A MAN FOR THE AGES

A STORY OF THE BUILDERS of DEMOCRACY

By IRVING BACHELLER

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I.—Samson and Sarah Traylor, with their two children, Josiah and Betsey, travel by wagon from their home in Vermontes, Vt., to the West, the land of plenty. Their destination is the Country of the Sangamon, in Illinois.

CHAPTER II.

Wherein Is a Brief Account of Sundry Curious Characters Met on the Road.

At Utica they bought provisions and a tin trumpet for Joe, and a doll with a real porcelain face for Betsey, and turned into the great main thoroughfare of the North leading eastward to Boston and westward to a shore of the midland seas. This road was once the great trail of the Iroquois, by them called the Long House, because it had reached from the Hudson to Lake Erie, and in their day had been well roofed with foliage.

Soon they came in view of the famous Erie canal, hard by the road. Through it the grain of the Far West had just begun moving eastward in a tide that was flowing from April to December. Big barges, drawn by mules and horses on its shore, were cutting the still waters of the canal. They stopped and looked at the barges and the long tow ropes and the tugging animals.

"There is a real artificial river, hundreds o' miles long, hand made of the best material, water tight, no snags or rocks or other imperfections, durability guaranteed," said Samson. "It has made the name of DeWitt Clinton known everywhere."

"I wonder what next!" Sarah exclaimed.

They met many teams and passed other movers going west, and some prosperous farms on a road wider and smoother than any they had traveled. They camped that night, close by the river, with a Connecticut family on its way to Ohio with a great load of household furniture on one wagon and seven children in another.

So they fared along through Canandaigua and across the Genesee to the village of Rochester and on through Lewiston and up the Niagara river to the falls, and camped where they could see the great water flood and hear its muffled thunder. When nearing the latter they overtook a family of poor Irish emigrants of the name of Flanagan, who shared their campsite at the falls. The Flanagans were on their way to Michigan and had come from the old country three years before and settled in Broome county, New York. They, too, were on their way to a land of better promise. Among them was a ragged, freckled, red-headed lad, well along in his teens, of the name of Dennis, who wore a tall beaver hat, tilted saucily on one side of his head, and a ragged blue coat with brass buttons, as he walked beside the oxen, whip in hand, with trousers ended in the tops of his cowhide boots. There was also a handsome young man in this party of the name of John Neil, who wore a ruffled shirt and swallow-tail coat, now much soiled by the journey. He listened to Samson's account of the Sangamon country and told that he thought he would go thither.

Sarah gave the Irish family a good supply of cookies and jerked venison before she bade them good-by.

When our travelers left, next morning, they stopped for a look at the great falls.

"Children," said Samson, "I want you to take a good look at that. It's the most wonderful thing in the world and maybe you'll never see it again."

"The Indians seem to think that the Great Spirit was in this river," said Sarah.

"And it seems to me they were right," Samson remarked thoughtfully. "But it seems as if the great spirit of America is in that water. It moves on in the day. It wills and no man can stop it. Everything in its current goes along with it."

"And so, the strong can stand the journey," said Joe.

The words sank in deeply and served as an echo to her own. She put her hand on the wagon tire and looked at the wagon through tears. Her heart had wearied them. Even their hearts were getting sore as they thought of the endless rest beds of the road ahead. Sarah took stuff in a sack with which she put it under her and the children on the seat. At a word of complaint he was wont to say:

"I know it's awful tiresome but we got to have patience. We're goin' to get used to it and have a wonderful lot of fun. The time'll pass quick—you see." Then he would sing and get them all laughing with some curious bit of drollery. They spent the night of July third at a tavern in Buffalo, then a busy, crude and rapid growing center for the shipping east and west.

There were emigrants on their way to the Far West in the crowd—men, women and children and babies in arms—Irish, English, Germans and Yankees. There were also well-dressed, handsome young men from the colleges of New England going out to be missionaries "between the desert and the sea."

Buffalo, on the edge of the midland seas, had the flavor of the rank, new soil in those days—and specially that day, when it was thronged with rough-coated and rough-tongued swearing men on a holiday, stevedores and boatmen off the lakes and rivers of the middle border—some of whom had had their training on the Ohio and Mississippi. There was much drunkenness and fighting in the crowded streets. Some of the carriers and handlers of American commerce vented their enthusiasm in song.

They had the lake view and its cool breeze on their way to Silver Creek, Dunkirk and Erie, and rough way it was in those days.

Enough has been written of this long and wearisome journey, but the worst of it was ahead of them—much the worse of it—in the swamp flats of Ohio and Indiana. In one of the former a wagon wheel broke down, and that day Sarah began to shake with ague and burn with fever. Samson built a rude camp by the roadside, put Sarah into bed under its cover and started for the nearest village on Colonel's back.

"I shall never forget that day spent in a lonely part of the woods," the good woman wrote to her brother. "It endeared the children to me more than any day I can remember. They brought water from the creek, a great quantity, and told me stories and cheered me in every way they could. My faith in God's protection was perfect and in spite of my misery the children were a great comfort. In the middle of the afternoon Samson returned with a doctor and some tools and a stick of seasoned timber. How good he looked when he came and knelt by my bed and kissed me! This is a hard journey, but a woman can bear anything with such a man. The doctor said I would be all right in three days, and I was."

Late that afternoon it began to rain. Samson was singing as he worked on his wheel. A traveler came along on horseback and saw our plight. He was a young missionary going west. Samson began to joke with him.

"'You're a happy man for one in so much trouble,' said the stranger.

"Then I heard Samson say: 'Well, sir, I'm on a fix where happiness is absolutely necessary. It's all the grease on the wagon wheels—we couldn't go on without it. When we need anything we make it do or go to bed. My wife is sick and my wagon is broke and it's raining and night is near to a lonesome country, and it ain't a real good time for me to be down in the mouth—is it, now? We haven't broke any bones or had an earthquake or been scalped by Indians, as there's still room for happiness.'

"'Good here, stranger—I like you,' said the man. 'If there's anything I can do to help you, I'm only a child.'

"He spent the night with them and helped Sarah into the wagon the next morning.

The fever and ague came from day to another and all day long the journey ended, although Samson kept the reins in hand through his misery. There were many breaks to mend, but Samson's ingenuity was always equal to the task.

One day, near nightfall, they were overtaken by a tall, handsome Yankee lad riding a pony. He soon stopped beside the wagon and looked toward the travelers as if appealing for help. The boy was pounding toward the lariat and muttering. Sarah saw at once that his mind was wandering in the delirium of fever. She got out of the wagon and took his hand. The moment he did so he began crying like a child.

"This boy is sick," she said to Samson, who came and helped him off his horse. They camped for the night and put the boy to bed and gave him medicine and tender care. He was too sick to travel next day. The Traylors stayed with him and nursed the lad until he was able to go on. He was from Niagara county, New York, and his name was Harry Needles. His mother had died long ago when he was ten and his father had married again. He had not been happy in his home after that and his father had given him a pony and a hundred dollars and sent him away to seek his own fortune. Homesick and lonely and ill, and just going west with a sublime faith that the West would somehow provide for him, he might even have perished on the way if he had not fallen in with friendly people. His story had touched the heart of Sarah and Samson. He was a big, green, gentle-hearted countryboy who had set out filled with hope and the love of adventure. Sarah found pleasure in mothering the poor lad and so it happened that he became one of their little party. He was helpful and good-natured and had sundry arts that pleased the children. The man and the woman liked the big, honest lad.

One day he said to Samson: "I hope you won't mind if I go along with you, sir."

"Glad to have you with us," said Samson. "We've talked it over. If you want to, you can come along with us and our home shall be yours and I'll do what's right by you."

They fared along through Indiana and over the wide savannas of Illinois, and on the ninety-second day of their journey they drove through rolling, grassy, flowering prairies and up a long, hard hill to the small log cabin settlement of New Salem, Illinois, on the shore of the Sangamon. They had arrived about noon in the middle of this little prairie village, opposite a small clapboard house. A sign hung over the door which bore the rudely lettered words: "Rutledge's Tavern."

A long, slim, stoop-shouldered young man, sat in the shade of an oak tree that stood near a corner of the tavern, with a number of children playing around him. He sat leaning against the tree trunk reading a book. He had risen as they came near and stood looking at them, with the book under his arm. Samson says in his diary that he looked like "an untrained yearling colt, about sixteen hands high. He got up slow and kept rising till his mass of black tousled hair was six feet four above the ground. Then he put on an old straw hat without any hand on it. He reminded me of Solomon Baker's fish rod, he was th' narrer. For humilitee I'd match him against the world. His hide was kind o' yaller and leathery. I could see he was still on the grow—a little over twenty—but his face was marked up by worry and weather like a man's. I never saw anybody so long between joints. Don't hardly see how he could tell when his feet got cold."

He wore a hickory shirt without a collar or coat or jacket. One suspender held up his coarse, linsey trousers, the legs of which faded closely and came only to a blue zone above his heavy cowhide shoes. Samson swore that he "fetched a sneeze and blued his big nose with a red handkerchief" as he stood surveying them in silence, while Dr. John Allen, who had sat on the door step reading a paper—a kindly faced man of middle age with a short white beard under his chin—greeted them cheerfully.

"Where do you hail from?" the Doctor asked.

"Vermont," said Samson.

"All the way in that wagon?"

"Yes, sir."

"I guess you're made of the right stuff," said the Doctor. "Where ye bound?"

"Don't know exactly. Going to find a claim somewhere."

"There's no better country than right here. This is the Canaan of America. We need people like you. Unhitch your team and have some dinner and we'll talk things over after you're rested. I'm the doctor here and I ride all over this part o' the country. I reckon I know it pretty well."

A woman in a neat calico dress came out of the door—a strong-built and rather well-favored woman with blonde hair and dark eyes.

"Mrs. Rutledge, these are travelers from the East," said the Doctor. "Give 'em some dinner, and if they can't pay for it, I can. They've came all the way from Vermont."

"Good land! Come right in an' rest yerselves. Abe, you show the gentleman where to put his horses an' lend him a hand."

She extended his long arm toward Samson and said "howdy" as they shook hands.

"When his big hand got hold of mine, I kind of felt his timber," Samson writes. "I says to myself, There's a man it would be hard to fall over in a hassle."

"What's yer name? How long ye been travelin'? My conscience! Ain't ye worn out?" the hospitable Mrs. Rutledge was asking as she went into the house with Sarah and the children. "You go and fold up with our little ones and let yer mother rest while I git some." she said to Joe and Betsey, and added as she took Sarah's shawl and bonnet: "You lie there an' rest yerself while I'm fixin' around the fire."

"Come A' the Way From Vermont!" Abe Asked.

Abe asked as he and Samson were unhitching.

"Yes, sir."

"By thing," the slim giant exclaimed, "I reckon you feel like throwin' off yer harness an' takin' a roll in the grass."

CHAPTER III.

Wherein the Reader Is Introduced to Offutt's Store and His Clerk Abe, and the Scholar Jack Kelso and His Cabin and His Daughter Bim, and Gets a First Look at Lincoln.

They had a dinner of prairie chickens and roast venison flavored with wild grape jelly, and creamed potatoes and cookies and doughnuts and raisin pie. It was a well-cooked dinner, served on white linen, in a clean room, and while they were eating the sympathetic landlady stood by the table, eager to learn of their travels and to make them feel at home. The good food and their kindly welcome and the beauty of the rolling, wooded prairie softened the regret which had been growing in their hearts and which only the children had dared to express.

"Perhaps we haven't made a mistake, after all," Sarah whispered when the dinner was over. "I like the people and the prairies are beautiful."

"It is the land of plenty at least," said Samson, as they came out of doors. "It is even better than I thought."

As Douglas Jerrold said of Australia: "Toss it with a hoe and it laughs with a harvest," said Dr. Allen, who still sat in the shade of the yard, smoking his pipe. "I have an extra horse and saddle. Suppose you leave the family with Mrs. Rutledge and ride around with me a little this afternoon. I can show you how it lies off to the west of us and tomorrow we'll look at the other side."

"Thank you—I want to look around here a little," said Samson. "What's the name of this place?"

"New Salem. We call it a village. It has a mill, a carding machine, a tavern, a smokehouse, five stores, fourteen houses, two or three dozen families, and a noble dam. It's a crude but growing place and soon it will have all the embellishments of civilized life."

That evening many of the inhabitants of the little village came to the tavern to see the travelers and were introduced by Dr. Allen. Most of them had come from Kentucky, although there were two Yankee families who had moved on from Ohio.

"These are good folks," said the Doctor. "There are others who are not so good. I could show you some pretty rough customers in Clary's Grove, not far from here. We have to take things as they are and do our best to make them better."

"Any Indians?" Sarah asked.

"You see one now and then, but they're peaceable. Most of 'em have gone with the buffaloes—farther west. Now and then a circuit rider comes here and preaches to us. You'll hear the Reverend Stephen Nuckles if you settle in these parts. He can holler louder than any man in the state."

The tavern was the only house in New Salem with stairs in it—stairs so steep, as Samson writes, that "they were first cousins to the ladder." There were four small rooms above them. Two of these were separated by a partition of cloth hanging from the rafters. In each was a bed and bedstead and smaller beds on the floor. In case there were a number of adult guests the bedstead was screened with sheets hung upon strings. In one of these rooms the travelers had a night of refreshing sleep.

After riding two days with the Doctor, Samson bought the claim of Isaac Gollador to a half section of land a little more than a mile from the western end of the village. He chose a site for his home on the edge of an open prairie.

"I'll go over and see Abe," said Dr. Allen, after the deal was made. "He's the best man with an ax and a saw in this part of the country. He clerks for Mr. Offut. Abe Lincoln is one of the best fellows that ever lived—a rough diamond just out of the great mine of the West, that only needs to be cut and polished."

Lincoln strode there was a small log structure about twenty by twenty which stood near the brow of the hill east of Rutledge's tavern. When they entered it she lay at full length on the counter, his head resting on a roll of blue denim as he studied a book held in his hand. He wore the same shirt and the suspenders and linsey trousers which he had worn in the dooryard of the tavern, but his feet were covered only by his blue yarn socks.

It was a general store full of exotic flavors, chiefly those of tea, coffee, tobacco, muscovado sugar and molasses. There was a counter on each side. Bolts of cloth, mostly calico, were piled on the far end of the right counter as one entered and the near end held a showcase containing a display of cutlery, pewter spoons, jewelry and fishing tackle. There were double windows of either side of the rough board door with its wooden latch. The long counter held a case filled with threads, buttons, combs, tobacco, shoes, and belts and Jew's harps. A balance stood in the middle of this counter. A chest of tea, a big brown jug, a box of candles, a keg and a large wooden pail occupied its farther end. The shelves on the side walls were filled by strange coats, plug tobacco, bolts of cloth, pills and patent medicines and pasteboard boxes containing shirts, handkerchiefs and underwear. At the near end of the store was a large fireplace. There were two chairs near the fireplace, both of which were occupied by a man who sat in one while his feet lay on the other. He wore a calico shirt with a fanciful design of morning-glories on it printed in appropriate colors, a collar of the same material and a red necktie.

Abe laid aside his book and rose to a sitting posture.

"Pardon me—you see the firm is busy," said Abe. "You know Eli Zane used to say that he was never so busy in his life as when he lay on his back with a broken leg. He said he had to work twenty-four hours a day doin' nothin' an' could never git an hour off. But a broken leg is not so bad as a large intellect. That lays you out with the fever an' ague of ignorance. Jack Kelso recommended Kirkham's pills and poultices of poetry. I'm trying both and slowly get

"Pardon Me—You See the Firm Is Busy."

with the other. You can bet I'll be glad to help in any way I can."

"We'll all turn in and help. I should think Bill or Jack Kelso could look after the store for a few days," said the Doctor. "I promised to take Mr. Traylor over to Jack Kelso's tonight. Couldn't you come along?"

"Good! We'll have a story-tellin' and get Jack to unlimber his guns," said Abe.

Jack Kelso's cabin, one of two which stood close together at the western end of the village, was lighted by the cheery blaze of dry logs in its fireplace. There were guns on a rack over the fireplace under Jack's head, a powder horn hanging near them on its string looped over a nail. There were wolf and deer and bear skins on the floor. The skins of foxes, raccoons, and wildcats adorned the log walls. Jack Kelso was a blond, smooth-faced, good-looking, sorrowhearted Scot, about forty years old, of a rather slight build, some five feet, eight inches tall. That is all that anyone knew of him save that he spent most of his time hunting and fishing and seemed to have all the best things which great men had said to written, on the tip of his tongue.

"Wo'kom! one here to the best seat o' the fireside," he told Samson. "My wife and daughter are away for a visit and for two days I've had the cabin to myself. Lady or gentleman of the land, and no hire fit to see! The homely cabin is a place of beauty. What a heaven it is to hev the flames are leapin'! There is Hogarth's line of beauty; nothin' so middlin' or unnatural."

He took Abe's hand and went on: "Hearkye lovers of romance, is Sam'on the story-teller! Is Sam'on who half in fun the wisdom of the wandering tribes. He can tell you a tale that will draw children from their play and old men from the chimney corner. My boy, take a chair next to Mr. Traylor. Mr. Traylor, you stand up as proud and firm as a big pine. I believe you're a Yankee."

"So do I," said Samson. "If you took all the Yankees out o' us I'd have an empty skin."

Then Abe began to show the strangers his peculiar art in these words: "Stephen Nuckles used to say: 'God's grace embraces the isles o' the sea an' the uttermost parts o' the earth. It reaches in the Esquimaux an' the Hottentots. Some go so far to say that it tickles in the Yankees but I don't go so far.'"

Samson joined in the good-natured laughter that followed.

"If you deal with some Yankees you take your life in your hands," he said. "They can serve God or Mammon and I guess they have given the devil some of his best ideas. He seems to be getting a lot of Yankee notions lately."

"There was a powerful prejudice in Kentucky against the Yankees," Abe went on. "Down there they used to tell about a Yankee who sold his hogs and was driving them to town. On the way he decided that he had sold them too cheap. He left them with his drover in the road and went on to town and told the buyer that he would need help to bring 'em in.

"'How's that?' the buyer asked.

"'Why they git away an' go to runnin' through the woods an' fields an' we can't keep up with 'em.'

"'I don't think I want 'em,' says the buyer. 'A speedy hog hasn't much pork to carry. I'll give ye twenty bits to let me off.'

"I guess that Yankee had one more hog than he'd counted," said Samson.

"Whatever prejudice you may find here will soon vanish," said Kelso, turning to the newcomer. "I have great respect for the sturdy sons of New England. I believe it was Theodore Parker who said that the pine was the symbol of their character. He was right. Its roots are deep in the soil; it towers above the forest; it has the strength of tall masts and the substance of the builder in its body, music in its waving branches and turpentine in its veins. I thought of this when I saw Webster and heard him speak at Plymouth."

"What kind of a looking man is he?" Abe asked.

"A big erect, splendid figure of a man. He walked like a ram at the head of his flock."

Abe who since his story had sat with a sad face looking into the fire now leaned forward, his elbows on his knees, and shook his head with interest while his gray eyes took on a look of animation. The diary speaks often of the "veil of sadness" on his face.

"He is a very great man," Abe exclaimed.

"Have you learned that last noble night of his in the reply to Haynes, as you promised?" Kelso asked.

"I have," said Abe, "and the other day when I was tramping back from Bowlin' Green's I came across a drove of cattle and stopped and gave it to them. They all let go of the grass and stood looking."

"Good! Now stand up and let us see how you imitate the great chief of the Whig clan," said Kelso.

The lanky and awkward youth rose and began to speak the lines in a high-pitched voice that trembled with excitement. It lowered and steadied and rang out like noble music on a well-played trumpet as the channel of his spirit filled with the mighty current of the orator's passion. Then indeed, the words fell from his lips "like the winter snows."

"They shook our hearts as the wind shakes the branches of a tree," Samson writes in his diary. "The lean, bony body of the boy was transfigured and as I looked at his face in the firelight I thought it was handsome.

"Not a word was spoken for a minute after he sat down. I had got my first look at Lincoln. I had seen his soul. I think it was then I began to realize that a man was being made among us 'more precious than fine gold; even a man more precious than the golden wedge of Ophir.'"

The Doctor gazed in silence at the boy. Kelso sat with both hands in his pockets and his chin upon his breast looking solemnly into the fire.

"Thank you, Abe," he said in a low voice. "Something unusual has happened and I'm just a little scared."

"Why?" she asked.

"For fear somebody will spoil it with another hog story. I'm a little

Began to Speak the Lines in a High-Pitched Voice.

afraid of anything I can say. I would venture this, that the man Webster is a prophet. In his Plymouth address he hears receding into never-returning distance the clank of chains and all the din of slavery. It will come true."

"Do you think so?" Abe asked.

"Sure—there are so many of us who hate it. These Yankees hate it and they and their children are scattering all over the midlands. Their spirit will guide the West. The love of liberty is the salt of their blood and the marrow of their bones. Liberty means freedom for all. Wait until these babies, coming out here by the wagonload, have grown to manhood. Slavery will have to reckon with them."

"I hate it, too," said Abe. "If I live I'm going to hit that thing on the head some day."

"Do you still want to be a lawyer?" Kelso asked.

"Yes, but sometimes I think I'd make a better blacksmith," said Abe. "I'm trying to make up my mind what's best for me."

"No, you're trying to decide what is best for your friends and your country and for the reign of law and justice and liberty."

"But I think every man acts from selfish motives," Abe insisted.

Doctor Allen demurred as follows: "The other night you happened to remember that you had overcharged Mrs. Peters for a jug of molasses and after you had closed the store you walked three miles to return the money which belonged to her. Why did you do it?"

"For a selfish motive," said Abe. "I believe honesty is the best policy."

"Then you took that long walk just to advertise your honesty—to induce people to call you 'Honest Abe' as they have began to do?"

"I wouldn't want to put it that way," said Abe.

"But that's the only way out!" the Doctor insisted. "And we knowing ones should have to call you 'Sordid Abe.'"

"There's a hidden Abe and you haven't got acquainted with him yet," Kelso interposed. "We have all caught a glimpse of him tonight. He's the Abe that loves home and justice and humanity and their great temple of freedom that is growing up here in the new world. He loves them better than fame or fortune or life itself. I think it must have been that Abe whose voice sounded like a trumpet just now and who sent you off to Mrs. Peters with the money. You haven't the courage to know him that we have. Some day you two will get acquainted."

At this moment there was a loud rap on the door. Mr. Kelso opened it and said: "Hello, Eli! Come in."

A sickly-faced, bow-legged man, bent under a great pack, partly covered with heavy clothing, stood in the doorway.

"Hello, Mr. Kelso," the stooped man answered. "De poor vandering Jew has gone back again—yes? I think I haf to take de hump off my back before I gits in."

Staggering beneath his load he let it down to the ground.

"Bring in your Trojan horse and mind you do not let out its four and twenty warriors until morning. I'll have some bread and milk for you in a minute. Gentlemen, this is my friend Eli—a wandering pioneer of trade."

"I haf a vonderful line o' goods—vonderful! vonderful!" said Eli, gesturing with both hands.

"First supper—then open your Trojan horse," said Kelso.

"First I must show my goods," Eli insisted, "an' I'll bet you take dem all—everything that I have in dot pack an' you pay my price an' you tank me an' say 'Eli, vat you have to drink?'"

"I'll bet you four bits I don't," said Kelso.

"You are my friend; I could not take your money like dot so easy. No! It would not be right. These are Scotch goods, gentlemen—so rare an' beautiful—not'ing like dem in de world."

He began to undo his pack while the little company stood around him.

"Gentlemen, you can see but you cannot buy. Only my friend can have dem goods," he went on glibly as he removed the cover of the pack.

Suddenly there was a lively stir in it. To the amazement of all a beautiful girl threw aside the ticking and leaped out of the large wicker basket it had covered. With a merry laugh she threw her arms around Jack Kelso's neck and kissed him.

The men clapped their hands in noisy merriment.

"That's like him, isn't it?" said the Doctor.

"Exactly!" Abe exclaimed.

"I stop at David Barney's an' dere she took de goods out o' my pack an fix up de job lot for you," said Eli with a laugh.

"A delightful surprise party!" the girl exclaimed.

She was a small-sized girl, nearing sixteen, with red cheeks and hazel eyes and blonde hair that fell in curls upon her shoulders.

"Mr. Traylor, this is my daughter Bim," said Kelso. "She is skilled in the art of producing astonishment."

"We must have heard of that handsome boy at the tavern and got in a hurry to come home," said the Doctor.

"Ann Rutledge says that he is a right purty boy," the girl laughed as she brushed her curls aside.

(Continued Next Saturday.)

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