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A Man for the Ages

A Story of the Builders of Democracy

By Irving Bacheller

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Samson and Sarah Traylor, with their two children, Josiah and Beesey, travel by train from their home in Vergennes, Vt., to the West, the land of liberty. Their destination is the County of Sangamon, in Illinois.

CHAPTER II.—At Niagara Falls they meet a party of immigrants, among them a youth named John McNeil, who also decides to go to the Sangamon country. All of the party suffer from fever and ague. Sarah's ministrations save the life of a youth, Harry Needles, in the last stages of fever, and he accompanies the Traylor. They reach New Salem, Illinois, and are welcomed by young "Abe" Lincoln.

CHAPTER III.—Among the Traylor's first acquaintances are Lincoln's friends, Jack Kelso and his pretty daughter, Bim, 18 years of age.

CHAPTER IV.—Samson decides to locate at New Salem, and begins building his house. Led by Jack Armstrong, rowdies attempt to break up the proceedings. Lincoln thrashes Armstrong. Young Harry Needles strikes Bap McNeil, of the Armstrong crowd, and McNeil threatens vengeance.

CHAPTER V.—A few days later Harry, alone, is attacked by McNeil and his gang, and would have been roughly used had not Bim driven off his assailants with a shotgun. John McNeil, the Traylor's Niagara Falls acquaintance, is markedly attentive to Ann Rutledge. Lincoln is in love with Ann, but has never had enough courage to tell her so.

CHAPTER VI.—Traylor helps two slaves, who had run away from St. Louis, to escape. Elphaiet Biggs, owner of the slaves, following them, attempts to beat up Traylor and in a night has his arm broken.

CHAPTER VII.—Waiting for his arm to heal, Biggs meets Bim, who, for whom Harry Needles has fallen in love. Biggs asks for Bim's hand, but her father refuses his consent. Biggs returns to St. Louis.

CHAPTER VIII.—Bim confesses to Harry that she loves Biggs, and the youth is disconsolate. Lincoln decides to seek a seat in the legislature. He and Harry volunteer for the Black Hawk war, and leave New Salem.

CHAPTER IX.—Biggs comes back to the village and he and Bim elope. Harry learns of it on his way home from the "war." Lincoln's advice and philosophy sustain him in his grief.

CHAPTER X.—Lincoln, defeated in his candidacy for the legislature, forms a partnership with "Bill" Berry in the grocery business. Biggs sends a gang to burn Traylor's house, but the New Salem men are warned and the raiders worsted.

CHAPTER XI.—Lincoln, now postmaster, decides to run again for the legislature. Ann Rutledge is openly in love with John McNeil. He leaves for his home in the East, promising to return soon and marry Ann. Lincoln accepts his defeat manfully. No word coming from McNeil, Ann confesses to Bim that his real name is McNamar, and her fears that he will not return. Lincoln in his deep love endeavors to reassure her, though he shares her misgivings. Lincoln wins his seat in the legislature.

CHAPTER XII.—Ann hears from McNamar, but his letter is cold and she is convinced he does not love her. She tells Abe of her doubt, and he convinces her his love and asks her to marry him. Ann declares she does not yet love him, but will try to. With that promise Lincoln sets out for Vandalia and his legislative duties.

CHAPTER XIII.—Inspired by Elijah Lovejoy, Traylor arranges on his farm a hiding place for runaway slaves, a station on the "Underground Railroad."



Shaking and Choked With Sobs.

shadow of the coming night. She looked like one searching in the dust for something very precious. The strong heart of Samson was touched by the sorrowful look of her so that he could not speak.

Soon he was able to say in a low, trembling voice:

"In every letter he tells of his love for you. That article in the paper was a cruel mistake."

After a little silence Bim rose from the ground. She stood, for a moment, wiping her eyes. Her form straightened and was presently erect. Her soul resented the injustice she had suffered. There was a wonderful and touching dignity in her voice and manner when she asked: "Why didn't he write to me?"

"He must have written to you," Sadly, calmly, thoughtfully, she spoke as she stood looking off at the fading glow in the west:

"It is terrible how things can work together to break the heart and will of a woman. Write to Harry and tell him that he must not come to see me again. I have promised to marry another man."

"I hope it isn't Davis," said Samson. "It is Davis."

"I don't like him. I don't think he's honest."

"But he has been wonderfully kind to us. Without his help we couldn't have lived. We couldn't even have given my father a decent burial."

"Has he been out here to see you?"

"No."

"And he won't come. That man knows how to keep out of danger. I don't believe you'll marry him."

"Why?"

"Because I intend to be a father to you and pay all your debts," said Samson.

The doctor called from the door of the cabin.

Bim said: "God bless you and Harry" as she turned away to take up her task again.

That night both of them began, as they say, to put two and two together. While he rode on in the growing dusk the keen intellect of Samson saw a convincing sequence of circumstances—the theft of the mail sack, the false account of Harry's death, the failure of his letters to reach their destination, and the fact that Bim had accepted money from Davis in time of need. A strong suspicion of foul play crept upon him and he began to consider what he could do in the matter.

Having forded a creek he caught the glow of a light in the darkness, a little way up the road. It was the lighted window of a cabin, before whose door he stopped his horse and "allooed":

"I am a belated and hungry traveler on my way to Chicago," he said to the man who presently greeted him from the open doorway.

"Have you come through Honey Creek settlement?" the latter asked.

"Left there about an hour ago."

"Sorry, mister, but I can't let you come into the house. If you'll move off a few feet I'll lay some grub on the choppin' block an' up the road about a half-mile you'll find a barn with some hay in it, where you and your horse can spend the night under 'over."

Samson moved away and soon the man brought a package of food and laid it on the block and ran back to the door.

"I'll lay a piece of silver on the block," Samson called.

"Not a darned cent," the man answered. "I hate like p'ison to turn a feller away in the night, but we're awful skered here with children in the house. Good-by. You can't miss the barn. It's close ag'in' the road."

Samson ate his luncheon in the darkness, as he rode, and presently came upon the barn and unsaddled and stabled and fed his horse in one end of it—the beast having drunk his fill at the creek they had lately forded—and lay down to rest for the night, with the saddle blanket beneath him and his coat for a cover. A wind from the north began to wail and whistle through the cracks in the barn and over its roof, bringing cold weather. Samson's feet and legs had been wet in the crossing, so that he found it difficult to keep warm. He crept to the side of his horse, which had laid down, and found a degree of comfort in the heat of the animal. But it was a bad night, at best.

"I've had many a long, hard night, but this is the worst of them," Samson thought.

There's many a bad night in the history of the pioneers, its shadows falling on lonely, ill-marked roads, cut by rivers, creeks and marshes and strung through unnumbered miles of wild country. Samson was up and off at daylight in a bitter wind and six inches of snow. It was a kind of work he would not have undertaken upon any call less commanding than that of friendship.

He reached Chicago at noon, having had nothing to eat that day. There was no such eager, noisy crowd in the streets as he had seen before. But the fever of speculation had passed. But there were many people on the main thoroughfares, among whom were Europeans who had arrived the autumn before. They were changing but the marks of the yoke were still upon them. In Chicago were the vitals of the West and they were very much alive in spite of the panic.

Samson bought some new clothes and had a bath and a good dinner at the City Hotel. Then he went to the office of Mr. Lionel Davis. There to his surprise he met his old acquaintance, Eli Fredenberg, who greeted him with great warmth and told of having settled in Chicago.

A well-dressed young man came out of an inner office.

"I'd like to see Mr. Davis," said Samson. "Tell him that I've got some money that belongs to him and that I'm ready to deliver it."

The young man disappeared through the door of the private office and soon returned and conducted Samson into the presence of Mr. Davis. The two men recognized each other.

"Well, sir, what is it about?" the young speculator demanded.

"The daughter of my old friend, Jack Kelso, owes you some money and I want to pay it," said Samson.

"Oh, that is a matter between Miss

Kelso and me," Mr. Davis spoke politely and with a smile.

"Not exactly—since I knew about it," Samson answered.

"I refuse to discuss her affairs with you," Davis declared.

"I suppose you mistrust me," said Samson. "Well, I've offered to pay you and I'm going to make it plain to them that they don't have to worry any more about the money you loaned them."

"Very well, I bid you good morning."

"Don't be in a hurry," Samson answered. "I have a note of five thousand dollars against you. It is indorsed to me by Henry Brimstead and I want to collect it."

"I refuse to pay it," Davis promptly answered.

"Then I shall have to put it in the hands of a lawyer," said Samson.

"Put it where you like but don't consume any more of my time."

"But you'll have to hear me say that I don't think you're honest."

"I have heard you," Davis answered calmly.

Samson withdrew and went to the home of Mrs. Kelso. He found her with Bim's boy in her lap—a handsome little lad, then a bit over two years old—at the house on La Salle street. Samson told of the failure of Bim's letter to reach him and of his offer to return the money which Davis had paid for their relief.

"I don't like the man and I don't want you to be under obligation to him," said Samson. "The story of Harry's death was false and I think that he is responsible for it. He wanted her to marry him right away after that—of course. And she went to the plague settlement to avoid marriage. I know her better than you do. She has read him right. Her soul has looked into his soul and it keeps her away from him."

But Mrs. Kelso could believe no evil of her benefactor, nor would she promise to cease depending on his bounty.

Samson was a little disheartened by the visit. He went to see John Wentworth, the editor of the Democrat, of whose extreme length Mr. Lincoln had humorously spoken in his presence. The young New Englander was seven feet tall. He welcomed the broad-shouldered man from Sangamon county and began at once to question him about Honest Abe and "Steve" Douglas and O. H. Browning and E. D. Baker and all the able men of the middle counties. At the first opportunity Samson came to the business of his call—the mischievous lie regarding Harry's death which had appeared in the Democrat. Mr. Wentworth went to the proofroom and found the manuscript of the article.

Samson told of the evil it had wrought and conveyed his suspicions to the editor.

"Davis is rather unscrupulous," said Wentworth. "We know a lot about him in this office."

Samson looked at the article and presently said: "Here is a note that he gave to a friend of mine. It looks to me as if the note and the article were written by the same hand."

Mr. Wentworth compared the two and said: "You are right. The same person wrote them. But it was not Davis."

When Samson left the office of the Democrat he had accomplished little save the confirmation of his suspicions. There was nothing he could do about it.

He went to Eli Fredenberg. "What has Davis done to you?" Samson asked, recalling where he had met Eli that morning.

Eli explained that he had borrowed money from Davis to tide him over the hard times and was paying 12 per cent for it.

"Dis morning I get dot letter from his secretary," he said as he passed a letter to Samson.

It was a demand for payment in the handwriting of the Brimstead note and had some effect on this little history. It conveyed definite knowledge of the authorship of a malicious falsehood. It aroused the anger and sympathy of Samson Traylor. In the conditions then prevailing Eli was unable to get the money. He was in danger of losing his business. Samson spent the day investigating the affairs of the merchant. His banker and others spoke well of him. He was said to be a man of character and credit embarrassed by the unexpected scarcity of good money. So it came about that, before he left the news city, Samson bought a fourth interest in the business of Eli Fredenberg, the lots he owned were then worth less than when he had bought them, but his faith in the future of Chicago had not abated.

He wrote a long letter to Bim recounting the history of his visit and frankly stating the suspicions to which he had been led. He set out on the west road at daylight toward the Riviere des Plaines, having wisely decided to avoid passing the plague settlement.

CHAPTER XXI.

Wherein a Remarkable School of Political Science Begins Its Sessions in the Rear of Joshua Speed's Store. Also at Samson's Fireside Honest Abe Talks of the Authority of the Law and the Right of Revolution.

The boy Joe had had a golden week at the home of the Brimsteads. The fair Annabel, knowing not the power that lay in her beauty, had captured

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his young heart scarcely fifteen years of age. He had no interest in her younger sister, Mary. But Annabel, with her long skirts and full form and glowing eyes and gentle dignity, had stirred him to the depths. When he left he carried a soul heavy with regret and great resolutions. Not that he had mentioned the matter to her or to any one. It was a thing too sacred for speech. To God, in his prayers, he spoke of it, but to no other.

He asked to be made and to be thought worthy. He would have had the whole world stopped and put to sleep for a term until he was delivered from the bondage of his tender youth. That being impossible, it was for him a sad, but not a hopeless world. Indeed, he rejoiced in his sadness. Annabel was four years older than he. If he could make her to know the depth of his passion, perhaps she would wait for him. He sought for self-expression in the Household Book of Poetry—a sorrowful and pious volume. He could find no ladder of rhyme with an adequate reach. He endeavored to build one. He wrote melancholy verses and letters, confessing his passion, to Annabel, which she did not encourage, but which she always kept and valued for their ingenuous and noble ardor. Some of these Amarcionics are among the treasures inherited by her descendants. They were a matter of slight importance, one would say, but they mark the beginning of a great career. Immediately after his return to the new home in Springfield, the boy, Josiah, set out to make himself honored of his ideal. In the effort he made himself honored of many. His eager brain had soon taken the footing of manhood.

A remarkable school of political science had begun its sessions in the little Western village of Springfield. The world had never seen the like of it. Abraham Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas, E. D. Baker, O. H. Browning, Jesse B. Thomas, and Josiah Lamborn—a most unusual array of talent as subsequent history has proved—were wont to gather around the fireplace in the rear of Joshua Speed's store, evenings, to discuss the issues of the time. Samson and his son Joe came often to hear the talk. Douglas looked like a dwarf among those long-geared men. He was slight and short, being only about five feet tall, but he had a big, round head covered with thick, straight, dark hair, a bulldog look and a voice like thunder. Douglas and Lincoln were in a heated argument over the admission of slavery to the territories the first night that Samson and Joe sat down with them.

"We didn't like that little rooster of a man, he had such a high and mighty way with him and so frankly opposed the principles we believe in. He was an out-and-out pro-slavery man. He would have every state free to regulate its domestic institutions, in its own way, subject only to the Constitution of the United States. Lincoln held that it amounted to saying 'that if one man chose to enslave another no third party shall be allowed to object.'"

In the course of the argument Douglas alleged that the Whigs were the aristocrats of the country.

"That reminds me of a night when I was speaking at Havana," said Honest Abe. "A man with a ruffled shirt and a massive gold watch chain got

up and charged that the Whigs were aristocrats. Douglas in his broadcloth and fine linen reminds me of that man. I'm not going to answer Douglas as I answered him. Most of the Whigs I know are my kind of folks. I was a poor boy working on a flatboat at eight dollars a month and had only one pair of breeches and they were buckskin. If you know the nature of buckskin, you know that when it is wet and dried by the sun it will shrink and my breeches kept shrinking and deserting the sock area of my legs until several inches of them were bare above my shoes. Whilst I was growing longer they were growing shorter and so much tighter that they left a blue streak around my legs which can be seen to this day. If you call that aristocracy I know of one Whig that is an aristocrat."

"But look at the New England type of Whig exemplified by the imperious and majestic Webster," said Douglas.

"Webster was another poor lad," Lincoln answered. "His father's home was a log cabin in a lonely land until about the time Daniel was born, when the family moved to a small frame house. His is the majesty of a great intellect."

There was much talk of this sort until Mr. Lincoln excused himself to walk home with his two friends who had just returned from the North, being eager to learn of Samson's visit. The latter gave him a full account of it and asked him to undertake the collection of Brimstead's note.

"I'll get after that fellow right away," said Lincoln. "I'm glad to get a chance at one of those men who have been skinning the farmers."

They sat down by the fireside in Samson's house.

"Joe has decided that he wants to be a lawyer," said Samson.

"Well, Joe, we'll all do what we can to keep you from being a shotgun lawyer," Abe Lincoln began. "I've got a good first lesson for you. I found it in a letter which Rufus Choate had written to Judge Davis. In it he says that we rightly have great respect for the decisions of the majority, but that the law is something vastly greater and more sacred than the verdict of any majority. 'The law,' he says, 'comes down to us one mighty and continuous stream of wisdom and experience accumulated, ancestral, widening and deepening and washing itself clearer as it runs on, the agent of civilization, the builder of a thousand cities. To have lived through ages of unceasing trial with the passions, interests and affairs of men, to have lived through the drums and trappings of conquest, through revolution and reform and all the changing cycles of opinion, to have attended the progress of the race and gathered unto itself the approbation of civilized humanity is to have proved that it carries in it some spark of immortal life.'"

The face of Lincoln changed as he recited the lines of the learned and distinguished lawyer of Massachusetts.

"His face glowed like a lighted lantern when he began to say those eloquent words," Samson writes in his diary. "He wrote them down so that Josiah could commit them to memory."

"That is a wonderful statement," Samson remarked.

Abe answered: "It suggests to me

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