

# 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, Sully Miller finds George Lescott, a landscape painter, unconscious, and after reviving him, goes for assistance. Samson South and Sully, taking Lescott to Samson's home, are met by Spicer South, head of the family, who tells them that Jesse Purvy has been shot.

## CHAPTER II—Continued.

"I hain't a-wantin' ter suspicion ye, Samson, but I know how ye feels about yore pap. I heered that Bud Spicer come by hyar yistiddy plumb full of liquor an' 'lowed he'd seen Jesse an' Jim Asberry a-talkin' tergether jest afore yore pap was kilt." He broke off abruptly, then added: "Ye went away from hyar last night, an' didn't git in twell after sunup—I just heered the news, an' come ter look fer ye."

"Air you-all 'lowin' thet I shot them shoots from the laurel?" inquired Samson, quietly.

"Ef we-all hain't 'lowin' hit, Samson, we're plumb shore thet Jesse Purvy's folks will 'low hit. They're jest a-holdin' yore life like a hostage fer Purvy's, anyhow. Ef he dies they'll try ter git ye."

The boy flashed a challenge about the group, which was now drawing the rein at Spicer South's yard fence. His eyes were sullen, but he made no answer.

One of the men who had listened in silence now spoke:

"In the first place, Samson, we hain't a-sayin' ye done hit. In the nex' place, ef ye did do hit we hain't a-blamin' ye—much. But I reckon them dawgs don't lie, an', ef they trails in hyar ye'll need us. That's why we've done come."

The boy slipped down from his mule and helped Lescott to dismount. He deliberately unloaded the saddlebags and kit and laid them on the top step of the stile, and, while he held his peace, neither denying nor affirming, his kinsmen sat their horses and waited.

Even to Lescott it was palpable that some of them believed the young heir to clan leadership responsible for the shooting of Jesse Purvy, and that others believed him innocent, yet none the less in danger of the enemy's vengeance. But, regardless of divided opinion, all were alike ready to stand at his back and all alike awaited his final utterance.

Then, in the thickening gloom, Samson turned at the foot of the stile and faced the gathering. He stood rigid, and his eyes flashed with deep passion. His hands, hanging at the seams of his jeans breeches, clinched, and his voice came in a slow utterance through which throbbed the tenacity of a soul-absorbing bitterness.

"I knowed all 'bout Jesse Purvy's bein' shot. . . . When my pap lay a-dyin' over thar at his house I was a little shaver ten years old."

Jesse Purvy hired somebody ter kilt him. . . . an' I promised my pap that I'd find out who that man was, an' thet I'd git 'em both—some day. So help me, God Almighty, I'm a-goin' ter git 'em both—some day!"

The boy paused and lifted one hand as though taking an oath. "I'm a-tellin' you-all the truth. . . . But I didn't shoot them shoots this mornin'. I hain't no truce buster. I gives ye my hand on hit. . . . Ef them dawgs come hyar they'll find me hyar, an' ef they hain't liars they'll go right by hyar. I don't 'low ter run away, an' I don't 'low ter hide out. I'm a-goin' ter stay right hyar. Thet's all I've got ter say ter ye."

For a moment there was no reply. Then the older man nodded with a gesture of relieved anxiety.

"Thet's all we wants ter know, Samson," he said, slowly. "Light, men an' come in."

## CHAPTER III.

In days when the Indian held the Dark and Bloody Grounds a pioneer, felling oak and poplar logs for the home he meant to establish on the banks of a purling watercourse, let his ax slip, and the cutting edge gashed his ankle. Since the discovered belongs the christening, that watercourse became Crippleshin, and so it is today set down on atlas pages. A few miles away, as the crow flies, but many weary leagues as a man must travel, a brother settler, racked with rheumatism, gave to his creek the name of Misery. The two pioneers had come together from Virginia, as their ancestors had come before them from Scotland. Together they had found one of the two gaps through the mountain wall, which for more than a hundred miles has no other passable rift. Together, and as comrades, they had made their homes and founded their race. What original grievance had sprung up between their descendants none of the present generation knew—perhaps it was a farm line or disputed title to a pig. The primary incident was lost in the limbo of the past; but for fifty years, with occasional inter-

vals of truce, lives had been snuffed out in the fiercely burning hate of these men whose ancestors had been comrades.

Old Spicer South and his nephew Samson were the direct lineal descendants of the name of Misery. Their kinsmen dwelt about them: the Souths, the Jaspers, the Spicers, the Wileys, the Millers and McCagers. Other families, related only by marriage and close association, were, in feud alignment, none the less "Souths." And over beyond the ridge, where the springs and brooks flowed the other way to feed Crippleshin, dwelt the Hollmans, the Purvises, the Asberrys, the Hollises and the Daltons—men equally strong in their vindictive fealty to the code of the vendetta.

By mountain standards old Spicer South was rich. His lands had been claimed when tracts could be had for the taking, and though he had to make his cross mark when there was a contract to be signed, his instinctive mind was shrewd and far seeing. The tinkle of his cowbells was heard for a long distance along the creek bottoms. His hillside fields were the richest and his coves the most fertile in that country. Some day, when a railroad should burrow through his section, bringing the development of coal and timber at the head of the rails, a sleeping fortune would yawn and awake to enrich him. There were black outcroppings along the cliffs, which he knew ran deep in veins of bituminous wealth. But to that time he looked with forboding, for he had been raised to the standards of his forefathers and saw in the coming of a new regime a curtailment of personal liberty. For new-fangled ideas he held only the aversion of deep-rooted prejudice. He hoped that he might live out his days and pass before the foreigner held his land and the law became a power stronger than the individual or the clan. The law was his enemy, because it said to him, "Thou shalt not," when he sought to take the yellow corn which bruising labor had coaxed from scattered rock-strewn fields to his own mash vat and still. It meant, also, a tyrannous power usually seized and administered by enemies, which undertook to forbid the personal settlement of personal quarrels. But his eyes, which could not read print, could read the signs of the times. He foresaw the inevitable coming of that day. Already he had given up the worm and mash vat, and no longer sought to make or sell illicit liquor. That was a concession to the federal power, which could no longer be successfully fought. State power was still largely a weapon in factional hands, and in his country the Hollmans were the office holders. To the Hollmans he could make no concessions. In Samson, born to be the fighting man, reared to be the fighting man, equipped by nature with deep hatreds and tigerish courage, there had cropped out from time to time the restless spirit of the philosopher and a hunger for knowledge. That was a matter in which the old man found his bitterest and most secret apprehension.

It was at this house that George Lescott, distinguished landscape painter of New York and the world at large, arrived in the twilight. Whatever enemy might have to be met tomorrow, old Spicer South recognized as a more immediate quest upon his attention the wounded guest of today. One of the kinsmen proved to have a rude working knowledge of bone setting, and before the half hour had passed Lescott's wrist was in a splint, and his injuries as well tended as possible, which proved to be quite well enough.

While Spicer South and his cousins had been sustaining themselves or building up competences by tilling their soil the leaders of the other faction were basing larger fortunes on the profits of merchandise and trade. So, although Spicer South could neither read nor write, his chief enemy, Micah Hollman, was to outward seeming an urbane and fairly equipped man of affairs. Judged by their heads, the clansmen were rougher and more illiterate on Misery, and in closer touch with civilization on Crippleshin. A deeper scrutiny showed this seeming to be one of the strange anomalies of the mountains.

Micah Hollman had established himself at Hixon, that shack town which had passed of late years from feudal county seat to the section's one point of contact with the outside world; a town where the ancient and modern orders brushed shoulders; where the new was tolerated, but dared not become aggressive. Directly across the street from the courthouse stood an ample frame building, on whose side wall was emblazoned the legend, "Hollman's Mammoth Department Store." That was the secret stronghold of Hollman power. He had always spoken deplorably of that spirit of lawlessness which had given the mountains a bad name.

When the railroad came to Hixon it found in Judge Hollman a "public-spirited citizen." Incidentally, the timber that it hauled and the coal that its flat cars carried down to the Bluegrass went largely to his consignees. He had so astutely anticipated coming events that, when the first accents of capital sought options they found themselves constantly referred to Judge Hollman. No wheel, it seemed, could turn without his nod. It was natural that the genial storekeeper should become the big man of the community and inevitable that the one big man should become the dictator. His inherited place as leader of the Hollmans in the feud he had seemingly passed on as an obsolete prerogative.

Yet, in business matters, he was found to drive a hard bargain, and men came to regard it the part of good policy to meet rather than combat his requirements. It was essential to his purposes that the officers of the law in his country should be in sympathy with him. Sympathy soon became abject subservience. When a South had opposed Jesse Purvy in the primary as candidate for high sheriff he was found one day lying on his face with a bullet-riddled body. It may have been a coincidence which pointed to Jim Asberry, the judge's nephew, as the assassin. At all events, the judge's nephew was a poor boy, and a charitable grand jury declined to indict him.

In the course of five years several South adherents, who had crossed Holman's path, became victims of the laurel ambushade. The theory of coincidence was strained. Slowly the rumor grew and persistently spread, though no man would admit having fathered it, that before each of these executions star-chamber conferences had been held in the rooms above Micah Hollman's, "Mammoth Department Store." It was said that those exclusive sessions were attended by Judge Hollman, Sheriff Purvy and certain other gentlemen selected by reason of their marksmanship. When one of these victims fell John South had just returned from a law school "down below," wearing "fetched-on" clothing and thinking "fetched-on" thoughts. He had amazed the community by demanding the right to assist in probing and prosecuting the affair. He had then shocked the community into complete paralysis by requesting the grand jury to indict not alone the alleged assassin, but also his employers, whom he named as Judge Hollman and Sheriff Purvy. Then he, too, fell under a bolt from the laurel.

That was the first public accusation against the bland capitalist, and it carried its own prompt warning against repetition. The judge's high sheriff and chief ally retired from office and went abroad only with a bodyguard. Jesse Purvy had built his store at a crossroads 25 miles from the railroads. Like Hollman, he had won a reputation for open-handed charity, was liked—and hated. His friends were legion. His enemies were so numerous that he apprehended violence not only from the Souths but also from others who nursed grudges in no way related to the line of feud cleavage. The Hollman-Purvy combination had retained enough of its old power to escape the law's retribution and to hold its dictatorship, but the efforts of John South had not been altogether bootless. He had ripped away two masks, and their erstwhile wearers could no longer hold their old semblance of law-abiding philanthropists. Jesse Purvy's home was the show place of the countryside. Commodious verandas looked out over pleasant orchards, and in the same inclosure stood the two frame buildings of his store—for he, too, combined merchandise with baronial powers. But back of the place rose the mountain side, on which Purvy never looked without dread. Twice its impetuous thickets had spat at him. Twice he had recovered from

laxed vigilance. He stood there possibly thirty seconds, then a sharp fusillade of clear reports barked out and was shattered by the hills into a long reverberation. With a hand clasped to his chest, Purvy turned, walked to the middle of the floor, and fell.

The henchmen rushed to the open sash. They leaped out and plunged up the mountain, tempting the assassin's fire, but the assassin was satisfied. The mountain was again as quiet as it had been at dawn. Inside, at the middle of the store, Jesse Purvy shifted his head against his daughter's knee and said, as one stating an expected event:

"Well, they've got me." An ordinary mountaineer would have been carried home to die in the darkness of a dirty and windowless shack. The long-suffering star of Jesse Purvy ordained otherwise. He might go under or he might once more beat his way back and out of the quicksands of death. At all events, he would fight for life to the last gasp.

Twenty miles away in the core of the wilderness, removed from a railroad by a score of semi-perpendicular miles, a fanatic had once decided to found a school. Now a faculty of ten men taught such as cared to come such things as they cared to learn. Higher up the hillside stood a small, but model hospital, with a modern operating table and a case of surgical instruments, which, it was said, the state could not surpass.

To this haven Jesse Purvy, the murder lord, was borne in a litter carried on the shoulders of his dependents. Here, as his steadfast guardian star decreed, he found two prominent medical visitors, who hurried him to the operating table. Later he was removed to a white bed, with the June sparkle in his eyes, pleasantly modulated through drawn blinds, and the June rustle and bird chorus in his ears—and his own thoughts in his brain.

Conscious, but in great pain, Purvy beckoned Jim Asberry and Aaron Hollis, his chiefs of bodyguard, to his bedside and waved the nurse back out of hearing.

"If I don't get well," he said feebly, "there's a job for you two boys. I reckon you know what it is!" They nodded, and Asberry whispered a name:

"Samson South?" "Yes," Purvy spoke in a whisper; but the old vindictiveness was not smothered. "You got the old man, I reckon you can manage the cub. If you don't he'll get you both one day."

The two henchmen scowled.

"I'll git him tomorrow," growled Asberry. "Thar hain't no sort of use in a-waitin'."

"No!" For an instant Purvy's voice rose out of its weakness to its old staccato tone of command, a tone which brought obedience. "If I get well I have other plans. Never mind what they are. That's my business. If I don't die, leave him alone, until I give other orders."

"If I get well and Samson South is killed meanwhile I won't live long either. It would be my life for his. Keep close to him. The minute you hear of my death—get him." He paused again, then supplemented, "You two will find something mighty interestin' in my will."

It was afternoon when Purvy reached the hospital, and, at nightfall of the same day, there arrived at his store's entrance, on stumbling, hard-ridden mules, several men, followed by two tawny hounds whose long ears flapped over their lean jaws, and whose eyes were listless and tired, but whose black muzzles wrinkled and sniffed with that sensitive instinct which follows the man scent. The ex-sheriff's family were instituting proceedings independent of the chief's orders. The next morning this party plunged into the mountain tangle and beat the cover with the bloodhounds in leash.

The two gentle-faced dogs picked their way between the flowering rhododendrons, the glistening laurels, the feathery pine sprouts and the moss-covered rocks. They went gingerly and alertly on ungainly, cushioned feet. Just as their masters were despairing they came to a place directly over the store, where a branch had been bent back and hitched to clear the outlook and where a boot heel had crushed the moss. There one of them raised his nose high into the air, opened his mouth, and let out a long, deep-chested bay of discovery.

George Lescott had known hospitality of many brauds and degrees. He had been the lionized celebrity in places of fashion. He had been the guest of equally famous brother artists in the cities of two hemispheres, and, since sincere painting had been his pole star, he had gone where his art's wanderlust beckoned. He had followed the lure of transitory beauty to remote sections of the world. The present trip was only one of many like it, which had brought him into touch with varying peoples and distinctive types of life. He told himself that never had he found men at once so crude and so courteous as these hosts who, facing personal perils, had still time and willingness to regard his comfort.

The coming of the kinsmen, who would stay until the present danger passed, had filled the house. The four beds in the cabin proper were full, and some slept on floor mattresses. Lescott, because a guest and wounded, was given a small room aside. Samson, however, shared his quarters in order to perform any service that an injured man might require. It had been a full and unusual day for the painter, and its incidents crowded in on him in retrospect and drove off the

possibility of sleep. Samson, too, seemed wakeful, and in the isolation of the dark room the two men fell into conversation, which almost lasted out the night. Samson went into the confessional. This was the first human being he had ever met to whom he could unburden his soul.

The thirst to taste what knowledge lay beyond the hills; the unnamed wanderlust that had at times brought him a restiveness so poignant as to be agonizing; the undefined attuning of his heart to the beauty of sky and hill; these matters he had hitherto kept locked in guilty silence.

In a cove or lowland pocket, stretching into the mountain side, lay the small and meager farm of the Widow Miller. The Widow Miller was a "South;" that is to say, she fell, by

tie of marriage, under the protection of the clan head. She lived alone with her fourteen-year-old son and her sixteen-year-old daughter. The daughter was Sully.

The sun rose on the morning after Lescott arrived, the mists lifted, and the cabin of the Widow Miller stood revealed. A touse-headed boy made his way to the barn to feed the cattle, and a red patch of color, as bright and tuneful as a Kentucky cardinal, appeared at the door between the morning-glory vines. The red patch of color was Sully.

She made her way, carrying a bucket, to the spring, where she knelt down and gazed at her own image in the water.

Before going home she set down her bucket by the stream, and, with a quick glance toward the house to make sure that she was not observed, climbed through the brush and was lost to view. She followed a path that her own feet had made, and after a steep course upward came upon a bald face of rock, which stood out storm battered where a rift went through the backbone of the ridge. This point of vantage commanded the other valley.

Down below, across the treetops, were a roof and a chimney from which a thread of smoke rose in an attenuated shaft. That was Spicer South's house and Samson's home. The girl leaned against the gnarled bowl of the white oak and waved toward the roof and chimney. She cupped her hands and raised them to her lips like one who means to shout across a great distance, then she whispered so low that only she herself could hear:

"Hello, Samson South!" She stood for a space looking down, and forgot to laugh, while her eyes grew religiously and softly deep, then, turning, she ran down the slope. She had performed her morning devotions.

That day at the house of Spicer South was an off day. The kinsmen who had stopped for the night stayed on through the morning. Nothing was said of the possibility of trouble. The men talked crops and tossed horse-shoes in the yard; but no one went to work in the fields, and all remained within easy call. Only young Tamarack Spicer, a raw-boned nephew, wore a sullen face and made a great show of cleaning his rifle and pistol.

Shortly after dinner he disappeared, and when the afternoon was well advanced Samson, too, with his rifle on his arm, strolled toward the stile.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## How Suckers Bite.

One Sunday morning, on his way to church, a deacon observed a boy industriously fishing. After the lad had landed several, he approached and said: "My son, don't you know it is very wrong to catch fish on the Sabbath day? And, besides, it is very cruel to impale that poor, helpless beetle upon that sharp hook." Said the boy: "Oh, say, mister, this is only an imitation! It ain't a real bug." "Bless me!" replied the deacon. "Well, I thought it was a real bug!" The boy, lifting a fine string of fish out of the water, said: "So did these suckers!"

## Friend of the Farmer.

Dr. Marion Dorset, bi-chemist of the federal bureau of animal industry, is the scientist who first isolated the germ responsible for that farm scourge cholera in the hog. That accomplished, he perfected a serum to combat it, protected his processes by patents and then turned them over to the public, to be used without charge.

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"Ef It Hain't Askin' Too Much, Will Ye Let Me See Ye Paint One of Them Things?"