A SPARTAN MOTHER OF MANY SORROWS

Mrs. Samuels Whose "Boys" Were the James Outlaws, Tells of Her Life

By Leigh Mitchell Hodges

Jesse James in 1876

House Where Jesse James Was Born

Mrs. Samuels in Front of Her Home. On Chair is Piece of Bomb that Blew off Her Arm

ONE afternoon, fifty-nine years ago, a Baptist minister of the pioneer ranks stood waist-deep in the waters of a little stream in Clay county, Missouri, and immersed three-score men and women.

Among those who stood on the bank was a tall women, broad of shoulder and keen-eyed, whom, seeing once, you would always remember. In her arms she held her baby boy, fourteen months old. The child cooed and clapped his little hands as his father performed the solemn rites.

That father was a fine specimen of the pioneer men of God, who had to be as much at home with a shotgun as with the Scriptures. He had made the overland journey from Kentucky with his young bride seven years prior to this day, and now he was known far and wide as an exhorter of vast power, a revivalist who could make men shiver with his dark pictures of sin, and shout for joy with his white visions of the saving grace of Christ.

Three years after this day he was to undertake the great ride across the plains to the new-found fields of gold, and, like Moses, to die within sight of his promised land.

That baby boy, his third son, was to be known throughout the world, yet not as his father would have had him known. He was to be 17 when the flames of civil strife burst forth, and after a career as fascinating as it was wild and daring, he was to be shot in the back by a comrade at 35.

For that baby boy was Jesse James!

He was to lead that mother through such a life as perhaps no other woman has ever known. And she followed where he led, a Spartan if ever one lived, and today she carries her ninety-three years of age and her centuries of harrowing experiences with the majestic bearing of a Caesar.

This is not easy to do with a stump in place of a right arm.

But that right arm was blown off by a bomb so many years ago that she is used to its loss by this time. And as Mrs. Zerelda Samuels talked to me of her eventful life, one afternoon not long ago, she swung the empty sleeve and a gleam of defiance mounted to her eyes—still keen, almost as keen, I am sure, as they were that afternoon long ago on the bank of Baptism creek.

SHE was sitting in the parlor of her grandson's home in Kansas City—her grandson, Jesse James, Jr., son of the outlaw, who is now a practicing lawyer. He had told me I would probably find her there—she had come up from her farm in Clay county the day before—and when one of her great-grandchildren opened the front door I saw her rise hastily from a rocking-chair in the sitting-room and peer into the hall. Hearing her name, she came forward.

For a moment I was struck dumb.

It was her face. I had never seen one like it before. It, writ in wrinkles, was a composite history of all the years of Christendom. It was a map of battles; a chart of struggles; a flesh-plan of fights.

"What do you want?" she asked. Her voice was firm, with a martial note played through its minor chord.

I told her what I wanted, adding that Jesse had sent me.

"How do I know he sent you?" she said, her eyes boring two holes in my head.

"You might telephone him to find out," I suggested.

She made no answer, but walked straight to the telephone. She called Jesse, but he had left his office. My manners looked a little weak, and in order to strengthen them I offered in evidence a history of Jesse James which he had just given me. In it he had written his name and the date.

"Possibly this will convince you," I said, handing her the book. "That is your grandson's writing, is it not?"

"It might be, but how do I know it is?" she replied.

My word is the only support I can offer, I answered.

"Well, you look honest, anyway, so sit down."

We sat down, and talked for half an hour. Then she went in with the telephone. This time she got Jesse, and I was justified.

"I knew you were all right the minute you told me to prove," she said. "I have seen enough of men to be able to read them pretty well in a minute or two. But sometimes I can't get over that feeling, you know, seeing the detectives sneaking around, and then I hate men. It's so hard for them to tell the truth."

STILL HAUNTED BY OLD FEARS

"If I'd known you were one, you would never have come in. But I can't get rid of the habit of getting up to see who's at the door. There were years when any knock might mean the Sheriff or a posse, and when many a night and when detectives almost played tattoos on windows as well as doors."

She leaned ever closer to me. A curious look of dread came into her eyes. She lowered her voice till it sounded like the soughing of the night-wind in the pines.

"Did you know, to this day I can't sleep a whole night through. Once, twice, three times I waken with a start and listen to hear some one prowling around the house, some detective! Then I remember, but I can't get over it."

She looked at her empty sleeve, and her eyes gleamed again. I asked her to tell me the story of that sleeve.

"It was long after the war, while my boys were hunted every hour, and detectives were coming to my home every little while. One dark midnight, while only me and the doctor and my colored women and my five-year-old son were alone, a bomb came crashing through the window. It was thrown with such force that it [illegible] the whole sash out and fell on the floor.

"I ran into the kitchen, and there it lay blazing. It was wrapped in a piece of cloth and soaked in oil. We had put it into the fireplace to keep it from setting the house on fire. Then it exploded.

"A piece of the shell struck little Archie in the breast, going in through him and killing him almost instantly. The explosion tore my right arm off between the wrist and elbow.

"We rushed outdoors, but could see no one in the darkness. We found the house had been set afire and the blazing carpet, but we put it out. Those fiends had intended to kill us all with the bomb and then burn us in our beds. There was a light show on the ground, and the next morning we attached the cowardly hounds, and it proved there were three or four of them. We found a revolver, one of them had left behind.

"I still have half of this bomb in the old house in Clay county, where we lives a peaceful life, visited annually by hundreds of persons who want to see the wife and mother of the noted desperado.

"It is a big wrought iron ball with a shell one-fourth of an inch thick and four inches in diameter. The edges are cut and carved. Above it hangs a picture of Archie, revered. He was killed by the explosion, and near this is a photograph of a gravestone. Beneath that photograph is this inscription:

In Loving Remembrance of My Beloved Son
Jesse W. James
Died April 3, 1882.
Aged 34 Years 6 Months 28 Days
Murdered by a Traitor and Coward, Whose Name is Not Worthy to Appear Here.

Mrs. Samuels as She Appeared at 60

You see the spirit of the woman in the last two lines!

"My boys were brave. I saw enough of it." Mrs. Samuels laughed sharply and went on: "I remember one day during the war Jesse and three more of Quantrell's men rode up to the farmhouse to wash up and change shirts. They told me they were hard chased, and while they were washing my colored boy held their horses back of the house and I watched from the front. By and by I saw about forty Federal soldiers going up through the field over toward old Dan Askew's house. Dan was a Northern spy. I shouted to Jesse:

"'I see some Federals.'

"'How many, mother?' asked Jesse.

"'About forty.'

"'Where are they?'

"'Going up through the field to old Dan Askew's.'

"'Well, keep your eye on them, mother,' said Jesse, and they went right on washing.

"In a minute I saw them coming down toward our house and I shouted:

"'Boys, they're coming to the house.'

"Jesse was spluttering with his face down in the water basin and he stopped long enough to say:

"'Let 'em come, mother; there are four of us, and I guess we can whip forty Federals all right enough.'

"I got scared and I ran back to where the boys were washing and begged them to run.

"'Do go, Jesse,' I said. 'They're crossing the branch and will be right here in half a minute.'

"Jesse just laughed at me and said: 'Don't get rattled, mother. I'm not going away from here with a dirty neck if I have to fight two hundred and forty Federals instead of forty.'

"Well, sir, those four boys did not mount their horses till the soldiers were at the front gate and they heard the latch rattling. Then they sprang into their saddles and leaped the back fence and rode across the pasture like mad. The Federals galloped around the house, part one way and part the other, and pulled their cavalry pistols, and such shooting and cursing you never heard.

"Our boys shot back as they ran, and the last I saw of them was a waving line of horses going over the top of the hill. I waited half an hour and then I could stand it no longer. I got on my horse, Betsy, and went up over the hill, expecting to find the bodies of four boys shot full of holes. About a mile from the house some one hailed me from the brush.

"'Where are you going, ma?'

"It was Jesse, and he and the boys were coming down from the old schoolhouse leading their horses and looking for their caps, which they had lost during the fight. They wouldn't listen to anything I'd say, but rode back to the house with me after they'd found their caps. They washed up again and then rode away.

"Some of the detectives that came prowling around had narrow escapes," continued Mrs. Samuels. "They used always to come when they thought my boys were away, but two of them missed it once and came very near getting killed. Jesse was at my home one day when I saw two men coming down the road. They stopped at the gate and hallooed. Jesse stepped just inside the door to the stairway leading to the attic and stood there with his revolvers in his hands. Jesse said:

"'Go to the door, mother.'

"I opened the door and one of the men said they were cattle buyers, and asked me if we had any fat cattle.

"'Tell them yes, mother,' said Jesse. 'Tell them the cattle are here and for them to come in and get them.'

"'The cattle you are looking for are in the house; come in and get them!' I shouted. They talked together awhile in whispers and then went on."

"My boys," that is the way this old woman always refers to Jesse and Frank—the one long dead, the other a prosperous farmer in Oklahoma. A little while after "Bob" Ford killed the former, the latter surrendered to the Governor of Missouri. Among my curiosities I have a cartridge that was in his belt the day he laid it on Crittenden's desk in the State Capitol.

"My boys"—stop a moment to think what she bore for them. Lay aside all questioning of them and their deeds. She says they were forced into the life they led, and reliable historians say much that might warrant some such conclusion. You could talk with her about them for a week and never once would you hear the words "robbery," "hold-up" or "murder" escape her thin lips in connection with either of them.

A CAREER OF SACRIFICE

"If you know that either of them ever held up a train, you know more than I do," she said to me, forbidding dignity attending her words.

Stop to think of what she bore for them, and add to all this the death of her first husband, 2000 miles away from her, the killing of her little boy by the bomb, and the present confinement in an asylum of her second husband, Dr. Samuels.

He is insane as the result of tortures suffered at the hands of Union soldiers during the war. A score of militiamen tried to get out of him the hiding place of Quantrell, the guerilla, but he didn't know so he couldn't tell them. He would not have told them if he had known.

They strung him up three times to a tree limb trying to make him tell. The third time the rope got into his neck and he was half lifeless when they took him down. Then they rode away with him and threw him into jail, whither they took Mrs. Samuels and her young daughter a few days later, keeping the two imprisoned a month because they were Southern sympathizers.

It was this brutal treatment of his stepfather that first fired Jesse. A little later he joined Quantrell and soon became the boldest and most daring of that fearless and devastating band. As a sure shot he was never excelled, seldom equaled. When his gun spoke it always spelt D-E-A-T-H!

His mother, who, like all pioneer women, knew how to handle a shotgun as a protection against wild beasts and marauders, now became the bodyguard of her own sons. For years she never answered the door without the shining barrel as a companion.

For years she would get up in the middle of the night, peer out into the darkness of the still country and sometimes mark a shadowy form not far away. She never knew when another bomb might burst through a window or when she might find herself surrounded by flames.

That first bomb brought her curious compensation for the child and the right arm it took.

She has always believed, and does to this day, that certain men threw it in the belief that they were driven to this desperate move by the ardent desire of officials of a railroad to destroy Jesse James, whom they regarded as having been the ringleader in a big train robbery on the road.

PRIZED A RAILWAY PASS

So, while her arm was healing, she sent a letter to the general manager of that road—the sort of letter you wouldn't exactly call calm or soothing. And in return for it she received an annual pass on the road for herself and family.

Year after year this pass was renewed, dwindling in its carrying capacity to herself and husband in later times, and when on the first of last January she got a notice that it would be cut off with all the others, she sat down and wept.

She had come to look upon that piece of cardboard almost as one of her children.

"It seems to me they might have sent it until I died," she said, telling me of the instance. "For I won't live very long, anyway, and a pass on a railroad for life isn't too much in return for the loss of a child and an arm."

For a while after her second husband became an invalid she ran the 100-acre farm herself, and she is physically able to do so now. But she likes to be so situated that she can go to Kansas City to visit her grandson once in a while, so she has rented the homestead and lives with her tenants.

In the summertime there is hardly a day when visitors do not come out from the little town of Kearney to see her and examine the collection in the walls of the house and take away with them a picture or two of the place where the most famous of modern bandits was born and lived.

She is always glad to see them, and she talks freely with them about her boys. Once in a week or two she poses before a amateur's camera, and always one who comes in contact with her feels that he is a remarkably smart fellow. [illegible] of circumstances that many a strong man could not have caught.

What a Blind Naturalist Did for His Friends, the Birds

JOHN T. TIMMONS, the blind naturalist of Cadiz, Ohio, loves birds. Recently he made a flock of martins comfortable and happy by building for them, with his own hands, a kind of bird apartment house, which has been erected in his yard.

It is a building with seventeen rooms, the central portion containing three floors of four rooms each. The house is a remarkable piece of architecture, and the birds seem as proud of it as is Mr. Timmons.

When the house was completed it was hoisted into position on top of a stout pole with much ceremony, many citizens of the town being present.

IN SPITE of his affliction, Mr. Timmons has achieved quite a reputation as a naturalist, which is not entirely local. The people of Cadiz are proud of him—and the town has presented to the world such famous men as Bishop Matthew Simpson, General George Custer, Edwin M. Stanton and John A. Bingham.

A very close student of nature, Mr. Timmons is able to distinguish, through sound, many things missed by those with sight. He can readily distinguish a large number of birds by their notes. He has also gained some reputation as a newspaper and magazine writer, and in his stories he shows he has a vivid imagination.

Roy Knabenshue, the well-known Toledo airship man, says Mr. Timmons can write a most accurate description of just how the earth appears to a man up in a balloon or airship, notwithstanding the fact he cannot see even when he is on the earth.

The painters of Cadiz, learning that Mr. Timmons had built a large birdhouse, offered to have a "raising" and to place the structure on a large pole for him.

They assembled at his pretty little home, and, amid much jollity, placed the new home for the purple martins on the pole, where the birds are now entertaining their blind host with their cheerful music.

"I always loved birds," said Mr. Timmons. "Some of the feathered songsters have formed the habit of living and hatching their young in boxes or small structures placed on poles so that cats or other animals cannot disturb them.

"I determined to build for the martins a comfortable home, and at odd times during the winter I worked at the birdhouse. I had but few tools, and having to work by the sense of touch, the task was somewhat tedious, but finally, after perseverance, I completed the house.

"It contains seventeen rooms. There are three floors in the main or central portion of the structure, with four rooms to each floor; there are two side wings, with two rooms each, and one room in the base of the central tower.

"The building has a cupola on each wing, with a tower in the middle, and the house has verandas on all sides.

"The structure contains over 600 pieces of lumber of various sizes, and it weighs almost 200 pounds. I used steel brads of various lengths in putting the house together, and they aided materially, as they seldom split the short pieces of wood.

"All the tools I had were a saw, a square, a plane, a pocketknife, a hammer and a miter box. The latter was a guide in sawing many of the smaller pieces, but to cut larger boards I had to use a square-ended board as a guide, marking the point to be cut by the use of the knife.

"I seldom spoiled a piece, and I can drive a nail as well as any one. After the building was completed, my wife painted it, and it was then ready to set up in place."

John T. Timmons, Blind Naturalist

His Apartment House for Birds