THE LIGHT IN THE CLEARING

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

By

IRVING BACHELLER

AUTHOR OF
EBEN HOLDEN, D'RI AND I, DARREL OF THE BLESSED ISLES, KEEPING UP WITH LIZZIE, ETC., ETC

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CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

—17—

My heart beat fast when I saw the house and my uncle and Purvis coming in from the twenty-acre lot with a load of hay. Aunt Deel stood on the front steps looking down the road. Now and then her waving handkerchief went to her eyes. Uncle Peabody came down the standard off his load and walked toward me.

"Say, stranger, have you seen anything of a feller by the name o' Bart Baynes?" he demanded.

"Have you?" I asked.

"No, sir, I ain't. Gosh a'mighty! Say! what have ye done with that boy of our'n?"

"What have you done to our house?" I asked again.

"Built on an addition."

"That's what I've done to your boy," I answered.

"Thunder an' lightnin'! How you've raised the roof!" he exclaimed as he grabbed my satchel. Dressed like a statesman an' bigger'n a bullmoose. I can't 'rastle with you no more. But, say, I'll run ye a race. I can beat ye an' carry the satchel, too."

We ran pell-mell up the lane to the steps like a pair of children.

Aunt Deel did not speak. She just put her arms around me and laid her dear old head upon my breast. Uncle Peabody turned away. Then what a silence! Off in the edge of the woodland I heard the fairy flute of a woodthrush.

"Purvis, you drive that load on the floor an' put up the hosses," Uncle Peabody shouted in a moment. "If you don't like it you can hire 'nother man. I won't do no more till after dinner. This slave business is played out."

"All right," Purvis answered.

"You bet it's all right. I'm fer abolition an' I've stood your domineerin', nigger-driver ways long enough fer one mornin'. If you don't like it you can look for another man."

Aunt Deel and I began to laugh at this good-natured, make-believe scolding of Uncle Peabody and the emotional strain was over. They led me into the house, where a delightful surprise awaited me, for the rooms had been decorated with balsam boughs and sweet ferns. A glowing mass of violets, framed in moss, occupied the center of the table. The house was filled with the odors of the forest, which, as they knew, were dear to me. I had written that they might expect me some time before noon, but I begged them not to meet me in Canton, as I wished to walk home after my long ride. So they were ready for me.

I remember how they felt the cloth on my back and how proudly they surveyed it.

"Couldn't buy them goods 'round these parts," said Uncle Peabody. "Nor nothin' like 'em—no, sir."

"Feels a leetle bit like the butternut trousers," said Aunt Deel as she felt my coat.

"Ayes, but them butternut trousers ain't what they used to be when they was young and limber," Uncle Peabody remarked. "Seems so they was gettin' kind o' wrinkled an' baldheaded-like, 'specially where I set down."

"Ayes! Wal I guess a man can't grow old without his pants growin' old, too—ayes!" said Aunt Deel.

"If yer legs are in 'em ev'ry Sunday they ketch it of ye," my uncle answered. "Long sermons are hard on pants, seems to me."

"An' the longer the legs the harder the sermons—in them little seats over 't the schoolhouse—ayes!" Aunt Deel added by way of justifying his complaint. "There wouldn't be so much wear in a ten-mile walk—no!"

The chicken pie was baking and the strawberries were ready for the shortcake.

"I've been wallerin' since the dew was off gittin' them berries an' vi'lets—ayes!" said Aunt Deel, now busy with her work at the stove.

"Aunt, you look as young as ever," I remarked.

She slapped my arm and said with mock severity:

"Stop that! W'y? You know better—ayes!"

How vigorously she stirred the fire then.

"I can't return the compliment—my soul! how you've changed—ayes!" she remarked.

"I hope you ain't fit no more, Bart. I can't bear to think o' you flyin' at folks an' poundin' of 'em. Don't seem right—no. it don't!"

"Why, Aunt Deel, what in the world do you mean?" I asked.

"It's Purvis' brain that does the poundin', I guess," said my uncle. "It's kind o' got the habit. It's a reg'lar beetle brain. To hear him talk ye'd think he an' you could clean out the hull Mexican nation—barrin' accidents. Why, anybody would suppose that yer enemies go to climbin' trees as soon as they see ye comin' an' that you pull the trees up by the roots to git at 'em."

"A certain amount of such deviltry is necessary to the comfort of Mr. Purvis," I remarked. "If there is nobody else to take the responsibility for it he assumes it himself. His imagination has an intense craving for blood and violence. It's that type of American who, egged on by the slave power, is hurrying us into trouble with Mexico."

Purvis came in presently with a look in his face which betrayed his knowledge of the fact that all the cobwebs spun by his fancy were now to be brushed away. Still he enjoyed them while they lasted and there was a kind of tacit claim in his manner that they were subjects regarding which no honest man could be expected to tell the truth.

As we ate our dinner they told me that an escaped slave had come into a neighboring county and excited the people with stories of the auction block and of negroes driven like yoked oxen on plantations in South Carolina, whence he had escaped on a steamboat.

"I b'lieve I'm goin' to vote for abolition," said Uncle Peabody. "I wonder what Sile Wright will say to that."

"He'll probably advise against it; the time isn't ripe for so great a change," was my answer. "He thinks that the whole matter should be left to the glacial action of time's forces."

Indeed I had spoken the view of the sounder men of the North. The subject filled them with dread alarm. But the attitude of Uncle Peabody was significant. The sentiment in favor of a change was growing. It was now to be reckoned with, for the abolition party was said to hold the balance of power in New York and New England and was behaving itself like a bull in a china shop.

After dinner I tried to put on some of my old clothes, but found that my nakedness had so expanded that they would not cover it, so I hitched my white mare on the spring wagon and drove to the village for my trunk.

Every week day after that I worked in the fields until the senator arrived in Canton about the middle of August. On one of those happy days I received a letter from old Kate, dated, to my surprise, in Saratoga. It said:

"Dear Barton Baynes: I thought I would let you know that my father is dead. I have come here to rest and have found some work to do. I am better now. Have seen Sally. She is very beautiful and kind. She does not know that I am the old witch, I have changed so. The others do not know—it is better that way. I think it was the Lord that brought me here. He has a way of taking care of some people, my boy. Do you remember when I began to call you my boy—you were very little. It is long, long ago since I first saw you in your father's dooryard—you said you were going to mill on a butterfly's back. You looked just as I thought my boy would look. You gave me a kiss. What a wonderful gift it was to me then! I began to love you. I have no one else to think of now. I hope you won't mind my thinking so much of you.

"God bless you,
"KATE FULLERTON."

I understood now why the strong will and singular insight of this woman had so often exercised themselves in my behalf. I could not remember the far day and the happy circumstance of which she spoke, but I wrote her a letter which must have warmed her heart I am sure.

Silas Wright arrived in Canton and drove up to our home. He reached our door at eight in the morning with his hound and rifle. He had aged rapidly since I had seen him last. His hair was almost white. There were many new lines in his face. He seemed more grave and dignified. He did not lapse into the dialect of his fathers when he spoke of the ancient pestimes of hunting and fishing as he had been wont to do.

"Bart," he said when the greetings were over, "let's you and me go and spend a day in the woods. I'll leave my man here to help your uncle while you're gone."

We went by driving south a few miles and tramping in to the foot of the stillwater on our river—a trail long familiar to me. The dog left us soon after we took it and began to range over thick wooded hills. We sat down among small, spirelike spruces at the river's edge with a long stretch of water in sight while the music of the hound's voice came faintly to our ears from the distant forest.

"Oh, I've been dreaming of this for a long time," said the senator as he leaned back against a tree and filled his lungs and looked out upon the water, green with lily pads along the edge and flecked with the last of the white blossoms. "I believe you want to leave this lovely country."

"I am waiting for the call to go."

"Well, I'm inclined to think you are the kind of man who ought to go," he answered almost sadly. "You are needed. I have been waiting until we should meet to congratulate you on your behavior at Cobleskill. I think you have the right spirit—that is the all-important matter. You will encounter strange company in the game of politics. Let me tell you a story."

He told me many stories of his life in Washington, interrupted by a sound like that of approaching footsteps. We ceased talking and presently a flock of partridges came near us, pacing along over the mat of leaves in a leisurely fashion. We sat perfectly still. A young cock bird with his beautiful ruff standing out, like the hair on the back of a frightened dog, strode toward us with a comic threat in his manner. It seemed as if he were of half a mind to knock us into the river. But we sat as still as stumps and he spared us and went on with the others.

The baying of the hound was nearer now. Suddenly we saw a big buck come down to the shore of the cove near us and on our side of the stream. He looked to right and left. Then he made a long leap into the water and waded slowly until it covered him. He raised his nose and laid his antlers back over his shoulders and swam quietly downstream, his nose just showing above the water. His antlers were like a bit of driftwood. If we had not seen him take the water his antlers might easily have passed for a bunch of dead sticks. Soon the buck slowly lifted his head and turned his neck and looked at both shores. Then very deliberately he resumed his place under water and went on. We watched him as he took the farther shore below us and made off in the woods again.

"I couldn't shoot at him, it was such a beautiful bit of politics," said the senator.

Soon the hound reached the cove's edge and swam the river and ranged up and down the bank for half an hour before he found the buck's trail again.

"I've seen many a rascal, driven to water by the hounds, go swimming away as slyly as that buck, with their horns in the air, looking as innocent as a bit of driftwood. They come in from both shores—the Whig and the Democratic—and they are always shot at from one bank or the other."

I remember it surprised me a little to hear him say that they came in from both shores.

"Just what do you want to do?" he asked presently.

"I should like to go down to Washington with you and help you in any way that I can."

"All right, partner—we'll try it," he answered gravely. "I hope that I don't forget and work you as hard as I work myself. It wouldn't be decent. I have a great many letters to write. I'll try thinking out loud while you take them down in sound-hand. Then you can draft them neatly and I'll sign them. You have tact and good manners and can do many of my errands for me and save me from those who have no good reason for taking up my time."

"You will meet the best people and the worst. There's just a chance that it may come to something worth while—who knows? You are young yet. It will be good training and you will witness the making of some history now and then."

What elation I felt!

Again the voice of the hound, which had been ringing in the distant hills, was coming nearer.

"We must keep watch—another deer is coming," said the senator.

We had only a moment's watch before a fine yearling buck came down to the opposite shore and stood looking across the river. The senator raised his rifle and fired. The buck fell in the edge of the water.

"How shall we get him?" my friend asked.

"It will not be difficult," I answered as I began to undress. Nothing was difficult those days.

I swam the river and towed the buck across with a beech withe in his gambrel joints. The hound joined me

"Thunder an' Lightnin'! How You've Raised the Roof!"

before I was half across with my burden and nosed the carcass and swam on ahead yelping with delight.

We dressed the deer and then I had the great joy of carrrying him on my back two miles across the country to the wagon. The senator wished to send a guide for the deer, but I insisted that the carrying was my privilege.

"Well, I guess your big thighs and broad shoulders can stand it," said he.

"My uncle has always said that no man could be called a hunter until he can go into the woods without a guide and kill a deer and bring it out on his back. I want to be able to testify that I am at least partly qualified."

"Your uncle didn't say anything about fetching the deer across a deep river without a boat, did he?" Mr. Wright asked me with a smile.

Leaves of the beeches, maples and basswoods—yellowed by frost—hung like tiny lanterns, glowing with noonday light, above the dim forest aisle which we traveled.

The sun was down when we got to the clearing.

"What a day it has been!" said Mr. Wright when we were seated in the wagon.

"One of the best in my life," I answered with a joy in my heart the like of which I have rarely known in these many years that have come to me.

We rode on in silence with the calls of the swamp robin and the hermit thrush ringing in our ears as the night fell.

"It's a good time to think, and there we take different roads," said my friend. "You will turn into the future and I into the past."

"I've been thinking about your uncle," he said by and by. "He is one of the greatest men I have ever known. You knew of that foolish gossip about him—didn't you?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Well, now, he's gone about his business the same as ever and showed by his life that it couldn't be true. Not a word out of him! But Dave Ramsey fell sick—down on the flat last winter. By and by his children were crying for bread and the poormaster was going to take charge of them. Well, who should turn up there, just in the nick of time, but Delia and Peabody Baynes. They fed those children all winter and kept them in clothes so that they could go to school. The strange thing about it is this: It was Dave Ramsey who really started that story. He got up in church the other night and confessed his crime. His conscience wouldn't let him keep it. He said that he had not seen Peabody Baynes on that road the day the money was lost but had only heard that he was there. He knew now that he couldn't have been there. Gosh t'almighty! as your uncle used to say when there was nothing else to be said."

It touched me to the soul—this long-delayed vindication of my beloved Uncle Peabody.

The senator ate supper with us and sent his hired man out for his horse and buggy. When he had put on his overcoat and was about to go he turned to my uncle and said:

"Peabody Baynes, if I have had any success in the world it is because I have had the exalted honor and consciousness that I represented men like you."

He left us and we sat down by the glowing candles. Soon I told them what Ramsey had done. There was a moment of silence. Uncle Peabody rose and went to the water pail for a drink.

"Bart, I believe I'll plant corn on that ten-acre lot next spring—darned if I don't," he said as he returned to his chair.

None of us ever spoke of the matter again, to my knowledge.

CHAPTER XVIII.

On the Summit.

My mental assets would give me a poor rating, I presume, in the commerce of modern scholarship when I went to Washington that autumn with Senator and Mrs. Wright. Still it was no smattering that I had, but rather a few broad areas of knowledge which were firmly in my possession. My best asset was not mental but spiritual, if I may be allowed to say it, in all modesty, for, therein I claim no special advantage, saving, possibly, an unusual strength of character in my aunt and uncle. Those days the candles were lighting the best trails of knowledge all over the land. Never has the general spirit of this republic been so high and admirable as then and a little later. It was to speak, presently, in the immortal voices of Whittier, Emerson, Whitman, Greeley and Lincoln. The dim glow of the candles had entered their souls and out of them came a light that filled the land and was seen of all men.

The railroads on which we traveled from Utica, the great cities through which we passed, were a wonder and an inspiration to me. I was awed by the grandeur of Washington itself. I took lodgings with the senator and his wife.

"Now, Bart," said he, when we had arrived, "I'm going to turn you loose here for a little while before I put harness on you. Go about for a week or so and get the lay of the land and the feel of it. Mrs. Wright will be your guide until the general situation has worked its way into your consciousness."

It seemed to me that there was not room enough in my consciousness for the great public buildings and the pictures and the statues and the vast machinery of the government. Beauty and magnitude have a wonderful effect when they spring fresh upon the vision of a youth out of the back country. I sang of the look of them in my letters and soon I began to think about them and imperfectly to understand them. They had their epic, lyric and dramatic stages in my consciousness.

One afternoon we went to hear Senator Wright speak. He was to answer Calhoun on a detail of the banking laws. The floor and galleries were filled. With what emotion I saw him rise and begin his argument as all ears bent to hear him! He aimed not at popular sentiments in highly finished rhetoric, as did Webster, to be quoted in the school books and repeated on every platform. But no words of mine—and I have used many in the effort—are able to convey a notion of the masterful ease and charm of his manner on the floor of the senate or of the singular modesty, courtesy, aptness and simplicity of his words as they fell from his lips. There were the thunderous Webster, the grandeur of whose sentences no American has equaled; the agile-minded Clay, whose voice was like a silver clarion; the far-seeing, fiery Calhoun, of "the swift sword"—most formidable in debate—but I was soon to learn that neither nor all of these men—gifted of heaven so highly—could cope with the suave, incisive, conversational sentences of Wright, going straight to the heart of the subject and laying it bare to his hearers. That was what people were saying as we left the senate chamber, late in the evening; that, indeed, was what they were always saying after they had heard him answer an adversary.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Victim of Popular Song.

Lawrence Kellie tells of an amusing experience he had over the song, "Douglas Gordon." He was introduced one evening to a gentleman whose name he did not catch. "I have no desire to meet you, Mr. Kellie," said the stranger. Kellie naturally looked a little astonished, but said nothing. "In fact," the other went on, "I hate the very sound of your name. For months past my mother has been worried by the receipt of telegrams and letters of condolence on my behalf, and the thing is beginning to get monotonous." "I'm sorry," said Kellie, "but what's that got to do with me?" "Well, I'll tell you," said the other. "My name's Douglas Gordon, and everybody imagines that your confounded song refers to me." And with that he turned on his heel and went.

How He Averages Up.

"De man dat kain't do no work his ownse'f," said Uncle Eben, "generally averages up by makin' a whole lot o' trouble foh other people."

Much Buzz; Little Money.

"Many a man dat's as busy as a bee," said Uncle Eben, "uses up all his time buzzin' an' don't make no money."

Separate Skirts Grow More Important

If anything were needed to foster the success of the separate skirt, that thing has come to the front, in the lovely Russian blouse of georgette crepe, or other material, which has been brought out for the summer season. It is an aristocratic garment, very graceful, and at its loveliest in crepes and other sheer fabrics. But certain of the new weaves in silk are running a close second to the sheerer materials. With a few of these blouses one may face the summer with confidence.

The separate skirt of white satin, or other fabric, and the separate skirt of black satin make the right background for these Russian blouses, having sufficient class and character of their own. Provided with these one may use all sorts of waists and blouses to make combinations that result in dress suitable for any hour of the day or evening. Then there are the utility skirts of sturdy cloth fabrics and the sports skirts that are so useful for occasions where one must be smartly but not formally dressed.

A very attractive model for a cloth skirt appears at the left of the two skirts pictured above, and is to be recommended for women who have slender figures. Its wide front panel is extended at the sides near the top and perfectly tailored side pieces plaited lengthwise, are set in below these extensions, the plaiting extending across the back. The panel provides a good background for buttons and buttonholes that are decorative.

The skirt at the right is another of the smart, plaited models which are not so frequently seen this season. It is made of a new weave in silk in which stripes, differing in color and weave, make the way of the designer easy. These run round the figure and the plaits in the skirt are arranged to form a panel at the back and front. Almost without exception, belts and girdles are made of the same material as the skirts.

Posies for Decorations.

The hothouse is rivaling the simple field in what it brings to flower hats and bedlowered brims this year, for roses, opulent jasmine and broad, full pansies are the style.

Those Practical Taffeta Suits

If manufacturers of ready-to-wear clothes were to neglect to provide taffeta suits for summer wear the chances are that women would have them made to order rather than face a summer without them. Taffeta makes a crisp, cool, smart and often inexpensive suit that may be made more or less dressy, according to the accessories worn with it and is most practical and comfortable for warm weather. As there is a perennial demand for it we may count on new designs each season, at least until some other silk displaces taffeta. But all the new weaves are of a totally different character and cannot rival a silk to which they bear no likeness, so the taffeta suits continue to fill their own particular niche. Suits of silk jersey and the latest arrivals, made of the lightest weight in tricolette, may come to divide honors with taffeta suits when they are as well known.

Navy blue is as much a favorite in silk as in wool and the suit at the left of the two shown above is in this color. Its skirt is cut with a slight inward slope toward the bottom and is plain. The coat is straight but belted at the waistline with a wide belt of the taffeta, having a buckle at each side of the back. The side pieces are pointed at the bottom with pockets that are also pointed and shirred across the top, the shirring forming a narrow standing frill. There is a narrow turnover collar and deep cuffs.

The suit at the right is as plain as a serge suit but is, nevertheless, a smart model. The skirt, with overlapped seams at each side, begins narrowing toward the bottom just below the hips. Rows of buttons, covered with taffeta, are set on these overlapped seams, terminating about eight inches above the very narrow hem. Covered buttons finish the sleeves and ornament the lower part of the coat fronts and a narrow sash, made of the silk, is finished with tassels. The crepe de chine collar and vestee are in a light beige color.

Julia Bottomley

The New Linings.

Satin capes shown at the Paris openings were lined with a soft pile fabric like duvetyn. These must add materially to the warmth of the garment.

Hairdressing Style.

The vogue in apparel along the directoire line has made the way for a new mode in hairdressing and there is much evidence of a return of the banded Greek and Roman hair arrangement, though, of course, in a modernized form.

For Worn Linings.

When the lining next to the collar of your coat or wrap begins to show signs of wear, get a few inches of wide silk military braid, matching the color, and sew it neatly over the worn part. By pulling a thread at the edge of the braid it can be made to fit perfectly smooth. Bloomers of crepe de chine, satin and silk jersey are becoming more and more popular for the narrow skirts of spring suits.

Have "V" Collar.

The new georgette blouses have a "V" and collar entirely independent of each other this year, and for the lady with the fattish rise between shoulders this is a godsend.

BRACE UP!

The man or woman with weak kidneys is half crippled. A lame, stiff back, with its constant, dull ache and sharp, shooting twinges, makes the simplest task a burden. Headaches, dizzy spells, urinary disorders and an "all worn out" feeling are daily sources of distress. Don't neglect kidney weakness and risk gravel, dropsy or Bright's disease. Get a box of Doan's Kidney Pills today. They have helped people the world over.

A Maryland Case

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A Good Audience.

Little Elizabeth studies music, also elocution, and it means much studying and practicing. It is sometimes hard to impress on her the importance of "practice makes perfect"; however, she is faithful. Edith, her playmate, is not burdened with these duties and often waits patiently while Elizabeth "practices."

To encourage Elizabeth, her mother remarked, "Won't it be a terrible thing for Edith to grow up and not know how to play the piano?" Elizabeth sighed and answered, "Well, one thing, Edith is going to grow up to be a mighty good audience."

Looked Like Melodrama.

When Lewis Waller was playing Charles Surface in "The School for Scandal" he unfortunately stumbled just before making his entrance, and his right hand was thrust into a pot of red paint, with which a scenic artist had been retouching some of the "props." There was no time to lose, so Mr. Waller walked on the stage with his hand apparently dripping with gore, as from some hideous crime. The audience imagined the actor had injured himself, until his uncontrollable mirth reassured them.

Like Mother.

Mrs. Flatbush—So this is the new baby?

Mr. Bensonhurst—Yes, that's our new little angel.

"Who does the dear take after?"

"Oh, her mother. The likeness is very striking."

"I can't see it."

"Well, watch her awhile and you'll see she keeps her mouth going all the time without saying anything."—Yonkers Statesman.

Terrifying.

"A lady of forbidding countenance?"

"Yes, even the automobiles pull up when she crosses the street."—Louis.

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The Main Point.

He—I never kissed any girl but you.

She—Never mind about your past performances. What's your intention in the future?—Boston Transcript.

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