

the shoulders and propelled him violently forward; a particularly merry horse snatched and proceeded to masticate the Squire's straw hat, another horse gave him an admonitory lift with his foot, the Squire fell; there was for a moment a confused mass of horse's feet, Squires and dust clouds, and as the venerable exhorter regained his feet and hurried into the store, he heard the populace respond heartily to the proposition, "Three cheers for Lem!"

"Not a word about Lem's only friend, of course," said the Squire spitefully, as he reached for a clothes-brush. "That's all the thanks a man gets in this world for doin' good. But say, Marg'ret, there ain't no danger of his dyin' on our hands now, is there?"

And Mrs. Barkum responded, "No, indeed—pears like a reel Providential interposition, this hoss-tradin' trip of Sam Reeves's."

CHAPTER X.

DR. BEERS GOES HUNTING, WITH UNEXPECTED RESULTS.

For a few days after the departure of the horse-party, some of the Mount Zion gossips tried hard to maintain the old interest in the subject of the Squire's treatment of Lem Pankett. They were unsuccessful, however; the cause having departed, every one's conscience felt easier. Lem was now beyond their reach, for either good or bad, so practical folks declared it was of no use to talk about him, while religious people, mentally confiding Lem to the care of the Father of all, felt that they had done their full duty, and rested peacefully under the influence of a conscience void of offence.

Perhaps the decline of interest in the case of Pankett *vs.* Barkum was partially due to a new cause of excitement which had been growing with a rapidity quite alarming to owners of a certain sort of property. Railroads and telegraph lines being unknown in the neighbourhood of Mount Zion, that virtuous town and its suburbs became a very Paradise for horse-thieves. This, in a country whose inhabitants were almost entirely dependent upon horses for the service done elsewhere by general machinery, was a state of affairs not to be regarded with equanimity. The thieves were numerous, active, quick in their live-stock transactions, and quicker with their pistols; they frequently intimidated or bought up sheriffs, and they were occasionally suspected of having justices in league with them, so some of the most determined horse-owners in each

county formed secret societies, every member of which was sworn to chase, at a moment's notice, any horse-thief of whom information could be obtained, and to act as judge, jury, and executioner in case he found the suspected person with the animal in his possession. Who the members of these societies were was seldom known except to the members themselves; they sometimes went in masks, to hide themselves even from their own neighbours, and the same masks were never used twice in succession. Between the societies of neighbouring counties there often existed signal-codes, and unwritten extradition and reciprocity treaties; suspected characters were passed at night, under guard, to the headquarters of whatever county they were supposed to have come from, for all these "Regulators" professed to be and generally were law-respecting citizens, and conceded to every suspected person the legal right to be tried in the locality in which the offence was committed.

Dr. Beers himself was a member of the band which looked after the interests of horse-owners in the vicinity of Mount Zion, but it was not upon judicial deeds intent that the doctor rode out of town one afternoon, with his rifle resting on the pommel of his saddle. The doctor was an original thinker, with a greater fondness for demonstration than is noticeable in all thinkers; he was also an enthusiastic sportsman, and on this particular occasion he was going to test a new theory. In an adjoining county he had shot deer in a piece of woods not far from a spring, shaded by a large oak; he had done "fire-shooting" near springs elsewhere; if he rightly remembered the configuration of the ground, it was likely that what was called "Big Oak Spring" was the only place near by where deer would be likely to find water. They would not be likely to visit it by daylight, for the spring was in open ground, at least two hundred yards from the edge of the forest; therefore, they *must* come at night—at any rate, the doctor was going to test the matter to his own satisfaction. He even disclaimed the use of the "light" or "fire" which was generally used to decoy the animals; the big oak was hollow, the opening being toward the spring; he could therefore remain entirely hidden and pick off his game at leisure. So great was the doctor's anxiety, that he started two or three hours earlier than was necessary; he therefore tied his horse in the woods at a safe distance, crept into the tree, drew his hat over his eyes, and soon was enjoying that repose which physicians of large practice know how to obtain whenever they have an hour or two at their disposal.

When the doctor awoke he found it had