

# THE LIGHT IN THE CLEARING

A TALE OF THE NORTH COUNTRY  
IN THE TIME OF SILAS WRIGHT

By  
**IRVING BACHELLER**

AUTHOR OF  
"MEN HOLDEN, BEN AND I, DARREL OF THE BLESSED ISLES,  
KEEPING UP WITH LIZZIE, ETC., ETC.

## PREFACE

The Light in the Clearing shone upon many things and mostly upon those which, above all others, have impassioned and perpetuated the Spirit of America and which, just now, seem to me to be worthy of attention. I believe that spirit to be the very candle of the Lord which, in this dark and windy night of time, has flickered so that the souls of the faithful have been afraid. But let us be of good cheer. It is shining brighter as I write and, under God, I believe it shall, by and by, be seen and loved of all men.

One self-contained, Homeric figure, of the remote country-side in which I was born, had the true spirit of Democracy and shed its light abroad in the senate of the United States and the capital at Albany. He carried the Candle of the Lord. It led him to a height of self-forgetfulness achieved by only two others—Washington and Lincoln. Yet I have been surprised by the profound and special ignorance of this generation regarding the career of Silas Wright.

The distinguished senator who served at his side for many years, Thomas H. Benton of Missouri, has this to say of Silas Wright in his Thirty Years' View: "He refused cabinet appointments under his fast friend Van Buren and under Polk, whom he may be said to have elected. He refused a seat on the bench of the Supreme Court of the United States; he rejected instantly the nomination in 1844 for vice president; he refused to be put in nomination for the presidency. He spent that time in declining office which others did in winning it. The office he did accept, it might well be said, were thrust upon him. He was born great and above office and unwillingly descended to it."

So much by way of preparing the reader to meet the great commoner in these pages.

There were those who accused Mr. Wright of being a spoilsman, the only warrant for which claim would seem to be his remark in a letter: "When our enemies accuse us of feeding our friends instead of them never let them lie in telling the story."

He was, in fact, a human being, through and through, but so upright that they used to say of him that he was "as honest as any man under heaven or in it."

For my knowledge of the color and spirit of the time I am indebted to a long

course of reading in its books, newspapers and periodicals, notably the North American Review, the United States Magazine and Democratic Review, the New York Mirror, the Knickerbocker, the St. Lawrence Republican, Benton's Thirty Years' View, Bancroft's Life of Martin Van Buren, histories of Wright and his time by Hammond and Jenkins, and to many manuscript letters of the distinguished commoner in the New York public library and in the possession of Mr. Samuel Wright of Weybridge, Vermont.

To any who may think that they discover portraits in these pages I desire to say that all the characters—save only Silas Wright and President Van Buren and Barton Baynes—are purely imaginary. However, there were Grimshaws and Purvites and Binkses and Aunt Deeds and Uncle Peabody in almost every rustic neighborhood those days, and I regret to add that Rovine Kito was on many roads. The case of Amos Grimshaw bears a striking resemblance to that of young Blackford, executed long ago in Mahoning, for the particulars of which case I am indebted to my friend, Mr. H. L. Ives of Potsdam.

## THE AUTHOR.

### BOOK ONE

Which Is the Story of the Candle and the Compass.

### CHAPTER I.

#### The Melon Harvest.

Once upon a time I owned a watermelon. I say once because I never did it again. When I got through owning that melon I never wanted another. The time was 1831; I was a boy of seven and the melon was the first of all my harvests.

I didn't know much about myself those days except the fact that my name was Bart Baynes and, further, that I was an orphan who owned a watermelon and a little spotted hen and lived on Rattleroad in a neighborhood called Lickysplit. I lived with my Aunt Deed and my Uncle Peabody Baynes on a farm. They were brother

and sister—be about thirty-eight and she a little beyond the far-distant goal of forty.

My father and mother died in a scourge of diphtheria that swept the neighborhood when I was a boy of five.

A few days after I arrived in the home of my aunt and uncle I stily entered the parlor and climbed the what-not to examine some white flowers on its top shelf and tipped the whole thing over, scattering its burden of albums, wax flowers and seashells on the floor. My aunt came running on her tiptoes and exclaimed: "Mercy! Come right out o' here this minute—you pest!"

I took some rather long steps going out, which were due to the fact that Aunt Deed had hold of my hand. While I sat weeping she went back into the parlor and began to pick up things.

"My wraith! my wraith!" I heard her moaning.

How well I remember that little assemblage of flower ghosts in wax! They had no more right to associate with human beings than the ghosts of 'able. Uncle Peabody used to call 'em the "Minervy flowers" because 'er was a present from his Aunt

Minerva. When Aunt Deed returned to the kitchen where I sat—a sorrowing little refugee hunched up in a corner—she said: "I'll have to tell you Uncle Peabody—ayes!"

"Oh please don't tell my Uncle Peabody," I wailed.

"Ayes! I'll have to tell him," she answered firmly.

For the first time I looked for him with dread at the window and when he came I hid in a closet and heard that solemn and penetrating note in her voice as she said:

"I guess you'll have to take that buy away—ayes!"

"What now?" he asked.

"My stars! he sneaked into the parlor and tipped over the what-not and smashed that beautiful wax wraith!"

"Jerusalem four-corners!" he exclaimed. "I'll have to—"

He stopped as he was wont to do on the threshold of strong opinions and momentous resolutions.

The rest of the conversation was drowned in my own cries and Uncle Peabody came and lifted me tenderly and carried me upstairs.

He sat down with me on his lap and hushed my cries. Then he said very gently:

"Now, Bub, you and me have got to be careful. What-nots and albums and wax flowers and haircloth sofas are the most dang'rous critters in St. Lawrence county. They're purty savage. Keep your eye peeled. You can't tell what minute they'll jump on ye. More boys have been dragged away and tore to pieces by 'em than by all the bears and panthers in the woods. Keep out o' that old parlor. Ye might as well go into a cage o' wolves. How be I goin' to make ye remember it?"

"I don't know," I whimpered and began to cry out in fearful anticipation.

He set me in a chair, picked up one of his old carpet-slippers and began to thump the bed with it. He belabored

in bed again.

For a long time I thought that the way a man punished a boy was by thumping his bed. I knew that women had a different and less satisfactory method, for I remembered that my mother had spanked me and Aunt Deed had a way of giving my hands and

feet a kind of watermelon thump with the middle finger of her right hand and with a curious look in her eyes. Uncle Peabody used to call it a "snappings look." Almost always he whacked the bed with his slipper. There were exceptions, however, and, by and by, I came to know in each case the destination of the slipper, for if I had done anything which really afflicted my conscience that strip of leather seemed to know the truth, and found its way to my person.

Aunt Deed toiled incessantly. She washed and scrubbed and polished and dusted and sewed and knitted from morning until night. She lived in mortal fear that company would come and find her unprepared—Alma Jones or Jabez Lincoln and his wife, or Ben and Mary Humphries, or "Mr. and Mrs. Horace Dunkelberg." These were the people of whom she talked when the neighbors came in and when she was not talking of the Bayneses. I observed that she always said "Mr. and Mrs. Horace Dunkelberg." They were the conversational ornaments of our home. "As Mrs. Horace Dunkelberg says," or "as I said to Mr. Horace Dunkelberg," were phrases calculated to establish our social standing. I supposed that the world was peopled by Joneses, Lincolns, Humphries and Dunkelbergs, but mostly by Dunkelbergs. These latter were very rich people who lived in Canton village.

I know, now, how dearly Aunt Deed loved her brother and me. I must have been a great trial to that woman of forty unused to the pranks of children and the tender offices of a mother. Naturally I turned from her to my Uncle Peabody as a refuge and a help in time of trouble, with increasing fondness. He had no knitting or sewing to do and when Uncle Peabody sat in the house he gave all his time to me and we weathered many a storm together as we sat silently in his favorite corner, of an evening, when I always went to sleep in his arms.

I was seven years old when Uncle Peabody gave me the watermelon seeds. I put one of them in my mouth and bit it.

"It appears to me there's an awful draft blowin' down your throat," said Uncle Peabody. "You ain't no business eatin' a melon seed."

"Why?" was my query.

"Cause it was made to put in the ground. Didn't you know it was alive?"

"Alive!" I exclaimed.

"Alive," said he. "I'll show ye." He put a number of the seeds in the ground and covered them, and said that part of the garden should be mine. I watched it every day and by and by two vines came up. One sickened and died in dry weather. Uncle Peabody said that I must water the other every day. I did it faithfully and the vine thrived.

It was hard work, I thought, to go down into the garden, night and morning, with my little pail full of water, but uncle said that I should get my pay when the melon was ripe. I had also to keep the wood-box full and feed the chickens. They were odious tasks. When I asked Aunt Deed what I should get for doing them she answered quickly:

"Nospanks and bread and butter—ayes!"

When I asked what were "nospanks" she told me that they were part of the wages of a good child. "I was better paid for my care of the watermelon vine, for its growth was measured with a string every day and kept me interested. One morning I found five blossoms on it. I picked one and carried it to Aunt Deed. Another I destroyed in the tragedy of catching

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He Belabored the Bed With Tremendous Vigor, Exclaiming "You Dreadful Child!"

the bed with tremendous vigor. Meanwhile he looked at me and exclaimed: "You dreadful child!"

I knew that my sins were responsible for this violence. I frightened me and my cries increased.

The door at the bottom of the stairs opened suddenly.

Aunt Deed called: "Don't lose your temper, Peabody. I think you've gone fur 'nough—ayes!"

Uncle Peabody stopped and blew as if he were very tired and then I caught a look in his face that reassured me.

He called back to her: "I wouldn't 'a' cared so much if it hadn't 'a' been the what-not and them Minervy flowers. When a boy tips over a what-not he's goin' it purty strong."

"Well, don't be too severe. You'd better come now and git me a pail o' water—ayes, I think ye had."

Uncle Peabody did a lot of sneezing and coughing with his big, red handkerchief over his face and I was not old enough then to understand it. He kissed me and took my little hand in his big hard one and led me down the stairs.

I dreamed that night that a long-legged what-not, with a wax wreath in its hands, chased me around the house and caught and bit me on the neck. I called for help and uncle came and found me on the floor and put me back

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