

the barren, sandy tracts ; past the hillsides, with shepherds, and flocks, and herds ; past the roads, with long trains of mules ; past the peasants lolling over walls and fences—so the train passed on, after mile and hour after hour ; but nothing of all this was noticed by Ashby, who sat buried in his gloomy reverie, from which he was unable to rally, until at length the train came to a full-stop. About such a sudden and abrupt stop there was something very singular indeed. No station was near. The country seemed wild and deserted, and no cause was likely to stop the train at such a place except some serious accident. The priest started up with a quick movement, thrust the breviary into his pocket, and peered anxiously out of the window, looking first backward and then forward. It was this movement that first roused Ashby. He started up and looked out. The sight that he saw was so startling that it served most effectually to chase away all morbid fancies, and give him something to think about of a far more serious character.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE WHOLE PARTY CAME TO GRIEF, AND ARE CARRIED AWAY CAPTIVE.

It was, in truth, a strange and startling sight that met Ashby's eyes as he looked out of the window. The train had been stopped in the middle of a plain, where the road ran along an embankment about three feet high. A crowd of armed men were here, gathered about the locomotive, and already forming lines along the side of the train. All looked shabby, none had any pretensions to uniforms, and their appearance was not sufficiently picturesque for brigands. In fact, they looked like a gang of rascals who had just taken to brigandage. "What a bad lot !" muttered Ashby to himself. As the tatterdemalions reached the spot, and extended their hands on both sides to the end of the train. At every window they shouted, "Back ! back ! Be quiet, and no harm will be done." Shouting such words as these, they aimed their guns so closely and with such furious gestures at the windows, that the passengers all shrank back, not only into their seats, but even into the corners of the carriages. The lines of armed men thus stood guarding the train while the passengers cowered inside. After a time a cry came from some one who was passing along, and who, as he kept shouting into each carriage :

"The train has been stopped in the name of his Majesty King."

All passengers are ordered to come out forthwith.