

THE LIGHT IN THE CLEARING

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

By
IRVING BACHELLER

AUTHOR OF
"EMER HOLTEN, DRI AND I, DABBLE OF THE BLESSED KALE,
KEEPING UP WITH LIZZIE, ETC., ETC.

I remember vividly the evening we took out the books and tenderly felt their covers and read their titles. There were "Cruikshanks' Comic Almanac" and "Hood's Comic Annual"; tales by Washington Irving and James K. Paulding and Nathaniel Hawthorne and Miss Mitford and Miss Austin; the poems of John Milton and Felicia Hemans. Of the treasures in the box I have now in my possession: A life of Washington, "The Life and Writings of Doctor Duckworth," "The Stolen Child," by "John Galt, Esq.," "Rosine Laval," by "Mr. Smith"; Sermons and Essays by William Ellery Channing. We found in the box also, thirty numbers of the "United States Magazine and Democratic Review" and sundry copies of the "New York Mirror."

Aunt Deel began with "The Stolen Child." She read slowly and often paused for comment or explanation or laughter or to touch the corner of an eye with a corner of her handkerchief in moments when we were all deeply moved by the misfortunes of our favorite characters, which were acute and numerous.

In those magazines we read of the great West—"the poor man's paradise"—"the stoneless land of plenty"; of its delightful climate, of the ease with which the farmer prospered on its rich soil. Uncle Peabody spoke playfully of going West, after that, but Aunt Deel made no answer and concealed her opinion on that subject for a long time. As for myself, the reading had deepened my interest in the east and west and north and south and in the skies above them. How mysterious and inviting they had become!

One evening a neighbor had brought the Republican from the post-office. I opened it and read aloud these words in large type at the top of the page:

"Silas Wright elected to the U. S. Senate."

"Well I want to know!" Uncle Peabody exclaimed. "That would make me forget it if I was going to be hung. Go on and read what it says."

I read the choosing of our friend for the seat made vacant by the resignation of William L. Marey, who had been elected governor, and the part which most impressed us were these words from a letter of Mr. Wright to Azariah Plegg of Albany, written when the former was asked to accept the place:

"I am too young and too poor for such an elevation. I have not had the experience in that great theater of politics to qualify me for a place so exalted and responsible. I prefer therefore the humbler position which I now occupy."

"That's his way," said Uncle Peabody. "They had hard work to convince him that he knew enough to be Surrogate."

"Big men have little conceit—ayes!" said Aunt Deel with a significant glance at me.

The candles had burned low and I was watching the shroud of one of them when there came a rap at the door. It was unusual for any one to come to our door in the evening and we were a bit startled. Uncle Peabody opened it and old Kate entered without speaking and nodded to my aunt and uncle and sat down by the fire. Vividly I remembered the day of the fortune-telling. The same gentle smile lighted her face as she looked at me. She held up her hand with four fingers spread above it.

"Ayes," said Aunt Deel, "there are four perils."

My aunt rose and went into the buttry while I sat staring at the aged old woman. Her hair was

white now and partly covered by a



Uncle Peabody Opened It and Old Kate Entered Without Speaking.

worn and faded bonnet. Forbidding as she was I did not miss the sweetness in her smile and her blue eyes when she looked at me. Aunt Deel came with a plate of doughnuts and bread and butter and head cheese and said in a voice full of pity:

"Poor of Kate—ayes! Here's something for ye—ayes!"

She turned to my uncle and said: "Peabody Baynes, what'll we do—I'd like to know—ayes! She can't rove all night."

"I'll git some blankets an' make a bed for her, good 'nough for anybody, out in the hired man's room over the shed," said my uncle.

He brought the lantern—a little tower of perforated tin—and put a lighted candle inside of it. Then he beckoned to the stranger, who followed him out of the front door with the plate of food in her hands.

"Well I declare! It's a long time since she went up this road—ayes!" said Aunt Deel, yawning as she resumed her chair.

"Who is of Kate?" I asked.

"Oh, just a poor ol' crazy woman—wanders all 'round—ayes!"

"What made her crazy?"

"Oh, I guess somebody misused and deceived her when she was young—ayes! It's an awful wicked thing to do. Come, Bart—go right up to bed now. It's high time—ayes!"

"I want to wait 'til Uncle Peabody comes back," said I.

"Why?"

"I'm afraid she'll do something to him."

"Nonsense! Ol' Kate is just as harmless as a kitten. You take your candle and go right up to bed—this minute—ayes!"

I went up-stairs with the candle and undressed very slowly and thoughtfully while I listened for the footsteps of my uncle. I did not get into bed until I heard him come in and blow out his lantern and start up the stairway. As he undressed he told me how for many years the strange woman had been roving in the roads "up hill and down dale, thousands an' thousands o' miles," and never reaching the end of her journey.

In a moment we heard a low wail above the sounds of the breeze that shook the leaves of the old "popple" tree above our roof.

"What's that?" I whispered.

"I guess it's of Kate ravin," said Uncle Peabody.

It touched my heart and I lay listening for a time, but heard only the loud whisper of the popple leaves.

CHAPTER V.

The Great Stranger

Some strangers came along the road those days—hunters, peddlers and the like—and their coming filled me with a joy which mostly went away with them, I regret to say. None of these, however, appealed to my imagination as did old Kate. But there was one stranger greater than she—greater indeed, than any other who came into Rattleroad. He came rarely and would not be long detained. How curiously we looked at him, knowing his fame and power! This great stranger was Money.

I shall never forget the day that my uncle showed me a dollar bill and a little shiny, gold coin and three pieces of silver, nor can I forget how carefully he watched them while they lay in my hands and presently put them back into his wallet. That was long before the time of which I am writing. I remember hearing him say, one day of that year, when I asked him to take us to the Caravan of Wild Beasts which was coming to the village:

"I'm sorry, but it's been a hundred Sundays since I had a dollar in my wallet for more than ten minutes."

I have his old account book for the years of 1837 and 1838. Here are some of the entries:

"Balanced ac'unts with J. Dorothy and gave him my note for \$2.15 to be paid in salts January 1, 1838. Sold ten bushels of wheat to E. Miner at 90 cents, to be paid in goods."

"Sold two sheep to Flavius Curtis and took his note for \$6, payable in boots on or before March the first."

Only one entry in more than a hundred mention money, and this was the sum of eleven cents received in balance from a neighbor.

So it will be seen that a spirit of

mutual accommodation served to help us over the rough going. Mr. Grimshaw, however, demanded his pay in cash and that I find was mainly the habit of the money-lenders.

We were poor but our poverty was not like that of these days in which I am writing. It was proud and cleanly and well-fed. Our fathers had seen heroic service in the wars and we knew it.

I was twelve years old when I began to be the reader for my little family. Aunt Deel had long complained that she couldn't keep up with her knitting and read so much. We had not seen Mr. Wright for nearly two years, but he had sent us the novels of Sir Walter Scott and I had then heart deep into the creed battles of Old Mortality.

Then came the evil days of 1837, when the story of our lives began to quicken its pace and excite our interest in its coming chapters. It gave us enough to think of, God knows.

Wild speculations in land and the American paper-money system had brought us into rough going. The banks of the city of New York had suspended payment of their notes. They could no longer meet their engagements. As usual, the burden fell heaviest on the poor. It was hard to get money even for black salts.

Uncle Peabody had been silent and depressed for a month or more. He had signed a note for Rodney Barnes, a cousin, long before and was afraid that he would have to pay it. I didn't know what a note was and I remember that one night, when I lay thinking about it, I decided that it must be something in the nature of horse colic. My uncle told me that a note was a trouble which attacked the brain instead of the stomach.

One autumn day in Canton Uncle Peabody traded three sheep and twenty bushels of wheat for a cook stove and brought it home in the big wagon. Rodney Barnes came with him to help set up the stove. He was a big giant of a man with the longest nose in the township. I have often wondered how any one would solve the problem of kissing Mr. Barnes in the immediate region of his nose, the same being in the nature of a defense.

That evening I was chiefly interested in the stove. What a joy it was to me with its damper and griddles and high oven and the shiny edge on its hearth! It rivaled, in its novelty and charm, any tin peddler's cart that ever came to our door. John Axtell and his wife, who had seen it pass their house, hurried over for a look at it. Every hand was on the stove as we tenderly carried it into the house, piece by piece, and set it up. Then they cut a hole in the upper floor and the stone chimney and fitted the pipe. How keenly we watched the building of the fire. How quickly it roared and began to heat the room!

When the Axtells had gone away Aunt Deel said:

"It's grand! It is sartin—but I'm afraid we can't afford it—ayes I be!"

"We can't afford to freeze any longer. I made up my mind that we couldn't go through another winter as we have," was my uncle's answer.

"How much did it cost?" she asked.

"Not much differ'nt from thirty-four dollars in sheep and grain," he answered.

Rodney Barnes stayed to supper and spent a part of the evening with us.

Like other settlers there, Mr. Barnes was a cheerful optimist. Everything looked good to him until it turned out badly.

He told how he had heard that it was a growing country near the great water highway of the St. Lawrence. Prosperous towns were building up in it. There were going to be great cities in Northern New York. There were rich stores of lead and iron in the rocks. Mr. Barnes had bought 50 hundred acres at ten dollars an

acre. He had to pay a fee of five per cent. to Grimshaw's lawyer for the survey and the papers. This left him owing fourteen hundred dollars on his farm—much more than it was worth.

Continued next week

Monmouth and Independence Auto-Bus Schedule

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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