

THE LIGHT IN THE CLEARING

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

By
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AUTHOR OF
"EVEN HOLDEN, D'Y AND I, DARREL 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 Deed on a farm on Battleground in a neighborhood called Lickitspitt, about the year 1833. Barton meets Sally 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 Roving Kate, known in the neighborhood as the "Silent Woman." Amos Grimshaw, young son of the richest man in the township, is a visitor at the Baynes home, and Roving Kate tells the fortunes of the two boys, predicting a bright future for Barton and death on the gallows for Amos. Reproved 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.

CHAPTER V—When Barton is twelve years old he becomes aware of the existence of a wonderful and mysterious power known as "Money," and learns how, through his possession of that wonderful thing Grimshaw is the most powerful and greatly dreaded man in the community, most of the settlers being in his debt. After a visit to the Baynes home Mr. Wright leaves a note in a sealed envelope, which Barton is to read on the first night when he leaves home to attend school.

CHAPTER VI—Barton is asked to drive a load to mill, arrives safely, but in a snowstorm, unable to see the road, the horses get into the ditch and a wheel of the wagon is broken. Uncle Peabody manages to get together enough to satisfy Grimshaw and obtain an extension.

CHAPTER VII—Now in his sixteenth year Barton accompanies "Mr. Purvis," the hired man, to the postoffice at Canton. On the way they meet a rider, and the three journey together. They are held up by a man with a gun, who makes the highwayman's demand of "Your money or your life." Purvis runs away, while the stranger draws a pistol, but before he can use it the robber shoots and kills him. Barton's horse throws him and runs away. The murderer bends over the stranger Barton throws a stone which he observes wounds the thief, who makes off at once, but not until Barton had noted that his gun stock was broken in a peculiar manner. Search of the neighborhood for the robber is unavailing and the stranger is buried.

a lighted candle in the hand of schoolmaster. He led us through a door into a narrow corridor. He thrust a big key into the lock of a heavy iron grating and threw it open and bade us step in. We entered an ill-smelling stone-floored room with a number of cells against its rear wall. He locked the door behind us. I saw a face and



I Saw a Face and Figure Behind the Grated Door of One of These Cells.

figure in the dim candle light, behind the grated door of one of these cells. How lonely and dejected and helpless was the expression of that figure! The sheriff went to the door and unlocked it.

"Hello, Grimshaw," he said sternly. "Step out here."

It all went to my heart—the manner of the sheriff so like the cold iron of his keys and doors—the dim candle light, the pale, frightened youth who walked toward us. We shook his hand and he said that he was glad to see us. I saw the scar under his left ear and reaching out upon his cheek, which my stone had made, and knew that he bore the mark of Cain.

He asked if he could see me alone and the sheriff shook his head and said sternly:

"Against the rules."
"Amos, I've a boy o' my own an' I feel for ye," said the schoolmaster. "I'm going to come here, now and then, to cheer ye up and bring ye some books to read. If there's any word of advice I can give ye—let me know. Have ye a lawyer?"

"There's one coming tomorrow."
"Don't say a word about the case, boy, to anyone but your lawyer—mind that."

We left him and went to our home and beds, I to spend half the night thinking of my discovery, since which, for some reason, I had no doubt of the guilt of Amos, but I spoke not of it to anyone and the secret worried me.

Next morning on my way to school I passed a scene more strange and memorable than any in my long experience. I saw the shabby figure of old Benjamin Grimshaw walking in the side path. His hands were in his pockets, his eyes bent upon the ground, his lips moving as if he were in deep thought. Roving Kate, the ragged, silent woman who, for the fortune of Amos, had drawn a gibbet, the shadow of which was now upon him, walked slowly behind the money tender pointing at him with her bony forefinger. Her stern eyes watched him as the cat watches when its prey is near it. She did not notice me. Silently, her feet wrapped in rags, she walked behind the man, always pointing at him. When he stopped she stopped. When he resumed his slow progress she followed. It thrilled me, partly because I had begun to believe in the weird, mysterious power of the Silent Woman. I had twenty minutes to spare and so I turned into the main street behind and close by them. I saw him stop and buy some crackers and an apple and a piece of cheese. Meanwhile she stood pointing at him. He saw, but gave no heed to her. He walked along the street in front of the stores, she following as before. How patiently she followed!

I started for the big schoolhouse and a number of boys joined me with pleasant words.

Sally ran past us with that low-lived Wilis boy, who carried her books for her. His father had gone into the grocery business and Henry wore boughten clothes. I couldn't tell Sally how mean he was. I was angry and decided not to speak to her until she spoke to me. I got along better in school, although there was some tittering when I recited, probably because I had a broader dialect and bigger boots than the boys in the village.

CHAPTER IX.

I Meet President Van Buren and Am Cross-Examined by Mr. Grimshaw. The days went easier after that. The boys took me into their play and some of them were most friendly. I had a swift foot and a good eye as well as a strong arm, and could hold my own at three old cat—a kind of baseball which we played in the schoolyard. Saturday came. As we were sitting down at the table that morning the younger children clung to the knees of Mr. Hacket and begged him to take them up the river in a boat.

"Good Lord! What wilt thou give e when I grow childless?" he exclaimed with his arms around them.

"That was the question of Abraham, and it often comes to me. Of course we shall go. But hark! Let us hear what the green chair has to say."

There was a moment of silence and then he went on with a merry laugh. "Right ye are, Michael Henry! You are always right, my boy—God bless your soul! We shall take Bart with us an' doughnuts an' cheese an' cookies an' dried meat for all."

From that moment I date the beginning of my love for the occupant of the green chair in the home of Michael Hacket. Those good people were Catholics and I a Protestant and yet this Michael Henry always insisted upon the most delicate consideration for my faith and feelings.

"I promised to spend the morning in the field with Mr. Wright, if I may have your consent, sir," I said.

"Then we shall console ourselves, knowing that you are in better company," said Mr. Hacket.

Mr. Dunkelberg called at the house in Ashery lane to see me after breakfast.

"Bart, if you will come with me I should like to order some store clothes and boots for you," he said in his squeaky voice.

For a moment I knew not how to answer him. Nettled as I had been by Sally's treatment of me, the offer was like rubbing ashes on the soreness of my spirit.

I blushed and surveyed my garments and said:

"I guess I look pretty bad, don't I?"

"You look all right, but I thought maybe you would feel better in softer

raiment, especially if you care to go around much with the young people. I am an old friend of the family and I guess it would be proper for me to buy the clothes for you. When you are older you can buy a suit for me, some time, if you care to."

It should be understood that well-to-do people in the towns were more particular about their dress those days than now.

"I'll ask my aunt and uncle about it," I proposed.

"That's all right," he answered. "I'm going to drive to your house this afternoon and your uncle wishes you to go with me. We are all to have a talk with Mr. Grimshaw."

He left me and I went over to Mr. Wright's.

They told me that he was cutting corn in the back lot, where I found him.

"Mr. Dunkelberg came this mornin' and wanted to buy me some new clothes and boots," I said.

The senator stopped work and stood looking at me with his hands upon his hips.

"I wouldn't let him do it if I were

you," he said thoughtfully.

Just then I saw a young man come running toward us in the distant field. Mr. Wright took out his compass.

"Look here," he said, "you see the needle points due north."

He took a lodestone out of his pocket, and holding it near the compass moved it back and forth. The needle followed it.

The young man came up to us breathing deeply. Perspiration was rolling off his face. He was much excited and spoke with some difficulty.

"Senator Wright," he gasped, "Mrs. Wright sent me down to tell you that President Van Buren is at the house."

I remember vividly the look of mild amusement in the senator's face and the serene calmness with which he looked at the young man and said to him:

"Tell Mrs. Wright to make him comfortable in our easiest chair and to say to the president that I shall be up directly."

To my utter surprise he resumed his talk with me as the young man went away.

"You see all ways are north when you put this lodestone near the needle," he went on. "If it is to tell you the truth you must keep the lodestone away from the needle. It's that way, too, with the compass of your soul, partner. There the lodestone is selfishness, and with its help you can make any direction look right to you and soon—you're lost."

He bound the last bundle and then we walked together toward the house, the senator carrying his sickle.

"I shall introduce you to the president," he said as we neared our destination. "Then perhaps you had better leave us."

Continued next week

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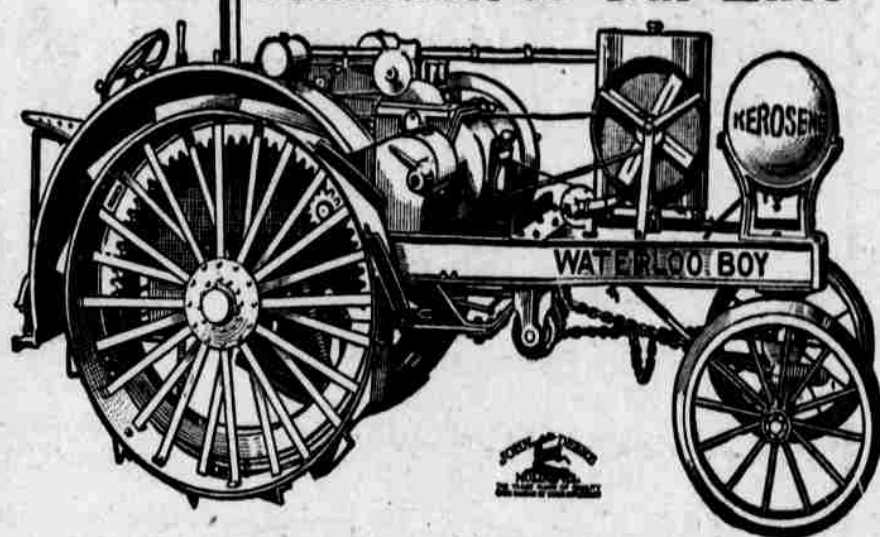


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