

THE LIGHT IN THE CLEARING

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

By
IRVING BACHELLER

AUTHOR OF
GREEN HOLDEN, DICK AND I, DANIEL OF THE BLESSED ISLES,
KEEPING UP WITH LIZZIE, ETC.

"Yes, I'll start off with him in an hour or so," said my friend. "I am interested in this boy and I want to see his aunt and uncle."

"Well, Sally, you go down to the office and stay with Bart until they go."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" the man asked of me.

"I don't know," I said.

"That means yes," said the man.

Sally and another little girl came with us and passing a store I held back to look at many beautiful things in a big window.

"Is there anything you'd like there, Bart?" the man asked.

"I wish I had a pair o' them shiny shoes with buttons on," I answered in a low, confidential tone, afraid to express, openly, a wish so extravagant.

"Come right in," he said, and I remember that when we entered the store I could hear my heart beating.

He bought a pair of shoes for me and I would have them on at once, and made it necessary for him to buy a pair of socks also.

After the shoes were buttoned on my feet I saw little of Sally Dunkelberg or the other people of the village, my eyes being on my feet most of the time.

The man took us into his office and told us to sit down until he could write a letter.

Soon a horse and buggy came for us and I briefly answered Sally's goodbye before the man drove away with me.

I remember telling him as we went on over the rough road, between fields of ripened grain, of my watermelon and my dog and my little pet hen.

I shall not try to describe that home coming. We found Aunt Deel in the road five miles from home. She had been calling and traveling from house

to house most of the night, and have never forgotten her joy at seeing me and her tender greeting. She got into the buggy and rode home with us, holding me in her lap. Uncle Peabody and one of our neighbors had been out in the woods all night with pine torches. I recall how, although excited by my return, he took off his hat at the sight of my new friend and said:

"Mr. Wright, I never wished that I lived in a palace until now."

He didn't notice me until I held up both feet and called: "Look 'a' there, Uncle Peabody."

Then he came and took me out of the buggy and I saw the tears in his eyes when he kissed me.

The man told of finding me on his little veranda, and I told of my ride with Dug Draper, after which Uncle Peabody said:

"I'm goin' to put in your boss and feed him, Comptroller."

"And I'm goin' to cook the best dinner I ever cooked in my life," said Aunt Deel.

When the great man had gone Uncle Peabody took me in his lap and said very gently and with a serious look:

"You didn't think I meant it, did ye?—that you would have to go 'way from here?"

"I don't know," was my answer.

"Course I didn't mean that. I just wanted ye to see that it wa'n't going to do for you to keep on tipplin' things over so."

That evening as I was about to go up-stairs to bed, Aunt Deel said to my uncle:

"Do you remember what o' Kate wrote down about him? This is his first peril an' he has met his first great man an' I can see that Silas Wright is kind o' fond o' him."

I went to sleep that night thinking

of the strange, old, ragged, silent woman.

CHAPTER III.

We Go to Meeting and See Mr. Wright Again.

I had a chill that night and in the weeks that followed I was nearly burned up with lung fever. Doctor Clark came from Canton to see me every other day for a time and one evening Mr. Wright came with him and watched all night near my bedside.

In the morning he said that he could come the next Tuesday morning if we needed him and set out right after breakfast, in the dim dawn light, to walk to Canton.

"Peabody Baynes," said my Aunt Deel as she stood looking out of the window at Mr. Wright, "that is one of the grandest, splendidest men that I ever see or heard of. He's an awful smart man, an' a day o' his time is worth more'n a month of our'n, but he comes away off here to set up with a sick young one and walks back. Does beat all—don't it?—ayes?"

"If any one needs help Silas Wright is always on hand," said Uncle Peabody.

I was soon out of bed and he came no more to sit up with me.

When I was well again, Aunt Deel said one day: "Peabody Baynes, I ain't heard no preachin' since Mr. Paugborn died. I guess we better go down to Canton to meetin' some Sunday. If there ain't no minister Silas Wright always reads a sermon, if he's home, and the paper says he don't go 'way for a month yet. I kind o' feel the need of a good sermon—ayes?"

"All right. I'll hitch up the hosses and we'll go. We can start at eight o'clock and take a bite with us 'n' git back here by three."

I had told Aunt Deel what Sally had said of my personal appearance.

"Your coat is good enough for anybody—ayes!" said she. "I'll make you a pair o' breeches an' then I guess you won't have to be 'shamed no more."

She had spent several evenings making them out of an old gray flannel petticoat of hers and had put two



She Had Spent Several Evenings Making Them Out of an Old Gray Flannel Petticoat.

pockets in them of which I was very proud. They came just to the tops of my shoes, which pleased me, for thereby the glory of my new shoes suffered no encroachment.

The next Sunday after they were finished we had preaching in the schoolhouse and I was eager to go and wear my wonderful trousers. Uncle Peabody said that he didn't know whether his leg would hold out or not "through a whole meetin'." His left leg was lame from a wrench and pained him if he sat long in one position. I greatly enjoyed this first public exhibition of my new trousers. I remember praying in silence, as we sat down, that Uncle Peabody's leg would hold out. Later, when the long sermon had begun to weary me, I prayed that it would not.

It was a beautiful summer morning as we drove down the hills and from the summit of the last high ridge we could see the smoke of a steamer looming over the St. Lawrence and the big buildings of Canton on the distant flats below us. My heart beat fast when I reflected that I should soon see Mr. Wright and the Dunkelbergs. I had lost a little of my interest in Sally. Still I felt sure that when she saw my new breeches she would conclude that I was a person not to be trifled with.

When we got to Canton people were flocking to the big stone Presbyterian church. It was what they called a "deacon's meeting." I remember that Mr. Wright read from the Scriptures, and having explained that there was no minister in the village, read one of Mr. Edwards' sermons, in the course of which I went to sleep on the arm of my aunt. She awoke me when the service had ended, and whispered:

"Come, we're goin' down to speak to Mr. Wright."

I remember Mr. Wright kissed me and said:

"Hello! Here's my boy in a new pair o' trousers!"

"Put yer hand in there," I said proudly, as I took my own hand out of one of my pockets, and pointed

the way.

He did not accept the invitation, but laughed heartily and gave me a little hug.

When we went out of the church there stood Mr. and Mrs. Horace Dunkelberg, and Sally and some other children. It was a tragic moment for me when Sally laughed and ran behind her mother. Still worse was it when a couple of boys ran away crying, "Look at the breeches!"

I looked down at my breeches and wondered what was wrong with them. They seemed very splendid to me and yet I saw at once that they were not popular. I went close to my Aunt Deel and partly hid myself in her cloak. I heard Mrs. Dunkelberg say:

"Of course you'll come to dinner with us?"

For a second my hopes leaped high. I was hungry and visions of jelly cake and preserves rose before me. Of course there were the trousers, but perhaps Sally would get used to the trousers and ask me to play with her.

"Thank ye, but we've got a good ways to go and we fetched a bite with us—ayes!" said Aunt Deel.

Eagerly I awaited an invitation from the great Mrs. Dunkelberg that should be decisively urgent, but she only said:

"I'm very sorry you can't stay."

My hopes fell like bricks and vanished like bubbles.

The Dunkelbergs left us with pleasant words. They had asked me to shake hands with Sally, but I had hung to my aunt's cloak and firmly refused to make any advances. Slowly and without a word we walked across the park toward the tavern sheds.

We had started away up the South road when, to my surprise, Aunt Deel mildly attacked the Dunkelbergs.

"These here village folks like to be waited on—ayes!—an' they're awful anxious you should come to see 'em when ye can't—ayes!—but when ye git to the village they ain't nigh so anxious—no they ain't!"

In the middle of the great cedar swamp near Little River Aunt Deel got out the lunch basket and I sat down on the buggy bottom between their legs and leaning against the dash. So disposed we ate our luncheon of fried cakes and bread and butter and maple sugar and cheese. What an efficient cure for good health were the doughnuts and cheese and sugar, especially if they were mixed with the idleness of a Sunday. I had a headache also and soon fell asleep.

The sun was low when they awoke me in our dooryard.

I soon discovered that the Dunkelbergs had fallen from their high estate in our home and that Silas Wright, Jr., had taken their place in the conversation of Aunt Deel.

CHAPTER IV.

In the Light of the Candles.

One day the stage, on its way to Ballybeen, came to our house and left a box and a letter from Mr. Wright, addressed to my uncle, which read:

"Dear Sir—I send herewith a box of books and magazines in the hope that you or Miss Baynes will read them aloud to my little partner and in doing so get some enjoyment and profit for yourselves.
Yours respectfully,
"S. WRIGHT, JR.

"P. S.—When the contents of the box have duly risen into your minds will you kindly see that it does a like service to your neighbors in School District No. 7? S. W. Jr."

"I guess Bart has made a friend o' this great man—sartin ayes!" said Aunt Deel. "I wonder who'll be the next one?"

The work of the day ended, the candles were grouped near the edge of the table and my aunt's armchair was placed beside them. Then I sat

on Uncle Peabody's lap by the fire or, as time went on, in my small chair beside him, while Aunt Deel adjusted her spectacles and began to read.
Continued next week

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Leaves Monmouth	Leaves Independence
6.50 a. m. North Bound	7.30 a. m.
1.50 p. m. " "	2.25 p. m.
5.15 " " "	5.48 " "
10.00 a. m. South Bound	10.34 a. m.
3.15 p. m. " "	3.51 p. m.
6.30 " " "	7.12 " "

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