

A RAILWAY ADVENTURE.

It was five minutes past seven, p. m., by the station clock, and consequently, within five minutes of the time at which the Dillmouth train was advertised to start. Most of the passengers had taken their seats, but some two or three were standing on the platform near the carriages, bent on having a last word with those they were about to leave behind them.

It was Wednesday night, and Wednesday was market-day at Middlesham. The train was therefore a heavy one, and nearly every compartment was full of passengers. It was usually five or ten minutes late in starting on the Wednesday night, owing to the extra traffic ; so that I and the other occupants of the compartment in which I had taken my seat were rather astonished when, the pointer having barely marked nine minutes past on the dial, the train without any preparatory whistle, moved off. I was under the impression that we were shunting for another carriage, for such a thing as starting *before* time was never known to have happened at Middlesham ; but when we moved past the long platform, past the entrance-signal, and through the bridge beyond, it became apparent to us all that we were off. There was a simultaneous pulling out of watches, and surprised looks passed from one to the other, and to the still open door of the carriage, as the conviction was gradually forced upon us..... The matter all at once became serious indeed. We were bowling along at a fearful rate, much quicker than any of us had ever experienced on any previous occasion on that line of curves and ugly gradients, and a dreadful fear began to show itself in our faces—a fear which first found expression from the gentleman I have hitherto designated as the second merchant.

“ It is my belief,” he said, “ that we are run away with.”

As he said the words there was a horrible, breath-taking-jumble of lamps and wall, and clocks and handbills, and white faces, as we dashed into and through another station, and then away—away into the black, black night beyond. After that none of us doubted that our train was a runaway, and also that it was running away to the certain destruction of nearly every passenger in it, unless something could be done to arrest its headlong career, and that very speedily.

When the keen edge of the shock had somewhat worn off, we began to think of what chances and means there were of deliverance, and naturally, the first to suggest itself was “ the guard.” Yes, doubtless the guard would see the danger as we had seen it, and would endeavor to avert the awful fate which seemed now hanging over us. There was comfort in the thought : but, alas ! it was very short-lived, for a glance down the train sufficed to show us that the door of the van was one of those which were still standing open. The