

THE LIGHT IN THE CLEARING

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

By
IRVING BACHELLER

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

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

CHAPTER I—Barton Baynes, orphan, is taken to live with his uncle, Peabody Baynes, and his Aunt Deel on a farm on Lickysplit in a neighborhood called Lickysplit, about the year 1828. Barton meets Billy Dunkelberg, about his own age, but socially of a class above the Bayneses, and is fascinated by the pretty face and fine clothes.

CHAPTER II—Barton meets Hoving Kate, known in the neighborhood as the "Blind Woman." Amos Grimshaw, young son of the richest man in the township, is a visitor at the Baynes home, and Hoving Kate tells the fortunes of the two boys, predicting a bright future for Barton and death on the gallows for Amos. Improved for an act of boyish mischief Barton runs away, intending to make his home with the Dunkelbergs. He reaches the village of Canton and falls into a sleep of exhaustion on a porch. There he is found by Silas Wright, Jr., prominent man in public affairs, who, knowing Peabody Baynes, takes Barton home after buying him new clothes.

CHAPTER III—Barton and his uncle and aunt visit Canton and hear Silas Wright read a sermon.

CHAPTER IV—Silas Wright evinces much interest in Barton, and sends a box of books and magazines to the Baynes home. The election of Silas Wright to the United States senate is announced.

Our cousin twisted the poker in his great hands until it squeaked as he stood before my uncle and said: "My wife and I have chopped and burnt and pried and hauled rocks and shoveled dung an' miked an' churned until we are worn out. For almost twenty years we've been workin' days an' nights an' Sundays. My mortgage was over-due, I owed six hundred dollars on it. I thought it all over one day an' went up to Grimshaw's an' took him by the back of the neck and shook him. He said he would drive me out o' the country. He gave me six months to pay up. I had to pay or lose the land. I got the money on the note that you signed over in Potsdam. Nobody in Canton would 'a' dared to lend it to me."

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screws on you now. You've got between him an' his prey. You've taken the mouse away from the cat."

I remember the little panic that fell on us then. I could see tears in the eyes of Aunt Deel as she sat with her head leaning wearily on her hand.

"If he does I'll do all I can," said Barnes, "whatever I've got will be yours."

Rodney Barnes left us, and I remember how Uncle Peabody stood in the middle of the floor and whistled the merriest tune he knew.

"Stand right up here," he called in his most cheerful tone. "Stand right up here before me, both o' ye."

I got Aunt Deel by the hand and led her toward my uncle. We stood



"One, Two, Three, Ready—Sing."

facing him. "Stand straighter," he demanded. "Now, altogether. One, two, three, ready—sing."

He beat time with his hand in imitation of the singing master at the schoolhouse and we joined him in singing an old tune which began: "Oh, keep my heart from sadness, God."

This irresistible spirit of the man bridged a bad hour and got us off to bed in fairly good condition.

A few days later the note came due and its owner insisted upon full payment. There was such a clamor for money those days! I remember that my aunt had sixty dollars which she had saved, little by little, by selling eggs and chickens. She had planned to use it to buy a tombstone for her mother and father—a long-cherished ambition. My uncle needed the most of it to help pay the note. We drove to Potsdam on that sad errand and what a time we had getting there and back in deep mud and sand and jolting over corduroys!

"Bart," my uncle said the next evening, as I took down the book to read, "I guess we'd better talk things over a little tonight. These are hard times. If we can find anybody with money enough to buy 'em I dunno but we better sell the sheep."

"If you hadn't been a fool," my aunt exclaimed with a look of great distress—"yes! if you hadn't been a fool."

"I'm just what I be, an' I ain't so big a fool that I need to be reminded of it," said my uncle.

"I'll stay home an' work," I proposed bravely.

"You ain't old enough for that," sighed Aunt Deel.

"I want to keep you in school," said Uncle Peabody, who sat making a splint broom.

While we were talking in walked Benjamin Grimshaw—the rich man of the hills. He didn't stop to knock, but walked right in, as if the house were his own. It was common gossip that he held a mortgage on every acre of the countryside. I had never liked him, for he was a stern-eyed man who was always scolding somebody, and I had not forgotten what his son had said of him.

"Good night!" he exclaimed curtly, as he sat down and set his cane between his feet and rested his hands upon it. He spoke hoarsely and I

remember the curious notion came to me that he looked like our old man. He wore a thin, gray beard under his chin. His mouth was shut tight in a long line curving downward a little at the ends. My uncle used to say that his mouth was made to keep his thoughts from leaking and going to waste. He had a big body, a big chin, a big mouth, a big nose and big ears and hands. His eyes lay small in this setting of bigness.

"Why, Mr. Grimshaw, it's years since you've been in our house—eyes!" said Aunt Deel.

"I suppose it is," he answered rather sharply. "I don't have much time to get around. I have to work. There's some people seem to be able to get along without it. I see you've got one o' these newfangled stoves," he added as he looked it over. "Huh! Itch folks can have anything they want."

Uncle Peabody had sat splintering the long stick of yellow birch. I observed that the jackknife trembled in his hand. His tone had a touch of unnaturalness, proceeding no doubt from his fear of the man before him, as he said:

"When I bought that stove I felt richer than I do now. I had almost enough to settle with you up to date, but I signed a note for a friend and had to pay it."

"Ayn! I suppose so," Grimshaw answered in a tone of bitter irony which cut me like a knife-blade, young as I was. "What business have you signin' notes an' givin' away money which ain't yours to give—I'd like to know? What business have you actin' like a rich man when you can't pay yer honest debts? I'd like to know that, too?"

"If I've ever acted like a rich man it's been when I wa'n't lookin'," said Uncle Peabody.

"What business have you to go enlargin' yer family—takin' another mouth to feed and another body to spin for? That costs money. I want to tell you one thing, Baynes, you've got to pay up or git out o' here."

He raised his cane and shook it in the air as he spoke.

"Oh, I ain't no doubt o' that," said Uncle Peabody. "You'll have to have yer money—that's sure; an' you will have it if I live, every cent of it. This boy is goin' to be a great help to me—you don't know what a good boy he is and what a comfort he's been to us!"

These words of my beloved uncle uncovered my emotions so that I put my elbow on the wood-box and leaned my head upon it and sobbed.

"I ain't goin' to be hard on ye, Baynes," said Mr. Grimshaw as he rose from his chair; "I'll give ye three months to see what you can do. I wouldn't wonder if the boy would turn out all right. He's big an' cordy of his age and a purty likely boy, they tell me."

Mr. Grimshaw opened the door and stood for a moment looking at us and added in a milder tone: "You've got one o' the best farms in this town an' if ye work hard an' use common sense ye ought to be out o' debt in five years—mebbe less."

He closed the door and went away.

Neither of us moved or spoke as we listened to his footsteps on the gravel path that went down to the road and to the sound of his buggy as he drove away. Then Uncle Peabody broke the silence by saying:

"He's the dam'dest!"

He stopped, set the half-splintered stick aside, closed his jackknife and went to the water-pail to cool his emotions with a drink.

Aunt Deel took up the subject where he had dropped it, as if no-half-expressed sentiment would satisfy her, saying:

"—old skinflint that ever lived in this world, eyes! I ain't goin' to hold my opinion o' that man no longer, eyes! I can't. It's too powerful—eyes!"

Having recovered my composure I repeated that I should like to give up school and stay at home and work.

Aunt Deel interrupted me by saying:

"I have an idee that Silas Wright will help us—eyes! He's comin' home an' you better go down an' see him—eyes! Hadn't ye?"

"Bart an' I'll go down to-morrer," said Uncle Peabody.

Some fourteen months before that day my uncle had taken me to Potsdam and traded grain and salts for what he called a "rip roarin' fine suit o' clothes" with boots and cap and shirt and collar and necktie to match. I having earned them by sawing and cording wood at three shillings a cord. How often we looked back to those better days! The clothes had been too big for me and I had had to wait until my growth had taken up the "slack" in my coat and trousers before I could venture out of the neighborhood. I had tried them on every week or so for a long time. Now my stature filled them handsomely and they fitted me with a pride and satisfaction which I had never known before.

"Now may the Lord help ye to be careful—awful, terrible careful o' them clothes every minute o' this day," Aunt Deel cautioned as she

looked at me. "Don't git no horse sweat nor wagon grease on 'em." To Aunt Deel wagon grease was the worst enemy of a happy and respectable home.

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 " " "	6.48 " "
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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Y. P. A. Meeting, - - 6.15 p. m.
Preaching Service, - - 7.30 p. m.
Prayer Meeting Wednesday, 7.30 p. m.

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Sunday School, - - - 10.00 a. m.
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Preaching Service, - - 7.30 p. m.
Prayer Meeting Wednesday, 7.30 p. m.

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