

The Calling of Jeremy

BY FLORENCE WILKINSON

A WINTER evening came down on Swanson's Dam Camp in the woods. The tall shadows and pink sunbeams walked between glistening tree shafts. The snow was painted warmly in the forest aisles. The skidding crews came filing down the steep log roads, their peveys, musket fashion, over their shoulders. They picked their way silently in the deep-worn hoof-holes between stiffened walls of snow knee-high. As they neared the camp clearing a gray moose-bird, hopping on a tote road, called to them with jocular familiarity.

The sun set behind a bank of creamy clouds that seemed to puff forward between the last black tree trunks on the forest horizon. As the dusk filled the wood lanes like a visible exhalation, the swampers strung along, indifferently entertained by one of Jeremy's veteran stories. Then the cream faded to dull pink, and the last moose-bird gave up his tricks till sunrise.

Fumes of supper from the cook-room reached the teamsters in the cattle-shanty as they stabled their horses for the night. After eating, which was brief and vehement, came the genial circle of the dog-room.

"Women," said Jeremy, "is like chinyware. The showy-lookers ain't no good for every-day. Them boarders as sits on the piazzzy down to the Beaver River House, all plumed out like peonies, they puts me in mind of my mother's figgered chiny plates. They'd crack if you looked at 'em, sure."

"There's all kinds of women," said Old Man Joe, ponderously.

The dog-room felt that his was the word of wisdom. It assented.

"Just the same as there is of hosses," went on the old man, stimulated by approval.

He had been a famous teamster in his day.

"You kin never git two alike. Cu-

r'ous creeters, hosses. They'll pick their way stiddy down into the mill-dump, with them logs pitched like the roof of a shanty, and then frighten at a Christmas card flyin' up at 'em. You never kin tell."

"I suppose there has to be women," said Jeremy, tolerantly, as if continuing Old Man Joe's train of thought, "but I was never no hand with 'em."

"You hain't never had a good shot at 'em." Eli spoke with compassion. "You ben't a married man, and it goes to follow you don't know women."

"No," said Jeremy, "I 'ain't never had no callin' to be a family man, leastways not what you might say *was* a callin'."

He gave a non-committal stroke to his iron-gray whiskers, but the modification of the statement was not lost on Paul Lawless, who took the mouth-organ from his lips to join in the conversation. He was a tall, well-made man, with a noticeably small head and a stiff blond mustache.

"We don't know nothing about Jeremy's wife," he twinkled, "but fer all that thar mought be a Miz Swinger up in Canady somewheres. He was five year with the Canucks, and, b'gosh, Jeremy 'ain't allus been the sober bird he lays out to be now."

Paul's little animal blue eyes glanced mischievously round the room.

"I've known sech as claimed not to be married having women tucked off somewheres," said Jeremy, stretching his square-cornered mouth to stern contempt, "but I don't be one of sech, Paul Lawless. When the time comes fer me to acknowledge my wife, so I'll do, not as I don't say now I've no use for them, this being the case. God bless me, I love a woman, if there is cull logs among them."

The dog-room relapsed into silence. The spruce wood crackled and split in

the stove, and above it, like withered effigies, hung the outspread, helpless mittens and misshapen coats of the lumbermen. Outside, the wind howled through the pine-tree tops.

"I 'ain't never had no callin' as *was* a callin'," repeated Jeremy, half to himself, as he filled his pipe.

The dog-room heeded him not, for upon it had settled the apathetic stupor that would only be stirred by the inspiration of going to bed. The skidding and swamping crews, who had turned in early, could be heard snoring in their bunks upstairs.

Paul put the organ to his mouth and breathed forth a plaintive strain. Jeremy's head was sunk forward, and on his leather-red face rested an expression of deep sadness.

Lawless, with little beamy eyes above his sentimental improvisation, cast up the number of logs yet to be hauled on his job. Perhaps there were one or two thoughts, like annoying flies, easily brushed away, of a certain little girl up at St. Timothée.

Then without warning the door of the shanty was opened, and a peddler, with a pack-basket on his back, appeared, and a woman, with the snow frozen on her black hair, and a little face pinched by the cold to painful red spots. The peddler was a surprise, the woman a sensation.

The men greeted the new-comers with casual nods and a dry good-evening. A lack of gush in the mountains implies no lack of cordiality. A demonstrative or even talkative welcome would have been an embarrassment. The peddler led the way to a bench before the stove, where he sat down. The woman followed, standing a moment in dazed fashion in front of the big roaring fire.

"Set down," said the peddler.

The woman obeyed.

"It's nipping out," remarked Eli.

"So it be," the peddler assented.

The woman drew off her frozen mittens and pressed her little stiffened hands together in agony. The change in temperature had blanched her face to a bluish pallor.

"Roads purty full?" said Jeremy, keeping his eyes off the woman in sympathetic discomfort.

"Up to boot-tops," the peddler replied. "Brought a passenger, ye see," he added, grinning awkwardly, and expecting an effusive exchange of sentiment between the woman and the husband she had come to meet.

By the time the peddler had drawn in the borders of his outward expectation he perceived with chagrin that something was wrong. The woman had deceived him. She had no husband at Swanson's Dam.

"Waal, do ye see him?" he turned to her with brusque disbelief.

The woman had pushed back the gray hood from her face, and her wet hair had curled in tangles around her forehead. She made a step forward, and then, as she met the relentless eyes of Paul Lawless, her hands fell to her side.

"Oh, my God!" she said, in a very low voice, and Jeremy's heart melted in pity.

She knew Paul would do it, as he had threatened if she dared follow him. He would deny her in the face of all that crowd. Paul would shame her.

The peddler was stung to anger by the awkward *dénouement*. He felt as flat as the perpetrator of an unsuccessful anecdote.

Paul Lawless, noting the receipt of his message in the woman's eyes, thrust his hands in his pockets and hummed an air. Jeremy's old face had darkened to a mahogany red. The woman sat limply by the stove, the passionate hopes of the long pilgrimage frozen to an icy lump over her heart. Was it, then, for nothing that Paul had kissed her in the woods of St. Timothée?

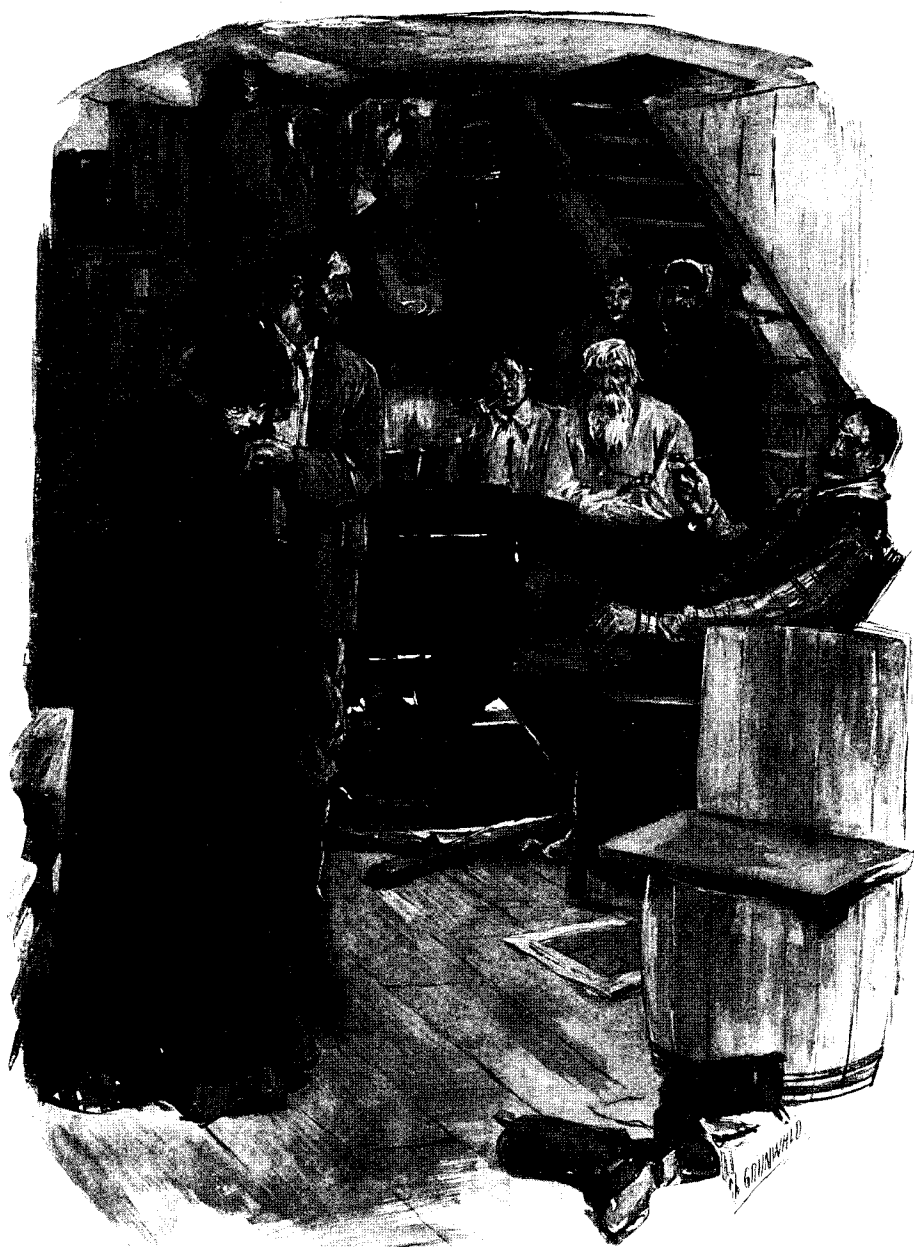
"Got some stuff to sell?" asked Lawless, hitching forward toward the peddler.

"Sure I have," replied the peddler, washing his hands of the embarrassment by turning his back on the woman. He pulled off his boots with brutal directness. "Picked her up on Jim Hoe's tote road," he remarked to Lawless with a confidential wink. "Has her reasons for coming here, I don't doubt."

He confided another, wickeder wink to Lawless. Lawless hemmed an indifferent assent.

"Whar'll she sleep?" whispered Eli to Jeremy. "Ain't it the deuce?"

But Jeremy did not hear him. Melis-



"I BE KINDER SLOW ABOUT SPEAKING UP, BECUZ SHE TOOK ME BY SURPRISE"

sa's little drooping back made a tight feeling under his chin. She was so pitifully young. His "callin'" had come to him, and it was strong. The rough, unsatisfied longing of many solitary years leapt forward and found their destiny. There was never a thought of himself nor of the lie forced upon him, but only of the woman he might save. He could hear already in imagination the scandalous gossip of the camp about this little black-eyed creature, unchampioned and unexplained in the midst of them; denied, put to shame, by the man who owed her honor.

"I'm going to bunk, boys," remarked Lawless, with the yawn of one who is safely out of a tight place.

As he rose, Melissa rose too, with a tragic look of unappeased appeal. Then Jeremy towered out of his barrel chair. The dog-room felt the approach of a climax, and was silent.

"Boys, this be my wife," Jeremy burst out.

She turned toward him, a vague hand uplifted to her forehead. Jeremy advanced and put a loose arm about her waist.

"I be kinder slow about speaking up, becuz she took me by surprise there for a few minutes, and we both of us be rather shy before strangers. Come, —"

There was a pause where a name should have been. "Come, dear."

They left the room together.

The dog-room waited till their steps reached the office, which was Jeremy's bed-room, separated from the general sleeping-room by a horse-blanket nailed across the doorway.

"He lied," said Old Man Joe, with judicial slowness. "That warn't no wife of his'n. He lied."

"Who be she, then, and what she's doing here?" Eli questioned, with glittering eagerness.

"I never seen the beat of her afore," Old Man Joe continued, "coming afoot these roads in the middle of the winter from the Lord knows where."

"And why didn't she go fer Jeremy first off?" asked Eli, "and why didn't he speak up fer her?"

"I never seen the beat of it," said the

old man. "He lied. I seen the lie fermenting in him afore he opened his mouth."

"You cayn't tell abaout Jeremy," said Lawless, biting from a plug of tobacco with sharp yellow teeth. "He's the darndest man to hang back."

Upstairs Jeremy whispered to Melissa: "My name's Jeremy. What's yours?"

"Melissy."

"And we've been married two years. Your folks wouldn't hear to the marriage, and kept you to home till now. I'll fix it up in the morning. Don't you be skeered. Good-night, dear."

A little later he appeared at the foot of the stairs, holding his boots in his hands. He scented the distrust of his comrades, and met it doggedly.

"I warn't expecting her to-day, or I'd have gone down to Hoe's with a tot-sleigh for her. But that ain't nothing to you. She kinder stole a march on me, don't you see."

No one joined in Jeremy's laugh, which rattled in his throat like pease.

"I'll thank ye kindly to be shy of waking her when ye turn in to bed," he said. "I'm going to sleep down here. She's clean tucked out."

The peddler and the other men exchanged looks and crept up stairs.

The lantern against the wall began to sputter and smell oily. The fire in the stove had almost burned out. The men above dropped their boots more gently than was their wont. Jeremy heard their low burr of talk, then the thump of them on their blankets, then speedily the resonant chorus of satisfied sleep.

He tried to recall the face of the woman asleep in his little bed. Somehow there had always been a mist before his sight when he looked at her. He remembered great eyes in a white oval of face and a veil of dark hair across the pillow.

"For all the world as purty as a drawing-picture. God help me!" he prayed.

The lantern gasped and went out. Some trees in the clearing clanked like iron chains. It had stopped snowing, and one large star shone in between the icicles at the window.



MAJOR-GENERAL NATHANIEL GREENE

Colonies and Nation

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES

BY WOODROW WILSON

THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE (*Continued*)

BUT Washington's genius and the license of the British soldiery turned the tide at last, when it seemed upon the very point of becoming overwhelming. The occupation of the British, brief as it had been, had brought upon New York and the Jerseys experiences like those of a country overrun by a foreign soldiery permitted almost every license of conquest. When the ministers in England found themselves, in 1774, face to face with the revolt in the colonies, they could count but 17,547 men all told in the king's forces; and when it came to sudden recruiting, they could obtain very few enlistments. They dared not risk conscription,—English opinion had never tolerated that, except to meet invasion. They sent to America, therefore, to reinforce General Howe, not only English soldiers as many as they could muster, but a great force of German troops as well, hired by the regiment, their trained officers included, from the Landgrave of

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