

lime upon them, and rolled into Thomsontown hot and dripping with rain. It was still pouring.

A plate-layer had just arrived at Wellington station on a trolley, having traversed the Short Hill track, and the traffic office wired to Thomsontown, "Line all clear."

"You're making good time, this weather," the station-master said to Finch, driver of the Star-Duster.

Finch blew his whistle and pushed the regulator forward slowly.

"That's Jefferson's fault," he said pleasantly, as the train moved out of the station and wound round the curve like a luminous serpent.

Then his face became grave once more. Downhill running with a fast train is always nerve-trying work, and in wet weather the risk is increased.

Half-way down the Short Hill is the Semicircle, where the line sweeps round the head of a gully, and below this are five tunnels numbered from the city end of the line.

Numbers "three" and "four" pierce outstanding spurs of the range whose sides slope precipitously into the valley below, and between them the line is supported by an embankment across a narrow gorge. At about the time the mail-train pulled out of Thomsontown, a boy was rounding up some cows so that they would be handy for the morning milking. The animals had been sheltering below the embankment, and were loth to leave their haven and face the rain.

The boy was throwing stones and shouting to them, when a trickle of earth and water rattled down the embankment. The boy looked up. What he saw set him running along the face of the hill, and with a sound between a huge sigh and a lazy snarl the whole embankment slid down, burying beneath it five good cows. Only the frightened boy remained, and the sagging rails and sleepers, wagging in mid-air, showed where the solid line had been.

When the boy rushed into the house two minutes later and told

his tale, his father, John Sangster, sprang to his feet.

"Gimme a light," he said quickly. "P'raps the boy got scared and left the cows. Damme, they can't all be gone."

His wife and his nineteen-year-old daughter assisted him to get into his oilskin and gum-boots, and he took a lantern in his hand.

As he left the door, his daughter ran after him.

"What is it, Loo?" he asked sharply.

"I didn't want to scare mother," she replied, "but there's a train coming down the line now—Dan's train. You must stop it somehow, Dad!"

She was white-lipped and trembling. She and Dan Jefferson were engaged to be married.

"Yes, yes, girl! I'll do my best. Perhaps the line is all right, though, and there's a chance of the train being blocked further up the line. Don't you worry," he added more kindly.

When Sangster reached the broken embankment the water was leaping in cascades down the fissure, and over the lower face of Number Four tunnel a waterfall was pouring.

As he looked at the havoc wrought, he realised that his son's story was no doubt quite correct, but his own immediate loss was quite forgotten in the face of the greater disaster. And when he heard the engines calling far up the line, and remembered that they were drawing a fast train, his blood ran cold.

Then he scrambled on to the line, and started to run up the track. In the tunnel he ran hard, fearing to meet the train underground. No man likes the thought of death in darkness, and there is little room for anything besides a train in a single-track tunnel.

As he reached the open-air he heard the Star-Duster's tuneful double-chime blowing for No. 5 tunnel. About a quarter of a mile separated the two tunnels, and he had covered half that distance when