

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. Samson reproves Tamarack Spicer for telling Sally that Jim Hollman is on the trail with bloodhounds hunting the man who shot Purdy. The bloodhounds lose the trail at Spicer South's door. Lescott discovers artistic ability in Samson.

CHAPTER V—Continued.

The two men had lost an hour huddled under a canopy beneath the cannonading of a sudden storm. They had silently watched titanic battalions of thunder clouds riding the skies in gusty puffs of gale and raking the earth with lightning and hail and water.

"My God!" exclaimed the mountain boy abruptly. "I'd give anything if I could paint that."

Lescott rose smilingly from his seat before the easel and surrendered his palette and sheaf of brushes.

"Try it," he invited.

For a moment Samson stood hesitant and overcome with diffidence; then, with set lips, he took his place and experimentally fitted his fingers about the brush, as he had seen Lescott do. He asked no advice. He merely gazed for a while, and then, dipping a brush and experimenting for his color, went to sweeping in his primary tones. Samson, even though he was hopelessly daubing, and knew it, was sincere, and the painter at his elbow caught his breath and looked on with the absorption of a prophet, who, listening to childish prattle, yet recognizes the gift of prophecy.

"That's the way hit looks ter me," the boy said, simply.

"That's the way it is," commended his critic.

For a while more Samson worked at the nearer hills, then he rose.

"I'm done," he said, "hain't a-goin' ter fool with them that tres an' things. I can't know nothing about that. I can't paint leaves an' twigs an' birdsnests. What I like is mountings an' skies an' seck-like things."

Lescott looked at the daub before him. A less trained eye would have seen only the daub, just as a poor judge of horseflesh might see only awkward joints and long legs in a weanling colt, though it be bred in the purple.

"Samson," he said, earnestly, "that's all there is to art. It's the power to feel the poetry of color. The rest can be taught. The genius must work, of course—work, work, work, and still work, but the gift is the power of seeing true—and, by God, boy, you have it. You've got what many men have struggled a lifetime for, and failed. I'd like to have you study with me. I'd like to be your discoverer. Look here."

The painter sat down, and speedily went to work. He painted out nothing. He simply toned, and, with precisely the right touch here and there, softened the crudeness, laid stress on the contrast, melted the harshness, and, when he rose, he had built, upon the rough cornerstone of Samson's laying, a picture.

"That proves it," he said. "I had only to finish. I didn't have much to undo. Boy, you're wasting yourself. Come with me, and let me make you. We all pretend there is no such thing, in these days, as sheer genius; but, deep down, we know that, unless there is, there can be no such thing as true art. There is genius and you have it." Enthusiasm was again sweeping him into an unintended outburst.

The boy stood silent. Across his countenance swept a conflict of emotions. He looked away, as if taking counsel with the hills.

"It's what I'm a-havin' fer," he admitted at last. "Hit's what I'd give half my life fer. 'Hit's what I'd sell my land, an' raise the money. I reckon hit would take passin' of money, wouldn't hit?" He paused, and his eyes fell on the rifle leaning against the tree. His lips tightened in sudden remembrance. He went over and picked up the gun, and, as he did so, he shook his head.

"No," he stolidly declared, "every man to his own tools. This here's mine."

Yet, when they were again out sketching, the temptation to play with brushes once more seized him, and he took his place before the easel. Neither he nor Lescott noticed a man who crept down through the timber, and for a time watched them. The man's face wore a surlly, contemptuous grin, and shortly it withdrew.

But, an hour later, while the boy was still working industriously and the artist was lying on his back, with a pipe between his teeth, and his half-closed eyes gazing up contentedly through the green of overhead branches, their peace was broken by a guffaw of derisive laughter. They looked up, to find at their backs a semi-

circle of scoffing humanity. Lescott's impulse was to laugh, for only the comedy of the situation at the moment struck him. A stage director, setting a comedy scene with that most ancient of jests, the gawking of boobs at some new sight, could hardly have improved on this tableau. At the front stood Tamarack Spicer, the returned wanderer. His lean wrist was stretched out of a ragged sleeve all too short, and his tattered "Jimmy" was shoved back over a face all a-grin. His eyes were blood-shot with recent drinking, but his manner was in exaggerated and cumbersome imitation of a rural master of ceremonies. At his back were the raw-boned men and women and children of the hills, to the number of a dozen.

"Ladies and gentlemen," announced Tamarack Spicer, in a hiccupping voice, "swing yo' partners an' sashay forward. See the only son of the late Henry South engaged in his marvelous an' heretofore undiscovered occupation of doin' fancy work. Ladies and gentlemen, after this here show is concluded, keep your seats for the concert in the main tent. This here fa-



"Ye're a Truce-Bustin', Murderin' Bully."

mous performer will favor ye with a little exhibition of plain an' fancy sock-darmin'."

After the first surprise, Samson had turned his back on the group. He was mixing paint at the time and he proceeded to experiment with a fleeting cloud effect, which would not outlast the moment. He finished that, and, reaching for the palette-knife, scraped his fingers and wiped them on his trousers' legs. Then, he deliberately rose.

Without a word he turned. Tamarack had begun his harangue afresh. The boy tossed back the long lock from his forehead, and then, with an unexpectedly swift movement, crouched and leaped. His right fist, shot forward to Tamarack Spicer's chattering lips, and they abruptly ceased to chatter as the teeth were driven into their flesh. Spicer's head snapped back, and he staggered against the onlookers, where he stood rocking on his unsteady legs. His hand swept instinctively to the shirt-concealed holster, but, before it had connected, both of Samson's fists were playing a terrific tattoo on his face. The inglorious master of the show dropped, and lay groggily trying to rise.

The laughter died as suddenly as Tamarack's speech. Samson stepped back again, and searched the faces of the group for any lingering sign of mirth or criticism. There was none. Every countenance was sober and expressionless, but the boy felt a weight of unuttered disapproval, and he glared defiance. One of the older onlookers spoke up reproachfully.

"Samson, ye hadn't hardly ought ter a-done that. He was jest a fannin' with ye."

"Git him up on his feet. I've got somethin' ter say ter him." The boy's voice was dangerously quiet. It was his first word. They lifted the fallen cousin, whose entertainment had gone astray, and led him forward grumbling, threatening and sputtering, but evincing no immediate desire to renew hostilities.

"What's hev ye been?" demanded Samson.

"That's my business," came the familiar mountain phrase.

"Why wasn't yer hyar when them dawgs come by? Why was ye the only South that runned away, when they was smellin' round fer Jesse Purdy's assassin?"

"I didn't run away." Tamarack's blood-shot eyes flared wickedly. "I knowed that of I stayed 'round hyar with them damned Hollmans stickin' their noses inter our business, I'd hurt somebody. So, I went over inter the next county fer a spell. You fellers must be able to take things offen the Hollmans, but I hain't."

"That's a damned lie," said Samson, quietly. "Ye runned away, an' ye runned in the water so them dawgs couldn't trail ye—ye done hit because ye shot them shoots at Jesse Purdy from the laurel—because ye're a truce-bustin', murderin' bully that shoots off his face, an' is skeered to fight." Samson paused for breath, and went on with regained calmness. "I've knowed all along ye was the man, an' I've kept quiet because ye're my kin. If ye're got anything else ter say, say hit. But, ef I ever ketches yer talkin' about me, or talkin' ter Sally, I'm a-goin' ter take ye by the scroff of the neck, an' drag ye plumb into Hixon, an' stick ye in the jailhouse. An' I'm a-goin' ter tell the high sheriff that the Souths apes ye outen their mouths. Take him away." The crowd turned and left

the place. When they were gone, Samson seated himself at his easel again, and picked up his palette.

CHAPTER VI.

Lescott had come to the mountains anticipating a visit of two weeks. His accident had resolved him to shorten it to the nearest day upon which he felt capable of making the trip out to the railroad. Yet June had ended; July had burned the slopes from emerald to russet-green; August had brought purple tops to the ironwood, and still he found himself lingering. And this was true although he recognized a growing sentiment of disapproval for himself. In Samson he thought he recognized twin gifts; a spark of a genius too rare to be allowed to flicker out, and a potentiality for constructive work among his own people, which needed for its perfecting only education and experience.

"Samson," he suggested one day when they were alone, "I want you to come East. You say that gun is your tool, and that each man must stick to his own. You are in part right, in part wrong. A man uses any tool better for understanding other tools. You have the right to use your brains and talents to the full."

The boy's face was somber in the intensity of his mental struggle, and his answer had that sullen ring which was not really sullenness at all, but self-repression.

"I reckon a feller's biggest right is to stand by his kinfolks. Unc' Spicer's gittin' old. He's done been good ter me. He needs me here."

"I appreciate that. He will be older later. You can go now, and come back to him when he needs you more. If what I urged meant disloyalty to your people, I could cut out my tongue before I argued for it. You must believe me in that. I want you to be in the fullest sense your people's leader. I want you to be not only their Samson—but their Moses."

The boy looked up and nodded.

"I reckon ye aims ter be friendly, all right," was his conservative response.

The painter went on earnestly:

"I realize that I am urging things of which your people disapprove, but it is only because they misunderstand that they do disapprove. They are too close, Samson, to see the purple that mountains have when they are far away. I want you to go where you can see the purple. If you are the sort of man I think you won't be beguiled. You won't lose your loyalty. You won't be ashamed of your people."

"I reckon I wouldn't be ashamed," said the youth. "I reckon there hain't no better folks nowher."

"I'm sure of it. There are going to be sweeping changes in these mountains. Conditions here have stood as immutably changeless as the hills themselves for a hundred years. That day is at its twilight. I tell you, I know what I'm talking about. The state of Kentucky is looking this way. The state must develop, and it is here alone that it can develop. Here are virgin forests and almost inexhaustible coal veins. Capital is turning from an orange squeezed dry, and cast about for fresher food. Capital has seen your hills. Capital is inevitable, relentless, omnipotent. Where it comes, it makes its laws. Conditions that have existed undisturbed will vanish. The law of the feud, which militates and courts have not been able to abate, will vanish before capital's breath like the mist when the sun strikes them. Unless you learn to ride the waves which will presently sweep over your country, you and your people will go under. You may not realize it, but that is true. It is written."

The boy had listened intently, but at the end he smiled, and in his expression was something of the soldier who scents battle, not without welcome.

"I reckon if these here fellers air a-comin' up here ter run things, an' drowned out my folks, hit's a right good reason fer me ter stay here—an' help my folks."

"By staying here, you can't help them. It won't be work for guns, but for brains. By going away and coming back armed with knowledge, you can save them. You will know how to play the game."

"I reckon they won't git our land, ner our timber, ner our coal, without we wants ter sell hit. I reckon of they tries that, guns will come in handy. Things has stood here like they is now, fer a hundred years. I reckon we kin keep 'em that-away fer a spell longer." But it was evident that Samson was arguing against his own belief; that he was trying to bolster up his resolution and impeached loyalty, and that at heart he was sick to be up and going to a world which did not despise "education." After a little, he waved his hand vaguely toward "down below."

"Ef I went down thar," he questioned suddenly and irrelevantly, "would I hev 'er cut my hair?"

"My dear boy," laughed Lescott, "I can introduce you in New York studios to many distinguished gentlemen who would feel that their heads had been shorn if they let their locks get as short as yours. In New York, you might stroll along Broadway garbed in turban and a burnouse without greatly exciting anybody. I think my own hair is as long as yours."

"Because," doggedly declared the mountaineer, "I wouldn't allow nobody ter make me cut my hair."

"Why?" questioned Lescott, amused at the stubborn inflection.

"I don't hardly know why— He paused, then admitted with a glare as though defying criticism: "Sally likes hit that-away—an' I won't let nobody dictate ter me, that's all."

The heaven was working, and one night Samson announced to his uncle from the doorstep that he was "stud-

in' erbout goin' away fer a spell, an' seen' the world."

The old man laid down his pipe. He cast a reproachful glance at the painter, which said clearly, though without words:

"I have opened my home to you and offered you what I had, yet in my old age you take away my mainstay."

"I loved you was a-studyin' erbout that, Samson," he said, at last. "I've done ter best fer ye I knowed. I kinder loved that from now on ye'd do the same fer me. I'm gittin' along in years right smart."

"Uncle Spicer," interrupted the boy, "I reckon ye knows that any time ye needed me I'd come back."

The old man's face hardened.

"Ef ye goes," he said, almost sharply, "I won't never send fer ye. ANY time ye ever wants ter come back, ye knows ther way. Thar'll be room an' victuals fer ye hyar."

"I reckon I must be a heap more useful ef I knowed more."

"I've heerd fellers say that afore. Hit hain't never turned out that way with them what has left the mountings. Mebby they gets more useful, but they don't git useful ter us. Either they don't come back at all, or mebby they comes back full of newfangled notions—an' ashamed of their kinfolks. That's the way, I've noticed, hit gen'ally turns out."

Samson scorned to deny that such might be the case with him, and was silent. After a time, the old man went on again in a weary voice, as he bent down to loosen his brogans and kick them noisily off on to the floor:

"The Souths hev done looked to ye a good deal, Samson. They loved they could depend on ye. Ye hain't quite twenty-one yet, an' I reckon I could refuse ter let ye sell yer prop'ty. But thar hain't no use tryin' ter hold a feller when he wants ter quit. Ye don't 'low ter go right away, do ye?"

"I hain't plumb made up my mind ter go at all," said the boy, shamefacedly. "But, ef I does go, I hain't a-goin' yit. I hain't spoke ter nobody but you about hit yit."

Lescott felt reluctant to meet his host's eyes at breakfast the next morning, dreading their reproach, but, if Spicer South harbored resentment, he meant to conceal it, after the stoic's code. There was no hint of constraint in his cordiality. Lescott felt, however, that in Samson's mind was working the leaven of that unspoken accusation of disloyalty. He resolved to make a final play, and seek to enlist Sally in his cause. If Sally's hero-worship could be made to take the form of ambition for Samson, she might be brought to relinquish him for a time, and urge his going that he might return strengthened. He went down to the creek at the hour when he knew Sally would be making her way thither with her milk pail, and intercepted her coming.

As she approached, she was singing, and the man watched her from the distance. He was a landscape painter and not a master of genre or portrait. Yet, he wished that he might, before going, paint Sally.

"Miss Sally," he began, "I've discovered something about Samson."

Her blue eyes flashed ominously.

"Ye can't tell me nothin' 'bout Samson," she declared, "withouten hit's somethin' nice."

"It's something very nice," the man reassured her.

"Then, ye needn't tell me, because I already knows hit," came her prompt and confident announcement.

Lescott shook his head, dubiously.

"Samson is a genius," he said.

"What's that?"

"He has great gifts—great abilities to become a figure in the world."

She nodded her head, in prompt and full corroboration.

"I reckon Samson'll be the biggest man in the mountings some day."

"He ought to be more than that."

a declaration of war. It was as though he had posed her as the Spirit of the Cumberlands.

He waited until she should be calmer.

"You don't understand me, Miss Sally. I'm not trying to take Samson away from you. If a man should lose a girl like you, he couldn't gain enough in the world to make up for it. All I want is that he shall have the chance to make the best of his life."

"I reckon Samson don't need no fotchod-on help ter make folks acknowledge him."

"Every man needs his chance. He can be a great painter—but that's the least part of it. He can come back equipped for anything that life offers. Here, he is wasted."

"Ye mean"—she put the question with a hurt quaver in her voice—"ye mean we all hain't good enough for Samson?"

"No, I only mean that Samson wants to grow—and he needs space and new scenes in which to grow. I want to take him where he can see more of the world—not only a little section of the world. Surely, you are not distrustful of Samson's loyalty? I want him to go with me for a while, and see life."

"Don't ye say hit!" The defiance in her voice was being pathetically tangled up with the tears. She was speaking in a transport of grief. "Don't ye say hit. Take anybody else—take 'em all down thar, but leave us Samson. We needs him hyar. We've jest got ter have Samson hyar."

She faced him still with quivering lips, but in another moment, with a sudden sob, she dropped to the rock, and buried her face in her crossed arms. He went over and softly laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Miss Sally," he began.

She suddenly turned on him a tear-stained, infuriated face, stormy with blazing eyes and wet cheeks and trembling lips.

"Don't touch me," she cried; "don't ye dare ter touch me! I hain't nothin' but a gal—but I reckon I could 'most tear ye ter pieces. Ye're jest a pizen snake, anyhow!" Then, she pointed a tremulous finger off up the road. "Git away from hyar," she commanded. "I don't never want ter see ye again. Ye're tryin' ter steal everything I loves. Git away, I tells ye!—git away—begone!"

"Think it over," urged Lescott, quietly. "See if your heart doesn't say I am Samson's friend—and yours." He turned, and began making his way over the rocks; but, before he had gone far, he sat down to reflect upon the situation. Certainly, he was not augmenting his popularity. A half-hour later, he heard a rustle, and, turning, saw Sally standing not far off. She was hesitating at the edge of the underbrush, and Lescott read in her eyes the effort it was costing her to come forward and apologize.

"I reckon—I reckon I've got ter ask yore pardon," she said, slowly and with labored utterance. He looked up to see her standing with her head drooping and her fingers nervously pulling a flower to pieces.

"I reckon I hain't a plumb fool. I knows that Samson's got a right ter education. Anyhow, I knows he wants hit."

"Education," said the man, "isn't going to change Samson, except to make him finer than he is—and more capable."

She shook her head. "I hain't got no education," she answered. "Hit's a-goin' ter make him too good fer me. I reckon hit's a-goin' ter jest about kill me. . . . Her lips twisted themselves into a pathetic smile again, and her chin came stiffly up. "But," she added, determinedly, "thet don't make no difference, nohow."

Yet, when Samson that evening gave his whippoorwill call at the Widow Miller's cabin, he found a dejected and miserable girl sitting on the stile, with her chin propped in her two hands and her eyes full of somberness and foreboding.

"What's the matter, Sally?" questioned he, anxiously. "Hes that low-down Tamarack Spicer been round here tellin' ye some more stories ter peeter ye?"

She shook her head in silence. Usually, she bore the brunt of their conversations, Samson merely agreeing with, or overruling, her in lordly brevities. The boy climbed up and sat beside her.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Wisdom From Thomas.

The thoughtful look on young Thomas' face betrayed that he had a few questions to ask. As soon as Mrs. Boardman had gone, he asked them.

"Mother," said he, "do you like to kiss Mrs. Boardman?"

"No, dear."

"Do you think Mrs. Boardman likes to kiss you?"

"I don't think she does."

"Then why do you and she always kiss when you meet?"

"I don't know, dear."

"Don't you think Mrs. Boardman would rather you didn't kiss her?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"Wouldn't you rather Mrs. Boardman didn't kiss you?"

"Oh, very much rather."

"Then," said young Thomas, conclusively, "that must be why."

Ancient Servants.

Francis Grierson, the English musician and author, writes of the French composer Auber in the Century for October that "if I were asked to name the most typical Frenchman I ever met I should not hesitate to name Auber." The composer at the time spoken of was eighty-five, and among his idiosyncrasies was his preference for servants of equally advanced years. He had five domestics, "the youngest, whom he called the baby, being the coachman, who was seventy-five."

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