

THE OPERATOR'S RIDE.

THE little station was silent, save for the occasional click of an instrument. A long, slow moving freight had passed on its way up the mountain, leaving the operator to resume his chair and his reverie.

"Gib" Adams had charge of the dispatcher's office, called Bell Glen, on the B & V., near the top of the Blue Ridge Mountains. From where he sat on the platform, Adams could see the narrow ribbon of steel rails descend the slope in a big loop and stretch away to the west. He could trace the dusty pike from his feet, down the ridge, and across the valley, till it was lost among the trees and hills in the distance. Below him, just at the foot of the mountain, lay the little town of C—, with the smoke rising from hearth and forge. Through the morning haze it looked like an island of brown in a sea of green. The valley was dotted with white farm buildings, and a little stream added its charm to the picture.

A click — click, click from the instrument interrupted his reverie. He leisurely answered the call and received this message: "Runaway cars coming, throw switch." Hardly had the sounder ceased when the "runaways"—a dozen box cars and a caboose—swept past the door and on down the grade. For an instant he stood bewildered. In fifteen minutes No. 54, the regular passenger, would leave C—, and begin to ascend the mountain, and in fifteen minutes the "runaways" would be nearing the bottom of the slope. He imagined the whole horrible sight when they came together; the crash, the shrieks and moans, the grinding of the heavy trucks, the hiss of escaping steam, then the calls of distracted searchers running around the splintered, smoking wreckage, the bloody hands here and there in the broken windows, and white, still faces peering with closed eyes out from the darkness of death.