

THE LIGHT IN THE CLEARING

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

By
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Author of
"MEN HOLDEN, DRI AND L. DAREL 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 Hattleroad in a neighborhood called Lick-Hill, about the year 1838. 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 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.

CHAPTER VIII—Barton leaves home to attend Michael Hackett's school. Amos Grimshaw is arrested charged with the murder of the stranger.

"Nobody knows anything of the kind, Baynes," said Mr. Dunkelberg. "Of course Amos never thought of killing anybody. He's a harmless kind of a boy. I know him well and so do you. Under the circumstances Mr. Grimshaw is afraid that Bart's story will make it difficult for Amos to prove his innocence."

Uncle Peabody shook his head with a look of firmness.

Again Grimshaw laughed between his teeth as he looked at my uncle. In his view every man had his price. "I see that I'm the mouse an' you're the cat," he resumed, as that curious laugh rattled in his throat. "Look a here, Baynes, I'll tell ye what I'll do. I'll cancel the hull mortgage."

Again Uncle Peabody rose from his chair with a look in his face which I have never forgotten. How his voice rang out!

"No, sir!" he shouted so loudly that we all jumped to our feet and Aunt Deed clumped her face with her apron and began to cry. It was like the explosion of a blast. Then the fragments began falling with a loud crash: "NO, SIR! YE CAN'T BUY THE NAIL ON MY LITTLE FINGER OR HIS WITH ALL YER MONEY—D—N YOU!"

It was like the shout of Israel from the top of the mountains. Shep bounced into the house with hair on end and the chickens cackled and the old rooster clapped his wings and crowed with all the power of his lungs. Every member of that little group stood stock still and breathless.

I trembled with a fear I could not have defined. Mr. Grimshaw shuffled out of the door, his cane rapping the floor as if his arm had been stricken with palsy in a moment.

Mr. Dunkelberg turned to my aunt, his face scarlet, and muttered an apology for the disturbance and followed the money lender.

"Come on, Bart," Uncle Peabody called cheerfully, as he walked toward the barnyard. "Let's go an' git in



"No, Sir! Ye Can't Buy the Nail on My Little Finger or His With All Yer Money—Dann You!"

He paid no attention to our visitors—neither did my aunt, who followed us. The two men talked together a moment, unbitted their horses, got into their buggies and drove away.

"Wal, I'm surprised at Mr. Horace Dunkelberg tryin' to come it over us like that—ayes! I be," said Aunt Deed.

"Wal, I ain't," said Uncle Peabody. "Ol' Grimshaw has got him under his thumb—that's what's the matter. You'll find he's up to his ears in debt to Grimshaw—prob'ly."

As we followed him toward the house, he pushing the wheelbarrow loaded with sacks of nuts, he added: "At last Grimshaw has found something that he can't buy an' he's awful surprised. Too bad he didn't learn that lesson long ago."

He stopped his wheelbarrow by the steps and we sat down together on the edge of the stoop as he added:

"I got mad—they kep' pickin' on me so—I'm sorry, but I couldn't help it. We'll start up ag'in somewhere if we have to. There's a good many days' work in me yet."

As we carried the bags to the attic room I thought of the lodestone and the compass and knew that Mr. Wright had foreseen what was likely to happen.

When we came down Uncle Peabody said to me:

"I feel sorry, awful sorry, for that boy."

We spent a silent afternoon gathering apples. After supper we played old sledge and my uncle had hard work to keep us in good countenance. We went to bed early and I lay long, hearing the autumn wind in the popple leaves and thinking of that great thing which had grown strong within us, little by little, in the candle light.

CHAPTER X.

A Party and—My Fourth Peril!

It was a rainy Sunday. In the middle of the afternoon Uncle Peabody and I had set out in our spring buggy with the family umbrella—a faded but sacred implement, always carefully dried, after using, and hung in the clothes press. We were drenched to the skin in spite of the umbrella. It was still raining when we arrived at the familiar door in Ashery lane. Uncle Peabody wouldn't stop.

He hurried away. We pioneers rarely stopped or even turned out for the weather.

"Come in," said the voice of the schoolmaster at the door. "There's good weather under this roof."

He saw my plight as I entered. "I'm like a shaggy dog that's been in swimming," I said.

"Upon my word, boy, we're in luck," remarked the schoolmaster.

I looked up at him.

"Michael Henry's clothes!—sure, they're just the thing for you!"

I followed him upstairs, wondering how it had happened that Michael Henry had clothes.

He took me into his room and brought some handsome, soft clothes out of a press with shirt, socks and boots to match.

"There, my liddle duck," said he, "put them on."

"Put them soon dry on me," I said.

"Put them on—ye laggard! Michael Henry told me to give them to you. It's the birthday night o' little Ruth, my boy. There's a big cake with candles and chicken pie and jellied cookies and all the like o' that. Put them on. A wet boy at the feast would dampen the whole proceedings."

I put them on and with a great sense of relief and comfort. They were an admirable fit—too perfect for an accident, although at the time I thought only of their grandeur as I stood surveying myself in the looking-glass. They were of blue cloth and I saw that they went well with my blond hair and light skin. I was putting on my collar and necktie when Mr. Hackett returned.

We went below and the table was very grand with its great frosted cake and its candles, in shiny brass sticks, and its jellies and preserves with the gleam of polished pewter among them. Mrs. Hackett and all the children, save Ruth, were waiting for us in the dining room.

"Now sit down here, all o' ye, with Michael Henry," said the schoolmaster. "The little lady will be impatient. I'll go and get her and God help us to make her remember the day."

He was gone a moment, only, when he came back with Ruth in lovely white dress and slippers and gay with ribbons, and the silver beads of Mary on her neck. We clasped our hands and cheered and, in the excitement of the moment, John tipped over his drinking glass and shattered it on the floor.

"Never mind, my brave lad—no glass ever perished in a better cause. God bless you!"

We ate and feasted and talked, and the sound of our laughter drowned the cry of the wind in the chimney and the drumming of the rain upon the windows.

Next morning my clothes, which had been hung by the kitchen stove, were damp and wrinkled. Mr. Hackett came to my room before I had risen.

"Michael Henry would rather see his clothes hanging on a good boy than on a nail in the closet," said he. "Sure they give no comfort to the nail at all."

"I guess mine are dry now," I answered.

"They're wet and heavy, boy. No son o' Baldur could keep a light heart in them. Sure ye'd be as much out o' place as a sunbeam in a cave o' bats. If ye care not for your own comfort think o' the poor lad in the green chair. He's that proud and pleased to see them on ye it would be a shame to reject his offer. Sure, if they were dry yer own garments would be good enough. God knows, but Michael Henry loves the look o' ye in these togs, and then the president is in town."

That evening he discovered a big stain, black as ink, on my coat and trousers. Mr. Hackett expressed the opinion that it might have come from the umbrella, but I am quite sure that he had spotted them to save me from the last homemade suit I ever wore, save in rough work, and keep Michael Henry's on my back. In any event I wore them no more save at chore time.

Sally came and went, with the Wills boy, and gave no heed to me. In her eyes I had no more substance than a ghost, it seemed to me, although I caught her, often, looking at me. I judged that her father had given her a bad report of us and had some regrets, in spite of my knowledge that we were right, although they related mostly to Amos.

Next afternoon I saw Mr. Wright and the president walking back and forth on the bridge as they talked together. A number of men stood in front of the blacksmith shop, by the river shore, watching them, as I passed, on my way to the mill on an errand. The two statesmen were in broadcloth and white linen and beaver hats. They stopped as I approached them.

"Well, partner, we shall be leaving in an hour or so," said Mr. Wright as he gave me his hand. "You may look for me here soon after the close of the session. Take care of yourself and go often to see Mrs. Wright and obey your captain and remember me to your aunt and uncle."

"See that you keep coming, my good boy," said the president as he gave me his hand, with playful reference, no doubt, to Mr. Wright's remark that I was a coming man.

"Bart, I've some wheat to be thrashed in the barn on the back lot," said the senator as I was leaving them. "You can do it Saturdays, if you care to, at a shilling an hour. Stack the straw out of doors until you've finished, then put it back in the bay. Winnow the wheat carefully and sack it and bring it down to the granary and I'll settle with you when I return."

I remember that a number of men who worked in Grimshaw's sawmill were passing as he spoke.

"Yes, sir," I answered, much elated by the prospect of earning money.

The examination of Amos was set down for Monday and the people of the village were stirred and shaken by wildest rumors regarding the evidence to be adduced. Every day men and women stopped me in the street to ask what I knew of the murder. I followed the advice of Bishop Perkins and kept my knowledge to myself.

Saturday came, and when the chores were done I went alone to the grain barn in the back lot of the senator's farm with fall and measure and broom and fork and shovel and sacks and my luncheon, in a pushcart, with all of which Mrs. Wright had provided me.

Continued next week

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Substance

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Prayer Meeting, - 7.30 p. m.
Prayer Meeting Wednesday, 7.30 p. m.

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