

A Man for the Ages

A Story of the Builders of Democracy

By Irving Bacheller

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and tossed aside the mangled, who ran away whining.

"That reminded me of a bull that tackled a man over in Vermont," he said. "The man had a club in his hand. He dodged and grabbed the bull's tail and bent him all over the lot. As the bull roared, the man holed: 'I'd like to know who began this fuss anyway.'"

The stranger laughed. "Is that your house?" Samson said. The man stepped nearer and answered in a low, confidential tone: "Say, mister, this is a combination poorhouse and idiot asylum. I am the idiot. These are the poor."

He pointed to the children. "You don't talk like an idiot," said Samson.

The man looked around and leaned over the wheel as if about to impart a secret.

"Say, I'll tell ye," he said in a low tone. "A real, first-class idiot never does. You ought to see my actions."

"This land is an indication that you're right," Samson laughed.

"It proves it," the stranger whispered.

"Have you any water here?" Samson asked.

The stranger leaned nearer and said in his most confidential tone: "Say, mister, it's about the best in the United States. Right over yonder in the edge of the woods—a spring—cold as ice—Simon-pure water. 'Bout the only thing this land'll raise is water."

"This land looks to me about as valuable as so much sheet lightning and I guess it can move just about as quick," said Samson.

The stranger answered in a low tone: "Say, I'll tell ye, it's a wild cow—don't stand still long enough to give ye time to get anything out of it. I've tailed and prayed, but it's hard to get much out of it."

"Praying won't do this land any good," Samson answered. "What it needs is manure and plenty of it. You can't raise anything here but fleas. It isn't decent to expect God to help run a flea farm. He knows too much for that, and if you keep it up He'll lose all respect for ye. If you were to buy another farm and bring it here and put it down on

shameful as some has treated ye should be compelled to do its own thing, or die. I've intended some things that may sell, I've been hoping my luck would turn."

"I'll turn when you turn it," Samson assured him.

Henry took the horses to his barn and watered and fed them. Then he brought two pails of water from the spring. Meanwhile Samson started a fire in a grove of small poplars by the roadside and began broiling venison, and Sarah got out the bread board and the flour and the rolling pin and the teapot. As she waited for the water she called the three strange children to her side. The oldest was a girl of ten, with a face uncommonly refined and attractive. In spite of her threadbare clothes, she had a neat and cleanly look and gentle manners. The youngest was a boy of four. They were a pathetic trio.

"Where's your mother?" Sarah asked of the ten-year-old girl.

"Dead. Died when my little brother was born."

"Who takes care of you?"

"Father—and God. Father says God does most of it."

"Oh dear!" Sarah exclaimed, with a look of pity.

They had a good dinner of fresh biscuits and honey and venison and eggs and tea. While they were eating Samson told Brimstead of the land of plenty.

After dinner, while Brimstead was bringing the team, one of his children, the blonde, pale, tattered little girl of six, climbed into the wagon seat and put holding a small rag doll, which Sarah had given her. When they were ready to go she stubbornly refused to get down.

"I'm going away," she said. "I'm going away off to find my mother. I don't like this place. There ain't no Santa Claus here. I'm going away."

She clung to the wagon seat and cried loudly when her father took her down.

"Ain't that enough to break a man's heart?" he said with a sorrowful look.

Then Samson turned to Brimstead and asked:

"Look here, Henry Brimstead, are you a drinking man? Honor bright now."

"Never drink a thing but water and tea."

"Do you know anybody who'll give ye anything for what you own here?"

"There's a man in the next town who offered me three hundred and fifty dollars for my interest."

"Come along with us and get the money if you can. I'll help ye fit up and go where ye can earn a living."

"I'd like to, but my horse is lame and I can't leave the children."

"Put 'em right in this wagon and come on. If there's a livery in the place, I'll send ye home."

So the children rode in the wagon and Samson and Brimstead walked, while Sarah drove the team to the next village. There the good women bought new clothes for the whole Brimstead family and Brimstead sold his interest in the sand plains and bought a good pair of horses, with harness and some cloth for a wagon cover, and had fifty dollars in his pocket and a new look in his face. He put his children on the backs of the horses and led them to his old home, with a sack of provisions on his shoulder. He was to take the track of the Traylor's next day and begin his journey to the shores of the Saginaw.

They got into a bad scale that afternoon and Samson had to cut some corduroy to make a footing for team and wagon and do much perching with the end of a heavy pole under the front axle. By and by the horses pulled them out.

"When of Colonel bends his neck things have to move, even if he is up to his belly in the mud," said Samson.

As the day waned they came to a river in the deep woods. It was an exquisite bit of forest with the bells of a hermit thrush ringing in one of its towers. Their call and the low song of the river were the only sounds in the silence. The glow of the setting sun which lighted the eastern windows of the forest had a color like that of the music—golden. Long shafts of it fell through the tree columns upon the road here and there. Our weary travelers stopped on the rude plank bridge that crossed the river. Orders of balsam and pine and tamarack came in a light, cool breeze up the river valley.

"I guess we'll stop at this tavern till tomorrow," said Samson.

Joe was asleep and they laid him on the blankets until supper was ready.

Soon after supper Samson shot a deer which had waded into the rapids. Fortunately, it made the opposite shore before it fell. All hands spent that evening dressing the deer and jerking the best of the meat. This they did by cutting the meat into strips about the size of a man's hand and salting and laying it on a rack, some two feet above a slow fire, and

covering it with green boughs. The heat and smoke dried the meat in the course of two or three hours and gave it a fine flavor. Delicious beyond any kind of meat is venison treated in this manner. If kept dry, it will retain its flavor and its sweetness for a month or more.

They set out rather late next morning. As usual, Joe stood by the head of Colonel while the latter lapped brown sugar from the timid palm of the boy. Then the horse was wont to touch the face of Joe with his big, hairy lips as a tribute to his generosity. Colonel had seemed to acquire a singular attachment for the boy and the dog, while Pete distrusted both of them. He had never a moment's leisure, anyhow, being always busy with his work or the flies. A few breaks in the pick basket had been repaired with green withes. It craved with its load of jerked venison when put aboard.

Further on the boy got a sore throat. Sarah bound a slice of pork around it and Samson built a camp by the roadside, in which, after a good fire was started, they gave him a hemlock sweat. This they did by steeping hemlock in pails of hot water and, while the patient sat in a chair by the fire, a blanket was spread about him and pinned close to his neck. Under the blanket they put the pails of steaming hemlock tea. After his sweat and a day and night in bed, with a varna fire burning in front of the shanty, Joe was able to resume his seat in the wagon. They spoke of the Brimsteads and thought it strange that they had not come along.

On the twenty-ninth day after their journey began they came in sight of the beautiful green valley of the Mohawk. As they looked from the hills they saw the roof of the forest dipping down to the river shores and stretching far to the east and west and broken here and there by small clearings. Soon they could see the smoke and spires of the thriving village of Utica.

(Continued Next Saturday.)

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"Tende is dead," says a Cape Cod newspaper, "and is growing daily worse."—Boston Transcript.

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"Elijah Brimstead Was a Friend of My Father."

top of this one, you could probably make a living. I wouldn't like to live where the wind could dig my potatoes."

Again the stranger leaned toward Samson and said in a half-whisper: "Say, mister, I wouldn't want you to mention it, but I ain't a boss. I'm like a dog with so many of 'em that he don't have time to eat. Some body has got to swap him or he'll die. You see, I traded my farm over in Vermont for five hundred acres of this sheet lightning—unsighted an' unseen. We was all crazy to go, was an' here we are. If it wasn't for the deer an' the fish I guess we'd be starved to death long ago."

"Where did ye come from?"

"Orwell, Vermont."

"What's yer name?"

"Henry Brimstead," the stranger whispered.

"Son of Elijah Brimstead?"

"Yes, sir."

Samson took his hand and shook it warmly. "Well, I declare!" he exclaimed. "Elijah Brimstead was a friend of my father."

"Who are you?" Brimstead asked.

"I'm one of the Traylor's of Vermont."

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