

The Call of the Cumberlands

By Charles Neville Buck

With Illustrations
from Photographs of Scenes
in the Play

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SYNOPSIS.

On Misery creek, at the foot of a rock from which he has fallen, Sally Miller finds George Lescott, a landscape painter, unconscious, and after reviving him, goes for assistance. Samson South and Sally, taking Lescott to Samson's home, are met by Spicer South, head of the family, who tells them that Jesse Purdy has been shot and that Samson is suspected of the crime. Samson denies it. The shooting of Jesse Purdy breaks the truce in the Hollman-South feud.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

He sauntered down the road, but, when he had passed out of vision, he turned sharply into the woods, and began climbing. His steps carried him to the rift in the ridge where the white oak stood sentinel over the watch tower of rock. As he came over the edge from one side his bare feet making no sound, he saw Sally sitting there, with her hands resting on the moss and her eyes deeply troubled. She was gazing fixedly ahead and her lips were trembling. At once Samson's face grew black. Some one had been making Sally unhappy. Then he saw beyond her a standing figure, which the tree trunk had hitherto concealed. It was the loose-knitted figure of young Tamarack Spicer.

"In course," Spicer was saying, "we don't low Samson shot Jesse Purdy, but them Hollmans 'll spicion him, an' I heered just now that them dawgs was trackin' straight up hyar from the mouth of Misery. They'll git hyar against sundown."

Samson leaped violently forward. With one hand he roughly seized his cousin's shoulder and wheeled him about.

"Shet up!" he commanded. "What d—n fool stuff hey ye been tellin' Sally?"

For an instant the two clansmen stood fronting each other. Samson's face was set and wrathful. Tamarack's was surly and snarling. "Hain't I got a license ter tell Sally the news?" he demanded.

"Nobody hain't got no license," reported the younger man in the quiet of cold anger, "ter tell Sally nothin' she'll fret her."

"Didn't I tell ye ter shet up?" Samson clenched his fists, and took a step forward. "Ef ye opens yore mouth again, I'm a-goin' ter smash hit. Now, git!"

Tamarack Spicer's face blackened, and his teeth showed. His right hand swept to his left arm-pit. Outwardly he seemed weaponless, but Samson knew that concealed beneath the hickory shirt was a holster, worn mountain fashion.

"What air ye a-reachin' atter, Tam'rack?" he inquired, his lips twisting in amusement.

"That's my business."

"Well, git hit out—or git out yerself, afore I throws ye often the cliff."

Sally showed no symptoms of alarm. Her confidence in her hero was absolute. The boy lifted his hand, and pointed off down the path. Slowly and with incoherent muttering, Spicer took himself away. Then only did Sally rise. She came over, and laid a hand on Samson's shoulder. In her blue eyes, the tears were welling.

"Samson," she whispered, "ef they're atter ye, come ter my house. I kin hide ye out. Why didn't ye tell me Jesse Jurvey'd done been shot?"

"Hit tain't nothin' ter fret about, Sally," he assured her. He spoke awkwardly, for he had been trained to regard emotion as unmanly. "Thar hain't no danger."

She gazed searchingly into his eyes, and then, with a short sob, threw her arms around him, and buried her face on his shoulder.

"Ef anything happens ter ye, Samson," she said, brokenly, "hit'll jest kill me. I couldn't live withouten ye, Samson. I jest couldn't do hit!"

The boy took her in his arms, and pressed her close. His eyes were gazing off over her bent head, and his lips twitched. He drew his features into a scowl, because that was the only expression with which he could safeguard his feelings. His voice was husky.

"I reckon, Sally," he said, "I couldn't live withouten ye, neither."

The party of men who had started at morning from Jesse Purdy's store had spent a hard day. The roads followed creek-beds, crossing and recrossing waterways in a fashion that gave the bloodhounds a hundred baffling difficulties. Often, their noses lost the trail, which had at first been so surely taken. Often, they circled and whined, and halted in perplexity, but each time they came to a point where, at the end, one of them again raised his muzzle skyward, and gave voice.

Toward evening, they were working up Misery along a course less broken. The party halted for a moment's rest, and, as the bottle was passed, the man from Lexington, who had brought the dogs and stayed to conduct the chase, put a question:

"What do ye call this creek?"

"Hit's Misery."

"Does anybody live on Misery that—er—that you might suspect?"

The Hollmans laughed.

"This creek is settled with Souths thicker'n hops."

The Lexington man looked up. He knew what the name of South meant to a Hollman.

"Is there any special South, who might have a particular grudge?"

"The Souths don't need no parti'lar grudge, but thar's young Samson South. He's a wildcat."

"He lives this way?"

"These dogs air a-makin' a bee-line fer his house," Jim Hollman was speaking. Then he added: "I've done been told that Samson denies doin' the shootin', an' claims he kin prove an alibi."

The Lexington man lighted his pipe, and poured a drink of red whiskey into a flask cup.

"He'd be apt to say that," he commented. "These dogs haven't any prejudice in the matter. I'll stake my life on their tellin' the truth."

An hour later, the group halted again. The master of hounds mopped his forehead.

"Are we still going toward Samson South's house?" he inquired.

"We're about a quarter from hit now, an' we hain't never varied from the straight road."

"Will they be apt to give us trouble?"

Jim Hollman smiled.

"I hain't never heered of no South submittin' ter arrest by a Hollman." The trailers examined their firearms, and loosened their holster-flaps. The dogs went forward at a trot.

CHAPTER V.

From time to time that day, neighbors had ridden up to Spicer South's stile, and drawn rein for gossip. These men brought bulletins as to the progress of the hounds, and near sundown, as a postscript to their information, a volley of gunshot signals sounded from a mountain top. No word was spoken, but in common accord the kinsmen rose from their chairs, and drifted toward their leaning rifles.

"They're a-comin' hyar," said the head of the house, curtly. "Samson ought ter be home. What's Tam'rack?"

No one had noticed his absence until that moment, nor was he to be found. A few minutes later, Samson's figure swung into sight, and his uncle met him at the fence.

"Samson, I've done asked ye all the questions I'm a-goin' ter ask ye," he said, "but them dawgs is makin' fer this house. They've jest been sighted a mile below."

Samson nodded.

"Now—Spicer South's face hardened—I owns down thar ter the road. No man kin cross that fence withouten I choose ter give him leave. Ef ye wants ter go indoors, an' stay thar, ye hain't got no business."

But if ye want ter go out, I'd love ter prove ter these hyar men that us Souths don't break our word. We done agreed ter this truce. I'd like ter invite 'em in, an' let them damn dawgs sniff round the feet of every man in my house—an' then, when they're plumb teetotally damn satisfied, I'd like ter tell 'em all ter go ter hell. That's the way I feels, but I'm a-goin' ter do jest what ye says."

Lescott did not overhear the conversation in full, but he saw the old man's face work with suppressed passion, and he caught Samson's louder reply.

"When them folks gets hyar, Uncle Spicer, I'm a-goin' ter be a-jettin' 'em out."



"They Have Followed Their Noses Here."

right out thar in front. I'm plumb willin' ter invite 'em in." Thar, the two men turned toward the house.

Already the other clansmen had disappeared noiselessly through the door or around the angles of the walls.

Fifteen minutes later, Lescott, standing at the fence, saw a strange cavalcade round the bend of the road. Several travel-stained men were leading mules, and holding two tawny and impatient dogs in leash. In their number, the artist recognized his host of two nights ago.

They halted at a distance, and in their faces the artist read dismay, for, while the dogs were yelping confidently and tugging at their cords, young Samson South—who should, by their prejudiced convictions, be hiding out in some secret stronghold—sat at the top step of the stile, smoking his pipe, and regarded them with a lack-luster absence of interest. Such a calm reception was uncanny. After a whispered conference, the Lexington man came forward alone. Old Spicer South had been looking on from the door, and was now strolling out to meet the envoy, unarmed.

And the envoy, as he came, held his hands unnecessarily far away from his

sides, and walked with an ostentatious show of peace.

"Evenin', stranger," hailed the old man. "Come right in."

"Mr. South," began the dog-owner, with some embarrassment, "I have been employed to furnish a pair of bloodhounds to the family of Jesse Purdy, who has been shot."

"I heerd tell that Purdy was shot," said the head of the Souths in an affable tone, which betrayed no deeper note of interest than neighborhood gossip might have elicited.

"I have no personal interest in the matter," went on the stranger, hastily, as one bent on making his attitude clear, "except to supply the dogs and manage them. I do not in any way direct their course; I merely follow."

"Ye can't hardly foce a dawg," Old Spicer sagely nodded his head as he made the remark. "A dawg jest natch'ly follers his own nose."

"Exactly—and they have followed their noses here." The Lexington man found the embarrassment of his position growing as the colloquy proceeded. "I want to ask you whether, if these dogs want to cross your fence, I have your permission to let them?"

The master of the house crossed the stile, the low sun shining on his shock of gray hair, and stood before the man-hunter. He spoke so that his voice carried to the waiting group in the road.

"Ye're plumb welcome ter turn them dawgs loose, an' let 'em ramble, stranger. Nobody hain't a-goin' ter hurt 'em. I sees some fellers out thar with ye thet mustn't cross my fence. Ef they does—the voice rang menacingly—"hit'll mean that they're a-bustin' the truce—an' they won't never go out ag'in. But you air safe in hyar. I gives yer my hand on that. Ye're welcome, an' yore dawgs is welcome. I hain't got nothin' 'gainst dawgs thet comes on four legs, but I shore bars the two-legged kind."

There was a murmur of astonishment from the road. Disregarding it, Spicer South turned his face toward the house.

"You boys kin come out," he shouted, "an' leave yore guns inside."

The leashes were slipped from the dogs. They leaped forward, and made directly for Samson, who sat as unmoving as a lifeless image on the top step of the stile. There was a half-moment of terrific suspense, then the beasts clambered by the seated figure, passing on each side and circled aimlessly about the yard—their quest unended. They sniffed diffidently about the trouser legs of the men who sauntered indolently out of the door. They trotted into the house and out again, and mingled with the mongrel home pack that snarled and growled hostility for this invasion. Then, came once more to the stile, and climbed out. Samson

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The Lexington man went back. For a minute or two Jim Hollman sat scowling down in indecision from his saddle. Then he admitted to himself that he had done all he could do without becoming the aggressor. For the moment he was beaten. He looked up and from the road one of the hounds raised its voice and gave cry. That baying afforded an excuse for leaving and Jim Hollman seized it.

"Go on," he growled. "Let's see what them d—d curs hes ter say now."

Mounting, they kicked their mules into a jog. From the men inside the fence came no note of derision, no hint of triumph. They stood looking out with expressionless, masklike faces until their enemies had passed out of sight around the shoulder of the mountain. The Souths had met and fronted an accusation made after the enemy's own choice and method. A jury of two hounds had acquitted them. It was not only because the dogs had refused to recognize in Samson a suspicious character that the enemy rode on grudgingly convinced, but, also, because the family, which



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"This hyar time I lets ye go back," said Samson, "fer the reason that I'm tryin' like all h—I ter keep this truce. But ye must stay on yore side or else ride the roads open. How is Purvy terday?"

"He's mighty porely," replied the other, in a sullen voice.

"All right. Thet's another reason why hit hain't healthy fer ye over hyar."

The spy turned and made his way over the mountain.

"D—n him!" muttered Samson, his face twitching, as the other was lost in the undergrowth. "Some day I'm a-goin' ter git him."

Tamarack Spicer did not at once reappear, and when one of the Souths met another in the road the customary dialogue would be: "Heard anything of Tamarack?" . . . "No, hev you?" "No, nary a word."

As Lescott wandered through the hills, his unhurt right hand began crying out for action and a brush to nurse. As he watched, day after day, the unrolling of the monumental hills and the transitions from busy, warlike whippers of hues to strong, glaring riot of color, this fret of restlessness became actual pain. He was wasting wonderful opportunity and the creative instinct in him was clamoring.

One morning, when he came out just after sunrise to the tin wash basin at the well, the desire to paint was on him with compelling force. The hills ended near their bases like things bitten off. Beyond lay limitless streamers of mist, but, while he stood at gaze, the filmy veil began to lift and float higher. Trees and mountains grew taller. The sun, which showed first as a ghost-like disk of polished aluminum, struggled through orange and vermilion into a sphere of living flame. Lescott heard a voice at his side.

"When does ye 'low ter commence paintin'?"

It was Samson. For answer the artist, with his unhurt hand, impatiently tapped his bandaged wrist.

"Ye still got yore right hand, hain't ye?" demanded the boy. The other laughed. It was a typical question. So long as one had the trigger finger left one should not admit disqualification.

"You see, Samson," he explained, "this isn't precisely like handling a gun. One must hold the palette; mix the colors; wipe the brushes and do half a dozen equally necessary things. It requires at least two perfectly good hands. Many people don't find two enough."

"But hit only takes one ter do the paintin', don't hit?"

"Yes."

"Well—the boy spoke diffidently but with enthusiasm—"between the two of us we've got three hands. I reckon ye kin larn me how ter do

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INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(By F. O. SELLERS, Acting Director of Sunday School Course, Moody Bible Institute, Chicago.)

LESSON FOR MARCH 14

SAUL GAINS HIS KINGDOM.

LESSON TEXT—I Samuel, chapter 11. GOLDEN TEXT—He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.—Prov. 16:32.

In order to repay Israel's victory under Jephthah, Nahash the Ammonite demanded the right eye of those besieged in Jabesh in Gilead; knowing that the left eye would be hid by their shields and they would thus be incapable of warfare. For Israel to make any covenant with the Ammonites was contrary to God's commands (Ex. 23:23; Deut. 23:3).

I. The Cry of Jabesh, vv. 1-3. This event probably occurred about a month after the previous lesson. It was a proud, haughty demand made of these Israelites. Exhausted and hopeless, they had offered to become servants in order to live. So today we frequently find men willing to compromise with the world and the devil, who only hold them in derision and contempt (v. 2). Compromising Christians are always blind leaders of the blind (Matt. 18:14; 6:22). The demand of Nahash would also bring reproach upon Israel, yet this same king afterwards showed kindness to David (II Samuel 10:2). History records that Emperor Basil II actually sent an army of 14,850 sightless men back to the king of Bulgaria, who died of grief and horror.

II. The Conquest of Ammon, vv. 4-11. Nahash granted the request for a seven days' respite. Here was Saul's opportunity—wrongs to be righted and people to be saved. Saul had held his peace since being anointed by Samuel, employing his time in everyday toil and duties (v. 5), for the messengers did not find Saul at home idle. The tidings of this insult were told to the people who lifted up their voices and wept (v. 4). The news of this threatened calamity reached Saul's ears and his conduct effectually put to silence those "worthless fellows" who despised him and had brought no presents at his anointing (10:27). Instead of tears Saul is moved to deeds. Like Cincinnatus and Israel Putnam, he left the plow to take up the sword, and did not in his own mind consider

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