

A ROMANCE OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILWAY.

BY FRED. TRAVERS.

I.

ONE morning in May, when London about the parks was looking its fairest, I was pacing the platform of the Great Portland Street Station of the Underground Railway.

Above me was the vaulted roof of glass and iron with the rumble of drays and busses; news stalls were at my side; passengers waiting for the train were meeting and passing me; at either end of the station were the black mouths of the tunnel, with lights twinkling like stars in their depths, and the distant buzz of the approaching engine.

Nearer and nearer came the train. The engine shot from the tunnel, like a shell from a mortar, and came whizzing into the station, as if it would fly past into the darkness beyond, but was arrested by the powerful force of the air-brakes.

Thirty doors flew open; the carriages discharged and took in their living freight in thirty-five seconds; the porters slammed the door; the guard waved his green flag, and, with a shriek, we were off into the tunnel. When I had time to look about me, I found we were two in a first-class carriage—by the door, myself, and opposite, in the middle seat, a fair a vision as eyes ever looked upon.

She was a fair-haired, blue-eyed English girl, with pure honest face and rosy cheeks, as if fanned by the breezes of the Wiltshire downs, or the sea at Margate.

She sat with the ease and self-possession of one accustomed to travel alone, and with that quiet dignity

which indicates a power to repel any unwelcome advances on the part of a stranger.

These mental notes had hardly been made when, with a shriek, we dashed into another station. 'Edge-ware Road!' shouted the guard. There was the same opening and slamming of doors, the same waving of the green flag, and we were off again, with a third occupant in the carriage. He was a slight man, with pale face and dark sunken eyes, wore a grey shooting coat, and looked like a returned Indian officer—one of those men who come back with diseased livers and moderate fortunes, to end their days at Bath or Cheltenham.

His manner was nervous and excited, and I noticed that from his seat among the cushions in the corner he cast, from time to time, furtive glances at my fellow-passenger above the pages of the *Times* which he was reading, as well as might be, by the light of the one flittering gas jet. Praed Street station was passed without adding to our company, and, in the next stretch of tunnel, the train slackened speed and came to a standstill. What could be wrong? All the accidents which had occurred in the last fortnight flashed through my mind. Were we to be overtaken and telescoped by the next train which might already be in the tunnel?

I jumped up and looked out of the window. The next moment I heard a shriek from my companion, followed by 'witch'—'vampire'—from the man in grey.

I turned and saw that he was a