

# A PERILOUS ROUTE

## The Railroad on Chenery Street

### Twenty-four People Were Injured.

#### The Economy of an Electric Railway Company in Dealing With the Public.

Soon after the cars began running on the San Francisco and San Mateo Electric Railway a disaster happened on Chenery street. The most inexperienced person could see how perilous was the line there, but to change it would have entailed expense. Another accident happened at the same place night before last. A heavily-loaded car was overturned and twenty-four people were injured. Some of them are not expected to recover. Human bodies were so crushed and mangled that even if life should not soon leave them they will carry the marks of that terrible Saturday evening to the grave.

The railroad at that point is on a long incline. Those who understand mathematics can form an idea of the grade from the information of the railroad officers that it is eight and a half degrees. That does not indicate much steepness. To people accustomed to mount Nob Hill or other such elevations the street on which the railway is might seem as easy to walk on as the level plain. Yet the cars rush down that declivity like sleds on a toboggan slide. The descent is lengthy, at every rod the velocity increases, and when a crash comes the impact is terrific.

Everybody who has ridden on a gravity railway knows the wild rush which its conveyances make. The velocity of the electric cars is similar when running from the top of the hill on Chenery street. If the sense of danger were absent the passengers would enjoy the thrill. One moment the car is at the summit, the next it has shot down to the curve below, a thousand feet away. The turn is too sharp for safety with such speed.

The company knew the danger to which it was subjecting its patrons since the serious accident in May, 1892, but it made no improvement in the road. The probability that lives would be lost did not count against the expense of altering the road.

The names of twenty-one persons who were injured on Saturday evening were published yesterday. Three more were learned. The additional list is as follows:

Charles Murray, aged 40 years, residing at 108 Langton street, a laborer in the employ of the railroad company. He reported at St. Luke's Hospital yesterday, and had a contused shoulder dressed.

Mrs. Lane, residing at Ocean View, sustained slight injuries.

Paul Smith, foreman of laborers for the railroad company at the power-house, Sunnyside, had his face badly contused.

The broken car was taken to the power-house late on Saturday night, but the evidences of the fearful event could not be all removed. The deep, slimy mud into which the passengers were hurled was there yesterday to mark the place, and the sidewalk by the heavy pole against which the car ran was covered with the glass of the car windows.

The motorman, Albert T. Ringwood, was not at work yesterday, although the company does not intend to discharge him. He gave Superintendent Simpson the following statement concerning the accident yesterday morning:

SAN FRANCISCO, Cal., January 27, 1894.—I, A. F. Ringwood, make the following statement: Left Baden at 4:44. Picked up passengers all along the line. At Ocean View I picked up quite a number, leaving Ocean View at 5:14. At Sunnyside I picked up twenty-five employes and passengers. At Randall street I stopped to discharge a passenger, and then proceeded down the hill. When setting brakes inside brake failed to work. I rang for conductor to set rear brakes, as the car was gaining speed rapidly. I threw the reverse lever over so car would generate current and choke down. Failing to generate soon enough I applied the current, which checked the car, but my fuse blew out and car got away from me. Brakes were in good order up to time of accident.

A. F. RINGWOOD.

It is the custom on the electric railway that runs to Ocean View to crowd as many passengers on each car as possible, and there were more people on this car than should have been received. Its spirit of thrift keeps the company from putting on enough cars to handle its traffic without a crush. There is so much time between cars and crowding is so inevitable that men take the smallest foothold they can get on the first car and hang on as best they can. Women flock inside, not being deterred by the prospect of having to stand in the jam, for this is the only route by which they can reach their destination.

The car of which Motorman Ringwood was in charge had a few less than 100 passengers on board before twenty-five people got on at the power-house. The conductor, Buckley, informed Behrend Joost, president of the company, that he had collected ninety-three fares. That number of persons is more than a comfortable load for the car. The addition of twenty-five penned everybody in except those who were standing on the steps. The latter did not have room to hold their bodies perpendicularly, but had to stand in an oblique position, their arms outstretched at full length to hold on to the supports.

President Joost said: "In the front of the car are two brake handles and in the rear are two. Those in the front are for the motorman to handle; those behind for the conductor. The two are set close to each other. On going down the hill the motorman sets the brakes to lessen the speed of the car. Ringwood set the outside brake and it worked all right. He then tried the other one, and something caught. Just what the matter was we don't know. When he found the second brake would not work he gave a tap with the bell, which signaled the conductor to put on brakes. The conductor set his outside brake, but could not work the other. Ringwood then threw his reverse current over. The reverse current keeps the car from going down hill, and if it is strong enough it forces the car up hill. But there was not time to stop the car with this reverse."

"How far was the car from the curve where it struck the pole when the first brake was put on?" was asked.

"About 500 feet," was the reply; "about half way between Randall and Thirtieth streets."

To travel that distance could not have taken more than two or three seconds, and the men in command of a car must be wonderfully spry to apply the brakes, ring bells and generate currents in that space of time.

The blowing out of the fuse, Superin-

tendent Simpson explained, occurs when more electricity than is necessary to run the car is produced. A stronger current than that would burn out the armatures if the circuit were not broken and the electricity shut off. Armatures cost considerable money, and rather than have them damaged the company prefers to have the current destroyed. This is accomplished by the blowing out of the fuse. If the circuit were not broken in this manner on Ringwood's car the current might have proved of sufficient reverse to check the car without the violence of a collision.

Rather than lose an armature, though, the company trusts to the brakes for such an emergency. The unreliability of the brakes, as well as the cheapness of the other precautions was shown by this accident.

The president and superintendent were anxious to have it understood yesterday that they did not blame the motorman. It was reported that Ringwood was a new hand, but they said he had been working for the company for three months. Mr. Joost was asked whether Ringwood made many trips since he went into the company's service.

O. yes," he answered. "Why, he has been earning as much as \$13 or \$14 a week part of the time. He has been on the Ocean View and San Mateo part of the line for fifteen days, as one of the regular motormen was sick."

In the opinion of the public it will matter little whether the accident was due to the incompetence of the motorman or the carelessness of the company, but as Mr.

hurt worse than at first reported. He has three fractures of the shoulder.

Six employes of the company were taken to St. Luke's Hospital for treatment.

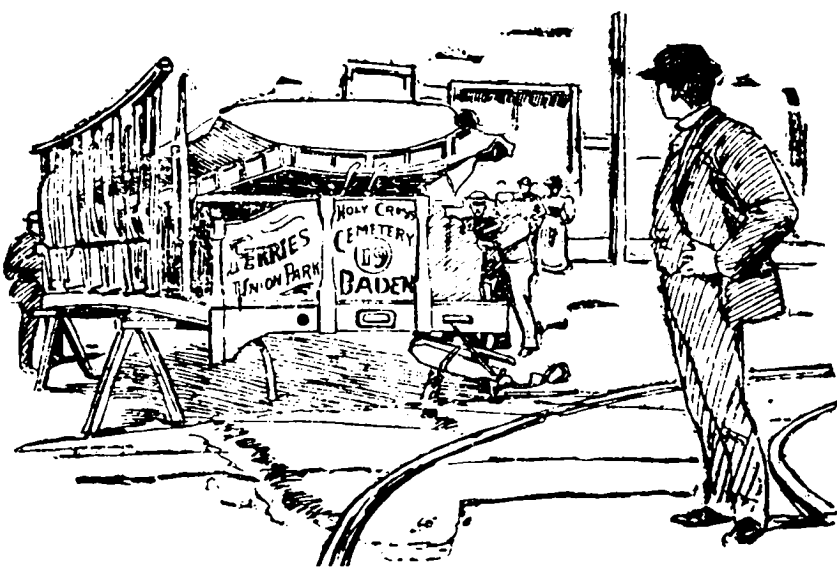
"The company will pay the expense of caring for them," said the medical superintendent. "Men who have been hurt from time to time on the electric road have been brought here, and Mr. Joost has always paid the bills."

The officials of the company were intelligent enough to see the danger of the Chenery-street hill, but they were willing to let the public take chances on it. They knew they would get the custom, no matter what their negligence, as the only other way to reach the places to which the electric cars go is the Southern Pacific Railroad, and its trains run only once in a while during the day. The company is at last going to do away with that part of the track on the Chenery-street side.

It has secured a franchise for San Jose avenue. All the track it will lay will be on two blocks. The cars will run from Thirtieth street junction up San Jose avenue to Randall street, and along Randall to Chenery. Mr. Joost said that this track will be laid in three weeks. It remains to be seen whether the track is constructed in a safe manner on the new route.

The height of the Chenery-street hill at Randall street will not be diminished by going the other way around the block, and there will still be a sharp curve at one corner to overcome.

The accounts of the accident on May 2, 1892, read as if they had been written yes-



THE REMAINS OF THE WRECKED CAR WHEN THEY WERE GATHERED UP.

Joost was desirous of showing Ringwood's credentials for skill, it looks as if the company is willing to take all the blame. Ringwood came from Portland. He has favorable letters as to his capability from officers of the Portland and the Salt Lake electric roads.

People who reside around the office of the company on Thirtieth street say that the electric company is constantly "breaking in" new men. It is said that employes complain because they do not get their wages on time, and that they either quit on that account voluntarily or are discharged because of the ill temper which the lack of their money arouses. "Green hands" are thus needed continually. Regular patrons of the cars have expected frequent calamitous accidents on the San Mateo line, and that they have not occurred oftener is attributed to luck. Mr. Joost was spoken to on this point, and he made denial. "We do not break in any men," he said. "The only motormen we hire are those who have had experience on electric cars in such cities as Seattle and Portland, where there are hills as in this city. So desirous are we of having experienced motormen that we do not take any of those who have worked on the Oakland line, for that route is not hilly."

The cable-car companies are bad enough with regard to the crowding which they permit, but the electric company is the worst sinner. President Joost admitted yesterday that on the line running to San Mateo the cars every day carry 200 or more passengers each. He gave the dimensions of these cars as follows: Length, 32 feet; width, including the steps which extend beyond the track, 9 feet. The cars on the Eddy-street and the Harrison-street lines, he said, carry loads of 125 people. The larger cars are well filled when 100 people are on board. The smaller cars cannot well carry more than 75 persons at the very utmost. The big cars are supposed to be nearly twice as capacious as the others, as they are vehicles with two trucks and the smaller cars have only one truck each.

Timothy Callaghan of 412 Duncan street and Edward Mooney of 440 Duncan street were standing on the front part of the car, where the motorman was, and they say that Ringwood was hampered by the crowd which piled around him. It is apparent that this must have been the case.

The company has such an immense traffic and so few cars that it utilizes every inch of standing-room on them. The space usually reserved for the motorman is not held sacred in the company's eagerness to take all the nickels that are coming its way. Such a space was provided on the cars by the builder, and a rod was run across the entrance to it to keep other people out, but that slight barricade has been removed.

The space reserved originally is hardly more than sufficient to allow elbow-room in which to set the brakes and perform whatever else is necessary, and when a motorman is obliged to press a crowd back to let his arm have free play he loses precious moments. A few seconds are sufficient for the bringing about of a fatal wreck on the electric road.

President Joost's attention was directed to the unprotected condition of the limited area where the motorman stands.

"Does not the crowd press in here?" he was asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"And the crowd interferes with the motorman?"

"I suppose it does a little."

"Why do you not put up barricades?"

"O, we did; but the crowd breaks them down."

He explained the weak contrivance which had been used as a guard for the motorman's place. The reporter wanted to know why sufficiently strong gates could not be put on, but Mr. Joost changed the subject.

The neglect of the company to properly fix its cars, to have enough cars and to make its track safe, and its other methods of economizing regardless of consequences to the public and in spite of the large revenue it gets from the travel over its road, will make cripples of several men; and women who were hurt Saturday night. David Vallerino, aged 18, who is at the County Hospital, may die as a result of the accident.

Miss Kiernan of 632 Haight street is more badly off than was at first supposed. Both of her thigh bones were broken.

Eugene O'Neil, one of the gang foremen employed by the company, was also

terday, the company having followed the same system since then, notwithstanding the bloody warning. The CHRONICLE of May 31 said:

Running down Chenery-street hill, on which the grade is very steep, the car became unmanageable. In the excitement and confusion which followed the crowd in the front of the car jammed against the gripman, who was thus rendered unable to work the brakes. Thus unchecked the car ran away down the hill and finally jumped the rails.

Assistant Superintendent H. E. Richards' story of the accident is that the car was overloaded with passengers, especially at the rear end. This had the effect of raising the front wheels off the track. Questioned as to the possibilities of avoiding a repetition of such an accident, Mr. Richards said that as the men get more experienced in the handling of the cars the risk will greatly diminish.

Mr. Hartzell, who was then superintendent of the road, in explaining that accident, made the following statement, which proves that the company knew that bad accidents would keep occurring at Chenery street:

Chenery-street hill is very steep. Opposite the hill is a schoolhouse, and the children from the school have been making use of the track as a toboggan slide, coasting down the rails on boards. This practice has made the rails as smooth as glass, so that when the car got away it was impossible to make the brakes hold.

Seven people were injured at that time.

The Chenery-street hill is not the only dangerous declivity on the electric railway routes. That on Harrison street, between Second and Third, is twice as steep as the Chenery-street toboggan slide. Its incline is sixteen and a half degrees, according to Mr. Joost. Some day an electric car will crash into human beings as it rushes down to Third street.

Mr. Joost said that an employe is kept at that point on guard, but he will not diminish very much the danger of a runaway electric car. The running away of an Eddy-street car on a level grade last year illustrated the eccentricities of those conveyances. A steep place on the electric line between Twenty-first and Twentieth streets may also be a scene of disaster before long. The Chenery-street disaster of 1892 may be repeated there. The incline there is eleven and a half degrees. These are not the only steep places on the lines.

In some cities, regulations as to the number of passengers cars may carry are enforced by the authorities.

The company will repair the damaged car and use it again.

The throngs on the cars yesterday were as great as ever, as the people had to come to town and get home again, and on every trip both ways each car was overloaded.

Mr. Joost said that to put the car together in proper trim again will cost \$500. To not use the remains of the wrecked car would be like throwing away \$750, he said. The picture shows how badly the car looked when taken to the power-house.