

VIGILANTE TIMES IN WALLA WALLA.

THE great rush to the Idaho mines during the few years immediately following their discovery, in 1860, carried with it some of the most lawless and desperate characters which the peculiar conditions of the Pacific coast had drawn hither. There were murderers and desperadoes who had fled from justice in the Eastern states, outlawed "Greasers," from Mexico, and "Sidney Ducks," from the penal colonies of Australia, and, in fact, outcasts from nearly every land beneath the sun. Their naturally vicious characters had been developed almost abnormally by the disordered condition of society in the California mines, and emboldened by numbers and exemption from punishment, they carried things with a high hand wherever they went. Generally denominated "Sports," they were of all grades of humanity, from the well educated to the ignorant, from the most gentlemanly and honorable gambler, so far as honor can be said to appertain to so degrading a business, to the most depraved and vicious of the human species.

Walla Walla was on the route of travel to and from the mines, the last great supply point before reaching them, and was a favorable and favorite place for hundreds of them to spend the winter season, whose rigors in the mines they were anxious to escape. With such an element among its population, the repression of crime and enforcement of law were always difficult, and often impossible. Lawlessness was rampant, and the officers struggled against it in vain. Thousands of men roamed round the country embraced in Idaho and Eastern Oregon and Washington Ter., having no permanent abiding place. Every town and mining camp was overrun with a transient element, of whom it was impossible for the officers to keep track. Miles of unsettled and unclaimed land stretched out in all directions, offering secure range upon which stolen cattle could be grazed; and strangers with bands of horses and cattle were constantly coming in, whose title to the property had to be assumed as good. Camped along the routes of travel and in the shanty hotels of towns and mining camps, were hundreds of men whose sole visible property was a roll of blankets. In such a condition of society there was little chance for the detection of criminals, and but little hope for their punishment when caught; for the migratory habits of the people generally carried the witnesses beyond the jurisdiction of the court long before the case came up for trial. Only when men were caught in the act of robbery, or when shooting occurred as the result of a sudden quarrel, and in the few cases where it was easily ascertained who were the guilty parties, was there any hope of inflicting punishment, and then it was but slight.

The plea of self defense was a very flexible one in those days, when men went armed and looked to themselves alone for protection. Disputes were settled with the revolver and knife, a custom not wholly dispensed with at the present day, and in the many quarrels that arose it was not difficult for the survivor to prove that he was defending his life. Sometimes there was no sur-