

Mrs. Pruett, "but I hardly reckon he does, bekaze I 'd mos' likely 'a' hyearn on it."

"Where is he?" insisted the young man.

"Who? my ole man? Oh, him an' a whole passel of the boys took their guns an' went off to'ards Hillman's spur bright an' early this mornin'. They said signs of a b'ar had been seed thar, but I allowed to myse'f that they was thess a-gwine on a frolic."

Mrs. Pruett took off her spectacles, wiped them on her apron, and readjusted them to her head, smiling serenely all the while.

"We may as well go to the Millirons'," remarked Hildreth of Hall.

"I don't care where you go, so you don't lead us into a trap," remarked one of the men.

They turned away from Mrs. Pruett's and rode farther into the settlement. But they soon discovered that Tray Mountain had practically closed its gates against them. The women they saw were as grim and as silent as the mountain. Hildreth of Hall had been telling his companions what a lively place (considering all the circumstances) Hatch's Clearing was, and this added to his embarrassment and increased his irritation. So