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A Man for the Ages

A Story of the Builders of Democracy

By Irving Bacheller

BOOK TWO. CHAPTER X.

In Which Abe and Samson Wrestle and Some Raiders Come to Burn and Stay to Repent.

Within a week after their return the election came off and Abe was defeated, although in his precinct two hundred and twenty-seven out of a total of three hundred votes had been cast for him. He began to consider which way to turn.

for a place in which he could serve them and if he could learn to serve Sangamon county he could learn to serve the state and, possibly, even the republic.

The career of the firm began on a hot day late in August with Bill Berry smoking his pipe in a chair on the little veranda of the store and Abe Lincoln sprawled in the shade of a tree that partly overhung its roof, reading a law book.



Here Comes Steve Nuckles on His Old Mare.

John McNeil, who for a short time had shared his military adventures, had become a partner of Samuel Hill in a store larger and better stocked than any the village had known.

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"Where do Samson Traylor live?"
Abe took him to the road and pointed the way.

"There be goin' to be a raid," said Nuckles. "I reckon, by all I've heard, it'll come on tonight."

"A raid! Who's going to be raided?" Abe asked.

"Them Traylor folks. That be a St. Louis map, name o' Biggs, don't stirred up the folks from Missouri and Tennessee on the south road 'bout the Yankee who helps the niggers on o' bondage. They be goin' to do som-regulatin' tonight. O' Satan'll be loose. Ef you don't wa'ch out they'll come over an' burn his house sartin'."

"We'll watch out," said Abe. "The don't know Traylor. He's one of the best men in this county."

"I've heered he were a he man an' a right powerful, God-fearin' man," said the minister.

"He's one of the best men that ever came to this country and any one that wants to try his strength is well come to; I don't," said Abe. "Are you going over there?"

"I were goin' to warn 'em an' help 'em o' I cain."

"Well, go on, but don't stir 'em up," Abe cautioned him. "Don't say a word about the raid. I'll be over there with some other fellers soon after sun-down. We'll just tell 'em it's a he party come over for a story-tellin' an' a raffle. I reckon we'll have some fun. Ride on over and take supper with 'em. They're worth knowin'."

In a few minutes the minister mounted his horse and rode away followed by his big dog.

"If I was you I wouldn't go," said Berry.

"Why not?"

"It'll hurt trade. Let the rest of Traylor's friends go over. There's enough of 'em."

"We must all stand as one man for law and order," said Abe. "If we don't there won't be any."

As soon as Abe had had his supper he went from house to house and asked the men to come to his store for a piece of important business. When they had come he told them what was in the wind. Soon after that hour Abe and Philemon Morris, and Alexander Ferguson, and Martin Wadell and Robert Johnson and Joshua Miller and Jack Kelson and Samuel Hill and John McNeil set out for the Traylor cabin. Samson greeted the party with a look of surprise.

"Have you come out to hang me?" he asked.

"No just to hang around ye," said Abe.

"This time it's a heart warmin'," Jack Kelson averred. "We left our wives at home so that we could pay our compliments to Mrs. Traylor without reserve, knowing you to be a man above jealousy."

"It's what we call a he party, on the prairie," said Ferguson. "For one thing I wanted to see Abe and the minister have a raffle."

The Reverend Stephen Nuckles stood in front of the door with Sarah and Harry and the children. He was a famous wrestler.

"I can't raffle like I used to could, but I be willin' to give ye a try, Abe," said the minister.

"You'd better save your strength for o' Satan," said Abe.

"Go on, Abe," the others urged. "Give him a try."

Abe modestly stepped forward. In the last year he had grown less inclined to that kind of fun. The men took hold of each other, collar and elbow. They parried with their feet for an instant. Suddenly Abe's long right leg caught itself behind the left knee of the minister. It was the hip lock as they called it those days. Once secured the stronger man was almost sure to prevail and quickly. The sturdy circuit rider stood against it for a second until Abe sprang his bow. Then the heels of the former flew upward and his body came down to the grass, back first.

"That ar done popped my wind bag," said the minister as he got up.

"Call in," said John McNeil and the others echoed it.

"I call in Samson Traylor," said the minister.

At last the thing which had long been a subject of talk and argument in the stores and houses of New Salem was about to come to pass—a trial of strength and agility between the two great lions of Sangamon county. Either of them would have given a month's work to avoid it.

"Now we shall see which is the son of Peleus and which the son of Telemachus," Kelson shouted.

"How shall we raffle?" Samson asked.

"I don't care," said Abe.

"Rough and tumble," Ferguson proposed.

Both men agreed. They bent low intently watching each other, their great hands outreaching. They stood braced for a second and suddenly both sprang forward. Their shoulders came together with a thud. It was like two big bison bulls hurling their weight in the first shock of battle. For a breath each bore with all his strength and then closed with his adversary. Each had an under hold with one arm, the other hooked around a shoulder. Samson lifted Abe from his feet but the latter with tremendous efforts loosened the hold of the Vermonteer, and regained the turf. They struggled across the dooryard the ground trembling beneath their feet. They went against the side of the house, shaking it with the force of their impact. Samson had broken the grip of one of Abe's hands and

now had his feet in the air again but the young giant clung to hip and shoulder and wriggled back to his foothold. Those lesser men were thrilled and a little frightened by the mighty struggle. Knowing the strength of the wrestlers they felt a fear of broken bones. Each had torn a rent in the coat of the other. If they kept on there was danger that both would be stripped. The children had begun to cry. Sarah begged the struggling men to stop and they obeyed her.

"If any of you fellers think that's un you can have my place," said Abe. "Samson, I declare you elected the strongest man in this county. You've got the muscle of a grizzly bear. I'm glad to be quit o' ye."

"It ain't a fair election, Abe," Samson laughed. "If you were ruffling or the right you could flop me. This title brush was nothing. Your heart ain't in it, and by thunder, Abe, when it comes to havin' fun I rather uss we'd both do better to let each other alone."

"Tain't exactly good amusement, o' for us," Abe agreed.

It was growing dark. Ann Rutledge craved on her pony, and called Abe aside and told him that the raiders ere in the village and were breaking the windows of Radford's store because he had refused to sell them liquor.

"Don't say anything about it," Abe cautioned her. "Just go into the house with Sarah Traylor and sit down and ave a good visit. We'll look after the raiders."

Then Abe told Samson what was p. The men concealed themselves in some bushes by the roadside while the minister sat close against an end of the house with his bloodhound beside him. Before they were settled in their places they heard the regulators coming. There were eight men in the arty according to Abe's count as they passed. The men, in concealment, hurried to the cabin and surrounded it, crouched against the eaves. In a moment they could see a light spot, blacker than the darkness, moving toward them. It was the rascal raiders. They came on with the stealth of a cat nearing its prey. A lionlike roar broke the silence. The preacher's bloodhound leaped forward, he waiting men sprang to their feet and charged. The raiders turned and ran, pell mell, in a panic toward their horses. Suddenly the darkness seemed to fill with moving figures. One of



Suddenly the Darkness Seemed to Fill With Moving Figures.

the fleeing men, whose coat tails the dog had seized, was yelling for help. The minister rescued him and the dog went on roaring after the others.

When the New Salemites got to the edge of the grove they could hear a number of regulators climbing into the treetops. Samson had a man in each hand; Abe had another, while Harry Needles and Alexander Ferguson were in possession of the man whom the dog had captured.

The minister was out in the grove with his bloodhound that was barking and growling under a tree. Jack Kelson arrived with a lantern. One of Samson's captives began swearing and struggling to get away. Samson gave him a little shake and bade him be quiet. The man uttered a cry of fear and pain and offered no more resistance. Stephen Nuckles came out of the grove.

"The rest o' that ar party done gone upstairs to roost," said the minister. "I reckon my dog'll keep 'em thar. We better jest tote these men inter the house an' have a prajin' bee. I've got a right smart good chanct, now, to whop o' Satan."

They moved the raiders' horses. Then the party—save Harry Needles, who stayed in the grove to keep watch—took its captives into the cabin. Three of them were boys from eighteen to twenty years of age. The other was a lanky, bearded Tennesseean some forty years old. One of the young lads had hurt his hand in the evening's frolic. Blood was dripping from it. The four sat silent and fearful and ashamed.

Sarah made tea and put it with meat and milk and doughnuts and bread and

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butter on the table for them. Samson washed and bandaged the boy's wound. The captives ate as if they were hungry, while the minister went out to feed his dog. When the men had finished eating Samson offered them tobacco. The oldest man filled his pipe and lighted it with a coal. Not one of the captives had said a word until this tall Tennesseean remarked after his pipe was going:

"Thankee, mister. You done been right good to us."

"Who told you to come here?" Samson demanded.

"Twere a man from St. Louis. He done said you hated the South an' were hopin' niggers to run away."

"And he offered to pay you to come here and burn this house and run Traylor out of the county, didn't he?" Abe asked.

"He did—yes, sah—he suah did," answered the man—like a child in his ignorance and simplicity.

"I thought so," Abe rejoined. "You tackled a big job, my friend. Did you know that every one of you could be sent to prison for a term of years, and I've a good mind to see that you go there. You men have got to begin right now to behave yourselves mighty proper or you'll begin to sup sorrow."

Stephen Nuckles returned as Abe was speaking.

"You jest leave 'em to me, Mr. Lincoln," he said. "These be good men, but o' Satan done got his hooks on 'em. Mis' Traylor, ef you don't mind, I be goin' to do a job o' prajin' right now. Men, you jest git down on yo' knees right hyar along o' me."

It is recorded later in the diary that the rude Shepherd of the prairies worked with these men on their farms for weeks until he had them wanted to the fold.

CHAPTER XI.

In Which Abe, Elected to the Legislature, Gives What Comfort He Can to Ann Rutledge in the Beginning of Her Sorrows—Also He Goes to Springfield for New Clothes.

Radford's grocery had been so wrecked by the raiders that its owner was disheartened. Reinforced by John Cameron and James Rutledge he had succeeded in drawing them away before they could steal whisky enough to get drunk. But they had thrown much of his goods into the street. Radford mended his windows and offered his stock for sale. After a time Berry and Lincoln bought it, giving notes in payment and applied for a license to sell the liquors they had thus acquired.

Late that autumn a boy baby arrived in the Traylor home. Mrs. Onstott, Mrs. Waddell and Mrs. Kelson came to help and one of the other of them did the nursing and cooking while Sarah was in bed and for a little time thereafter. The coming of the baby was a comfort to this lonely mother of the prairies.

There is a letter from Sarah to her brother dated May, 10, 1833, in which she sums up some months of history in the words that follow:

"The Lord has given us a new son. I have lived through the ordeal—thanks to His goodness—and am strong again. The coming of the baby has reconciled us to the loss of our old friends as much as anything could. It has made this little home dear to us and proved the quality of our new friends. Nothing is too much for them to do. I don't wonder that Abe Lincoln has so much confidence in the people of this country. They are sound at heart, both the northerners and the southerners. Harry Needles is getting over his disappointment. He goes down to the store often to sit with Abe and Jack Kelson and hear them talk. He and Samson are getting deeply interested in politics. Abe lets Harry read the books that he borrows from Major Stuart of Springfield. The boy is bent on being a lawyer and improving his mind. Dim Kelson writes to her mother that she is very happy in her new home but there is something between the lines which seems to indicate that she is trying to put a good face on a bad matter. Abe has been appointed postmaster. Every time he leaves the store he takes the letters in his hat and delivers them as he gets a chance. We have named the new baby Samuel."

One evening of that summer, Abe came out to the Traylor's with a letter in his hat for Sarah.

"How's business?" Samson asked. "Going to peter out, I reckon." Abe answered with a sorrowful look. "It will leave me badly in debt. I wanted something that would give-me a chance for study and I got it. By ding! It looks as if I was going to

(continued on page 5)



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