

# 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, Joseph and Harry, travel by wagon from their home in Vergennes, Vt., to the West. The head of party, their destination is the "Country of the Mountains" in Illinois.

**CHAPTER II.**—At Niagara Falls they meet a party of immigrants, among them a youth named John McNell, who also decides to go to the mountain country. All of the party suffer from fever and ague. Sarah's ministrations save the life of a youth, Harry Needles, in the last stages of fever, and by accompanying the Traylor's they reach New Salem, Illinois, and are welcomed by young "Abner" Lincoln.

**CHAPTER III.**—Among the Traylor's first acquaintances are Lincoln's friends, Jack Hays and the pretty daughter, Eliza, 16 years of age.

**CHAPTER IV.**—Samson decides to locate at New Salem, and begins building his home. Led by Jack Armstrong, cowboys attempt to break up the proceedings. Lincoln thwarts Armstrong. Young Harry Needles strikes Ben McNell, of the Armstrong crowd, and McNell threatens vengeance.

**CHAPTER V.**—A few days later Harry, alone, is attacked by McNell and his gang, and would have been roughly used had not him driven off his assailants with a shotgun. John McNell, the Traylor's Niagara Falls acquaintance, is markedly attentive to Ann Hollister. Lincoln is in love with Eliza, but has never had enough courage to tell her so.

### CHAPTER VI.

Which Describes the Lonely Life in a Prairie Cabin and a Stirring Adventure on the Underground Railroad About the Time It Began Operations.

When Samson paid Mr. Golder, a "doctor" came with the latter to look at the money before it was accepted. There were many counterfeiters and bills good only at a certain discount of face value going about those days and the doctor was in great request. Directly after moving in, Samson dug a well and lined it with a follow log. He bought tools and another team and then he and Harry began their fall plowing. They after day for weeks they paced with their treading horses until a hundred acres, stretching half a mile to the west and well to the north of the house, were black with them. Fever and ague descended upon the little home in the early winter.

In a letter to her brother, dated January 4th, 1832, Sarah writes: "We have been longing for news from home, but not a word has come from you. It don't seem as if we could stand it unless we hear from you or some of the folks once in a while. We are not dead just because we are a thousand miles away. We want to hear from you. Please write and let us know how you are getting on."

us know how father and mother are and all the news. We have all been sick with the fever and ague. It is a beautiful country and the soil is very rich, but there is some sickness. Samson and I were both sick at the same time. I never knew Samson to give up before. He couldn't go on, his head ached so. Little Joe helped me get the fire started and brought some water and waited on us. Harry Needles had gone away to Springfield for Mr. Orlin with a drove of hogs. Two other boys are with him. He is going to buy a new suit. He is a very proud boy. Joe and Bessey got back with the doctor at nine. That night Abe Lincoln came and sat up with us and gave us our medicine and kept the fire going. It was comical to see him lying beside Joe in his trundle bed, with his long legs sticking over the end of it and his feet standing on the floor about a yard from the bed. He was spread all over the place. He talked about religion and his views would shock most of our friends in the East. He doesn't believe in the kind of Heaven that the milliners talk about or any eternal hell. He says that nobody knows anything about the hereafter, except that God is a kind and forgiving father and that all men are His children. He says that we can only serve God by serving each other. He seems to think that every man, good or bad, black or white, rich or poor, is his brother. He thinks that Henry Clay, next to Daniel Webster, is the greatest man in the country. He is studying hard. Expects to go out and make speeches for Clay next summer. He is quite severe in his talk against General Jackson. He and Samson agree in politics and religion. They are a good deal alike. He is very fond of Samson and Harry—calls them his partners. We love this big awkward giant. His feet are set in the straight way and we think that he is going to make his mark in the world.

"You said you would come out next spring to look about. Please don't disappoint us. I think it would almost break my heart. I am counting the days. Don't be afraid of fever and ague. Sapington's pills cure it in three or four days. I would take the steam boat at Pittsburg, the roads in Ohio and Indiana are so bad. You can get a steamer up the Illinois river at Alton and get off at Beardstown and drive across country. If we knew when you were coming Samson or Abe would meet you. Give our love to all the folks and friends.

"Yours affectionately,  
"Sarah and Samson."

It had been a cold winter and not easy to keep comfortable in the little house. In the worst weather Samson had used to get up at night to keep the fire going. Late in January a wind from the southwest melted the snow and washed the dirt of the mill lands so that for a week or so, it seemed as if spring were come. One night of this week Sarah awoke the family with her barking. A strong wind was rushing across the plains and rattling over the cabin and walling in its chimney. Suddenly there was a rap on the door. When Samson opened it he saw in the moonlight a young colored man and woman standing near the doorstep.

"Is this Abner Traylor?" the young man asked.

"It is," said Samson. "What can I do for you?"

"Ma'r, de good Lord done fetched us here to ask you for help," said the negro. "We be high come out with cold an' hunger, sith, 'deed we be."

Samson asked them in and put wood on the fire, and Sarah got up and made some hot tea and brought food from the cupboard and gave it to the strangers, who sat shivering in the bright fire. They were a good-looking pair, the young woman being almost white. They were man and wife. The latter stopped eating and moaned and shook with emotion as her husband told their story. Their master had died the year before and they had been brought to St. Louis to be sold in the slave market. There they had escaped by night and gone to the house of an old friend of their former master who lived north of the city on the river shore. He had taken pity on them and brought them across the Mississippi and started them on the north road with a letter to Elijah Lovejoy of Alton and a supply of food. Since then they had been hiding days in the swamps and thickets and had traveled by night. Mr. Lovejoy had sent them to Ernest Weight of Springfield, and Mr. Weight had given them the name of Samson Traylor and the location of his cabin. From there they were bound for the house of John Peasley, in Hopkinton, Tennessee county.

Lovejoy had asked them to keep the letter with which they had begun

their travels. The letter stated that their late master had often expressed his purpose of leaving them their freedom when he should pass away. He had left no will and since his death the two had fallen into the hands of his nephew, a despotic, violent young drunkard of the name of Biggs.

Samson was so moved by their story that he hitched up his horses and put some hay in the wagon box and made off with the fugitives up the road to the north in the night. When daylight



Up the Road to the North in the Night.

came he covered them with hay. About eight o'clock he came to a frame house and barn, the latter being of unusual size for that time and country. Above the door of the barn was a board which bore the stenciled legend: "John Peasley, Orwell Farm."

As Samson drew near the house he observed a man working on the roof of a woodshed. Something familiar in his look held the eye of the New Salem man. In half a moment he recognized the face of Henry Brimstead. It was now a cheerful face. Brimstead came down from the ladder and they shook hands.

"Good land o' Goshen! How did you get here?" Samson asked. Brimstead answered:

"Through the help of a feller that looks like you an' the gift of a pair o' horses. Come down this road early in September on my way to the land o' plenty. Found Peasley here. Couldn't help it. Saw his name on the barn. Used to go to school with him in Orwell. He offered to sell me some land with a house on it an' trust me for his money. I liked the looks of the country and so I didn't go no further. I was goin' to write you a letter, but I hadn't got around to it yet. Ain't forgot that you'd done for us. I can tell ye that."

"Well, this looks better than the old place—a lot better—and you took better than the fella farmer back in York state. How are the children?"

"Fat an' happy an' well dressed. Mrs. Peasley has been a mother to em an' her sister is goin' to be a wife to me." He came close to Samson and added in a confidential tone: "Say, if I was any happier I'd be scolded. I'm like I was when I got over the tooth-ache—so scolded for fear it would come back I was kind o' miserable."

Mr. Peasley came out of the door. He was a big, full-bearded, jovial man.

"I've got a small load o' hay for you," said Samson.

"I was expecting it, though I supposed 'twould be walkin'—in the dark o' night," Peasley answered. "Drive in on the barn floor."

When Samson had driven into the barn its doors were closed and the negroes were called from their place of hiding. Samson writes:

"I never realized what a blessing it is to be free until I saw that scared, unclean woman crawling out from under the dusty hay and shaking themselves like a pair of dogs. The weather was not cold or I guess they would have been frozen. They knelt together on the barn floor and the woman prayed for God's protection through the day. Peasley brought food for them and stowed them away on the top of his hayrack with a pair of buffalo skins. I suppose they got some sleep there. I went into the house to breakfast and while I ate Brimstead told me about his trip. His children were there. They looked clean and happy. He lived in a log cabin a little further up the road. Mrs. Peasley's name was written on the door. She is a fat and cheerful looking lady, very light complexioned. Her hair is red—like burnt butter. Looks to me a lively, stout, staid, goodhearted woman who can do a lot of hard work. She can see a joke and has an answer handy every time."

For details of the remainder of the historic visit of Samson Traylor to the home of John Peasley we are indebted to a letter from John to his brother

Charles, dated February 21, 1832. In this he says:

"We had gone out to the barn and Brimstead and I were helping Mr. Traylor hitch up his horses. All of a sudden two men came riding up the road at a fast trot and turned in and came straight toward us and pulled up by the wagon. One of them was a slim, fresh-faced young feller about twenty-three years old. He wore top boots and spurs and a broad-brimmed blue hat and gloves an' a fur waistcoat and party linen. He looked at the face of the wagon and said: 'That's you, we've followe'."

"Which of you is Samson Traylor?" he asked.

"I am," said Traylor.

"The young feller jumped off his horse and then he to the fence. Then he went up to Traylor and said:

"What did you do with my siggers, you dirt swabber?"

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