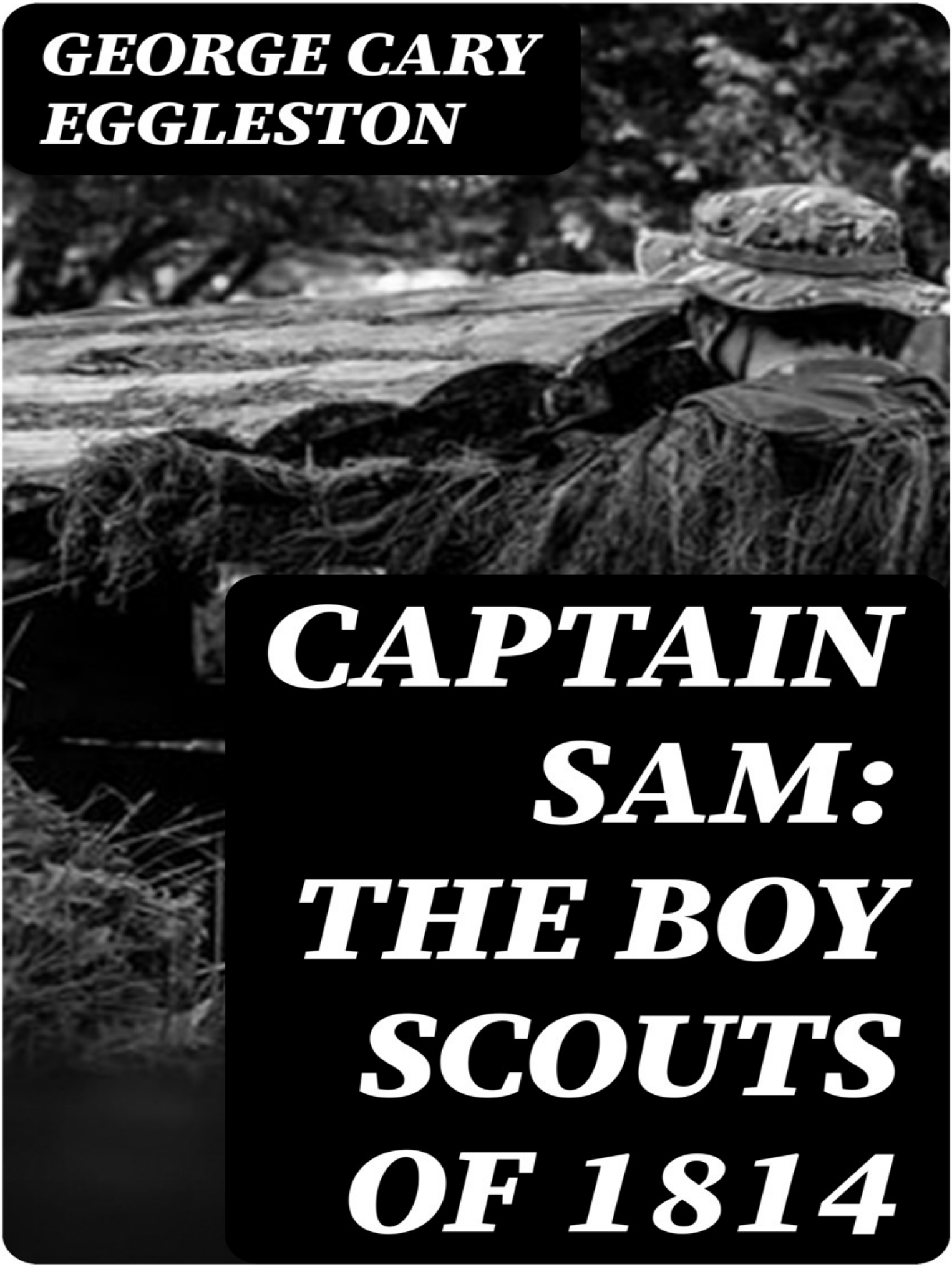
GEORGE CARY EGGLESTON



CAPTAIN SAM: THE BOY SCOUTS OF 1814

George Cary Eggleston

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CAPTAIN SAM.

CHAPTER I.

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A MUTINY.

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f you open your mouth again, I'll drive my fist down your throat!"

The young man, or boy rather,—for he was not yet eighteen years old,—who made this very emphatic remark, was a stalwart, well-built youth, lithe of limb, elastic in movement, slender, straight, tall, with a rather thin face, upon which there was as yet no trace of coming beard, high cheek bones, and eyes that seemed almost to emit sparks of fire as their lids snapped rapidly together. He spoke in a low tone, without a sign of anger in his voice, but with a look of earnestness which must have convinced the person to whom he addressed his not very suave remark, that he really meant to do precisely what he threatened.

As he spoke he laid his left hand upon the other's shoulder, and placed his face as near to his companion's as was possible without bringing their noses into actual contact; but he neither clenched nor shook his fist. Persons who mention weapons which they really have made up their minds to use, do not display them in a threatening manner. That is the device of bullies who think to frighten their adversaries by the threatening exhibition as they do by their threatening words. Sam Hardwicke was not a bully, and he

did not wish to frighten anybody. He merely wished to make the boy hold his tongue, and he meant to do that in any case, using whatever measure of violence he might find necessary to that end. He mentioned his fist merely because he meant to use that weapon if it should be necessary.

His companion saw his determination, and remained silent.

"Now," resumed Sam, "I wish to say something to all of you, and I will say it to you as an officer should talk to soldiers on a subject of this sort. Fall into line! Right dress! steady, front!"

The boys were drawn up in line, and their commander stood at six paces from them.

"Attention!" he cried, "I wish you to know and remember that we are engaged in no child's play. We are soldiers. You have not yet been mustered into service, it is true, but you are soldiers, nevertheless, and you shall obey as such. Listen. When it became known in the neighborhood that I had determined to join General Jackson and serve as a soldier you boys proposed to go with me. I agreed, with a condition, and that condition was that we should organize ourselves into a company, elect a captain, and march to Camp Jackson under his command, not go there like a parcel of school-boys or a flock of sheep and be sent home again for our pains. You liked the notion, and we made a fair bargain. I was ready to serve under anybody you might choose for captain. I didn't ask you to elect me, but you did it. You voted for me, ever one of you, and made me Captain. From that moment I have been responsible for everything.

"I lead you and provide necessary food. I plan everything and am responsible for everything. If you misbehave as you go through the country I shall be held to blame and I shall be to blame. But not a man of you shall misbehave. I am your commander, you made me that, and you can't undo it. Until we get to Camp Jackson I mean to command this company, and I'll find means of enforcing what I order. That is all. Right face! Break ranks!"

A shout went up, in reply.

"Good for Captain Sam!" cried the boys. "Three cheers for our captain!"

"Huzza! Huzza! Huzza!"

All the boys,—there were about a dozen of them—joined in this shout, except Jake Elliott, the mutineer, who had provoked the young captain's anger by insisting upon quitting the camp without permission, and had even threatened Sam when the young commander bade him remain where he was.

The revolt was effectually quelled. The mutineer had found a master in his former school-mate, and forebore to provoke the threatened corporal punishment further.

The camp was in the edge of a strip of woods on the bank of the Alabama river, the time, afternoon, in the autumn of the year 1814. The boys had marched for three days through canebrakes, and swamps, and had still a long march before them. Sam had called a halt earlier than usual that day for reasons of his own, which he did not explain to his fellows. Jake Elliott had objected, and his objection being peremptorily overruled by Sam, he had undertaken to go on alone to the point at which he wished to pass the remainder

of the day, and the night. Sam had ordered him to remain within the lines of the camp. He had replied insolently with a threat that he would himself take charge of the camp, as the oldest person there, when Sam quelled the mutiny after the manner already set forth.

Now that he was effectually put down, he brooded sulkily, meditating revenge.

As night came on, the camp fire of pitch pine threw a ruddy glow over the trees, and the boys, weary as they were with marching, gathered around the blazing logs, and laughed and sang merrily, Jake Elliott was silent and sullen through it all, and when at last Sam ordered all to their rest for the night, Jake crept off to a tree near the edge of the prescribed camp limits and threw himself down there. Presently a companion joined him, a boy not more than fourteen years of age, who was greatly awed by Sam's sternness, and who naturally sought to draw Jake into conversation on the subject.

"You're as big as Sam is," he said after a while, "and I wonder you let him talk so sharp to you. You're afraid o' him, aint you?"

"No, but you are."

"Yes I am. I'm afraid o' the lightning too, and he's got it in him, or I'm mistaken."

"Yes 'n' you fellows hurrahed for him, 'cause you was afraid to stand up for yourselves."

"To stand up for you, you mean, Jake. It wasn't our quarrel. We like Sam, if we are afraid o' him, an' between him an' you there wa'nt no call for us to take sides against him. Besides we're soldiers, you know, an' he's capt'n."

"A purty capt'n he is, aint he, an' you're a purty soldier, aint you. A soldier owning up that he's afraid," said Jake tauntingly.

"Well, you're afraid too, you know you are, else you wouldn't 'a' shut up that way like a turtle when he told you to."

"No, I aint afraid, neither, and you'll find it out 'fore you're done with it. I didn't choose to say anything then, but *I'll get even with Sam Hardwicke yet*, you see if I don't."

"Mas' Jake," said a lump of something which had been lying quietly a little way off all this time, but which now raised itself up and became a black boy by the name of Joe, who had insisted upon accompanying Sam in his campaigns; "Mas' Jake, I'se dun know'd Mas' Sam a good deal better'n you know him, an' I'se dun seed a good many things try to git even wid him, 'fore now; Injuns, water, fire, sunshine, fever 'n ager, bullets an' starvation all dun try it right under my eyes, an' bless my soul none on 'em ever managed it yit."

"You shut up, you black rascal," was the only reply vouchsafed the colored boy.

"Me?" he asked, "oh, I'll shut up, of course, but I jist thought I'd tell you 'cause you might make a sort o' 'zastrous mistake you know. Other folks dun dun it fore now, tryin' to git even wid Mas' Sam."

"Go to sleep, you rascal," replied Jake, "or I'll skin you alive."

Joe snored immediately and Jake's companion laughed as he crept away toward the fire. An hour later the camp was slumbering quietly in the starlight, Sam sleeping by himself

under a clump of bushes on the side of the camp opposite that chosen by Jake Elliott for his resting-place.

CHAPTER II.

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GETTING EVEN IN THE DARK.

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am Hardwicke had thrown himself down under a clump of bushes, as I have said, a little apart from the rest of the boys. Before he went to sleep, however, his brother Tom, a lad about twelve years of age, but rather large for his years, came and lay down by his side, the two falling at once into conversation.

"What made you fire up so quick with Jake Elliott, Sam?" asked the younger boy.

"Because he is a bully who would give trouble if he dared. I didn't want to have a fight with him and so I thought it best to take the first opportunity of teaching him the first duty of a soldier,—obedience."

"But you might have reasoned with him, as you generally do with people."

"No I couldn't," replied Sam.

"Why not?" Tom asked.

"Because he isn't reasonable. He's the sort of person who needs a master to say 'do' and 'don't.' Reasoning is thrown away on some people."

"But you had good reasons, didn't you, for stopping here instead of going on further?" asked Tom.

"Certainly. There's the Mackey house five miles ahead, and if we'd gone on we must have stopped near it to night?"

"Well, what of that?"

"Jake Elliott would have pilfered something there."

"How do you know?" asked Tom in some surprise at his brother's positiveness.

"Because," Sam replied, "he tried to steal some eggs last night at Bungay's. I stopped him, and that's why I choose to camp every night out of harm's way, and keep all of you within strict limits. I don't mean to have people say we're a set of thieves. Besides, Jake Elliott has meant to give trouble from the first, and I have only waited for a chance to put him down. He isn't satisfied yet, but he's afraid to do anything but sneak. He'll try some trick to get even with me pretty soon."

"Oh, Sam, you must look out then," cried Tom in alarm for his brother. "Why don't you send him back home?"

"For two or three reasons. In the first place General Jackson needs all the volunteers he can get."

"Well, what else?"

"That's enough, but there's another good reason. If I let him go away it would be saying that I can't manage him, and that would be a sorry confession for a soldier to make. I can manage him, and I will, too."

"But Sam, he'll do you some harm or other."

"Of course he will if he can, but that is a risk I have to take."

"Well, I'm going to sleep here by you, any how," said Tom.

"No you mustn't," replied the elder boy. "You must go over by the fire where the other boys are, and sleep there."

"Why, Sam?"

"Well, in the first place, if I'm not a match in wits for Jake Elliott, I've no business to continue captain, and I've no right to shirk any trial of skill that he may choose to make. Besides you're my brother, and it will make the other boys think I'm partial if you stay here with me. Go back there and sleep by the fire. I'll take care of myself."

"But Sam—" began Tom.

"*You've* seen me take care of myself in tighter places than any that he can put me in, haven't you?" asked Sam. "There's the root fortress within ten feet of us. You haven't forgotten it have you?"

"No," said Tom, rising to go, "and I don't think I shall forget it soon; but I don't like to let my 'Big Brother' sleep here alone with Jake Elliott around."

"Never mind me, I tell you, but go to the boys and go to sleep. I'll take care of myself."

With that the two boys separated, Tom walking away to the fire, and Sam rolling himself up in his blanket for a quiet sleep. He had already removed his boots, coat and hat, and thrown them together in a pile, as he had done every night since the march began, partly because he knew that it is always better to sleep with the limbs as free as possible from pressure of any kind, and partly because he suffered a little from an old wound in the foot, received about a year before in the Indian assault upon Fort Sinquefield, and found it more comfortable, after walking all day, to remove his boots.

The camp grew quiet only by degrees. Boys have so many things to talk about that when they are together they are pretty certain to talk a good while before going to sleep, and especially so when they are lying in the open air, under the starlight, near a pile of blazing logs. They all stretched themselves out on the ground, weary with their day's march, and determined to go at once to sleep, but somehow each one found something that he wanted to say and so it was more than an hour before the camp was quite still. Then every one slept except Jake Elliott. He lay quietly by a tree, and seemed to be sleeping soundly enough, but in fact he was not even dozing. He was laying plans. He had a grudge against Sam Hardwicke, as we know, and was very busily thinking what he could do by way of revenge. He meant to do it at night, whatever it might be, because he was afraid to attempt any thing openly, which would bring on a conflict with Sam, of whom he was very heartily afraid. He was ready to do any thing that would annoy Sam, however mean it might be, for he was a coward seeking revenge, and cowardice is so mean a thing itself, that it always keeps the meanest kind of company in the breasts of boys or men who harbor it. Boys are apt to make mistakes about cowardice, however, and men too for that matter, confounding it with timidity and nervousness, and imagining that the ability to face unknown danger boldly is courage. There could be no greater mistake than this, and it is worth while to correct it. The bravest man I ever knew was so timid that he shrunk from a shower bath and jumped like a girl if any one clapped hands suddenly behind him. Cowardice is a matter of character. Brave men are they who