

grown quite dark, but the air about him was not so quiet as was natural to an empty field under the starlight. The doctor's senses were alert at once, and he soon heard human voices and saw shadowy forms standing and sitting about. The doctor's prudence restrained him from emerging at once, and he puzzled his brain to know who the men might be. Fire-hunters? That *would* be a shame; besides there were too many of them—two, or three men at most, were as many as ever composed a fire-hunting party. Emigrants? Perhaps; they certainly had horses tied in the edge of the timber, yet emigrants always had waggon, and fastened their horses near them; emigrants made fires, too, but the doctor could neither see a fire, nor the reflection of the light from one, nor smell the burning wood, which latter he could surely have done if any had been burning. Besides, emigrants were not in the habit of standing listlessly about. Drovers? The doctor could neither hear nor see any cattle. Soldiers? The Mexican war had just ended, and small parties of discharged Illinoisians and Indianians had frequently passed through Mount Zion on their way to their homes, but whenever the doctor had observed these brave fellows in bivouac, not a man could he see in a vertical position—they were either stretched upon the ground, or seated in a position which seemed to indicate that the principal duty of a veteran was to embrace and tenderly cherish his own knees. Horse-thieves? The doctor cast an agonized thought toward his own trusty animal, contracted himself into the smallest possible limits, and grasped his rifle. The doctor was not a coward; he had once—not intentionally—had a hand-to-hand difficulty with a panther, just after discharging his rifle at a deer upon which the panther, watching from a tree over his head, had designs, and the panther's skin now ornamented the doctor's office. But between a single panther and a dozen or more horse-thieves the doctor quite sensibly made a distinction, with the odds in favour of the thieves. If he only had one of those pistols—new-fashioned they were then, and Eastern newspapers called them revolvers—if he only had one—or two, or three—of these, what a record he might make for himself—what a splendid practical education in bullet-wounds he might speedily enjoy—what an unparalleled opportunity for dissection! The doctor was religious, but he had a theory that all sins could be traced to physical conditions; the worse the sinner, the more abnormal must be the status of his vital organs—consequently what a contribution to the cause of pathological science he might make, could he only freely ex-

amine the interiors of a dozen or twenty horse-thieves!

The men still stood aimlessly about; the doctor heard their voices, but could not distinguish their words. One of them approached the tree—what if he should attempt to enter it? Why hadn't the doctor thought of this before? He himself had on his oldest clothes; he might have quietly stepped out into the shadow of the tree, strided carelessly toward the wood as if he were one of the party, made a detour to the spot where his own horse was fastened, galloped across the county line, not more than a mile distant, alarmed his brother-Regulators, approached this gang and captured or—yes, killed—killed some of them, and been at once the greatest hero of both counties. Oh! if that approaching man would only be guided away from the hollow of the tree!—the doctor did not hesitate to pray earnestly on the subject.

The man passed the tree, and the doctor prepared to emerge. As it was dark, and the doctor was a bit of a sentimentalist, he was not ashamed to kiss the cold barrel of his darling old rifle—he might never see it again.

The doctor peered cautiously out, and as suddenly withdrew his head, for he heard a shrill double whistle, three times repeated, and apparently from the road. The signal was immediately answered by some one near the tree, who twice uttered a treble whistle. Then the doctor understood that the men about him were "Regulators," assembled for judicial and punitive duty, and that the prisoner was being brought into their presence. Whether to identify himself, which he could do by signal, or to be a secret spectator, the doctor scarcely knew for a moment. He determined upon the latter, but the men massed themselves under a portion of the tree which the hollow could not command, so the doctor was compelled to be satisfied with being a listener.

CHAPTER XI.

"REGULATORS' " COURT.

"Go! him?" asked a man who leaned against the trunk of the tree.

"Sure enough, Major," replied the man addressed, "but he's a queer case."

"How?" asked the Major.

"He acts as if he was looney—if he isn't playin' possum right up to the handle, then he is a fool, as sure as my name is Blizzer," said the man.

"Trot him up," said the Major. "Two heads are better than one, so of course eighteen or twenty heads are better yet. Let's talk it over together."