

With a shout of enthusiasm, several of the younger members of the party sprang forward into the plain at a gallop; but the shout was mingled with one of a different tone from the older men.

"Hist!—hallo!—hold on, ye cat-a-mounts! There's Injuns ahead!"

The whole band came to a sudden halt at this cry, and watched eagerly, and for some time in silence, the motions of a small party of horsemen who were seen in the far distance, like black specks on the golden sky.

"They come this way, I think," said Major Hope, after gazing steadfastly at them for some minutes.

Several of the old hands signified their assent to this suggestion by a grunt, although to unaccustomed eyes the objects in question looked more like crows than horsemen, and their motion was for some time scarcely perceptible.

"I sees pack-horses among them," cried young Marston in an excited tone; "an' there's three riders; but there's som'thin' else, only wot it be I can't tell."

"Ye've sharp eyes, younker," remarked one of the men, "an' I do b'lieve yer right."

Presently the horsemen approached, and soon there was a brisk fire of guessing as to who they could be. It was evident that the strangers observed the cavalcade of white men, and regarded them as friends, for they did not check the headlong speed at which they