The Call of the Cumberlands

By Charles Neville Buck

With Illustrations from Photographs of Scenes in the Play

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CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

"Dear Samson: The war is on again. Tamarack Spicer killed Jim Asberry, and the Hollmans have killed Tamarack. Uncle Spicer is shot, but he may get well. There is nobody to lead the Souths. I am trying to hold them down until I hear from you. Don't come if you don't want to—but the gun is ready. With love,

"SALLY."

Slowly Samson South came to his feet. His voice was in the dead-level pitch which Wilfred had once before heard. His eyes were as clear and hard as transparent flint.

"I'm sorry to be of trouble, George," he said, quietly. "But you must get me to New York at once—by motor I must take a train south tonight."

"No bad news, I hope," suggested Lescott.

For an instant Samson forgot his four years of veneer. The century of prenatal barbarism broke out fiercely. He was seeing things far away—and forgetting things near by. His eyes blazed and his fingers twitched.

"Hell, no!" he exclaimed. "The war's on, and my hands are freed!"

For an instant, as no one spoke, he stood breathing heavily, then, wheeling, rushed toward the house as though just across its threshold lay the fight into which he was aching to hurl himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

Samson stopped at his studio and threw open an old closet where, from a littered pile of discarded background draperies, canvases and stretchers, he fished out a buried and dust-covered pair of saddlebags. They had long lain there forgotten, but they held the rusty clothes in which he had left Misery.

Samson had caught the fastest westbound express on the schedule. In thirty-six hours he would be at Hixon There were many things which his brain must attack and digest in these hours. He must arrange his plan of action to its minutest detail, because he would have as little time for reflection, once he had reached his own country, as a wildcat flung into a pack of hounds.

From the railroad station to his home he must make his way—most probably fight his way—through thirty miles of hostile territory, where all the trails were watched. And yet, for the time, all that seemed too remotely unreal to hold his thoughts.

He took out Sally's letter, and read it once more. He read it mechanically and as a piece of news that had brought evil tidings. Then, suddenly, another aspect of it struck him—an aspect to which the shock of its reception had until this tardy moment blinded him. The letter was perfectly grammatical and penned in a hand of copybook roundness and evenness The address, the body of the missive and the signature were all in one chirography She would not have intrusted the writing of this letter to anyone else.

Sally had learned to write.

Moreover, at the end were the words, "with love." It was all plain now. Sally had never repudiated him. She was declaring herself true to her mission and her love

"Good God!" groaned the man, in abjectly bitter self-contempt. His hand went involuntarily to his cropped head, and dropped with a gesture of self-doubting. He looked down at his tan shoes and silk socks. He rolled back his shirtsleeve and contemplated the forearm that had once been as brown and tough as leather. It was now the arm of a city man, except for the burning of one outdoor week. He was returning at the eleventh hour—stripped of the faith of his kinsmen, half-stripped of his faith in himself If he were to realize the constructive dreams of which he had last night so confidently prattled to Adrienne, he must lead his people from under the blighting shadow of the feud.

He must reappear before his kinsmen as much as possible the boy who had left them—not the fop with newfangled affectations. His eyes fell upon the saddlebags upon the floor of the Pullman and he smiled satirically He would like to step from the train at Hixon and walk brazenly through the town in those old clothes, challenging every hostile glance. If they shot him down on the streets, as they certainly would do, it would end his questioning and his anguish of dilemma He would welcome that, but it would, after all, be shirking the issue

He must get out of Hixon and into his own country unrecognized. The lean boy of four years ago was the somewhat filled-out man now. The one concession that he had made to Paris life was the wearing of a closely cropped mustache. That he still wore—had worn it chiefly because he liked to hear Adrienne's humorous denunciation of it. He knew that, in his present guise and dress, he had an excellent chance of walking through the streets of Hixon as a stranger. And, after leaving Hixon, there was a mission to be performed at Jesse Purvy's store. As he thought of that mission a grim glint came to his pupils.

All journeys end, and as Samson passed through the tawdry cars of the local train near Hixon he saw several faces which he recognized, but they either eyed him in inexpressive silence or gave him the greeting of the "furriner."

As Samson crossed the toll bridge to the town proper he passed two brown-shirted militiamen, lounging on the rail of the middle span. They grinned at him, and, recognizing the outsider from his clothes, one of them commented:

"Ain't this the hell of a town?"

"It's going to be," replied Samson, enigmatically, as he went on.

Still unrecognized, he hired a horse at the livery stable, and for two hours rode in silence, save for the easy creaking of his stirrup leathers and the soft thud of hoofs.

The silence soothed him. The brooding hills lulled his spirit as a crooning song lulls a fretful child. Mile after mile unrolled forgotten vistas. Something deep in himself murmured:

"Home!"

It was late afternoon when he saw ahead of him the orchard of Purvy's place, and read on the store wall, a little more weather stained, but otherwise unchanged:

"Jesse Purvy, General Merchandise."

The porch of the store was empty, and as Samson flung himself from his saddle there was no one to greet him. This was surprising, since, ordinarily, two or three of Purvy's personal guardsmen loafed at the front to watch the road Just now the guard should logically be doubled. Samson still wore his eastern clothes—for he wanted to go through that door unknown. As Samson South he could not cross its threshold either way. But when he stepped up on to the rough porch

"The War's On and My Hands Are Freed!"

flooring no one challenged his advance. The yard and orchard were quiet from their front fence to the grisly stockade at the rear, and, wondering at these things, the young man stood for a moment looking about at the afternoon peace before he announced himself.

Yet Samson had not come to the stronghold of his enemy for the purpose of assassination. There had been another object in his mind—an utterly mad idea, it is true, yet so bold of conception that it held a ghost of promise. He had meant to go into Jesse Purvy's store and chat artlessly, like some inquisitive "furriner." He would ask questions which by their very impertinence might be forgiven on the score of a stranger's folly. But, most of all, he wanted to drop the casual information, which he should assume to have heard on the train, that Samson South was returning, and to mark, on the assassin leader, the effect of the news. In his new code it was necessary to give at least the rattler's warning before he struck, and he meant to strike. If he were recognized, well—he shrugged his shoulders

But as he stood on the outside, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, for the ride had been warm, he heard voices within. They were loud and angry voices. It occurred to him that by remaining where he was he might gain more information than by hurrying in.

"I've done been your executioner for 'leventy years," complained a voice, which Samson at once recognized as that of Aaron Hollis, the most trusted of Purvy's personal guards. "I hain't never laid down on yo yet. Me an' Jim Asberry killed old Henry South. We laid fer his boy, an' would 'a' got him ef you'd only said ther word. I went inter Hixon an' killed Tam'rack Spicer, with soldiers all round me. There hain't no other damn fool in these mountings would 'a' took such a long chance es thet. I'm tired of it They're a-goin' ter git me, an' I wants ter leave, an' you won't come clean with the price of a railroad ticket to Oklahoma. Now, damn yore stingy soul, I gits that ticket or I gits you!"

"Aaron, you can't scare me into doin' nothin' I ain't aimin' to do." The old baron of the vendetta spoke in a cold, stoical voice. "I tell ye I ain't quite through with ye yet In due an' proper time I'll see that ye get yer ticket." Then he added, with conciliating softness: "We've been friends a long while. Let's talk this thing over before we fall out."

"Thar hain't nothin' to talk over," stormed Aaron. "Ye're jest tryin' ter kill time till the boys gits hyar, and then I reckon ye 'lows ter have me kilt like yer've had me kill them others Hit ain't no use. I've done sent 'em away. When they gits back hyar, either you'll be in hell, or I'll be on my way outen the mountings."

Samson stood rigid. Here was the confession of one murderer, with no denial from the other. The truce was off. Why should he wait? Cataracts seemed to thunder in his brain, and yet he stood there, his hand in his coat pocket, clutching the grip of a magazine pistol. Samson South the old, and Samson South the new were writhing in the life-and-death grapple of two codes. Then, before decision came, he heard a sharp report inside, and the heavy fall of a body to the floor.

A wildly excited figure came plunging through the door, and Samson's left hand swept out and seized its shoulder in a sudden vise grip.

"Do you know me?" he inquired, as the mountaineer pulled away and crouched back with startled surprise and vicious frenzy.

"No, damn ye! Git outen my road!" Aaron thrust his cocked rifle close against the stranger's face. From its muzzle came the acrid stench of freshly burned powder. "Git outen my road afore I kill ye!"

"My name is Samson South."

Before the astounded finger on the trigger could be crooked, Samson's pistol spoke from the pocket, and, as though in echo, the rifle blazed, a little too late and a shade too high, over his head, as the dead man's arms went up.

Except for those two reports there was no sound. Samson stood still, anticipating an uproar of alarm. Now he should doubtless have to pay with his life for both the deaths, which would inevitably and logically be attributed to his agency. But, strangely enough, no clamor arose. The shot inside had been muffled, and those outside, broken by the intervening store, did not arouse the house. Purvy's bodyguard had been sent away by Hollis on a false alarm. Only the "womenfolks" and children remained indoors, and they were drowning with a piano any sounds that might have come from without.

Now Samson South stood looking down, uninterrupted, on what had been Aaron Hollis as it lay motionless at his feet. There was a powder-burned hole in the butternut shirt, and only a slender thread of blood trickled into the dirt-grimed cracks between the planks.

Samson turned to the darkened doorway. Inside was emptiness, except for the other body, which had crumpled forward and face down across the counter. A glance showed that Jesse Purvy would no more fight back the coming of death. He was quite unarmed.

Samson paused only for a momentary survey. His score was clean He would not again have to agonize over the dilemma of old ethics and new. Tomorrow the word would spread like wildfire along Misery and Crippleshin that Samson South was back and that his coming had been signalized by these two deaths. The fact that he was responsible for only one—and that in self-defense—would not matter. They would prefer to believe that he had invaded the store and killed Purvy and that Hollis had fallen in his master's defense at the threshold. Samson went out, still meeting no one, and continued his journey.

Dusk was falling when he hitched his horse in a clump of timber, and, lifting his saddlebags, began climbing to a cabin that sat back in a thicketed cove. He was now well within South territory and the need of masquerade had ended

The cabin had not for years been occupied. Its rooftree was leaning askew under rotting shingles The doorstep was ivy-covered, and the stones of the hearth were broken. But it lay well hidden and would serve his purposes

Shortly, a candle flickered inside before a small hand mirror. Scissors and safety razor were for a while busy The man who entered in impeccable clothes emerged fifteen minutes later—transformed. There appeared under the rising June crescent a smooth-faced native, clad in stained store clothes, with rough woolen socks showing at his brogan tops, and a battered felt hat drawn over his face No one who had known the Samson South of four years ago would fail to recognize him now. And the strangest part, he told himself, was that he felt the old Samson.

At a point where a hand bridge crossed the skirting creek, the boy dismounted. Ahead of him lay the stile where he had said good-by to Sally.

He was going to her, and nothing else mattered.

He lifted his head and sent out a long, clear whippoorwill call, which quavered on the night much like the other calls in the black hills around him. After a moment he went nearer, in the shadow of a poplar, and repeated the call.

Then the cabin door opened Its jamb framed a patch of yellow candle light and, at the center, a slender silhouetted figure, in a fluttering, eager attitude of uncertainty. The figure turned slightly to one side, and, as it did so, the man saw clasped in her right hand the rifle, which had been his mission, bequeathed to her in trust She hesitated, and the man, invisible in the shadow, once more imitated the bird note, but this time it was so low and soft that it seemed the voice of a whispering whippoorwill

Then, with a sudden glad little cry, she came running with her old fleet grace down to the road.

Samson had vaulted the stile and stood in the full moonlight As he saw her coming he stretched out his arms and his voice broke from his throat in a half-hoarse, passionate cry:

"Sally!"

It was the only word he could have spoken just then, but it was all that was necessary It told her everything

For a time there was no speech, but to each of them it seemed that their tumultuous heartbeating must sound above the night music, and the telegraphy of heartbeats tells enough

But they had much to say to each other, and, finally, Samson broke the silence:

"Did ye think I wasn't a-coming back, Sally?" he questioned, softly. At that moment he had no realization that his tongue had ever fashioned smoother phrases. And she, too, who had been making war on crude idioms, forgot, as she answered:

"Ye done said ye was comin'." Then she added a happy lie: "I knowed plumb shore ye'd do hit."

After a while she drew away and said, slowly:

"Samson, I've done kept the old rifle-gun ready fer ye. Ye said ye'd need it bad when ye come back, an' I've took care of it."

She stood there holding it, and her voice dropped almost to a whisper as she added:

"It's been a lot of comfort to me sometimes, because it was your'n. I knew if ye stopped keerin' fer me ye wouldn't let me keep it—an' as long as I had it I—" She broke off, and the fingers of one hand touched the weapon caressingly.

After a long while they found time for the less wonderful things.

"I got your letter," he said, seriously, "and I came at once." As he began to speak of concrete facts he dropped again into ordinary English and did not know that he had changed his manner of speech.

For an instant Sally looked up into his face, then with a sudden laugh, she informed him:

"I can say 'isn't' instead of 'hain't,' too. How did you like my writing?"

He held her off at arm's length, and looked at her pridefully, but under his gaze her eyes fell and her face flushed with a sudden diffidence and a new shyness of realization. She wore a calico dress, but at her throat was a soft little bow of ribbon. She was no longer the totally unself-conscious wood nymph, though as natural and instinctive as in other days. Suddenly she drew away from him a little, and her hands went slowly to her breast and rested there. She was fronting a great crisis, but, in the first flush of joy she had forgotten it. She had spent lonely nights struggling for rudiments; she had sought and fought to refashion herself, so that, if he came, he need not be ashamed of her. And now he had come and, with a terrible clarity and distinctness, she realized how pitifully little she had been able to accomplish. Would she pass muster? She stood there before him, frightened, self-conscious and palpitating, then her voice came in a whisper:

"Samson, dear, I'm not holdin' you to any promise. Those things we said were a long time back. Maybe we'd better forget em now and begin all over again"

But again he crushed her to his arms and his voice rose triumphantly:

"Sally, I have no promises to take back, and you have made none that I'm ever going to let you take back—not while life lasts!"

Her laugh was the delicious music of happiness

"I don't want to take them back," she said Then, suddenly, she added importantly: "I wear shoes and stockings now, and I've been to school a little. I'm awfully—awfully ignorant, Samson, but I've started, and I reckon you can teach me."

His voice choked. Then, her hands strayed up, and clasped themselves about his head.

"Oh, Samson," she cried, as though someone had struck her, "you've cut yore ha'r."

"It will grow again," he laughed But he wished that he had not had to make that excuse Then, being honest, he told her all about Adrienne Lescott—even about how, after he believed that he had been outcast by his uncle and kinsmen, he had had his moments of doubt. Now that it was all so clear, now that there could never be doubt, he wanted the woman who had been so true a friend to know the girl whom he loved. He loved them both, but was in love with only one. He wanted to present to Sally the friend who had made him, and to the friend who had made him the Sally of whom he was proud. He wanted to tell Adrienne that now he could answer her question—that each of them meant to the other exactly the same thing; they were friends of the rarer sort, who had for a little time been in danger of mistaking their comradeship for passion.

As they talked, sitting on the stile, Sally held the rifle across her knees. Except for their own voices and the soft chorus of night sounds, the hills were wrapped in silence—a silence as soft as velvet

"I learned some things down there at school, Samson," said the girl, slowly, "and I wish—I wish you didn't have to use the rifle."

"Jim Asberry is dead," said the man gravely.

"Yes," she echoed, "Jim Asberry's dead." She stopped there Yet, her sign completed the sentence as though she had added, "but he was only one of several Your vow went farther"

After a moment's pause, Samson added:

"Jesse Purvy's dead."

The girl drew back, with a frightened gasp. She knew what this meant, or thought she did.

"Jesse Purvy!" she repeated "Oh, Samson, did ye—?" She broke off, and covered her face with her hands.

"No, Sally," he told her. "I didn't have to." He recited the day's occurrences, and they sat together on the stile, until the moon had sunk to the ridge top.

* * * * * * *

Capt. Sidney Callomb, who had been dispatched in command of a militia

"I Have No Promises to Take Back."

company to quell the trouble in the mountains, should have been a soldier by profession. All his enthusiasms were martial.

The deepest sorrow and mortification he had ever known was that which came to him when Tamarack Spicer, his prisoner of war and a man who had been surrendered on the strength of his personal guaranty, had been assassinated before his eyes. In some fashion, he must make amends He realized, too, and it rankled deeply, that his men were not being genuinely used to serve the state, but as instruments of the Hollmans, and he had seen enough to distrust the Hollmans. Here, in Hixon, he was seeing things from only one angle. He meant to learn something more impartial

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

WAR TERMS NOT UNDERSTOOD

"Forlorn Hope," for Instance, Has Not the Meaning With Which It Is Credited.

In the course of every war one hears a great deal about "forlorn hopes." The term is one of the most misused in the vocabulary of war It is commonly misunderstood to mean "lost troop"—that is "detached troop." The word "hope" in the phrase is not an English but a Dutch word, "hoop," meaning literally "heap," and secondarily body of troops The word "forlorn" represents the Dutch "verloren"—lost. A "verloren hoop" was a detached body of troops thrown out in front of the main line of battle to find the enemy and engage them first. This was the regular sixteenth and seventeenth century practice, and though it was one of the more dangerous kinds of service it was not desperate or, in the English sense, forlorn. Nowadays much the same work is done by the detached bodies of cavalry which are thrown out before the main line to find the enemy.

"Capitulation" is another term of war, which is very loosely used It does not mean surrender, but surrender on terms; in fact, it means the terms, not the surrender. It is from the Latin "capitulum" or "heading" (from which is derived our word "chapter"), and a capitulation is a formal treaty of surrender drawn up under a series of headings or chapters, embodying the terms on each point.

Woman's Logic.

You sometimes wonder about the logic of the feminist mind.

A man was to meet his wife at her office at one o'clock to take luncheon with her. He was 20 minutes late. She had gone out.

He sat down and waited. At 1:30 she arrived.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"I'm waiting for you."

"Didn't you know I wouldn't come back after I'd given you up and gone out?"

"But you did come back, didn't you? You are back now, aren't you?"

"Yes, but you might have known that when I did come back I would have had my lunch, and there would be no use in waiting to have it with me."

"Well, have you had it?"

"No."—Denver News.

Japanese a Patient People.

Impatience among the Japanese is a thing you will rarely observe as you travel through their strange and beautiful country If, on the other hand, you yourself, in touring Japan, might upon occasion grow somewhat impatient, you will only become the quiet laughing stock—behind your back—of the little Japs themselves. An hour, or even a day, more or less in this oriental country is of little account, and matters cannot be made to move any the quicker because of any irritability.

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