when he first felt the effects of the derailment. He stated that the brakes of his train were working

in a proper manner and that after the accident he made an examination of the engine and train and could find nothing which would be likely to cause the derailment. Shortly after the accident in company with Conductor Haslett he went to the switch and found it set for the siding with the handle down in position and the light burning and displaying red. The switch lock was locked and lying on the switch tie at the base of the switch. The switch points fitted and the switch worked properly when they tried it.

Conductor Haslett of train No. 4 stated that leaving Social Circle he was riding in the second car from the engine, shortly after departing the car began to rock and he realizing that there was trouble and started for the signal cord, but was thrown down before he could reach it. When he got up the train had stopped. After getting out of the car he started back to find the rear portion of the train and on his way passed the switch. He examined the switch with Engineman Partee, this was about 7 or 8 minutes after accident occurred. He estimated the speed of the train to have been about 30 miles per hour at the time the derailment occurred.

Conductor Born, whose train was the last to use the switch prior to the accident, stated that when his train finished its work on the siding about 7:30 A. M. on the day of the accident, he saw his brakeman close the switch and lock the lever in position for the main track. This statement is also borne out by brakeman McKinney who was standing on the top of one of the box cars of the train

at the time.

Brakeman Miller, on the above train, stated that when the work was completed he threw the switch for the main line, and locked it, pulled the chain a couple of times and looked at the switch points. He stated that it is impossible to remove the key from the lock without locking it. In his opinion it would be impossible for the passing trains to change the position of the switch lever even though not locked with a switch lock, the position of the switch cannot be changed without raising the lever to a horizontal position.

Pullman Conductor Lively stated that two of his passengers riding in the rear car told him that after they felt the first joint they went to the rear platform and looked out and as the train passed the switch they saw a man standing close by it.

Engineman Webb of Extra 134 West upon passed over the switch in question about ten minutes before the derailment occurred stated that when his train passed the switch it displayed a white light and that he did not notice anything wrong with it.

Supervisor Williams stated that after the accident, he made an examination of the switch and with the exception of the broken housing to the spring on the frog caused by a wheel, found it in good condition and working properly. He believes that the construction of the switch is such that it would be impossible for the position of the switch to be changed without actually raising the handle and throwing

it around. He does not believe it possible to have been thrown out of adjustment by a passing train.

Investigation disclosed no defect in the track or equipment which could in any way have caused this accident.

It is believed that this derailment was caused by the switch being thrown between the trucks of the second car of the train by some unknown person.

The fact that the front portion of the train held to the main track and that the remainder took the siding and that the position of the switch after the accident was set for the siding together with the construction of the switch warrants this conclusion.

There was evidence to show that the day before the accident there had been some trouble with several negro track laborers over their refusal to lay rails and that the Foreman had discharged them from the service, and it is known that one of these men had a switch key in his possession and lived not far from the scene of the accident.

At the time of the accident the crew of train No. 4 has been on duty 2 hours 30 minutes and the engine crew had been on duty 8 hours 30 minutes in the aggregate since their last full rest period and were not on duty in violation of the provisions of the Hours of Service Act.