

George Carter,
7 miles west of Talladega Springs, Ala.

Jack Kytle
Editorial Department

"A WOMAN'S LIKE A DUMB ANIMAL"

For forty-two years, George Carter has been pulling and shoving at the handle of a cross-cut saw. He is a big, slouch-shouldered man, six feet three inches tall, 220 pounds of bone and muscle. He is 62 years old, but he says proudly, "I don't never ask no rest time--I ain't never been white-eyed but once, an' I got to tell you 'bout that." His skin is dark and leathery, his eyes black and squinted, his coarse, black hair streaked with gray.

It was Sunday afternoon, and he sat there on the slanting porch of his shanty, with his willow-bottomed chair propped against the wall. His huge feet were covered by rough cotton socks, cut at the heels and toes. He pulled hard at a cob pipe through a slender cane stem, and he said:

"A old man gits purty lonesome-like out to hisself this-a-way; but I ain't got no cause to grumble. I been 'round lots in my day, an' I done buried two ol' women. You couldn't give me another'n. They's too many runnin' 'bout that you don't have to feed.

"Gittin' down to what you axed me, I been loggin' and foolin' 'bout sawmills since I was a duck of a boy. Ol' man Blalock, over at th' valley,

says he wouldn't give me fer four common men. He oughter know. He's seed a lot of loggers.

"Why, when th' ol' man was runnin' a mill over thar in th' holler, buyin' his lumber tree by tree, he says to me, 'George, I got to make a profit. I got to git trees that'll make fine, clear boards; an' it's go'nter be up to you to git 'em.' Well, sir, I got enough of 'em to make him rich. I jest go up to a tree an' look it over, an' I can tell you what kind of lumber it's go'nter make. I can spot th' knots 'way up 'mongst th' limbs. I can even tell 'bout how many feet of good boards or floorin' there is in a tree.

"He ain't never paid me right, but I don't need nothin' much now.

When I was a young duck I worked fer fifty cents a day, sunup to sundown; but I weren't workin' fer him back then. Th' ol' man pays me two dollars now, an' he s'posed to be th' boss logger. I ain't s'posed to work but eight hour a day, but I could count on my ten fingers how many times I got out o' th' woods fore good dark.

"One time I went to him 'bout my pay, an' he put on a mouth that was as pore as a widder woman. He says, 'George, you know I'm yore friend; I'd pay you more if I could. But my sales is 'way down. If I'm go'nter keep eatin' myself, I can't pay my help no more. It'd bust me, an' then we'd

all be out in th' cold.' Well, I ain't been to him since that day. He thinks I'm a damned fool, but I ain't blind. A man that's been lumberin' as long as me knows a few things. I can look at th' stock in his sheds an' know that he has lyin' with a face as bare as a baby's rump. I know what I out in th' woods, an' I know how much lumber it'll make.

"He's got plenty money to keep him th' rest of his life. He don't bank it over at Sylacaugy. He banks some of it in Birmingham, an' some in Mobile. Tony told me 'bout that, an' he ought'er know; he mails most of th' ol' man's letters up at th' Springs. Tony's th' commissary man, an' he says ol' Blalock is so stingy he wears buttons on his pants made out of his own wood. He's that tight, all right."

George stretched his towering frame, lifting his huge, sun-baked arms above his head. He shuffled his chair nearer the edge of the porch, where he could prop his feet against the two-by-four railing. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"I been 'round," he said at last, "an' I ain't proud of some of th' things I done. I never did know no mummy an' daddy. Some said I was a woods colt, but they never said it to my face. Anyway, I was gived away. I was gived to a ol' man named Sears over on th' river--me an' a girl they said was my

sister.

"That ol' man nigh 'bout worked me to death. He had a big farm over thar' an' it got to whar I was doin' jest 'bout everything. I stood it 'til I'se fifteen year old, an' then I runned away. He katched me th' first time an' whooped me 'til my ol' jacket stuck to my back, it was so full of blood. But I made up my mind he wasn't go'nter keep me. Next time I runned away, it was in th' night, an' I crossed th' river an' set out down th' road. I kept on goin' an' 'fore I knowed it, I'se in Selma.

"I tell you, I was so hongry when I got thar, an' I'd drunk so much water, that my belly thought I'd took in washin'. I've heerd folks say they wouldn't beg fer nothin' if they was starvin' to death; but they jest ain't never been hongry enuff. I went up to a house an' I begged, an' I got some coffee an' some cornbread. I ain't never tasted nothin' so good as that, an' I seen good vittles in my time.

"They was a circus thar in Selma, an' I'd not seed one before in my life. I jest comed up on it while I'se walkin' an' I went up, boy-like, to listen to th' music. They was takin' down one of th' tents, an' when I'se standin' thar goggle-eyed, a man come up on me. He says, 'Boy, you look stout; you wants work?' An' well, I was needin' a job 'bout as bad as a

body could. I pitched in right thar, an' I done so good that they took me along in th' work gang.

"I done all right, too. I was 'bout six foot high then, an' weighed close ter two hundred pound. I was like a ox, an' couldn't none of them men outwork me. But my dander kept risin' up, an' if I'd had bug-sense I'd a knowed trouble was comin'. I'd keep gittin' my dander up when th' boss-man'd come 'round with his cussin' an' bullyin'. I'd b'ill in my innards when he'd kick a nigger, an' I got to thinkin' what was go'nter happen if he ever kicked me.

"He weren't high as me, but he was broad an' built close to th' ground. He didn't have no good side to him--he was jest mean as hell--an' even when he was in good humor, you knowed he was jest a rattlesnake in th' sunshine. You knowed there weren't nothin' 'bout him that was any good a-tall.

"Well, sir, I let a rope slip one day, an' he comed 'round to whar I was. We was at a little town in North Car'lina, an' that's a good piece from hyar. He started cussin' me, callin' me things that showed me thar was go'nter be trouble. Then, 'fore I knowed what was happenin,' he kicked me.

"I reached down on th' ground, an' I got my fingers on a sledge hammer that was lyin' thar. I said, 'You son-of-a-bitch, you kick me jest one more time an' I'll kill you. So he'p me my good God, I'll knock yo'r brains down

yo'r throat.'

"I'll say this fer him; he weren't no coward. He jest looked at me a second or two, an' then he comed t'ward me. I knowed he meant business; I had to perteck myself. I raised that hammer an' I knocked him in th' head so hard that he fell like a sick ox. I run like hell, then, but didn't nobody try to kotch me. I guess everybody was glad.

"To this day, I don't know what become of him. He might a-died, fer I hit him a solid lick. Since I got religion, I pray 'bout it sometimes, but I ain't never been able to feel sorry 'bout it. He axed fer it, an' if he got well, I bet he didn't kick nobody else fer a long time."

George stuffed his pipe with sack tobacco again, struck a match on the pineboard floor, and puffed silently for a few moments.

"It took me mor'n a month to git back hyar. I was ragged an' hongry, an' didn't have no friends to go to, but I made up my mind I weren't goin' back to ol' man Sears.' I'se feelin' grown now, an' I knowed I weren't goin' to take no more beatin's from him. I knowed I'd kill him if he ever laid a hand on me, fer I couldn't even think 'bout him an' not burn in my head. Sometimes I thought 'bout that gal that was s'posed to be my sister, but I never knowed that she was. She was a little ol' skinny, light-haired gal, an' she never favored me. Some folke say I got Indian blood, I wouldn't know. But I guess I done things in my

time bad as a Indian.

"I done things that th' good God won't ever forgive me fer. When I come back, I didn't have no friends, cept Tom Green, a nigger that lived down in Coosa County 'bout th' bend. I went down thar with him, an' he was as bad a nigger as I was a white man. I took to card playin' an' whiskey drinkin' down thar, an' we raised so much hell that we driv' his ol' woman plumb out-a th' house. When we'd give out-a whiskey, we'd jost make us some more an' go right ahead rassin' hell.

"A bunch of niggers who worked at th' Jackson sawmill over at th' Springs useta come down to Tom's house on Sundays, an' Tom an' me'd play cards with 'em an' take what they had. That's one of th' things I won't ever be fergive fer. There was them po'r niggers who'd git paid maybe three dollars on Saturday, an' then Tom an' me'd git 'em drunk an' take everything they had. You see this scar on th' side of my head? Well, I got it right thar. A crazy nigger gived it to me with a butcher knife.

"I stayed down thar in them woods 'til I was goin' on twenty year old. Tom an' me was makin' whiskey an' gamblin' an' fishin' a little fer a livin' an' we was doin' good. But then one Saturday, Tom got full of likker an' went over th' mountain to a sawmill that had started runnin' over thar.

They was a bunch of niggers workin' at the mill, an' one of 'em was a nigger named Doc, who had a tall, yaller gal fer a woman that made Tom's mouth water. Tom saw her once, an' then he comed to me an' said that he couldn't look at 'er an' stand still. Th' thoughts of her feet runned all over him; an' then, that Saturday he got likkered up.

"He headed straight fer that Doc's shack 'spite all th' way I begged him to stay away. He had a pistol in his overall pocket, an' I knowed that he was goin' atter what he wanted. I begged him right to th' door leadin' up to th' shack, but they wasn't nothin' could be done. He went up thar and walked in th' door.

"He wasn't no sooner in than Doc's woman started hollerin'. I was standin' out in th' road watchin', fer I knowed Tom was drunk enough to shoot me if I tried to stop him. The door was open a little, an' I could see him wrestlin' with that yaller gal, an' her screamin' like she was in a bed of snakes. Niggers started runnin' out of all th' shacks, an' some of 'em headed straight fer th' sawmill boiler room.

"I knowed then that thar was hell to pay, fer that was whar Doc was workin'. In no time a-tall, he come runnin' t'ward his shack, an' he had a rifle in his hand. He stopped out in the front yard, an' he called out, 'Come out-a my house, nigger, or I'm comin' atter you.'

"He hadn't no more than said it when Tom come to th' door. ^{Tom} He didn't
say a thing, he jest leveled down with his pistol an' started shootin' at
Doc--I don't know how many times. But Doc jest stepped back of a tree thar
in th' yard an' waited 'til Tom had finished. Then he raised that rifle to
his shoulder.

"I never seed a shot ^u ga'ged better'n that one. Tom stepped back from
th' door, kinder to one side, but Doc seemed to know whar he was standin'.
He shot through th' wall, 'bout two feet from th' door, an' that bullet got
Tom right through th' belly. We runned up to th' house an' he was dead. Th'
gal was under th' bed.

"Now I'm th' sort that knows what side my bread's buttered on. I knowed
them people might say I was Tom's friend an' have it in fer me. But when I
seed he was dead, I knowed that a dead man can't do nothin' fer nobody. So
I started cussin' him right and left, an' tol' Doc that I'd see th' law didn't
do nothin' to him. I did that, too, fer I went over to th' county seat at
Rockford an' helped see that they didn't bother him. They jest had a little
hearin', an' then they turned him loose.

"I didn't lose nothin' by tellin' what I knowed. They was a young man
named Hughes who was runnin' th' sawmill, an' he told me that he was to thank
me fer what I'd done fer his nigger. Well, sir, I seed that th' time was right,

an' I axed him fer a job. He gived it to me, an' that's whar I started out sawmillin'.

"I was a grownup man, an' I was as tough an' as stout as a mule. At first, I helped fire th' b'iler, totin' slabs fer it, but then one day Mr. Hughes come up to me. He says, 'I'm short in th' woods, George; I need loggers out thar. How'd you like to try yo'r hand at it?' I tol' him that I'd like it fine, an' th' next day, I was pullin' at th' end of a crosscut saw.

"Well, sir, I had som'pun happen out thar that gived me a lesson. I don't min' tellin' you 'bout it, fer it's got funny to me now. They was a little ol' man helpin' me named Davis, an' he weren't nothin' but a runt. Th' first time I seed him I wanted to laugh, fer it was funny to think he could keep up with me on a saw.

"Th' second day I worked out thar, he was goin' in to th' commissary fer som'pun, an' I give him a dime an' axed him to git me some 'baccar. He was gone a couple of hours, an' when he come back he seemed mighty worried. He come right to me, an' he said, 'George, I done lost that dime of your'n; I'll pay it back come Saturday.' An' I was wantin' 'baccar, an' I got mad as hell. I said, 'You stole my money.'

"Well, sir, he straightened up his little old wizened self, an' he said, 'That's a lie.' He was white as a sheet, an' he was tremblin' like he was go'nter fall to pieces. I knowed he was scared as a rabbit, so I took a step t'ward him an' said, 'If you say that ag'in, I'll slap yo'r face.' He come right back at me. He said, 'It's a lie--a double dogged lie!'

"They was just us two away out thar in th' woods--miles away from th' closest soul. I ris up my arm, an' I slapped his face so hard that it cracked like th' stinger on a cowhide whip. I slapped it that hard, an' then I turned to walk off.

"I've stirred up a yaller jacket nest many a time, an' I've had 'em git over me faster'n a country boy pickin' a banjo, but I ain't never had nothin' git on me as fast as that dried-up little ol' man. We was standin' on th' side of a hill, an' he come at me head first. His shoulders hit me in the belly, an' I went down on my back, with my head p'inted down th' hill, an' my feet p'inted up. It was all sudden-like, an' I couldn't a got up if it'd bin th' end of th' world.

"I tried to hit at him from whar I was lyin', but he wasn't nowher I hit. He was jest like a banty rooster, an' he hit me in th' face so fast that you couldn't a counted th' licks. He jest sit on my chest an' beat on my nose an' eyes an'

mouth like he was beatin' a drum. I couldn't do nothin', so I said, 'You have whooped me.' He got up then, but my eyes was swelled 'til it was all I could do to see, an' my mouth felt like it was big as a ham.

"It's a funny thing, but I got to likin' that little ol' man. He tried to pay me back my dime, but I wouldn't take it. We went on cuttin' logs together, an' it weren't long 'fore we was mighty good friends. An' it was him that I was goin' to tell you 'bout--th' only time in my life I ever was white-eyed.

"It was all on account of a ol' cheap watch. Bein' out in th' woods as he was, we couldn't hear no whistles for quittin' time, so th' man that owned a watch did all th' time-callin'. Well, this was my watch, an' it was up to me when we was to rest. It got to whar I allus called time for 'bout fifteen minutes every mornin' so we could go over to a spring close by an' git us some water. When we'd drunk, we'd lie down awhile an' talk.

"Things kept up like that a long time, and it come to th' point th war Davis weren't doin' much work. He wanted to rest all th' time, an' we couldn't keep up with the teamsters. Well, sir, th' notion struck me that if I'd let him call th' time he might do better work, so one day I took out my watch an' handed it to him. I said, 'You keep th' watch awhile Mister Davis, an' you call th' time.'"

"Now, I've made lots of mistakes in my life, but that'n was th' worst. That little ol' man went crazy as a bat. He was allus takin' out that watch an' lookin' at it like he was a boss, an' he couldn't git to workin' early ^{enough} ~~enough~~. It got to whar he wouldn't even lie down when we'd go to th' spring, an' he was stingy 'bout goin' a-tall. We'd git down thar, but jest th'minute I laid down, he'd take out that watch an' say, 'Got to git back on th' job, Carter; got to keep th' trees fallin'.'

"It tickled me fer a while, but it got to whar it weren't funny. One hot day in August we was cuttin' logs, an' he was worse than ever. He worked like we was th' only loggers in th' woods, an' by dinner time, I was blowin' an' sweetin' like a mule. That evenin', he jest kept on sawin' like he was fightin' a fire, an' I knowed I couldn't make it no further. I took my hands off my end of th' saw, an' I says to him, 'You better let me have th' watch ag'in. We'll take turns keepin' time, week by week.' But I never did git 'round no more to lettin' him carry it.

"I was beginnin' to make fair money fer them times--dollar an' a half a day. I was growed up, so I got my mind on havin' a woman of my own. I got to castin' 'round fer one, an' I got my mind set on a little ol' gal that lived over on th' Peters' Place. Her ma was passed on, an' her pa wasn't

doin' no good at keepin' her up. She was ragged as a can of kraut. Her pa was too busy raisin' hell to mind attar her, an' I knowed he'd be glad to git rid of her.

"One day I axed him 'bout it, an' he said he didn't mind. I traipsed over thar a couple of times an' did a little purty talkin' to th' gal, an' one day I tol' her I wanted her to come an' live with me--that it was all fixed with her pa. She studied 'bout it fer a minute or two, but I guess she was glad to come. She'd had a hell of a life thar whar she was. I tuk her ~~to~~ shack that night, an' she kitched on right off. Weren't no time 'fore she had th' place lookin' better--scrubbed clean as a whistle-- an' she planted some flowers out in th' yard.

"She never was much purty, but she was a good woman. Her name was Texas sun'pn-or-other; I don't recollect her pa's name. She weren't half my size-- didn't weigh a hundert pound--but that jest suited me. I allus have liked a little bitay woman. They don't give no trouble, an' they don't eat much.

"I guess I loved her some. That is, I loved her fer awhile. But like I said, I'se useta raisin' hell, an' it weren't long 'fore I got my mind on that ag'in. I guess I'se purty bad, but shouldn't no woman ever think she can put bite in a man's mouth. I recollect that I come home one day at dinner-

time, an' I was hongry an' t'ard. She allus had my dinner ready for me, but this time th' hoe cake weren't quite done, an' it 'peared to me that she weren't doin' nothin' to help things. She was sittin' at a quilt she had hangin' from th' ceilin', an' it made me madder to see her sittin' thar workin' with a needle an' thread when I was starvin', an' she should a been in th' kitchen. Well, sir, I jest give a runnin' leap, an' landed sq'are in th' middle of that damned quilt. Down it come, railin's an' all."

George laughed boisterously, stamping the floor with one of his huge, socked feet. He slouched forward in the chair, his elbows on his knees.

"I'm tellin' you this, fer I'm headin' up to a p'int. That little ol' woman was a-feared of me, an' she kept her mouth shut, no matter what I done. But all th' time, she weren't keepin' her mouth shut fer ever'body. She was goin' up to Mister Hughes' house behin' my back, an' she was tellin' him how bad I was treatin' her. That shows no woman can't be trusted. If they are like a mouse 'round you, well, you can bet th' shirt off'n yo'r back that they're talkin' to somebody. An' her talkin' her head off to Mister Hughes weren't doin' me no good; though I didn't know 'bout it till later. If I had knowed, I'd a busted her wide open.

"It all come to a head one mornin' when I weren't doin' nothin' that most

any man wouldn't do. They was a gal lived up on th' hill 'bove my shack, an' she was a sight fer sore eyes--big-chested an' broad hiped. Well, I ain't denyin' that I'd been watchin' her fer a long time, an' I knowed that she had her eyes sot on me--any man can tell when a woman wants 'im. She come to my place ev'ry mornin' for buttermilk that I'se lettin' her folks have; an' on this pertic'lar mornin', she jest happened to ketch me right. That miserable little ol' woman of mine was big with a baby, an' I didn't have no eyes for her.

"This gawky ol' corn-fed gal come saunterin' into th' kitchen that mornin', when I was sittin' thar gettin' my grub. I looked up an' seed her, and she looked better'n I'd ever seed her look before--an' she was smilin' at me like she was thinkin' 'bout th' same thing. I guess that's why th' notion struck me all of a sudden. I knowed that my ol' woman was out at th' lot, an' things was sot jest right.

"Now, I'm tellin' you this, fer I'm leadin' up to a pint. I got up from th' table an' walked over to whar that gal was standin'. She didn't move a leg. I says, 'Ye'r kinder frisky, ain't you?', an' she giggled woman-like. Well, sir, I jest eased my arm 'bout her then, an' she was soft as a feather bed. I was huggin' her like all hell--I had ev'rything jest like I wanted it--when my ol' woman come in at th' door.

"She didn't say nothin' at first; jest stood thar with her eyes buggin'

out like a chipmunk's. I weren't goin' to let her faze me, so I jest kept on huggin', but th' gal was squirmin' an' pawin' so bad I couldn't hold 'er. Then my ol' woman said, 'George, what are you doin'?' An' I come right back at her. I says, 'I'm havin' a good time, mama.'"

The giant figure straightened in the chair, and the huge hands came down upon the huge knees with a resounding smack. A burst of laughter rumbled from the leathery, bull-like throat.

"I guess ye'r wonderin' what th' p'int is," he said after awhile. "Well, this is it; Thar ain't no sin 'bout nothin' like that 'less you git kitched; that's all th' sin they is--gittin' kitched.

"Well, sir, my ol' woman couldn't keep her mouth shet 'bout that neither. She went straight as a pigeon to Mr. Hughes, an' she must-a tol' him a bellyful. Anyways, he comed up to me on th' job a few days later, an' I could see that he had his dander up. He called me to one side, an' he says, 'Damn ye'r hide, you ought'er be killed. Somebody ought'er take a shotgun an' blow th' skin off yo'r stinkin' bones.' I tol' him somebody had been totin' a passel of lies, but he says, 'Don't be layin' nothin' off on that little woman. I'd fire you if it weren't fer her. As it is, I'm go'nter run you off this place if ever I hyar of you mistreatin' her ag'in.'

"That shows you can't put no trust in a damned woman, but I knowed Mister Hughes meant what he said. It got to worryin' me some, fer them was hard times, an' I couldn't 'ford to lose no job. If it hadn't a-been fer that, I'd a busted that woman wide open, but I knowed if I tetches her she'd go runnin' to him. So I jest bided my time.

"They was a meetin' goin' on 'bout that time, an' I done a lot of studyin' 'bout it. I knowed Mister Hughes was a churchly man, an' I got to thinkin' that I'd put myself in good with him by j'inin' up; he'd done a heap of talk to me--'bout how I'd ought'er git myself right with th' God A'mighty.

"Th' hardest thing I ever done was that. Ol' Reverent Sardis from over at th' Valley was doin' th' bellerin', an' he was th' damn-dest hypocrite you ever seed. He run a little ol' store when he weren't preachin', an' when a gal'd come in th' store, he'd try to hug 'er. I 'member they tol' me that one gal comed in fer a sack of sugar, an' that when he tried to love' 'er up a little she busted that sack of sugar over his damned head. They said that he could comb his hair fer a week an' git enough sugar to sweeten his coffee with.

"Well, I went up thar to that meetin', an' my ol' woman traipsed along with me as proud as a mother wren. She didn't know nothin' 'bout what I was doin' it fer, so when we went in an' sot down, she begin lookin' about happy-like,

with her little ol' eyes wet as a baby's behin'. I sot an' listened to th' sermont, thinkin' 'bout what a hypocrite ol' Sardis was up thar on th' platform, bellerin' like he'd bust his throat open. I never listened to 'im, but when they started th' singin', I went an' j'ined up.

"I wasn't never in a church-house before, an' I felt like a damned fool. Ol' Sardis shuk han's with me, then sot me down on a banch in front of ever'body. They was th' most takin' on thar I ever heerd, with them fools all a-bellerin' an' a-jumpin'. Some of them was a-cryin', an' that was right down my way. I allus could [^] cry easy, thinkin' 'bout what a hard row I'd had to hoe. So I beganed a-cryin' with th' others, an' they comed down to th' front, pawin' at me an' makin' me feel like I was in th' crazy house.

"Atter it was all over, Mister Hughes come 'round an' tol' me how glad he was. He called me 'Brother' an' I knowed I'd got him whar I wanted him. I kept him thar, too, fer I went to that church-house regular. They weren't but one thing that was good 'bout it. Ol' Sardis couldn't 'ford to preach at th' mill but twice a month, fer he had another church some'ers. It was a hard job, but I stuck it out--I stuck it out fer six damned years--'til ol' Sardis was dead an' in hell, an' a new preacher comed--an' 'til Mister Hughes went busted an' had to quit sawmillin'.

I had three young'uns now, so I had to git me up another job. But th' first thing I done was to git me a hick'ry stick an' beat th' lard out-a that damned tale-carryin' woman. I vent her'til she was down on her knees hollerin' fer God's love, an' I teached her a lesson she didn't never fergit. She never did carry no more tales on me. She never did say nothin', neither, when I got me up a woman that I wanted to fun with, an' I got me up a-plenty.

"But don't you never do that, son. I'm a ol' man now, an' I know all thar is to know. When you fun with mor'n one woman, you never do seem to fun as much as you want to; you want-a foller ever' woman that comes along. You don't hav' to do that, but I do. I'm so weak.

"It didn't take me long to git another job attar I left th' Hughes mill. I was th' best logger in that country, I knowed my trees like they was people, an' I was th' stoutest man anywhar to be found. I went over to Shelby County, cōs't to Four-Mile, an' I kitched on right off with Ol' Man Brazier. He was th' kind that never give a damn what sort of [~]man you was, jest so you was a _^good worker. Well, that suited me fine, fer I didn't have to go to church no more, an' I could git out in th' pasture an' paw up sand with th' cows.

"I guess I paved up enough of it to fill th' Coosa River. That was one place whar they was enough women to suit me, an' I runned attar 'em 'til my

tongue was rollin' out like a damned dog's. My little ol' woman didn't open her mouth, neither, fer I had learned her how to keep it sewed up. Th' best times I ever loved her, I reckon, was right attar we beganned livin' together, an' when I stood lookin' down at her dead face. She died a-havin' a kid. She shoulda' t ought'er a had it, fer Doc Beyer had tol' her she'd die if she did.

"They was a woman name of Nora livin' thar that I liked a heap, but I had done made up my mind that I weren't never goin' to feed no other woman regular. They's a lot of things to be done 'bout a shack, though, an' a man can't do all of it--specially if they's a passel of kids runnin' 'round. I tried batchin' it fer nearly a month attar Tex died, an' I weren't doin' no good at it. One Sunday mornin' I got to thinkin' 'bout it, so that evenin' I went over to Nora's place an' tol' her how I felt about it. We had funned ^{id} 'round a good while, anyways, so she got up her duds an' comed over to my shack.

"But right attar we beganned livin' together regular, I tol' her how things was go'n'er be run. I knowed she hadn't hardly lived whar she had been, fer her ma was a widder woman, and thar was a gang of other brats thar. I knowed that meat an' bread at regular would be enough to keep 'er with me, an' I was right. She was a good worker, but she never did take a likin' to my other woman's kids. I had to git her up some of 'er own, an' that was all

right with me. I allus did try to keep my women totin' a little bitsy baby.

That keeps 'em from studyin' devilment."

Again, the rear of laughter burst from the big throat, and again the huge hands were clapped hard against the huge knees.

"I don't guess I'ee as rough on Nora as I was my fust woman; but that was on account of her workin' to keep me in a good humor. Sometimes I'd git drunk an' whale th' hell out-a her a time or two, but mostly I treated her as good as any woman ought'er be treated. Don't never be too good to one of 'em. A woman's like a dumb animal--like a cow or a bitch dog. You got to frail 'em with a stick now an' then to make 'em look up to you.

"Why, I tell you sump'un; they's been men workin' at loggin' camps whar I been that handled their ol' women like they was gold dollars. They'd pet 'em up, buy partys fer 'em, an' keep their backsides kivered with glad rags; an' then Ol' George Hyar'd come along an' take 'em fer hisself. I've seed men that didn't have no sense 'bout handlin' women. You never ought'er tell one of 'em that she looks good, or that anybody'd have 'em 'cept you. She'll git to believin' it if you tell 'er that, an' she'll start struttin' 'round like a rooster that's whooped ever'thing in th' countryside.

"I tol' Nora how things was go'nter be run, an' they was runned that way

fer nor'n 'leven years. She gived me six young'uns while we was livin' together, but she got to whar she weren't with keepin'. She got to creepin' 'bout th' house like a wood-legged woman, an' her hide got as galler as a persimmon. I got to thinkin' once that I'd run 'er off--she weren't doin' me no good--but it was fer th' best that I didn't. She was tuk with a chill one night, an' she went out a awful way.

"It's go'nter come my time some day, but I pray to God I don't go out like that woman. It was awful. She'd got to whar she talked a lot 'bout sinnin', an' how me an' her was doin' wrong by havin' kids an' not even bein' married. 'Bout a month 'fore she died, she says to me one day, 'George, le's go over to Sylacauga or some're an' git a preacher to talk over us.' That was funny as hell to me, an' I thought she'd went bug-crazy. But you know, I'se thinkin' of what she said jest th' other day. Do you s'pose that's why she did that-a-way?

"When she was lyin' thar tremblin' with th' chill, she kept raisin' up her hands an' yellin', 'He's in th' kitchen now! Th' devil's in th' kitchen, an' he's comin' atter me!' She went away yellin' things like that, with 'er eyes wide open. I wonder if th' damned devil was in thar atter her?

"Well, if he was, he's go'nter be thar with feathers on his head when it comes my time. He's go'nter do a frillie, fer he's got a heap a meat to fry

when he gits to me . Reverent Dailey, that young feller over at Harpersville, tol' me th' Lord could save anybody. He tol' me, 'Though yo'r sins air of scarlet, I will wash 'em white as snow.' That's what I'm countin' on. That's what I went to Judge McKinnon fer an' got him to give me one of his old Bibles. I ain't never read a lick in my life, but I got to thinkin' I didn't want to go out without a Bible in my fanned shack.

It's go'nter take a heep of washin' fer me, fer if it's a sin to have young'uns an' not be married, I done a lot of it. It's got to whar anybody could come up an' say, 'How're ye, pa?', an' I wouldn't know if I ought'er knock hell out-a him or kiss 'im. But I got religion, even if I don't go to no church. Reverent Dailey said he was go'nter pray fer me, an' I guess that'll wash me off a little.

"I done los' track of most of the kids I had by my two women. I kept 'em with me 'til they jest drifted off an' didn't come back. One of th' little ol' gals -- she never was bright--went to Sylacauga to work in th' mill, an' somebody tol' me she was runnin' etter ev'ry pair of britches in sight. If I ever kotch up with 'er, I'll bust some of 'er ribs loose. My oldest boy was makin' likker down on Coharie Creek last I heard--I don' know whar he is now. I don' know whar none of 'em is, so don' ax me 'bout 'em.

"I been workin' fer Ol' Blalock a good spell now, an' I reckon th' place is as good as any'n I'd find. But he don't pay me like he ought'er. They ain't nobody knows a tree better'n me, an' they ain't nobody can do harder work. Ol' Blalock thinks I'm a damned fool, but I been 'round."

As he talked, the black, squinted eyes kept turning with increasing intentness upon a narrow, weed-flanked trail that ribboned toward his shanty over a stretch of bottom land. Now, he roused his big frame from the chair and glanced inside the bare, two-room structure. His eyes paused upon the face of a cheap alarm clock that ticked above the fireplace.

"I ain't rushin' you off," he said after awhile. "This place is yo'rn to stay as long as you want to. But I thought I better tell you they's some fo'ke comin' over hyar atter awhile--they's Bud Baker an' some of them Estris boys. They go'nter have some likker an' some gals along, an' we mought try raisin' a little hell. I thought I better tell you 'bout it, but that yo're welcome to stay."

But the visitor was ready to go. Already, the sun was disappearing behind the fringe of pine trees over on Sulphur Mountain. Already, there was hoarse laughter down the path, punctuated with an occasional shrill outburst. Somebody in the approaching crowd was plunking "Red River Valley" on a banjo.

7/25/39

S.J.

George Carter,
7 miles west of Talladega Springs, Ala.

By Jack Kyle
Kyle

"A WOMAN'S LIKE A DUMB ANIMAL."

For forty-two years, George Carter has been pulling and shoving at the handle of a cross-cut saw. He is a big, slouch-shouldered man, six feet three inches tall, 220 pounds of bone and muscle. He is 62 years old, but he says proudly, "I ^{don't} ~~ain't~~ never asked no rest time--I ain't never been white-eyed but once, an' I got to tell you 'bout that." His skin is dark and leathery, his eyes black and squinted, his coarse, black hair streaked with gray.

It was Sunday afternoon, and he sat there on the ^{slanting} ~~front~~ porch of his shanty, with his willow-bottomed chair propped against the wall. His huge feet were covered by rough cotton socks, out at the heels and toes. He pulled hard at a cob pipe/^{through} ~~stick~~ a slender cane stem, and he said: "A old man gits purty lonesome-like out to hisself this-a-way; but I ain't got no cause to grumble. I been ^{found} ~~found~~ lots in my day, an' I done buried two ol' women. You couldn't give me another'n. They's too many runnin' 'bout that you don't have to feed.

"Gittin' down to what you axed me, I been loggin' and ~~fallin'~~ foolin' 'bout sawmills since I was a duck of a boy. Oj Man Blalock, over at th' valley, says he wouldn't give me fer four common men. He ought'er know. He's seed a lot of loggers.

"Why, when th' ol' man was runnin' a mill over thar in th' holler, buyin' his lumber tree by tree, he says to me, 'George, I got to make a profit. I got to git trees that'll make fine, clear boards; an' it's go'nter be up to you to git 'em.' Well, sir, I got ^{enough} ~~enuff~~ of 'em to make him rich. I

jest go up to a tree an' look it over, an' I can tell you what kind of lumber it's go'nter make. I can spot th' knots 'way up 'mongst th' limbs. I can even tell 'bout how many feet of good boards or floorin' there is in a tree.

"He ain't never paid me right, but I don't need nothin' much now. When I was a young duck I worked fer fifty cents a day, sunup to sundown; but I weren't workin' fer him back then. Th' ol' man pays me two dollars now, an' s'posed me/~~supposed~~ to be th' boss logger. I ain't s'posed to work but eight hour a day, but I could count on my ten fingers how many times/~~times~~^I got out o' th' woods 'fore good dark.

"One time I went to him 'bout my pay, an' he put on a mouth that was as pore as a widder woman. He says, 'George, you know I'm yore friend; I'd pay you more if I could. But my sales is 'way down. If I'm go'nter keep eatin' myself, I can't pay my help no more. It'd bust me, an' then we'd all be out in th' cold.' Well, I ain't been to him since that day. He thinks I'm a damned fool, but I ain't blind. A man that's been lumberin' as long as me knows a few things. I can look at th' stock in his sheds an' know that he was lyin' with a face as bare as a baby's rump. I know what I cut in ~~the~~ th' woods, an' I know how much lumber it'll make.

"He's got plenty money to keep him th' rest of his life. He don't bank it over at Sylacaugy. He banks some of it in Birmingham, an' some in Mobile. Tony told me 'bout that, an' he ought'er know; he mails most of th' ol' man's letters up at th' Springs. Tony's th' commissary man, an' he says ol' Blalock is so stingy he wears buttons on his pants made out of his own wood. He's that tight, all right."

George stretched his towering frame, ^{lifting} his ~~huge~~^{huge} sun-baked arms ~~lifted~~ above his head. He shuffled his chair nearer the edge of the porch, where he could prop his feet against the two-by-four railing. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"I been ~~found~~^{found}," he said at last, "an' I ain't proud of some of th' things I done. I never did know no mammy an' daddy. Some said I was a wood colt, but they never said it to my face. Anyway, I was gived away. I was gived to a ol' man named Sears over on th' river— me an' a girl they said was my sister.

"That ol' man nigh 'bout worked me to death. He had a big farm over thar, an' it got to whar I was doin' jest 'bout everything. I stood it 'til I'se fifteen year old, an' then I runned away. He kotched me th' first time an' whooped me 'til my ol' jacket stuck to my back, it was so full of blood. But I made up my mind he wasn't go'nter keep me. Next time I runned away, it was in th' night, an' I crossed th' river an' set out down th' road. I kept on goin', ~~and~~ an' 'fore I knowed it, I'se in Selma.

"I tell you, I was so hongry when I got thar, an' I'd drunk so much water, that my belly thought I'd took in washin'. I've heard folks say they wouldn't beg fer nothin' if they was starvin' to death; but they jest ain't never been hongry enuff. I went up to a house an' I begged, an' I got some coffee an' some cornbread. I ain't never tasked nothin' so good as that, an' I seen good vittles in my time.

"They was a circus thar in Selma, an' I'd not seed one before in my life. I jest comed up on it while I'se walkin', an' I went up, ~~and~~ ~~the~~ boy-like, to listen to th' music. They was takin' down one of th' tents, an when I'se standin' thar goggle-eyed, a man come up on me. He says, 'Boy, you look stout; you wanta work?' An' well, I was needin' a job 'bout as bad as a body could. I pitched in right thar, an' I done so good that they took me along in th' work gang.

"I done all right, too. I was 'bout six foot high then, an' weighed clos' ter two hundert pound. I was like a ox, an' couldn't none of them men outwork me. But my dander kept risin' up, an' if I'd had bug-sense I'd a

knowed trouble was comin'. I'd keep gittin' my dander up when th' boss-man'd come 'round with his cussin' an' bullyin'. I'd b'il in my innards when he'd kick a nigger, an' I got to thinkin' what was go'nter happen if he ever kicked me.

"He weren't high as me, but he was broad an' built close to th' ground. He didn't have no good side to him--he was jest mean as hell--an' even when he was in good humor, you knowed he was jest a rattlesnake in th' sunshine. You knowed there weren't nothin' 'bout him that was any good a-tall.

"Well, sir, I let a rope slip one day, an' he comed 'round to whar I was. We was at a little town in North Ca'lina, an' that's a good piece from hyar. He started cussin' me, callin' me things that showed me thar was go'nter be trouble. Then, 'fore I knowed what was happenin,' he kicked me.

"I reached down on th' groun', and I got my fingers on a sledge hammer that was lyin' thar. I said, 'You son-of-a-bitch, you kick me jest one more time an' I'll kill you. So he'p me my good God, I'll knock yo'r brains down yo'r throat.'

"I'll say this fer him: he weren't no coward. He jest looked at me a second or two, an' then he comed t'ward me. I knowed he meant business; I had to pertek myself. I raised that hammer an' I knocked him in th' head so hard that he fell like a ^{sick} ~~sick~~ ox. I run like hell, then, but didn't nobody try to kotch me. I guess ~~every~~ ever'body was glad.

"To this day, I don't know what become of him. He might-a died, fer I hit him a solid lick. Since I got religion, I pray 'bout it sometimes, but I ain't never been able to feel sorry 'bout it. He axed fer it, an' if he got well, I bet he didn't kick nobody else fer a long time."

George stuffed his pipe with sack tobacco again, struck a match on the pineboard floor, and puffed silently for a few moments.

"It took me mor'n a month to gât back hyar. I was ragged an' hongry,

an' I didn't have no friends to go to, but I made up my mind I weren't goin' back to ol' man Sears'. I'se feelin' grown now, an' I knowed I/~~were~~ weren't goin' to take no more beatin's from him. I knowed I'd kill him if he ever laid a hand on me, fer I couldn't even think 'bout him an' not burn in my head. Sometimes I thought 'bout that gal that was s'posed to be my sister, but I never knowed that she was. She was a little ol' skinny, light-haired gal, an' she never favored me. Some folks say I got Indian blood, I wouldn't know. But I guess I done things in my time bad as a Indian.

"I done things that th' good God won't ever forgive me fer. When I comed back, I didn't have no friends 'cept Tom Green, a nigger that lived down in Coosa County 'bout th' bend. I went down thar with him, an' he was as bad a nigger as I was a white man. I took to card playin' an' whisky drinkin' down thar, an' we raised so much hell that we driv' his ol' woman plumb out-a th' house. When we'd give out-a whiskey, we'd jest make us some more an' go right ahead raisin' hell. ~~that was hell to pay, fer that was what Doc~~

"A bunch of niggers who worked at th' Jackson sawmill over at th' Springs usta come down to Tom's house on Sundays, an' Tom an' me'd play cards with 'em an' take what they had. That's one of th' things I won't ever be fergived fer. There was them po'r niggers who'd ~~git paid~~ ^{paid} maybe three dollars on Saturday, an' then Tom an' me'd git 'em drunk an' take everything they had. You see this scar on th' side of my head? Well, I got it right thar. A crazy drunk nigger gived it to me with a butcher knife. ~~and that rifle~~

"I stayed down thar in them woods 'til I was goin' on twenty year old. Tom an' me was makin' whiskey an' gamblin' an' fishin' a little fer a livin', an' we was doin' good. But then one Saturday, Tom got full of likker an' went over th' mountain to a sawmill that had started runnin' over thar. They was a bunch of niggers workin' at th' mill, an' one of 'em was a nigger named Doc, who had a tall, yaller gal fer a woman that made Tom's mouth

water. Tom saw her once, an' then he comed to me an' said that he couldn't look at 'er an' stand still. Th' thoughts of her jest runned all over him; an' then, that Saturday he got likkered up.

"He headed straight fer that Doc's shack 'spite all th' way I begged him to stay away. He had a pistol in his overall pocket, an' I knowed that he was goin' atter what he wanted. I begged him right to th' door leadin' up to th' shack, but they wasn't nothin' could be done. He went up thar and walked in th' door.

"He wasn't no sooner in than Doc's woman started hollerin'. I was standin' out in th' road watchin', fer I knowed Tom was drunk ^{enough} to shoot me if I tried to stop him. Th' door was open a little, an' I could see him wrastlin' with that yaller gal, an' her screamin' like she was in a bed of snakes. Niggers started runnin' out of all th' shacks, an' some of 'em headed straight fer th' sawmill boiler room.

"I knowed then that thar was hell to pay, fer that was whar ~~that~~ Doc was workin'. In no time a-tall, he comed runnin' t'ward his shack, an' he had a ~~double~~ rifle in his hand. He stopped out in th' front yard, an' he called out, 'Come out-a my house, nigger, or I'm comin' atter you.'

"He hadn't no more than said it when Tom comed to th' door. He didn't say a thing, he jest leveled down with his pistol an' started shootin' at Doc--I don't know how many times. But Doc jest stepped back of a tree thar in th' yard an' waited 'til Tom had finished. Then he raised that rifle to his shoulder.

"I never seed a shot ga'ged better'n that one. Tom stepped back from th' door, kinder to one side, but Doc seemed to know whar he was standin'. He shot through th' wall 'bout two feet from th' door, an' that bullet got Tom right through th' belly. We runned up to th' house an' he was dead. Th' gal was under th' bed.

"Now I'm th' sort that knows what side my bread's buttered on. I knowed them people might say I was Tom's friend an' have it in fer me. But when I seed he was dead, I knowed that a dead man can't do nothin' fer nobody. So I started cussin' him right an' left, an' tol' Doc that I'd see ~~th~~ th' law didn't do nothin' to him. I did that, too, fer I went over to th' county seat at Rockford an' helped see that they didn't bother him. They jest had a little hearin', an' then they turned him loose.

"I didn't lose nothin' by tellin' what I knowed. They was a young man named Hughes who was runnin' th' sawmill, an' he told me that he was to thank me fer what I'd done fer his nigger. Well, sir, I seed that th' time was right, an' I axed him fer a job. He gived it to me, an' that's whar I started out sawmillin'.

"I was a grownup man, an' I was as tough an' as stout as a mule. At first, I helped fire th' b'iler, totin' slabs fer it, but then one day Mr. Hughes comed up to me. He says, 'I'm short in th' woods, George; I need loggers out thar. How'd you like to try yo'r hand at it?' I tol' him that I'd like it fine, an' th' next day, I was pullin' at th' end of a crosscut saw.

"Well, sir, I had som'pun happen out thar that gived me a lesson. I don't min' tellin' you 'bout it, fer it's got funny to me now. They was a little ol' man helpin' me ~~wh~~ who was named Davis, an' he weren't nothin' but a runt. Th' first time I seed him I wanted to laugh, fer it was ~~st~~ funny to think he could keep up with me on a saw.

"Th' second day I worked out thar, he was goin' in to th' commissary fer som'pun, an' I gived him a dime an' axed him to git me some 'baccar. He was gone a couple of hours, an' when he comed back he seemed mighty worried. He come right to me, an' he said, 'George, I done lost that dime of your'n; I'll pay it back come Saturday.' An' I was wantin' 'baccar, an' I got mad as hell. I said, 'You stole my money.'

" Well, sir, he straightened up his little ol' wizened self, an' he said, 'That's a lie.' He was white as a sheet, an' he was tremblin' like he was go'nter fall to pieces. I knowed he was scared as a rabbit, so I took a step t'ward him an' said, 'If you say that ag'in, I'll glap yo'r face.' He comed right back at me. He said, 'It's a lie--a double-dogged lie!'

"They was just us two away out thar in th' woods--miles away from th' closest soul. I riz up my arm, an' I slapped his face so hard that it cracked like th' stinger on a cowhide whip. I slapped it that hard, an' then I turned to walk off.

"I've stirred up a yaller jacket nest many a time, an' I've had 'em git over me faster'n a country boy pickin' a banjer, but I ain't never had nothin' git on me as fast as that dried-up little ol' man. We was standin' on th' side of a hill, an' he comed at me head first. His shoulders hit me in the belly, an' I went down on my back, with my head p'inted down th' hill, an' my feet p'inted up. It all was sudden-like, an' I couldn't a got up if it'd bin th' end of th' world.

"I tried to hit at him from whar I was lyin', but he wasn't no whar I hit. He was jest like a banty rooster, an' he hit me in th' face so fast that you couldn't a counted th' licks. He jest sit on my chest an' beat ~~me~~ on my nose an' eyes an' mouth like he was beatin' a drum. I couldn't do nothin', so I said, 'You have whooped me.' He got up then, but my eyes was swelled 'til it was all I could do to see, an' my mouth felt like it was big as a ham.

"It's a funny thing, but I got to likin' that little ol' man. He tried to pay me back my dime, but I wouldn't take it. We went on cuttin' logs together, an' it weren't long 'fore we was mighty good friends. An' it was him that I was goin' to tell you 'bout--th' only time in my life I ever was white-eyed.

"It was all on account of a ol' cheap watch. Bein' out in th' woods as we was, we couldn't hear no whistles fer quittin' time, so th' man that owned a watch did all th' time-callin.' Well, this was my watch, an' it was up to me when we was to rest. It got to whar I allus called time for 'bout fifteen minutes every mornin' so we could go over to a spring closeby an' git us some water. When we'd drank, we'd lie down awhile an' talk.

"Things kept up like that a long time, and it come to th' p'int whar Davis weren't doin' much work. He wanted to rest all th' time, an' we couldn't keep up with th' teamsters. Well, sir, th' notion struck me that if I'd let him call th' time he might do better work, so one day I took out my watch an' handed it to him. I said, 'You keep th' watch awhile Mister Davis, an' you call th' time.'

"Now, I've made lots of mistakes in my life, but that'n was th' worst. That little ol' man went crazy as a bat. He was allus takin' out that watch an' lookin' at it like he was a boss, an' he couldn't git to workin' early enuff. It got to whar he wouldn't even lie down when we'd go to th' spring, an' he was stingy 'bout goin' ~~in~~ a-tall. We'd git down thar, but jest th' minute I laid down, he'd take out that watch an' say, 'Got to git back on th' job, Carter; got to keep th' trees fallin'!'

"It tickled me fer awhile, but it got to whar it weren't funny. One hot day in August we was cuttin' logs, an' he was worse than ever. He worked like we was th' only loggers in th' woods, an' by dinner time, I was blowin' an' sweatin' like a mule. That evenin', he jest kept on sawin' like he was fightin' a fire, an' I knowed I couldn't make it no further. I took my hands off my end of th' saw, an' I says to him, 'You better let me have th' watch ag'in. We'll take turns keepin' time, week by week.' But I never did git 'round/^{no more} to lettin' him carry it.

"I was beginnin' to make fair money fer them times--dollar and

a half a day. I was growed up, so I got my mind on havin' a woman of my own. I got to castin' 'round fer one, an' I got my mind sot on a little ol' gal that lived over on th' Peters' Place. Her ma was passed on, an' her pa wasn't doin' no good at keepin' her up. She was ragged as a can of kraut. Her pa was too busy raisin' hell to mind atter her, an' I knowed he'd be glad to git rid of her.

"One day I axed him 'bout it, an' he said he didn't mind. I traipsed over thar a couple of times an' did a little purty talkin' to th' gal, an' one day I tol' her I wanted her to come an' live with me--that it was all fixed with her pa. She studied 'bout it fer a minute or two, but I guess she was glad to come. She'd had a hell of a life thar whar she was. I tuk her to my shack that night, an' she kotched on right off. Weren't no time 'fore she had th' place lookin' better--scrubbed clean as a whistle--an' she planted some flowers out in th' yard.

"She never was much purty, but she was a good woman. Her name was Texas sum'pn-er-other; I don't recollect her pa's name. She weren't half my size--didn't weigh a hundert pound--but that jest suited me. I allus have liked a little bitsy woman. They don't give no trouble, an' they don't eat much.

"I guess I loved her some. That is, I love^d her fer awhile. But like I said, I'se us'²ta raisin' hell, an' it weren't long 'fore I got my mind on that ag'in. I guess I'se purty bad, but shouldn't no woman ever think she can put bits in a man's mouth. I recollect that I comed home one day at dinner-time, an' I was hungry and t'ard. She allus had my dinner ready fer me, but this time th' hoe cake weren't quite done, an' it 'peared to me that she weren't doin' nothin' to help things. She was sittin' at a quilt she had hangin' from th' ~~sittin'~~ ceilin', an' it made me madder to see her sittin' thar workin' with a needle an' thread when I was starvin', an' she should

a been in th' kitchen. Well, sir, I jest give a runnin' leap, an' I landed square in th' middle of that damned quilt. Down it comed, railin's an' all."

George laughed boisterously, stamping the floor with one of his huge, socked feet. He slouched forward in the chair, ^{his} elbows on his knees.

"I'm tellin' you this, fer I'm leadin' up to a p'int. That little ol' woman was a-feared of me, an' she kept her mouth shet, no matter what I done. But all th' time, she weren't keepin' her mouth shet fer ever'body. She was goin' up to Mister Hughes' house behin' my back, an' she was tellin' him how bad I was treatin' her. That shows no woman can't be trusted. If they are like a mouse 'round you, well, you can bet th' shirt off'n yo'r back that they're talkin' to somebody. An' her talkin' her head off to Mister Hughes weren't doin' me no good, though I didn't know 'bout it 'til later. If I had knowed, I'd a busted 'er wide open.

"It all comed to a head one mornin' when I ~~was~~ weren't doin' nothin' that most any ~~man~~ man wouldn't do. They was a gal lived up on th' hill 'bove my shack, an' she was a sight fer sore eyes--big-chested an' broad hip^d-ped. Well, I ain't denyin' that I'd been watchin' her fer a long time, an' I knowed that she had her eyes sot on me--any man can tell when a woman wants 'im. She comed to my place ev'ry mornin' for buttermilk that I'se lettin' her folks have; an' on this pertic'lar mornin', she jest happened to kotch me right. That miserable little ol' woman of mine was big with a baby, an' I didn't have no eyes fer her.

"This gawky ol' corn-fed gal comed saunterin' into th' kitchen that mornin', when I was sittin' thar gettin' my grub. I looked up an' seed her, and she looked better'n I'd ever seed her look before--an' she was smilin' at me like she was thinkin' 'bout th' same thing I was. I guess that's why th' notion struck me all of a sudden. I knowed that my ol' woman was out at th' lot, an' things was sot jest right.

"Now, I'm tellin' you this, fer I'm leadin' up to a p'int. I got up from th' table an' walked over to whar that gal was standin'. She didn't move a leg. I says, 'Ye'r kinder frisky, ain't you?', an' she giggled woman-like. Well, sir, I jest eased my arm 'bout her then, an' she was ~~was~~ soft as a feather bed. I was huggin' her like all hell--I had ev'rything jest like I wanted it--when my old woman comed in at th' door.

"She didn't say nothin' at first; jest stood thar with her eyes buggin' out like a chipmunk's. I weren't goin' to let her faze me, so I jest kept on huggin', but th' gal was squirmin' an' pawin' so bad I couldn't hold 'er. Then my ol' woman said, 'George, what are you doin'?' An' I comed right back at her. I says, 'I'm havin' a good time, mama.'

The giant figure straightened in the chair, and the huge hands came down upon the huge knees with a resounding smack. A burst of laughter rumbled from the leathery, bull-like throat.

"I guess ye'r wonderin' what th' p'int is," he said after awhile, "Well, this is it: Thar ain't no sin 'bout nothin' like that 'less you git kitched; ~~that's~~ that's all th' sin they is--gittin' kitched."

"Well, sir, my ol' woman couldn't keep her mouth shet 'bout that, neither. She went straight as a pigeon to Mister Hughes, an' she must-a tol' him a bellyful. Anyways, he comed up to me on th' job a few days later, an' I could see that he had his dander up. He called me to one side, an' he says, 'Damn yo'r hide, you ought'er be killed. Somebody ought'er take a shotgun an' blow th' skin off yo'r stinkin' bones.' I tol' him somebody had been totin' a passel of lies, but he says, 'Don't be layin' nothin' off on that little woman. I'd fire you if it weren't fer her. As it is, I'm go'nter run you off this place if ever I hyar of you mistreatin' her ag'in.'

"That shows you can't put no trust in a damned woman, but I knowed

Mister Hughes meant what he said. It got to worryin' me some, fer them was hard times, an' I couldn't 'ford to lose no job. If/~~me~~^{it} hadn't a-been fer that, I'd a busted that woman wide open, but I knowed if I tetched her she'd go runnin' to him. So I jest bided my time.

"They was a meetin' goin' on 'bout that time, an' I done a lot of studyin' 'bout it. I knowed Mister Hughes was a churchly man, an' I got to thinkin' that I'd put myself in good with him by j'inin' up; he'd done a heap of talk ~~to me~~ to me--'bout how I'd ought'er git myself right with th' God A'mighty.

"Th' hardest thing I ever done was that. Ol' Reverent Sardis from over at th' Valley was doin' th' bellerin', an' he was th' damn-dest hypocrite you ever seed. He run a little ol' store when he weren't preachin', an' when a gal'd come in th' store, he'd try to ~~hug~~ hug 'er. I 'member they tol' me that one gal comed in fer a sack of sugar, an' that when he tried to love 'er up a little she ~~bust~~ busted that sack of sugar over his damned head. They said that he could comb his hair fer a week an' git enough sugar to sweeten his coffee with.

"Well, I went up thar to that meetin', an' my ol' woman traipsed along with me as proud as a mother wren. She didn't know nothin' 'bout what I was doin' it fer, so when we went in an' sot down, she begin lookin' about happy-like, with her little ol' eyes wet as a baby's behind. I sot an' listened to th' sermont, thinkin' 'bout what a hypocrite ol' Sardis was up thar on th' platform, bellerin' like he'd bust his throat open. I never listened to 'im, but when they started th' singin', I went an' j'ined up.

"I wasn't never in a church-house before, an' I felt like a damned fool. Ol' Sardis shuk han's with me, then sot me down on a banch in front of ever'body. They was th' most takin' on thar I ever heerd, with them

fools all a-bellerin' and a-jumpin'. Some of them was a-cryin', an' that was right down my way. I allus could cry easy, thinkin' 'bout what ~~is~~ a hard row I'd had to hoe. So I beganned ~~a~~ a-cryin' with th' others, an' they comed down to th' front, pawin' at me an' makin' me feel like I was in th' crazy house.

"Atter it was all over, Mister Hughes comed 'round an' tol' me how glad he was. He called me 'Brother' an' I knowed I'd got him whar I wanted him. I kept him thar, too, fer I went to that church-house regular. They weren't but one thing that was good 'bout it. Ol' Sardis couldn't 'ford to preach at th' mill but twice a month, fer he had another church some'ers. It was a hard job, but I stuck it out--I stuck it out fer six damned years--'til ol' Sardis was dead an' in hell, an' a new preacher comed--an' 'til Mister Hughes went busted an' had to quit sawmillin'.

"I had three young'uns now, so I had to git me up another job. But th' first thing I done was to git me a ~~hick'ry~~ hick'ry stick an' beat th' lard out-a that damned tale-carryin' woman. I beat her 'til she was down on her knees hollerin' fer God's love, an' I taught her a lesson she didn't never fergit. She never did carry no more tales on me. She never did say nothin', neither, when I got me up a woman that I wanted to fun with, an' I got me up ~~enough~~ a-plenty.

"But don't you never do that, son. I'm a ol' man now, an' I know all thar is to know. When you fun with mor'n one woman, you never do seem to fun ~~like~~ as much as you want to; you want-a foller ever' woman that comes along. You don't hav' to do that, but I do. I'm so weak.

"It didn't take me long to git another job atter I left th' Hughes mill. I was th' best logger in that country, I knowed my trees like they was people, an' I was th' stoutest man anywhar to be found. I went over to Shelby County, clos't to Four-Mile, an' I kitched on right

off with with ~~the~~ Ol' Man Brazier. He was th' kind that never gived a damn what sort of man you was, jest so you was a good worker. Well, that suited me fine, fer I didn't have to go to church no more, an' I could git out in th' pasture an' paw up sand with th' cows.

"I guess I pawed up enuff of it to fill th' Coosa River. That was one place whar they was ^{enough} women to suit me, an' I runned atter 'em 'til my tongue was rollin' out like a damned dog's. My little ol' woman didn't open her mouth, neither, fer I had learned her how to keep it sewed up. ~~That~~ Th' best times I ever loved her, I reckon, was right atter we beganned livin' together, an' when I stood lookin' down at her dead face. She died a-havin' a kid. She shouldn't ought'er a had it, fer Doc Boyer had tol' her she'd die if she did.

"They was a woman name of Nora livin' thar that I liked a heap, but I had done made up my mind that I weren't never goin' to feed no other woman regular. They's a lot of things to be done 'bout a shack, though, an' a man can't do all of it--specially if they's a passel of kids runnin' 'round. I tried batchin' it fer nearly a month atter Tex died, an' I weren't doin' no good at it. One Sunday mornin' I got to thinkin' 'bout it, ~~and~~ so that evenin' I went over to Nora's place an' tol' her how I felt 'bout it. We had funned 'round a good while, anyways, so she got up her duds an' comed over to my shack.

"But right atter we beganned livin' together regular, I tol' her how things was go'nter be run. I knowed she hadn't hardly lived whar she had been, fer her ma was a widder woman, and thar was a gang of other brats thar. I knowed that meat an' bread et regular would be ^{enough} to keep 'er with me, an' I was right. She was a good worker, but she never did take a likin' to my other woman's kids. I had to git her up some of 'er own, an' that was all right with me. I allus did try to keep my women

totin' a little bitsy baby. That keeps 'em from studyin' devilment."

Again, the roar of laughter burst from the big throat, and again the huge hands were clapped hard against ^{the} huge knees.

"I don't guess I'se as rough on Nora as I was my fust woman; but that was on account of her workin' to keep me in a good humor. Sometimes I'd git drunk an' whale th' hell out-a her a time or two, but mostly I treated her as good as any woman ought'er be treated. Don't never be too good to one of 'em. A woman's like a dumb animal---like a cow or a bitch dog. You got to frail 'em with a stick now an' then to make 'em look up to you.

"Why, I tell you sump'un; they's been men workin' at loggin' camps whar I been that handled their ol' women like they was gold dollars. They'd pet 'em up, buy purtys fer 'em, an' ^{keep} their backsides kivered with glad rags; an' then Ol' George hyar'd come along an' take 'em fer hisself. I've seed men that didn't have no sense 'bout handlin' women. You never ought'er tell one of 'em that she looks good, er that anybody'd have 'em 'cept you. She'll git to believin' it if you tell 'er that, an' she'll start struttin' 'round like a rooster that's whooped ever'thing in th' countryside.

"I tol' Nora how things was go'nter be run, an' they was runned that way fer mor'n 'leven years. She gived me six young'uns while we was livin' together, but she got ^{to} whar she weren't wuth keepin'. She got to creepin' ~~about~~ 'bout th' house like a wood-legged woman, 'an her hide got as yaller as a persimmon. I got to thinkin' once that I'd run 'er off--- she weren't doin' me no good---but it was fer th' best that I didn't. She was ~~take~~ tuk with a chill one night, an' she went out a awful way.

"It's go'nter come my time some day, but I pray to God I don't go out like that woman. It was awful. She'd got to whar she talked a lot

'bout sinnin', an' how me ~~and~~ an' her was doin' wrong by havin' kids an' not even bein' married. 'Bout a month 'fore she died, she says to me one day, 'George, le's go over to Sylacaugy or some'rs an' git a preacher to talk over us.' That was funny as hell to me, an' I thought she'd went bug-crazy. But you know, I'se thinkin' of what she said jest th' other day. Do you s'pose that's why she did that-a-way?

"When she was lyin' thar tremblin' with th' chill, she kept raisin' up her hands an' yellin', 'He's in th' kitchen now! Th' devil's in th' kitchen, an' he's comin' atter me!' She went away yellin' things like that, with 'er eyes wide open. I wonder if th' damned devil was in thar atter her?

"Well, if he was, he's go'nter be thar with feathers on his head when it comes my time. He's ~~gonn~~ go'nter do a frolic, fer he's got a heap a meat to fry when he gits to me. Reverent Dailey, that young feller over at Harpersville, tol' me th' Lord could save anybody. He tol' me, 'Though yo'r sins air of scarlet, I will wash 'em white as snow.' That's what I'm countin' on. That's what I went to Judge McKinnon fer an' got him to give me one of his old Bibles. I ain't never read a lick in my life, but I got to thinkin' I didn't want to go out without a Bible in my damned shack.

"It's go'nter take a heap of washin' fer me, fer if it's a sin to have young'uns an' not be married, I done a lot of it. It's got to whar ~~if~~ anybody could come up an' say, 'How're ye, pa?', an' I wouldn't know if I ought'er knock hell out-a him or kiss 'im. But I got religion, even if I don't go to no church. Reverent Dailey said he was go'nter pray fer me, an' I guess that'll wash me off a little.

"I done los' track of most of the kids I had by my two women. I kept 'em with me 'til they jest drifted off an' didn't come back. One of

th' little ol' girls---she never was bright--went to Sylacaugy to work in th' mill, an' somebody tol' me she was runnin' atter ev'ry pair of britches in sight. If I ever kotch up with 'er, I'll bust some of 'er ribs loose. My oldes' boy was makin' likker down on Cohagie Creek last I heard---I don' know whar he is now. I don' know whar none of 'em is, so ~~an' I~~ don' ax me 'bout 'em.

"I been workin' fer Ol' Blalock a good spell now, an' I reckon th' place is as good as ary'n I'd find. But he don' pay me like he ought'er. They ain't nobody knows a tree better'n me, an' they ain't nobody can do harder work. Ol' Blalock thinks I'm a dammed fool, but I been 'round."

As he talked, the black, squinted eyes kept turning with increasing intentness upon a narrow, weed-flanked trail that ribboned toward his shanty over a stretch of bottom land. Now, he roused his big frame from the chair and glanced inside the bare, two-room structure. His eyes paused upon the face of a cheap alarm clock that ticked above the fireplace.

"I ain't rushin' you off," he said after awhile. "This place is yo'rn to stay ~~ix~~ at long as you want to. But I thought I better tell ^{they's} you/~~that~~ some fo'ks ~~ix~~ comin' over hyar atter awhile--they's Bud Baker an' some of them ^{Matris} boys. They go'nter have some likker an' some gals along, an' we mought try raisin' a little hell. I thought I better tell you 'bout it, but that yo're welcome to stay."

But the visitor was ready to go. Already, the sun was disappearing behind the fringe of ~~wilderness~~ pine trees over on ~~the~~ Sulphur Mountain. Already, there was hoarse laughter down the path, punctuated with an occasional shrill outburst. Somebody in the approaching crowd was plunking "Red River Valley" on a banjo.

George Carter,
7 miles west of Talladega Springs, Ala.

Jack Kytle
Editorial Department

"A WOMAN'S LIKE A DUMB ANIMAL"

1,20

For forty-two years, George Carter has been pulling and shoving at the handle of a cross-cut saw. He is a big, slouch-shouldered man, six feet three inches tall, 220 pounds of bone and muscle. He is 62 years old, but he says proudly, "I don't never ask no rest time--I ain't never been white-eyed but once, an' I got to tell you 'bout that." His skin is dark and leathery, his eyes black and squinted, his coarse, black hair streaked with gray.

It was Sunday afternoon, and he sat there on the slanting porch of his shanty, with his willow-bottomed chair propped against the wall. His huge feet were covered by rough cotton socks, out at the heels and toes. He pulled hard at a cob pipe through a slender cane stem, and he said:

"A old man gits purty lonesome-like out to hisself this-a-way; but I ain't got no cause to grumble. I been 'round lots in my day, an' I done buried two ol' women. You couldn't give me another'n. They's too many runnin' 'bout that you don't have to feed.

"Gittin' down to what you axed me, I been loggin' and foolin' 'bout sawmills since I was a duck of a boy. Ol' man Blalock, over at th' valley.

says he wouldn't give me fer four common men. He oughter know. He's need a lot of loggers.

"Why, when th' ol' man was runnin' a mill over thar in th' holler, buyin' his lumber tree by tree, he says to me, 'George, I got to make a profit. I got to git trees that'll make fine, clear boards; an' it's go'nter be up to you to git 'em.' Well, sir, I got enough of 'em to make him rich. I jest go up to a tree an' look it over, an' I can tell you what kind of lumber it's go'nter make. I can spot th' knots 'way up 'mongst th' limbs. I can even tell 'bout how many feet of good boards or floorin' there is in a tree.

"He ain't never paid me right, but I don't need nothin' much now. When I was a young duck I worked fer fifty cents a day, sunup to sundown; but I weren't workin' fer him back then. Th' ol' man pays me two dollars now, an' he s'posed to be th' boss logger. I ain't s'posed to work but eight hour a day, but I could count on my ten fingers how many times I got out o' th' woods fore good dark.

"One time I went to him 'bout my pay, an' he put on a mouth that was as pore as a widder woman. He says, 'George, you know I'm yore friend; I'd pay you more if I could. But my sales is 'way down. If I'm go'nter keep eatin' myself, I can't pay my help no more. It'd bust me, an' then we'd

all be out in th' cold.' Well, I ain't been to him since that day. He thinks I'm a damned fool, but I ain't blind. A man that's been lumberin' as long as me knows a few things. I can look at th' stock in his sheds an' know that he was lyin' with a face as bare as a baby's rump. I know what I cut in th' woods, an' I know how much lumber it'll make.

"He's got plenty money to keep him th' rest of his life. He don't bank it over at Sylacaugy. He banks some of it in Birmingham, an' some in Mobile. Tony told me 'bout that, an' he ought'er know; he mails most of th' ol' man's letters up at th' Springs. Tony's th' commissary man, an' he says ol' Blalock is so stingy he wears buttons on his pants made out of his own wood. He's that tight, all right."

George stretched his towering frame, lifting his huge, sun-baked arms above his head. He shuffled his chair nearer the edge of the porch, where he could prop his feet against the two-by-four railing. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"I been 'round," he said at last, "an' I ain't proud of some of th' things I done. I never did know no mussy ang daddy. Some said I was a woods colt, but they never said it to my face. Anyway, I was gived away. I was gived to a ol' man named Sears over on th' river--no an' a girl they said was my

sister.

"That ol' man nigh 'bout worked me to death. He had a big farm over thar' an' it got to whar I was doin' jest 'bout everything. I stood it 'til I'se fifteen year old, an' then I runned away. He katched me th' first time an' whooped me 'til my ol' jacket stuck to my back, it was so full of blood. But I made up my mind he wasn't go'nter keep me. Next time I runned away, it was in th' night, an' I crossed th' river an' set out down th' road. I kept on goin' an' 'fore I knowed it, I'se in Selma.

"I tell you, I was so hongry when I got thar, an' I'd drunk so much water, that my belly thought I'd took in washin'. I've heerd folke say they wouldn't beg for nothin' if they was starvin' to death; but they, jest ain't never been hongry enuff. I went up to a house an' I begged, an' I got some caffee an' some cornbread. I ain't never tasted nothin' so good as that, an' I seen good vittles in my time.

"They was a circus thar in Selma, an' I'd not seed one before in my life. I jest comed up on it while I'se walkin' an' I went up, boy-like, to listen to th' music. They was takin' down one of th' tents, an' when I'se standin' thar goggle-eyed, a man come up on me. He says, 'Boy, you look stout; you wanta work?' An' well, I was needin' a job 'bout as bad as a

body could. I pitched in right thar, an' I done so good that they took me along in th' work gang.

"I done all right, too. I was 'bout six foot high then, an' veighed close ter two hundert pound. I was like a ox, an' couldn't none of them men outwork me. But my dander kept risin' up, an' if I'd had bug-sense I'd a knowed trouble was comin'. I'd keep gittin' my dander up when th' boss-man'd come 'round with his cussin' an' bullyin'. I'd bill in my innards when he'd kick a nigger, an' I got to thinkin' what was go'nter happen if he ever kicked me.

"He weren't high as me, but he was broad an' built close to th' ground. He didn't have no good side to him--he was jest mean as hell--an' even when he was in good humor, you knowed he was jest a rattlesnake in th' sunshine. You knowed there weren't nothin' 'bout him that was any good a-tall.

"Well, sir, I let a rope slip one day, an' he comed 'round to whar I was. We was at a little town in North Car'lina, an' that's a good piece from hyar. He started cussin' me, callin' me things that showed me thar was go'nter be trouble. Then, 'fore I knowed what was happenin,' he kicked me.

"I reached down on th' ground, an' I got my fingers on a sledge hammer that was lyin' thar. I said, 'You son-of-a-bitch, you kick me jest one more time an' I'll kill you. So he'p me my good God, I'll knock yo'r brains down

yo'r throat.'

"I'll say this fer him; he weren't no coward. He jest looked at me a second or two, an' then he comed t'ward me. I knowed he meant business; I had to perteck myself. I raised that hammer an' I knocked him in th' head so hard that he fell like a sick ox. I run like hell, then, but didn't nobody try to kotch me. I guess everybody was glad.

"To this day, I don't know what becume of him. He might a-died, fer I hit him a solid lick. Since I got religion, I pray 'bout it sometimes, but I ain't never been able to feel sorry 'bout it. He axed fer it, an' if he got well, I bet he didn't kick nobody else fer a long time."

George stuffed his pipe with sack tobacco again, struck a match on the pineboard floor, and puffed silently for a few moments.

"It took me mor'n a month to git back hyar. I was ragged an' hongry, an' didn't have no friends to go to, but I made up my mind I weren't goin' back to ol' man Sears.' I'se feelin' grown now, an' I knowed I weren't goin' to take no more beatin's from him. I knowed I'd kill him if he ever laid a hand on me, fer I couldn't even think 'bout him an' not burn in my head. Sometimes I thought 'bout that gal that was s'posed to be my sister, but I never knowed that she was. She was a little ol' skinny, light-haired gal, an' she never favored me. Some folks say I got Indian blood, I wouldn't know. But I guess I done things in my

time bad as a Indian.

"I done things that th' good God won't ever forgive me fer. When I come back, I didn't have no friends. Cept Tom Green, a nigger that lived down in Coosa County 'bout th' bend. I went down thar with him, an' he was as bad a nigger as I was a white man. I took to card playin' an' whiskey drinkin' down thar, an' we raised so much hell that we driv' his ol' woman plumb out-a th' house. When we'd give out-a whiskey, we'd jest make us some more an' go right ahead rassin' hell.

"A bunch of niggers who worked at th' Jackson sawmill over at th' Springs useta come down to Tom's house on Sundays, an' Tom an' me'd play cards with 'em an' take what they had. That's one of th' things I won't ever be fergive fer. There was them po'r niggers who'd git paid maybe three dollars on Saturday, an' then Tom an' me'd git 'em drunk an' take everything they had. You see this scar on th' side of my head? Well, I got it right thar. A crazy nigger gived it to me with a butcher knife.

"I stayed down thar in them woods 'til I was goin' on twenty year old. Tom an' me was makin' whiskey an' gamblin' an' fishin' a little fer a livin' an' we was doin' good. But then one Saturday, Tom got full of likker an' went over th' mountain to a sawmill that had started runnin' over thar.

They was a bunch of niggers workin' at the mill, an' one of 'em was a nigger named Doc, who had a tall, yaller gal fer a woman that made Tom's mouth water. Tom saw her once, an' then he comed to me an' said that he couldn't look at 'er an' stand still. Th' thoughts of her ject runned all over him; an' then, that Saturday he got likkered up.

"He headed straight fer that Doc's shack 'spite all th' way I begged him to stay away. He had a pistol in his overall pocket, an' I knowed that he was goin' atter what he wanted. I begged him right to th' door leadin' up to th' shack, but they wasn't nothin' could be done. He went up thar and walked in th' door.

"He wasn't no sooner in than Doc's woman started hollerin'. I was standin' out in th' road watchin', fer I knowed Tom was drunk enough to shoot me if I tried to stop him. The door was open a little, an' I could see him wrastlin' with that yaller gal, an' her screamin' like she was in a bed of snakes. Niggers started runnin' out of all th' shacks, an' some of 'em headed straight for th' sawmill boiler room.

"I knowed then that thar was hell to pay, fer that was whar Doc was workin'. In no time a-tall, he come runnin' t'ward his shack, an' he had a rifle in his hand. He stopped out in the front yard, an' he called out, 'Come out-a my house, nigger, or I'm comin' atter you.'

"He hadn't no more than said it when Tom come to th' door. ^{Tom} He didn't say a thing, he jest leveled down with his pistol an' started shootin' at Doc--I don't know how many times. But Doc jest stepped back of a tree thar in th' yard an' waited 'til Tom had finished. Then he raised that rifle to his shoulder.

"I never seed a shot ^{ga}ged better'n that one. Tom stepped back from th' door, kinder to one side, but Doc seemed to know whar he was standin'. He shot through th' wall, 'bout two feet from th' door, an' that bullet got Tom right through the belly. We runned up to th' house an' he was dead. Th' gal was under th' bed.

"Now I'm th' sort that knows what side my bread's buttered on. I knowed them people might say I was Tom's friend an' have it in fer me. But when I seed he was dead, I knowed that a dead man can't do nothin' fer nobody. So I started cussin' him right and left, an' tol' Doc that I'd see th' law didn't do nothin' to him. I did that, too, fer I went over to th' county seat at Rockford an' helped see that they didn't bother him. They jest had a little hearin', an' then they turned him loose.

"I didn't lose nothin' by tellin' what I knowed. They was a young man named Hughes who was runnin' th' sawmill, an' he told me that he was to thank me fer what I'd done fer his nigger. Well, sir, I seed that th' time was right,

an' I axed him for a job. He gived it to me, an' that's whar I started out sawmillin'.

"I was a grownup man, an' I was as tough an' as stout as a mule. At first, I helped fire th' b'iler, totin' slabs fer it, but then one day Mr. Hughes come up to me. He says, 'I'm short in th' woods, George; I need loggers out thar. How'd you like to try yo'r hand at it?' I tol' him that I'd like it fine, an' th' next day, I was pullin' at th' end of a crosscut saw.

"Well, sir, I had som'pun happen out thar that gived me a lesson. I don't min' tellin' you 'bout it, fer it's got funny to me now. They was a little ol' man helpin' me named Davis, an' he weren't nothin' but a runt. Th' first time I seed him I wanted to laugh, fer it was funny to think he could keep up with me on a saw.

"Th' second day I worked out thar, he was goin' in to th' commissary fer som'pun, an' I give him a dime an' axed him to git me some 'baccor. He was gone a couple of hours, an' when he come back he seemed mighty worried. He come right to me, an' he said, 'George, I done lost that dime of your'n; I'll pay it back come Saturday.' An' I was wantin' 'baccor, an' I got mad as hell. I said, 'You stole my money.'

"Well, sir, he straightened up his little old wizened self, an' he said, 'That's a lie.' He was white as a sheet, an' he was tremblin' like he was go'nter fall to pieces. I knowed he was scared as a rabbit, so I took a step t'ward him an' said, 'If you say that ag'in, I'll slap yo'r face.' He come right back at me. He said, 'It's a lie--a double dogged lie!'"

"They was just us twe away out thar in th' woods--miles away from th' closest soul. I ris up my arm, an' I slapped his face so hard that it cracked like th' stinger on a cowhide whip. I slapped it that hard, an' then I turned to walk off.

"I've stirred up a yaller jacket nest many a time, an' I've had 'em git over me faster'n a country boy pickin' a banjo, but I ain't never had nothin' git on me as fast as that dried-up little ol' man. We was standin' on th' side of a hill, an' he come at me head first. His shoulders hit me in the belly, an' I went down on my back, with my head p'inted down th' hill, an' my feet p'inted up. It was all sudden-like, an' I couldn't a got up if it'd bin th' end of th' world.

"I tried to hit at him from whar I was lyin', but he wasn't nowhar I hit. He was jest like a banty rooster, an' he hit me in th'face so fast that you couldn't a counted th' licks. He jest sit on my chest an' beat on my nose an' eyes an'

mouth like he was beatin' a drum. I couldn't do nothin', so I said, 'You have whooped me.' He got up then, but my eyes was swelled 'til it was all I could do to see, an' my mouth felt like it was big as a hin.

"It's a funny thing, but I got to likin' that little ol' man. He tried to pay me back my dime, but I wouldn't take it. We went on cuttin' logs together, an' it weren't long 'fore we was mighty good friends. An' it was him that I was goin' to tell you 'bout--th' only time in my life I ever was white-eyed.

"It was all on account of a ol' cheap watch. Bein' out in th' woods as he was, we couldn't hear no whistles for quittin' time, so th' man that owned a watch did all th' time-callin'. Well, this was my watch, an' it was up to me when we was to rest. It got to whar I allus called time for 'bout fifteen minutes every mornin' so we could go over to a spring close by an' git us some water. When we'd drunk, we'd lie down awhile an' talk.

"Things kept up like that a long time, and it come to th' point ^hwar Davis weren't doin' much work. He wanted to rest all th' time, an' we couldn't keep up with the teamsters. Well, sir, th' notion struck me that if I'd let him call th' time he might do better work, so one day I took out my watch an' handed it to him. I said, 'You keep th' watch awhile Mister Davis, an' you call th' time.'"

"Now, I've made lots of mistakes in my life, but that'n was th' worst. That little ol' man went crazy as a bat. He was allus takin' out that watch an' lookin' at it like he was a boss, an' he couldn't git to workin' early ^{enough} ~~enough~~. It got to whar he wouldn't even lie down when we'd go to th' spring, an' he was stingy 'bout goin' a-tall. We'd git down thar, but jost th' minute I laid down, he'd take out that watch an' say, 'Got to git back on th' job, Carter; got to keep th' trees fallin'.'

"It tickled me fer awhile, but it got to whar it weren't funny. One hot day in August we was cuttin' logs, an' he was worse than ever. He worked like we was th' only loggers in th' woods, an' by dinner time, I was blowin' an' sweatin' like a mule. That evenin', he jost kept on sawin' like he was fightin' a fire, an' I knowed I couldn't make it no further. I took my hands off my end of th' saw, an' I says to him, 'You better let me have th' watch ag'in. We'll take turns keepin' time, week by week.' But I never did git 'round no more to lettin' him carry it.

"I was beginnin' to make fair money fer them times--dollar an' a half a day. I was growed up, so I got my mind on havin' a woman of my own. I got to castin' 'round fer one, an' I got my mind sot on a little ol' gal that lived over on th' Peters' Place. Her ma was passed on, an' her pa wasn't

doin' no good at keepin' her up. She was ragged as a can of kraut. Her pa was too busy raisin' hell to mind atter her, an' I knowed he'd be glad to git rid of her.

"One day I axed him 'bout it, an' he said he didn't mind. I traipsed over thar a couple of times an' did a little purty talkin' to th' gal, an' one day I tol' her I wanted her to come an' live with me--that it was all fixed with her pa. She studied 'bout it fer a minute or two, but I guess she was glad to come. She'd had a hell of a life thar whar she was. I tuk her ~~to~~ shack that night, an' she kitched on right off. Weren't no time 'fore she had th' place lookin' better--scrubbed clean as a whistle-- an' she planted some flowers out in th' yard.

"She never was much purty, but she was a good woman. Her name was Texas sun'pn-er-ether; I don't recollect her pa's name. She weren't half my size-- didn't weigh a hundert pound--but that jest suited me. I allus have liked a little bitay woman. They don't give no trouble, an' they don't eat much.

"I guess I loved her some. That is, I loved her fer awhile. But I like I said, I'se useta raisin' hell, an' it weren't long 'fore I got my mind on that ag'in. I guess I'se purty bad, but shouldn't no woman ever think she can put bits in a man's mouth. I recollect that I come home one day at dinner-

time, an' I was hongry an' t'ard. She allus had my dinner ready for me, but this time th' hoe cake weren't quite done, an' it 'peared to me that she weren't doin' nothin' to help things. She was sittin' at a quilt she had hangin' from th' ceilin', an' it made me madder to see her sittin' thar workin' with a needle an' thread when I was starvin', an' she should a been in th' kitchen. Well, sir, I jest give a runnin' leap, an' landed sq'are in th' middle of that damned quilt. Down it come, railin's an' all."

George laughed boisterously, stamping the floor with one of his huge, soaked feet. He slouched forward in the chair, his elbows on his knees.

"I'm tellin' you this, fer I'm headin' up to a p'int. That little ol' woman was a-feared of me, an' she kept her mouth shet, no matter what I done. But all th' time, she weren't keepin' her mouth shet fer ever'body. She was goin' up to Mister Hughes' house behin' my back, an' she was tellin' him how bad I was treatin' her. That shows no woman can't be trusted. If they are like a mouse 'round you, yell, you can bet th' shirt off'n yo'r back that they're talkin' to somebody. An' her talkin' her head off to Mister Hughes weren't doin' me no good; though I didn't know 'bout it till later. If I had knowed, I'd a busted her wide open.

"It all come to a head one mornin' when I weren't doin' nothin' that most

any man wouldn't do. They was a gal lived up on th' hill 'bove my shack, an' she was a sight for sore eyes--big-chested an' broad hiped. Well, I ain't denyin' that I'd been watchin' her for a long time, an' I knowed that she had her eyes set on me--any man can tell when a woman wants 'im. She come to my place ev'ry mornin' ^e for buttermilk that I'ce lettin' her folks have; an' on this pertic'lar mornin', she jest happened to ketch me right. That miserable little ol' woman of mine was big with a baby, an' I didn't have no eyes ^e for her. [^]

"This gawky ol' corn-fed gal come saunterin' into th' kitchen that mornin', when I was sittin' thar gettin' my grub. I looked up an' seed her, and she looked better'n I'd ever seed her look before--an' she was smilin' at me like she was thinkin' 'bout th' same thing. I guess that's why th' notion struck me all of a sudden. I knowed that my ol' woman was out at th' lot, an' things was set jest right.

"Now, I'm tellin' you this, fer I'm leadin' up to a pint. I got up from th' table an' walked over to whar that gal was standin'. She didn't move a leg. I says, 'Ye'r kinder frisky, ain't you?', an' she giggled woman-like. Well, sir, I jest eased my arm 'bout her then, an' she was soft as a feather bed. I was huggin' her like all hell--I had ev'rything jest like I wanted it--when my ol' woman come in at th' door.

"She didn't say nothin' at first; jest stood thar with her eyes buggin'

out like a chipmunk's. I weren't goin' to let her faze me, so I jest kept on huggin', but th' gal was squirmin' an' pawin' so bad I couldn't hold 'er. Then my ol' woman said, 'George, what are you doin'?' An' I come right back at her. I says, 'I'm havin' a good time, mama.'"

The giant figure straightened in the chair, and the huge hands came down upon the huge knees with a resounding smack. A burst of laughter rumbled from the leathery, bull-like throat.

"I guess ye'r wonderin' what th' p'int is," he said after awhile. "Well, this is it; Ther ain't no sin 'bout nothin' like that 'less you git kitched; that's all th' sin they is--gittin' kitched.

"Well, sir, my ol' woman couldn't keep her mouth shet 'bout that neither. She went straight as a pigeon to Mr. Hughes, an' she must-a tol' him a bellyful. Anyways, he comed up to me on th' job a few days later, an' I could see that he had his dander up. He called me to one side, an' he says, 'Damn yo'r hide, you ought'er be killed. Somebody ought'er take a shotgun an' blow th' skin off ⁱⁿ yo'r stinkin' bones.' I tol' him somebody had been totin' a passel of lies, but he says, 'Don't be layin' nothin' off on that little woman. I'd fire you if it weren't f'or her. As it is, I'm go'nter run you off this place if ever I hyar of you mistreatin' her ag'in.'

"That shows you can't put no trust in a damned woman, but I knowed Mister Hughes meant what he said. It got to worryin' me some, fer them was hard times, an' I couldn't 'ford to lose no job. If it hadn't a-been fer that, I'd a busted that woman wide open, but I knowed if I tetches her she'd go runnin' to him. So I jest bided my time.

"They was a meetin' goin' on 'bout that time, an' I done a lot of studyin' 'bout it. I knowed Mister Hughes was a churchly man, an' I got to thinkin' that I'd put myself in good with him by j'oinin' up; he'd done a heap of talk to me--'bout how I'd ought'er git myself right with th' God A'mighty.

"Th' hardest thing I ever done was that. Ol' Reverent Sardis from over at th' Valley was doin' th' bellerin', an' he was th' damn-deest hypocrite you ever seed. He run a little ol' store when he weren't preachin', an' when a gal'd come in th' store, he'd try to hug 'er. I 'member they tol' me that one gal comed in fer a sack of sugar, an' that when he tried to lover 'er up a little she busted that sack of sugar over his damned head. They said that he could comb his hair fer a week an' git enough sugar to sweeten his coffee with.

"Well, I went up thar to that meetin', an' my ol' woman traipsed along with me as proud as a mother wren. She didn't know nothin' 'bout what I was doin' it fer, so when we went in an' sot down, she begin lookin' about happy-like,

with her little ol' eyes wet as a baby's behin'. I sot an' listened to th' sermon, thinkin' 'bout what a hypocrite ol' Sardis was up thar on th' platform, bellerin' like he'd bust his throat open. I never listened to 'im, but when they started th' singin', I went an' j'ined up.

"I wasn't never in a church-house before, an' I felt like a damned fool. Ol' Sardis shuk han's with me, then sot me down on a bench in front of ever'body. They was th' most takin' on thar I ever heerd, with them fools all a-bellerin' an' a-jumpin'. Some of them was a-cryin', an' that was right down my way. I allus could ^e cry easy, thinkin' 'bout what a hard row I'd had to hoe. So I beganed a-cryin' with th' others, an' they comed down to th' front, pawin' at me an' makin' me feel like I was in th' crazy house.

"Atter it was all over, Mister Hughes come 'round an' tol' me how glad he was. He called me 'Brother' an' I knowed I'd got him whar I wanted him. I kept him thar, too, fer I went to that church-house regular. They weren't but one thing that was good 'bout it. Ol' Sardis couldn't 'ford to preach at th' mill but twice a month, fer he had another church some'ers. It was a hard job, but I stuck it out--I stuck it out fer six damned years--'til ol' Sardis was dead an' in hell, an' a new preacher comed--an' 'til Mister Hughes went busted an' had to quit sawmillin'.

I had three young'uns now, so I had to git me up another job. But th' first thing I done was to git me a hick'ry stick an' beat th' lard out-a that damned tale-carryin' woman. I vent her'til she was down on her knees hollerin' fer God's love, an' I teachd her a lesson she didn't never fergit. She never did carry no more tales on me. She never did say nothin', neither, when I got me up a woman that I wanted to fun with, an' I got me up a-plenty.

"But don't you never do that, son. I'm a ol' man now, an' I know all thar is to know. When you fun with mer'n one woman, you never do seem to fun as much as you want to; you want-a foller over' woman that comes along. You don't hav' to do that, but I do. I'm so weak.

"It didn't take me long to git another job attar I left th' Hughes mill. I was th' best logger in that country, I knowed my trees like they was people, an' I was th' stoutest man anywhar to be found. I went over to Shelby County, close't to Four-Mile, an' I katched on right off with Ol' Man Brasier. He was th' kind that never give a damn what sort of ^o man you was, jest so you was a _^ good worker. Well, that suited me fine, fer I didn't have to go to church no more, an' I could git out in th' pasture an' jaw up sand with th' cows.

"I guess I paved up enough of it to fill th' Coosa River. That was one place whar they was enough women to suit me, an' I runned attar 'em 'til my

tongue was rollin' out like a damned dog's. My little ol' woman didn't open her mouth, neither, fer I had learned her how to keep it sewed up. Th' best times I ever loved her, I reckon, was right attar we beganned livin' together, an' when I stood lookin' down at her dead face. She died a-havin' a kid. She shouldn't ought^{er} a had it, fer Doc Boyer had tol' her she'd die if she did.

"They was a woman name of Nora livin' thar that I liked a heap, but I had done made up my mind that I weren't never goin' to feed no other woman regular. They's a lot of things to be done 'bout a shack, though, an' a man can't do all of it--specially if they's a passel of kids runnin' 'round. I tried batchin' it fer nearly a month attar Tex died, an' I weren't doin' no good at it. One Sunday mornin' I got to thinkin' 'bout it, so that evenin' I went over to Nora's place an' tol' her how I felt about it. We had funned 'round a good while, anyways, so she got up her duds an' comed over to my shack.

"But right attar we beganned livin' together regular, I tol' her how things was go'nter be run. I knowed she hadn't hardly lived whar she had been, fer her ma was a widder woman, and thar was a gang of other brats thar. I knowed that meat an' bread et regular would be enough to keep 'er with me, an' I was right. She was a good worker, but she never did take a likin' to my other woman's kids. I had to git her up some of 'er own, an' that was all

right with me. I allus did try to keep my women totin' a little bitay baby. That keeps 'em from studyin' devilment."

Again, the roar of laughter burst from the big throat, and again the huge hands were clapped hard against the huge knees.

"I don't guess I'ese as rough on Nora as I was my fust woman; but that was on account of her workin' to keep me in a good humor. Sometimes I'd git drunk an' whale th' hell out-a her a time or two, but mostly I treated her as good as any woman ought'er be treated. Don't never be too good to one of 'em. A woman's like a dumb animal--like a cow or a bitch dog. You got to frail 'em with a stick now an' then to make 'em look up to you.

"Why, I tell you susp'un; they's been men workin' at loggin' camps whar I been that handled their ol' women like they was gold dollars. They'd pet 'em up, buy purtys fer 'em, an' keep their backsides kivered with glad rags; an' then Ol' George hyar'd come along an' take 'em fer hisself. I've seed men that didn't have no sense 'bout handlin' women. You never ought'er tell one of 'em that she looks good, or that anybody'd have 'em 'cept you. She'll git to believin' it if you tell 'er that, an' she'll start struttin' 'round like a rooster that's whooped ever'thing in th' countryside.

"I tol' Nora how things was go'nter be run, an' they was runned that way

fer mor'a 'leven years. She gived me six young'uns while we was livin' together, but she got to whar she weren't wuth keepin'. She got to creepin' 'bout th' house like a wood-legged woman, an' her hide got as galler as a persimmon. I got to thinkin' once that I'd run 'er off--she weren't doin' me no good--but it was fer th' best that I didn't. She was tuk with a chill one night, an' she went out a awful way.

"It's go'nter come my time some day, but I pray to God I don't go out like that woman. It was awful. She'd got to whar she talked a lot 'bout sinnin', an' how me an' her was doin' wrong by havin' kids an' not even bein' married. 'Bout a month 'fore she died, she says to me one day, 'George, le's go over to Sylacaugy or somers an' git a preacher to talk over us.' That was funny as hell to me, an' I thought she'd went bug-crazy. But you know, I'se thinkin' of what she said jest th' other day. Do you s'pose that's why she ²did that-a-way?

"When she was lyin' thar tremblin' with th' chill, she kept raisin' up her hands an' yellin', 'He's in th' kitchen now! Th' devil's in th' kitchen, an' he's comin' atter me!' She went away yellin' things like that, with 'er eyes wide open. I wonder if th' damned devil was in thar atter her?

"Well, if he was, he's go'nter be thar with feathers on his head when it comes my time. He's go'nter do a frilic, fer he's got a heap a meat to fry

when he gits to me . Reverent Dailey, that young feller over at Harpersville, tol' me th' Lord could save anybody. He tol' me, 'Though yo'r sins air of scarlet, I will wash 'em white as snow.' That's what I'm countin' on. That's what I went to Judge McKinnon for an' got him to give me one of his old Bibles. I ain't never read a lick in my life, but I got to thinkin' I didn't want to go out without a Bible in my damned shack.

/It's go'nter take a heap of washin' for me, for if it's a sin to have young'uns an' not be married, I done a lot of it. It's got to whar anybody could come up an' say, 'How're ye, pal?', an' I wouldn't know if I ought'er knock hell out-a him or kiss 'im. But I got religion, even if I don't go to no church. Reverent Dailey said he was go'nter pray for me, an' I guess that'll wash me off a little.

"I done los' track of most of the kids I had by my two women. I kept 'em with me 'til they jest drifted off an' didn't come back. One of th' little ol' gals -- she never was bright--went to Sylacaugy to work in th' mill, an' somebody tol' me she was runnin' attar ev'ry pair of britches in sight. If I ever kotch up with 'er, I'll bust some of 'er ribs loose. My oldes' boy was makin' likker down on Coharie Creek last I heard--I don' know whar he is now. I don' know whar none of 'em is, so don' ax me 'bout 'em.

"I been workin' fer Ol' Blalock a good spell now, an' I reckon th' place is as good as any'n I'd find. But he don' pay me like he ought'er. They ain't nobody knows a tree better'n me, an' they ain't nobody can do harder work. Ol' Blalock thinks I'm a damned fool, but I been 'round."

As he talked, the black, squinted eyes kept turning with increasing intentness upon a narrow, weed-flanked trail that ribboned toward his shanty over a stretch of bottom land. Now, he roused his big frame from the chair and glanced inside the bare, two-room structure. His eyes paused upon the face of a cheap alarm clock that ticked above the fireplace.

"I ain't rushin' you off," he said after awhile. "This place is yo'ra to stay as long as you want to. But I thought I better tell you they's some fo'ks comin' over hyar atter awhile--they's Bud Baker an' some of them Katria boys. They go'nter have some likker an' some gals along, an' we nought try raisin' a little hell. I thought I better tell you 'bout it, but that yo're welcome to stay."

But the visitor was ready to go. Already, the sun was disappearing behind the fringe of pine trees over on Sulphur Mountain. Already, there was hoarse laughter down the path, punctuated with an occasional shrill outburst. Somebody in the approaching crowd was plunking "Red River Valley" on a banjo.

7/25/39

S.J.