

## The Curly Walnut.

(By Alice Morgan, in 'The Youth's Companion'.)

The little boy sat on the prize pumpkin that his grandfather had placed in front of the house to challenge the comment of passers-by. He was chewing sorghum-cane between selections from a doubtful hymnology:

'Give me that old-time aligion,  
Give me that old-time aligion.  
It was good for Paul and Silas,  
It is good enough for me.'

His Aunt Carolina—the child was an orphan—stood on the porch spinning stocking-yarn, while near her sat his grandfather, old Colonel Ledbetter, cobbling shoes as diligently and contentedly as if born bred to that lowly occupation instead of being a forehanded farmer, holding county and township offices.

'Thomas J. certainly is a good singer,' said Carolina. 'He can carry the tune of every last hymn he hears 'em sing down to church, and he can carry the words, too, clean up to twenty verses, I reckon, and he can make up a plenty, too.'

The old man laid down his implements, and looked fondly and proudly at his grandson.

Carolina let her eyes range along the highroad.

'Here comes ol' man Sumter,' she said.

'You say Cap'n Sumter's a-comin'?' asked her father, and he got up and went out to the road. At his signal, his neighbor twitched Sal to a stand and stared at him.

Colonel Ledbetter had pleasant information to impart. He lifted one foot to the fore wheel and looked hard into the road lest his eyes should forestall his tongue as the bearer of good news.

'You sold me them 'leven wa'nut-trees on Sundown Hill for thirty dollars apiece,' he said.

'I reckon that's 'bout how the case stands.' The hard old face looked steadily at the smiling one, and not a line softened.

'Well, sir,' the pleasant eyes looked up with a sparkle, 'there's a little mistake about one of 'em, an' I expect we'd better rectify it right now—'

'G'long!' Old man Sumter hit the mule a 'lick,' saying viciously as she sprang forward, 'You got the timber, an' I got the money, an' I don't rectify no mistakes now! You're old enough to have knowed what you was gettin' 'fore you paid for 'em.'

'Jes' as you please, Sam Sumter.' The indignant old gentleman spoke in a tone of supreme indifference, and turned toward the house. 'I've had my men up there a-fellin' them trees, and that one furthest up the hill is a curly wa'nut. Five years ago I sold one like it for twelve hundred dollars, and I could have given you points 'bout sellin' yours; but seein' you don't rectify mistakes, why, that's all there is about it, and we'll stick to the bargain.'

Again Sal was jerked up, and twisting round on a pivotal hand pressed to the seat, old man Sumter regarded his interlocutor with intense concern. But Colonel Ledbetter proceeded to the house without looking right or left, and his ireful neighbor went on his way.

Colonel Ledbetter resumed his seat, and his grandson came and leaned against him. 'Looks like he's plumb mad, granddaddy.'

'Ye-e-s, he is, Thomas J., he's plumb



COLONEL LEDBETTER HAD PLEASANT INFORMATION TO IMPART.

mad, and he's been so ever since I've known him, and that's mighty nigh sixty years. He would't take notice to me just now when I was going to put more than a thousand dollars right into his hand; it would mighty nigh have paid off that mortgage that's been skinning him these twenty years. Thomas J., don't you ever go to bein' mad at everybody all the time. It's not Christian, and more than that, it kind of spoils your aim, so that you don't bring down any game.'

'Was he born that-a-way, granddaddy?'

'I expect he was, Thomas J., I expect he was.'

'I'm mighty sorry for him.' The little fellow twisted his hands together and looked afar. 'It's powerful mizzable to be born with ways that you can't help.'

The old man's attention and sympathy were his in an instant. 'Don't you go to taking on about that, Thomas J.,' he said, drawing his arm tightly about the child. 'You're bound to outgrow that before long.'

The 'that' to which he referred was a sleep-walking habit to which the child was

addicted, and of which he was so desperately ashamed that the fear of being caught in the act was the burden of his little life.

'What's curly wa'nuts good for, granddaddy?' Thomas J. asked, after a while.

'They're good for veneering, grandson. You see, this is how 'tis: They don't saw the logs through like they do down to Campbell's sawmill, but they saw 'em round and round, into sheets mighty nigh as thin as writin'-paper. There hadn't ought to be any cuts or holes in it, so they can make the sheets as long as the log itself. And they'll saw that log up till there ain't a core left that's as thick as my arm.'

'What can they make out of timber that's thin as writin'-paper, granddaddy?'

Then, to the extent of his own imperfect knowledge of the veneering process, the old man explained it to the child.

'So far as I know,' he said, addressing his daughter, 'there are only three veneering-mills in the country. When I sold my tree I wrote a letter to all three of 'em and told 'em what I had to sell; and