



"IN THE GLOW OF EXERCISE AND SPARKLE OF ANGER SHE WAS BEWILDERING."

(See page 610.)

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A Buckeye Hollow Inheritance.

BY BRET HARTE.



HE four men on the "Zip Coon" Ledge had not got fairly settled to their morning's work. There was the usual lingering hesitation which is apt to attend the taking-up of any regular or monotonous performance, shown in this instance in the prolonged scrutiny of a pick's point, the solemn selection of a shovel, or the "hefting," or weighing, of a tapping iron or drill. One member becoming interested in a funny paragraph he found in the scrap of newspaper wrapped around his noonday cheese, shamelessly sat down to finish it, regardless of the prospecting-pan thrown at him by another. They had taken up their daily routine of mining life like schoolboys at their tasks.

"Halloa!" said Ned Wyngate, joyously recognising a possible further interruption. "Blamed if the Express rider ain't comin' here!"

He was shading his eyes with his hand as he gazed over the broad, sun-baked expanse of broken "flat" between them and the high road. They all looked up, and saw the figure of a mounted man with a courier's bag thrown over his shoulder galloping towards them. It was really an event, as their letters were usually left at the grocery at the cross-roads.

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"I knew something was goin' to happen," said Wyngate. "I didn't feel a bit like work this morning."

Here one of their number ran off to meet the advancing horseman. They watched him until they saw the latter rein up and hand a brown envelope to their messenger, who ran breathlessly back with it to the Ledge as the horseman galloped away again.

"A telegraph for Jackson Wells," he said, handing it to the young man who had been reading the scrap of paper.

There was a dead silence. Telegrams were expensive rarities in those days, especially with the youthful Bohemian miners of the Zip Coon Ledge. They were burning with curiosity, yet a singular thing happened.



"ONE OF THEIR NUMBER RAN OFF TO MEET THE ADVANCING HORSEMAN."

Accustomed as they had been to a life of brotherly familiarity and unceremoniousness, this portentous message from the outside world of civilization recalled their old formal politeness. They looked steadily away from the receiver of the telegram, and he on his part stammered an apologetic "Excuse me, boys," as he broke the envelope.

There was another pause, which seemed to be interminable to the waiting partners. Then the voice of Wells in quite natural tones said, "By gum, that's funny! Read that, Dexter; read it out loud."

Dexter Rice, the foreman, took the proffered telegram from Wells's hand, and read as follows: "Your uncle, Quincy Wells, died yesterday, leaving you sole heir. Will attend you to-morrow for instructions—Baker and Twiggs, attorneys, Sacramento."

The three miners' faces lightened and turned joyously to Wells. But *his* face looked puzzled.

"May we congratulate you, Mr. Wells?" said Wyngate, with affected politeness; "or possibly your uncle may have been English, and a title goes with the 'prop,' and you may be Lord Wells or Very Wells—at least."

But here Jackson Wells's youthful face lost its perplexity, and he began to laugh long and silently to himself. This was protracted to such an extent that Dexter asserted himself, as foreman and senior partner.

"Look here, Jack! don't sit there cackling like a chuckleheaded magpie—if you *are* the heir."

"I—can't—help it," gasped Jackson. "I am the heir, but you see, boys, there *ain't* any *property*!"

"What do you mean? Is all that a sell?" demanded Rice.

"Not much!—telegraph's too expensive for that sort o' foolin'. You see, boys, I've got an Uncle Quincy—though I don't know him much—and he *may* be dead. But his whole fixin's consisted of a claim the size of ours, and played out long ago; a ramshackled lot o' sheds called a cottage, and a kind of market garden of about three acres, where he reared and sold vegetables. He was always poor, and as for calling it 'property,' and *me* the 'heir!'—Good Lord!"

"A miser as sure as you're born!" said Wyngate, with optimistic decision. "That's always the way. You'll find every crack of that blessed old shed stuck full of greenbacks and certificates of deposit, and lots of gold dust and coin buried all over that cow patch! And of course no one suspected it! And of course he lived all alone, and

never let anyone get into his house, and nearly starved himself! Lord love you! there's hundreds of such cases. The world is full of 'em!"

"That's so!" chimed in Pulaski Briggs, the fourth partner, "and I tell you what! Jacksey, we'll come over with you the day you take possession and just 'prospect' the whole blamed shanty, pig-sties and potato patch, for fun, and won't charge you anything."

For a moment Jackson's face had really brightened under the infection of enthusiasm, but it presently settled into perplexity again.

"No! You bet the boys around Buckeye Hollow would have spotted anything like that long ago."

"Buckeye Hollow!" repeated Rice and his partners.

"Yes! Buckeye Hollow—that's the place; not twenty miles from here—and a God-forsaken hole—as you know."

A cloud had settled on Zip Coon Ledge. They knew of Buckeye Hollow, and it was evident that no good had ever yet come out of that Nazareth.

"There's no use of talking now," said Rice, conclusively. "You'll draw it all from the lawyer shark who's coming here to-morrow, and you can bet your life he wouldn't have taken this trouble if there wasn't suthin' in it. Anyhow, we'll knock off work now and call it half a day—in honour of our distinguished young friend's accession to his baronial estates of Buckeye Hollow. We'll just toddle down to Tomlinson's at the cross-roads and have a nip and a quiet game of old sledge at Jacksey's expense. I reckon the estate's good for *that*," he added, with severe gravity. "And, speaking as a far-minded man, and the president of this yer company, if Jackson would occasionally take out and air that telegraphic despatch of his while we're at Tomlinson's, it might do something for that company's credit with Tomlinson! We're wantin' some new blastin' plant bad!"

Oddly enough the telegram, accidentally shown at Tomlinson's, produced a gratifying effect, and the Zip Coon Ledge materially advanced in public estimation. With this possible infusion of new capital into its resources the company was beset by offers of machinery and goods, and it was deemed expedient by the sapient Rice that, to prevent the dissemination of any more accurate information regarding Jackson's property, the next day the lawyer should be met at the stage office by one of the members, and con-

veyed secretly past Tomlinson's to the Ledge.

"I'd let you go," he said to Jackson, "only it won't do for that skunk of a lawyer to think you're too anxious—*sabe*? We want to rub into him that we are in the habit out yer of havin' things left to us—and a fortin' more or less, falling into us now and then, ain't nothin' alongside of the Zip Coon claim. It won't hurt ye to keep up a big bluff on that hand of yours. Nobody would dare to 'call' you."

Indeed this idea was carried out with such elaboration the next day that Mr. Twiggs, the attorney, was considerably impressed both by the conduct of his guide, who (although burning with curiosity) expressed absolute indifference regarding Jackson Wells's inheritance, and the calmness of Jackson himself, who had to be ostentatiously called from his work on the Ledge to meet him and who even gave him an audience in the hearing of his partners. Forced into an apologetic attitude, he expressed his regret at being obliged to bother Mr. Wells with an

To the impecunious owners of Zip Coon Ledge it seemed a large sum, but they did not show it. "You see," continued Mr. Twiggs, "it's really a case of 'willing away' property from its obvious or direct inheritors—instead of a beneficial grant. I take it that you and your uncle were not particularly intimate, at least so I gathered when I made the will, and his simple object was to disinherit his only daughter, with whom he had some quarrel, and who had left him to live with his late wife's brother, Mr. Morley Brown, who is quite wealthy and residing in the same township. Perhaps you remember the young lady?"

Jackson Wells had a dim recollection of this cousin—a hateful, red-haired schoolgirl—and an equally unpleasant memory of this other uncle, who was purse-proud and had never taken any notice of him. He answered affirmatively.

"There may be some attempt to contest the will," continued Mr. Twiggs, "as the disinheriting of an only child and a daughter offends the sentiment of the people and of



"HE TOOK THE WILL FROM HIS POCKET."

affair of such secondary importance, but he was obliged to carry out the formalities of the law.

"What do you suppose the estate is worth?" asked Wells, carelessly.

"I should not think that the house, the claim, and the land would bring more than 1,500dols.," replied Twiggs, submissively.

judges and jury, and the law makes such a will invalid, unless a reason is given. Fortunately your uncle has placed his reasons on record. I have a copy of the will here and can show you the clause." He took it from his pocket and read as follows: "I exclude my daughter Jocelinda Wells from any

benefit or provision of this my will and testament for the reason that she has voluntarily abandoned her father's roof for the house of her mother's brother, Morley Brown; has preferred the fleshpots of Egypt to the virtuous frugalities of her own home, and has discarded the humble friends of her youth and the associates of her father for the meretricious and slavish sympathy of wealth and position. In lieu thereof, and as compensation therefor, I do hereby give and bequeath to her my full and free permission to gratify her frequently-expressed wish for another guardian in place of myself, and to become the adopted daughter of the said Morley Brown, with the privilege of assuming the name of Brown as aforesaid."

"You see," he continued, "as the young lady's present position is a better one than it would be if she were in her father's house, and was evidently a compromise—the sentimental consideration of her being left homeless and penniless falls to the ground. However, as the inheritance is small, and might be of little account to you, if you choose to waive it, I daresay we may make some arrangement."

This was an utterly unexpected idea to the Zip Coon Company, and Jackson Wells was, for a moment, silent. But Dexter Rice was equal to the emergency, and turned to the astonished lawyer with severe dignity. "You'll excuse me for interferin', but, as the senior partner of this yer Ledge, and Jackson Wells yer—bein' a most important member—what affects his usefulness on this claim affects us. And we propose to carry out this yer will, with all its dips and spurs and angles!"

As the surprised Twiggs turned from one to the other Rice continued: "Ez far as we kin understand this little game, it's the just punishment of a high-flying girl as breaks her pore father's heart—and the re-ward of a young feller ez has bin to our knowledge ez devoted a nephew as they make 'em. Time and time again, sittin' around our camp fire at night, we've heard Jacksey say, kinder to himself and kinder to us, 'Now, I wonder what's gone o' old Uncle Quincy?' and he never sat down to a square meal or ever rose from a square game but what he allus said, 'If old Uncle Quincy was only here now, boys, I'd die happy.' I leave it to you, gentlemen, if that wasn't Jackson Wells's gait all the time?"

There was a prolonged murmur of assent and an affecting corroboration from Ned Wyngate of "That was him—that was Jacksey all the time!"

"Indeed, indeed," said the lawyer, nervously. "I had quite the idea that there was very little fondness——"

"Not on your side—not on your side," said Rice, quickly. "Uncle Quincy may not have ante'd up in this matter o' feelin' nor seen his nephew's rise. You know how it is yourself in these things, being a lawyer and a far-minded man—it's all on one side, generally! There's always one who loves and sacrifices, and all that, and there's always one who rakes in the pot! That's the way o' the world, and that's why," continued Rice, abandoning his slightly philosophical attitude and laying his hand tenderly and yet with a singularly significant grip on Wells's arm, "we say to him, 'Hang on to that will and Uncle Quincy's memory.' And we hev to say it. For he's that tender-hearted and keardless of money—having his own share in this Ledge—that ef that girl came whimperin' to him he'd let her take the 'prop,' and let the hull thing slide! And then he'd remember that he had rewarded that gal that broke the old man's heart, and that would upset him again in his work. And there, you see, is just where *we* come in! And we say, 'Hang on to that will like grim death!'"

The lawyer looked curiously at Rice and his companions and then turned to Wells. "Nevertheless I must look to you for instructions," he said, drily.

But by this time Jackson Wells—although really dubious about supplanting the orphan—had gathered the sense of his partners and said, with a frank show of decision: "I think I must stand by the will."

"Then I'll have it proved," said Twiggs, rising. "In the meantime, if there is any talk of contesting——"

"If there is, you might say," suggested Wyngate, who felt he had not had a fair show in the little comedy, "ye might say to that old skeesicks of a wife's brother, if he wants to nipple in, that there are four men on the Ledge—and four revolvers! We are gin'rally far-minded, peaceful men; but when an old man's heart is broken, and his grey hairs brought down in sorrow to the grave, so to speak, we're bound to attend the funeral. *Sabe?*"

When Mr. Twiggs had departed again, accompanied by a partner to guide him past the dangerous shoals of Tomlinson's grocery, Rice clapped his hand on Wells's shoulder. "If it hadn't been for me, sonny, that shark would have landed you into some compromise with that red-haired gal! I saw you weakenin', and then I chipped in. I may

have piled up the agony a little on your love for old Quincy, but if you aren't an ungrateful cub that's how you ought to hev been feelin' anyhow!" Nevertheless the youthful Wells, although touched by his elder partner's loyalty and convinced of his own disinterestedness, felt a painful sense of lost chivalrous opportunity.

On mature consideration it was finally settled that Jackson Wells should make his preliminary examination of his inheritance alone, as it might seem inconsistent with the previous indifferent attitude of his partners if they accompanied him. But he was implored to yield to no blandishments of the enemy, and to even make his visit a secret.

He went. The familiar flower-spiked tree which had given its name to Buckeye Hollow had never yielded entirely to improvements and the incursions of mining enterprise, and many of them had even survived the disused ditches, the scarred flats, the discarded levels, ruined flumes, and roofless cabins of the earlier occupation, so that when Jackson Wells entered the wide, straggling street of "Buckeye," that summer morning was filled with the radiance of its blossoms and fragrant with their incense. His first visit there ten years ago had been a purely perfunctory and hasty one, yet he remembered the ostentatious hotel, built in the "flush time" of its prosperity, and already in a green premature decay; he recalled the Express office and Town Hall, also passing away in a kind of similar green deliquescence; the little zinc church now overgrown with fern and brambles, and the two or three fine substantial houses in the outskirts, which seemed to have sucked the vitality of the little settlement. One of these he had been told was the property of his rich and wicked maternal uncle—the hated appropriator of his red-headed cousin's affections. He recalled his brief visit to the departed testator's claim and market garden, and his by no means favourable impression of the lonely, crabbed old man, as well as his relief that his objectionable cousin, whom he had not seen since he was a boy, was then absent at the rival uncle's.

He made his way across the road to a sunny slope where the market garden of three acres

seemed to roll like a river of green rapids to a little "run" or brook, which, even in the dry season, showed a trickling rill. But here he was struck by a singular circumstance. The garden rested in a rich alluvial soil, and under the quickening Californian sky had developed far beyond the ability of its late cultivator to restrain or keep it in order. Everything had grown luxuriously and in monstrous size and profusion. The garden had even trespassed its bounds and impinged upon the open road, the deserted claim, and the ruins of the Past. Stimulated by the little cultivation Quincy Wells had found time to give it, it had leaped its three acres and rioted through the Hollow. There were scarlet-runners crossing the abandoned sluices, peas climbing the Court House wall, strawberries matting the trail, while the seeds and pollen of its few homely Eastern flowers had been blown far and wide through the woods. By a grim satire, Nature seemed to have been the only thing that still prospered in that settlement of Man.

The cabin itself, built of unpainted boards, consisted of a sitting-room, dining-room, kitchen, and two bedrooms, all plainly furnished, although one of the bedrooms was better ordered, and displayed certain signs of feminine decoration which made Jackson believe it had been his cousin's room. Luckily, the slight temporary struc-



"SOMETHING STUCK UP ON THE GATE-POST ATTRACTED HIS ATTENTION."

ture bore no deep traces of its previous occupancy to disturb him with its memories, and for the same reason it gained in cleanliness and freshness; the dry desiccating summer wind that blew through it had carried away both the odours and the sense of domesticity; even the *adobe* hearth had no fireside tales to tell; its very ashes had been scattered by the winds; and the gravestone of its dead owner on the hill was no more flavourless of his personality than was this plain house in which he had lived and died. The excessive vegetation produced by the stirred-up soil had covered and hidden the empty tin cans, broken boxes, and fragments of clothing which usually heaped and littered the tent-pegs of the pioneer. Nature's own profusion had thrust them into obscurity.

Jackson Wells smiled as he recalled his sanguine partner's idea of a treasure-trove concealed and stuffed in the crevices of this tenement—already so palpably picked clean by those wholesome scavengers of California—the dry air and burning sun. Yet he was not displeased at this obliteration of a previous tenancy; there was the better chance for him to originate something. He whistled hopefully as he lounged with his hands in his pockets towards the only fence and gate that gave upon the road. Something stuck up on the gate-post attracted his attention. It was a sheet of paper bearing the inscription in a large hand: "Notice to trespassers. Look out for the Orphan Robber!" A plain sign-board in faded black letters on the gate, which had borne the legend, "Quincy Wells, Dealer in Fruit and Vegetables," had been rudely altered in chalk to read: "Jackson Wells, Double Dealer in Wills and Codicils," and the intimation "Bouquets sold here" had been changed—"Bequests stole here."

For an instant the simple-minded Jackson failed to discover any significance of this outrage, which seemed to him to be merely the wanton mischief of a schoolboy. But a sudden recollection of the lawyer's caution sent the blood to his cheeks and kindled his indignation. He tore down the paper and rubbed out the chalk interpolation, and then laughed at his own anger. Nevertheless, he would not have liked his belligerent partners to see it.

A little curious to know the extent of this feeling, he entered one of the shops, and by one or two questions which judiciously betrayed his ownership of the property he elicited only a tradesman's interest in a possible future customer and the ordinary

curiosity in a stranger. The bar-keeper of the hotel was civil, but brief and gloomy. He had heard the property was "willed away" on account of some family quarrel which "warn't none of his." Mr. Wells would find Buckeye Hollow a mighty dull place after the mines. It was played out—sucked dry by two or three big mine-owners who were trying to "freeze out" the other settlers, so as they might get the place to themselves and "boom it." Brown, who had the big house over the hill, was the head demon of the gang! Wells felt his indignation kindle anew. And this girl that he had ousted was Brown's friend. Was it possible that she was a party to Brown's designs to get this three acres with the other lands? If so, his long-suffering uncle was only just in his revenge.

He put all this diffidently before his partners on his return, and was a little startled at their adopting it with sanguine ferocity. They hoped that he would put an end to his thoughts of backing out of it. Such a course now would be dishonourable to his uncle's memory. It was clearly his duty to resist these beastly satraps of capitalists; he was providentially selected for the purpose—a village Hampden to withstand the tyrant. "And I reckon that shark of a lawyer knew all about it when he was gettin' off that 'purp stuff' about people's sympathies with the girl," said Rice, belligerently. "Contest the will, would he? Why, if we caught that Brown with a finger in the pie we'd just whip up the boys on this Ledge and lynch him. You hang on to that three acres and the garden patch of your forefathers, sonny, and we'll see you through!"

Nevertheless it was with some misgivings that Wells consented that his three partners should actually accompany him and see him put in peaceable possession of his inheritance. His instinct told him that there would be no contest of the will, and still less any opposition on the part of the objectionable relative, Brown. When the waggon which contained his personal effects and the few articles of furniture necessary for his occupancy of the cabin arrived, the exaggerated swagger which his companions had put on in their passage through the settlement gave way to a pastoral indolence equally half-real, half-affected. Lying on their backs under a buckeye, they permitted Rice to voice the general sentiment.

"There's a suthin' soothin' and dreamy in this kind o' life, Jacksey, and we'll make a

point of comin' here for a couple of days every two weeks to lend you a hand ; it will be a mighty good change from our nigger work on the claim."

In spite of this assurance and the fact that they had voluntarily come to help him put the place in order, they did very little beyond lending a cheering expression of unqualified praise and unstinted advice. At the end of four hours' weeding and trimming the boundaries of the garden they unanimously gave their opinion that it would be more systematic for him to employ Chinese labour at once.

"You see," said Ned Wyngate, "the Chinese naturally take to this kind o' business. Why, you can't take up a china plate or saucer but you see 'em pictured there working at jobs like this, and then they kin live on green things and rice that cost nothin', and chickens ; you'll keep chickens, of course ?"

Jackson thought that his hands would be full enough with the garden, but he meekly assented. "I'll get a pair—you only want two to begin with," continued Wyngate,

hen from another. Then you set 'em, and when the chickens are hatched out you just return the hen to the second man, and the eggs, when your chickens begin to lay, to the first man, and you've got your chickens for nothing—and there you are."

The ingenious proposition which was delivered on the last slope of the domain, where the partners were lying exhausted from their work, was broken in upon by the appearance of a small boy barefooted, sunburnt, and tow-headed, who, after a moment's hurried scrutiny of the group, threw a letter with unerring precision into the lap of Jackson Wells and then fled precipitately. Jackson instinctively suspected he was connected with the outrage on his fence and gate-post, but as he had avoided telling his partners of the incident, fearing to increase their belligerent attitude, he felt now an awkward consciousness mingled with his indignation, as he broke the seal and read as follows :—

"SIR,—This is to inform you that although you have got hold of the property by underhanded and sneaking ways, you ain't no



"SHE WAS BEWILDERING."

cheerfully, "and in a month or two you've got all you want and eggs enough for market. On second thoughts I don't know whether you hadn't better begin with eggs first. That is, you borry some eggs from one man and a

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right to touch or lay your vile hands on the Cherokee Rose alongside the house, nor on the Giant of Battles, nor on the Maiden's Pride by the gate—the same being the property of Miss Jocelinda Wells and planted by her under the penalty of the Law. And if you, or any of your gang of ruffians, touches it or them, or any thereof, or don't deliver it up when called for in good

order, you will be persecuted by them.—
AVENGER.”

It is to be feared that Jackson would have suppressed this also, but the keen eyes of his partners, excited by the abruptness of the messenger, were upon him. He smiled feebly, and laid the letter before them. But he was unprepared for their exaggerated indignation, and with difficulty restrained them from dashing off in the direction of the vanished herald. “And what could you do?” he said; “the boy’s only a messenger.”

“I’ll get at that dirty skunk Brown, who’s back of him,” said Dexter Rice.

“And what then?” persisted Jackson, with a certain show of independence. “If this stuff belongs to the girl, I’m not certain I sha’n’t give them up without any fuss. Lord! I want nothing but what the old man left me—and certainly nothing of hers.”

Here Ned Wyngate was heard to murmur that Jackson was one of those men who would lie down and let coyotes crawl over him if they first presented a girl’s visiting-card, but he was stopped by Rice demanding paper and pencil. The former being torn from a memorandum-book, and a stub of the latter produced from another pocket, he wrote as follows:—

“SIR,—In reply to the hogwash you have kindly exuded in your letter of to-day, I have to inform you that you can have what you ask for Miss Wells, and perhaps a trifle on your own account, by calling this afternoon on, yours truly,”—“Now sign it,” continued Rice, handing him the pencil.

“But this will look as if we were angry and wanted to keep the plants,” protested Wells.

“Never you mind, sonny, but sign! Leave the rest to your partners, and when you lay your head on your pillow to-night return thanks to an over-ruling Providence for providing you with the right gang of ruffians to look after you!”

Wells signed reluctantly, and Wyngate offered to find a Chinaman in the gulch who would take the missive. “And being a Chinaman, Brown can do any cussin’ or buck talk *through* him!” he added.

The afternoon wore on; the tall Douglas pines near the water-pools wheeled their long shadows round and half-way up the slope, and the sun began to peer into the faces of the reclining men. Subtle odours of mint and southernwood, stragglers from the garden, bruised by their limbs, replaced the fumes of their smoked-out pipes, and the hammers of the woodpeckers were busy in the grove as

they lay lazily nibbling the fragrant leaves like peaceful ruminants. Then came the sound of approaching wheels along the invisible highway beyond the buckeyes, and then a halt and silence. Rice rose slowly; bright pin-points in the pupils of his grey eyes.

“Bringin’ a waggon with him to tote the hull shanty away,” suggested Wyngate.

“Or fetched his own ambulance,” said Briggs. Nevertheless, after a pause, the wheels presently rolled away again.

“We’d better go and meet him at the gate,” said Rice, hitching his revolver-holster nearer his hip. “That waggon stopped long enough to put down three or four men.”

They walked leisurely but silently to the gate. It is probable that none of them believed in a serious collision, but now the prospect had enough possibility in it to quicken their pulses. They reached the gate. But it was still closed; the road beyond it empty.

“Mebbee they’ve sneaked round to the cabin,” said Briggs, “and are holdin’ it inside.” They were turning quickly in that direction when Wyngate said, “Hush! someone’s there in the brush under the buckeyes.” They listened—there was a faint rustling in the shadows.

“Come out o’ that, Brown—into the open. Don’t be shy,” called out Rice, in cheerful irony. “We’re waitin’ for ye.”

But Briggs, who was nearest the wood, here suddenly uttered an exclamation, “B’gosh!” and fell back, open-mouthed, upon his companions. They, too, in another moment, broke into a feeble laugh and lapsed against each other in sheepish silence. For a very pretty girl, handsomely dressed, swept out of the wood and advanced towards them.

Even at any time she would have been an enchanting vision to these men, but in the glow of exercise and sparkle of anger she was bewildering. Her wonderful hair, the colour of freshly hewn redwood, had escaped from her hat in her passage through the underbrush, and even as she swept down upon them in her majesty she was jabbing a hairpin into it with a dexterous feminine hand.

The three partners turned quite the colour of her hair—Jackson Wells alone remained white and rigid. She came on, her very short upper lip showing her white teeth with her panting breath.

Rice was first to speak. “I beg—your pardon, miss—I thought it was Brown—you know,” he stammered.

But she only turned a blighting brown eye on the culprit, curled her short lip till it almost vanished in her scornful nostrils, drew her skirt aside with a jerk, and continued her way straight to Jackson Wells, where she halted.

"We did not know you were here alone," he said, apologetically.

"Thought I was afraid to come alone, didn't you? Well, you see, I'm not. There!" She made another dive at her hat and hair, and brought the hat down wickedly over her straight eyebrows. "Gimme my plants."

Jackson had been astonished. He would have scarcely recognised in this wilful beauty the red-haired girl whom he had boyishly hated and with whom he had often quarrelled. But there was a recollection—and with that recollection came an instinct of habit. He looked her squarely in the face, and, to the horror of his partners, said: "Say please!"

They had expected to see him fall, smitten with the hairpin! But she only stopped, and then in bitter irony said: "Please, Mr. Jackson Wells."

"I haven't dug them up yet, and it would serve you just right if I made you get them for yourself. But perhaps my friends here might help you—if you were civil." The three partners rushed forward eagerly. "Only show us what you want," they said, in one voice. The young girl stared at them, and at Jackson. Then with swift determination she turned her back scornfully upon him, and with a dazzling smile, which reduced the three men to absolute idiocy, said to the others: "I'll show you," and marched away to the cabin.

"Ye mustn't mind Jacksey," said Rice, sycophantically, edging to her side; "he's so cut up with losin' your father that he loved like a son he isn't himself, and don't seem to know whether to ante up or pass out. And as for yourself, miss, why—what was it he was sayin' only just as the young lady came?" he added, turning abruptly to Wyngate.

"Everything that Cousin Josey planted

with her own hands must be took up carefully and sent back, even though it's killin' me to part with it," quoted Wyngate, unblushingly, as he slouched along on the other side.

Miss Wells's eyes glared at them, though her mouth still smiled, ravishingly. "I'm sure I'm troubling you."

In a few moments the plants were dug up and carefully laid together; indeed, the servile Briggs had added a few that she had not indicated.



"MAKE-BELIEVE AND HYPOCRITE!"

"Would you mind bringing them as far as the buggy that's coming down the hill?" she said, pointing to a buggy driven by a small boy, which was slowly approaching the gate. The men tenderly lifted the uprooted plants, each carrying one, and proceeded solemnly, Miss Wells bringing up the rear, towards the gate where Jackson Wells was still surlily lounging.

They passed out first. Miss Wells lingered for an instant, and then, advancing her beautiful but audacious face within an inch of Jackson's, hissed out, "Make-believe and hypocrite!"

"Cross-patch and Sauce-box!" returned Jackson, readily, still under the malign influence of his boyish past, as she flounced away. Presently he heard the buggy rattle away with his persecutor. But his partners still lingered on the road in earnest conver-

sation, and when they did return it was with a singular awkwardness and embarrassment which he naturally put down to a guilty consciousness of their foolish weakness in succumbing to the girl's demands. But he was a little surprised when Dexter Rice approached him gloomily.

"Of course," he began, "it ain't no call of ours to interfere in family affairs, and you've a right to keep 'em to yourself, but if you'd been fair and square and aboveboard in what you got off on us about this per——"

"What do you mean?" demanded the astonished Wells.

"Well—callin' her a 'red-haired gal.'"

"Well—she is a red-haired girl!" said Wells, impatiently.

"A man," continued Rice, pityingly, "that is so prejudiced as to apply such language to a beautiful orphan—torn with grief at the loss of a beloved but d——d misconstruing parent, merely because she begs a few vegetables out of his potato-patch—ain't to be reasoned with. But when you come to look at this thing by and large, and as a far-minded man, sonny, you'll agree with us that the sooner you make terms with her the better. Considerin' your interest, Jacksey—let alone the claims of humanity—we've concluded to withdraw from here until this thing is settled. She's sort o' mixed us up with your feelings agin her, and naturally supposed we object to the colour of her hair! and bein' a penniless orphan, rejected by her relations——"

"What stuff are you talking?" burst in Jackson. "Why, *you* saw she treated you better than she did me."

"Steady! There you go with that temper of yours that frightened the girl! Of course, she could see that *we* were far-minded men, accustomed to the ways of society, and not upset by the visits of a lady or the givin' up of a few green sticks! But let that slide! We're goin' back home to-night, sonny, and when you've thought this thing over and are straightened up and get your right bearin's, we'll stand by you as before. We'll put a man on to do your work on the Ledge—so ye needn't worry about that."

They were quite firm in this decision—however absurd or obscure their conclusions—and Jackson, after his first flash of indignation, felt a certain relief in their departure. But strangely enough, while he had hesitated about keeping the property when they were violently in favour of it, he now felt he was right in retaining it against their advice to compromise. The sentimental idea had

vanished with his recognition of his hateful cousin in the *role* of the injured orphan. And for the same odd reason her prettiness only increased his resentment. He was not deceived—it was the same capricious, wilful, red-haired girl!

The next day he set himself to work with that dogged steadiness that belonged to his simple nature, and which had endeared him to his partners. He set half-a-dozen Chinamen to work, and followed—although apparently directing their methods. The great difficulty was to restrain and control the excessive vegetation, and he matched the small economies of the Chinese against the opulence of the Californian soil. The "garden patch" prospered; the neighbours spoke well of it and of him. But Jackson knew that this fierce harvest of early spring was to be followed by the sterility of the dry season—and that irrigation could alone make his work profitable in the end. He brought a pump to force the water from the little stream at the foot of the slope to the top—and allowed it to flow back through parallel trenches. Again Buckeye applauded! Only the gloomy bar-keeper shook his head. "The moment you get that thing to pay, Mr. Wells, you'll find the hand of Brown, somewhere, getting ready to squeeze it dry!"

But Jackson Wells did not trouble himself about Brown, whom he scarcely knew. Once, indeed, while trenching the slope he was conscious that he was watched by two men from the opposite bank, but they were apparently satisfied by their scrutiny and turned away. Still less did he concern himself with the movements of his cousin, who once or twice passed him superciliously in her buggy on the road. Again, she met him as one of a cavalcade of riders mounted on a handsome but ill-tempered mustang—which she was managing with an ill-temper and grace equal to the brute's, to the alternate delight and terror of her cavalier. He could see that she had been petted and spoiled by her new guardian and his friends far beyond his conception. But why she should grudge him the little garden and the pastoral life for which she was so unsuited puzzled him greatly.

One afternoon he was working near the road when he was startled by an outcry from his Chinese labourers, their rapid dispersal from the strawberry-beds where they were working, the splintering crash of his fence-rails, and a commotion among the buckeyes. Furious at what seemed to him one of the usual wanton attacks upon coolie



"JACKSON RELEASED THE HORSE."

labour, he seized his pick and ran to their assistance. But he was surprised to find Jocelinda's mustang caught by the saddle and struggling between two trees, and its unfortunate mistress lying upon the strawberry-bed. Shocked but cool-headed, Jackson released the horse first, who was lashing out and destroying everything within his reach, and then turned to his cousin. But she had already lifted herself to her elbow, and with a trickle of blood and mud on one fair cheek was surveying him scornfully under her tumbled hair.

"You don't suppose I was trespassing on your wretched patch again, do you?" she said, in a voice she was trying to keep from breaking. "It was that brute who bolted."

"I don't suppose you were bullying *me* this time," he said; "but you were *your horse*—or it wouldn't have happened. Are you hurt?"

She tried to move; he offered her his hand, but she shied from it and struggled to her

feet. She took a step forward—but limped.

"If you don't want my arm, let me call a Chinaman," he suggested.

She glared at him. "If you do I'll scream!" she said, in a low voice, and he knew she would. But at the same moment her face whitened, at which he slipped his arm under hers in a dexterous, business-like way, so as to support her weight. Then her hat got askew and down came a long braid over his shoulder; he remembered it of old—only it was two or three feet longer and darker than then. "If you could manage to limp as far as the gate and sit down on the bank, I'd get your horse for you," he said. "I hitched it to a sapling."

"I saw you did—before you even offered to help me," she said, scornfully.

"The horse would have got away—you couldn't."

"If you only knew how I hated you," she said, with a white face—but a trembling lip.

"I don't see how that would make things any better," he said. "Better wipe your face; it's scratched and muddy, and you've been rubbing your nose in my strawberry-bed."

She snatched his proffered handkerchief suddenly, applied it to her face, and said: "I suppose it looks dreadful?"

"Like a pig's," he returned, cheerfully.

She walked a little more firmly, after this, until they reached the gate. He seated her on the bank and went back for the mustang. That beautiful brute, astounded and sore from its contact with the top rail and brambles, was cowed and subdued as he led it back.

She had finished wiping her face and was hurriedly disentangling two stinging tears from her long lashes, before she threw back his handkerchief. Her sprained ankle obliged him to lift her into the saddle and adjust her

little shoe in the stirrup. He remembered when it was still smaller. "You used to ride astride," he said—a flood of recollection coming over him; "and it's much safer with your temper and that brute."

"And you," she said, in a lower voice, "used to be——" But the rest of her sentence was lost in the switch of the whip and the jump of her horse, but he thought the word was "kinder."

Perhaps this was why, after he watched her canter away, he went back to the garden, and, from the bruised and trampled strawberry-bed, gathered a small basket of the finest fruit, covered them with leaves, added a paper with the highly-ingenious witticism, "Picked up with you," and sent them to her by one of the Chinamen. Her forcible entry moved Li Sing, his foreman, also chief laundryman to the settlement, to reminiscences.

"Me heap knew Missy Wells and ole man, who go dead. Ole man allee time make chin-music to missy. Allee time jaw, jaw—allee time make lows—allee time cuttee up missy! Plenty time lockee up missy top side house; no can walkee—no can talkee—no hab got—how can get?—must washee, washee allee same Chinaman. Ole man go dead—missy all lightee now. Plenty fun. Plenty stay in Blown's big house, top side hill; Blown first-chop man." Had he inquired he might have found this Pagan testimony, for once, corroborated by the Christian neighbours.

But another incident drove all this from his mind. The little stream—the life-blood of his garden—ran dry! Inquiry showed that it had been diverted two miles away into Brown's ditch. Wells's indignant protest elicited a formal reply from Brown, stating that he owned the adjacent mining claims, and reminding him that mining rights to water took precedence of the agricultural

claim, but offering, by way of compensation, to purchase the land thus made useless and sterile. Jackson suddenly recalled the prophecy of the gloomy bar-keeper. The end had come! But what could the scheming capitalist want with the land—equally useless, as his uncle had proved—for mining purposes? Could it be sheer malignity, incited by his vengeful cousin? But here he paused, rejecting the idea as quickly as it came. No! his partners were right? He was a trespasser on his cousin's heritage; there was no luck in it; he was wrong, and this was his punishment! Instead of yielding gracefully as he might he

must back down now, and she would never know his first real feelings. Even now he would make over the property to her as a free gift, but his partners had advanced him money from their scanty means to plant and work it. He believed that an appeal to their feelings would persuade them to forego even that, but he shrank even more from confessing his defeat to them than to her.

He had little heart in his labours that day, and dismissed the Chinamen early. He again examined his uncle's old mining claim on the top of the slope, but was satisfied that it had been a hopeless enterprise and wisely abandoned. It was sunset when he stood under the buckeyes, gloomily looking at the glow fade out of the west, as it had out of his boyish

hopes. He had grown to like the place. It was the hour, too, when the few flowers he had cultivated gave back their pleasant odours as if grateful for his care. And then he heard his name called.

It was his cousin standing a few yards from him in evident hesitation. She was quite pale, and for a moment he thought she was still suffering from her fall, until he saw in her nervous, half-embarrassed manner that



"IT WAS HIS COUSIN STANDING A FEW YARDS FROM HIM."

it had no physical cause. Her old audacity and anger seemed gone, yet there was a queer determination in her pretty brows.

"Good evening," he said.

She did not return his greeting, but, pulling uneasily at her glove, said, hesitatingly, "Uncle has asked you to sell him this land?"

"Yes."

"Well—don't!" she burst out, abruptly.

He stared at her.

"Oh! I'm not trying to keep you here," she went on, flashing back into her old temper, "so you needn't stare like that. I say don't because it ain't right—it ain't fair."

"Why, he's left me no alternative," he said.

"That's just it—that's why it's mean and low. I don't care if he is our uncle."

Jackson was bewildered and shocked.

"I know it's horrid to say it," she said, with a white face, "but it's horrider to keep it in! Oh, Jack! when we were little—and used to fight and quarrel—I never was mean—was I? I never was underhanded—was I? I never lied—did I? And I can't lie now. Jack," she looked hurriedly around her, "*he* wants to get hold of the land—*he* thinks there's gold in the slope and bank by the stream. He says dad was a fool to have located his claim so high up. Jack! did you ever prospect the bank?"

A dawning of intelligence came upon Jackson. "No," he said; "but," he added, bitterly, "what's the use? He owns the water now—I couldn't work it."

"But, Jack, *if* you found the colour, this would be a *mining* claim! You could claim the water right; and as it's your land, your claim would be first!"

Jackson was startled. "Yes, *if* I found the colour."

"You *would* find it."

"*Would*?"

"Yes! I *did*. On the sly! Yesterday

morning, on your slope by the stream, when no one was up! I washed a pan full and got that"—she took a piece of tissue-paper from her pocket, opened it, and shook into her little palm three tiny pin-points of gold.

"And that was your own idea, Jossy?"

"Yes!"

"Your very own?"

"Honest Injin!"

"Wish you may die?"

"True, O King!"

He opened his arms and they mutually embraced. Then they separated, taking hold of each other's hands solemnly, and falling back until they were at arms' length. Then they slowly extended their arms sideways at full length until this action naturally brought their faces and lips together. They did this with the utmost gravity three times, and then embraced again, rocking on pivoted feet like a metronome. Alas! it was no momentary inspiration. The most casual and indifferent observer could see that it was the result of long previous practice and shameless experience. And as such—it was a revelation and an explanation.

"I always supposed that Jackson was playin' us about that red-haired cousin," said Rice, two weeks later, "but I can't swallow that purp stuff about her puttin' him up to that dodge about a new gold discovery on a fresh claim just to knock out Brown. No, sir. He found that gold in openin' these irrigatin' trenches—the usual nigger luck—findin' what you're not lookin' arter."

"Well, we can't complain, for he's offered to work it on shares with us," said Briggs.

"Yes—until he's ready to take in another partner."

"Not—Brown?" said his horrified companions.

"No!—but Brown's adopted daughter—that red-haired cousin!"