

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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BARTON MAKES HIS FIRST FORAY INTO THE WORLD AS A STUDENT IN MICHAEL HACKETT'S ACADEMY

Synopsis.—Barton Baynes, an orphan, goes to live with his uncle, Peabody Baynes, and his Aunt Deel on a farm on Rattleroad, in a neighborhood called Lickitysplit, about the year 1826. He meets Sally Dunkelberg, about his own age, but socially of a class above the Bayneses, and is fascinated by her pretty face and fine clothes. Barton also meets Rovin' Kate, known in the neighborhood as the "Silent Woman." Amos Grimshaw, a young son of the richest man in the township, is a visitor at the Baynes home and Rovin' Kate tells the boys' fortunes, predicting a bright future for Barton and death on the gallows for Amos. Barton meets Silas Wright, Jr., a man prominent in public affairs, who evinces much interest in the boy. Barton learns of the power of money when Mr. Grimshaw threatens to take the Baynes farm unless a note which he holds is paid. Now in his sixteenth year, Barton, on his way to the post office at Canton, meets a stranger and they ride together. They encounter a highwayman, who shoots and kills the stranger. Barton's horse throws him and runs away. As the murderer bends over the stranger Barton throws a stone, which he observes wounds the thief, who makes off at once.

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

The beauty of that perfect day was upon her. I remember that her dress was like the color of its fireweed blossoms and that the blue of its sky was in her eyes and the yellow of the sunlight in her hair and the red of its clover in her cheeks. I remember how the August breezes played with her hair, flinging its golden curving strands about her neck and shoulders so that it touched my face, now and then, as we walked! Somehow the rustle of her dress started a strange vibration in my spirit. I put my arm around her waist and she put her arm around mine as we ran along. A curious feeling came over me. I stopped and looked at my arm.

"It's very warm!" I said as I picked a stalk of fireweed.

"What was there about the girl which so thrilled me with happiness?"

She turned away and felt the ribbon by which her hair was gathered at the back of her head.

After a moment of silence I ventured: "I guess you've never fallen in love."

"Yes, I have."

"Who with?"

"I don't think I dare tell you," she answered, slowly, looking down as she walked.

"I'll tell you who I love if you wish," I said.

"Who?"

"You." I whispered the word and was afraid she would laugh at me, but she didn't.

We stopped and listened to the song of a bird—I do not remember what bird it was—and then she whispered: "Will you love me always and forever?"

"Yes," I answered in the careless way of youth.

She stopped and looked into my eyes and I looked into hers.

"May I kiss you?" I asked, and afraid, with cheeks burning.

She turned away and answered: "I guess you can if you want to."

Now I seem to be in Aladdin's tower and to see her standing so red and graceful and innocent in the sunlight, and that strange fire kindled by our kisses warms my blood again.

That night I heard a whispered conference below after I had gone upstairs. I knew that something was coming and wondered what it might be.

I remember the sad excitement of that ride to the village and all the words of advice and counsel spoken by my aunt.

I remember looking in vain for Sally as we passed the Dunkelbergs'. I remember my growing loneliness as the day wore on and how Aunt Deel stood silently buttoning my coat, with tears rolling down her cheeks while I leaned back upon the gate in front of the Hackett house, on Ashery lane, trying to act like a man and rather ashamed of my poor success. Uncle Peabody stood surveying the sky in silence with his back toward us. He turned and nervously blew out his breath. His lips trembled, a little as he said:

"I dunno but what it's goin' to rain."

I watched them as they walked to the tavern sheds, both looking down at the ground and going rather unsteadily. Oh, the look of that beloved pair as they walked away from me!—the look of their leaning heads! Their silence and the sound of their footsteps are, somehow, a part of the picture which has hung all these years in my memory.

Sally Dunkelberg and her mother came along and said that they were glad I had come to school. I could not talk to them, and seeing my trouble they went on, Sally waving her hand to me as they turned the corner below. I felt ashamed of myself. Suddenly I heard the door open behind me and the voice of Mr. Hackett:

"Bart," he called, "I've a friend here who has something to say to you. Come in."

I turned and went into the house.

"Away with sadness—liddle buck!" he exclaimed as he took his violin from its case while I sat wiping my eyes.

"Away with sadness! She often raps at my door, and while I try not to be

should. You remember Rovin' Kate?" he asked by and by.

"Yes," I answered.

"Some day when you're a little older I'll tell you her story an' you'll see what happens when men an' women break the law o' God. Here's Mr. Wright's letter. Aunt Deel asked me to give it to you to keep. You're old enough now an' you'll be goin' away to school before long, I guess."

I took the letter and read again the superscription on its envelope:

"To Master Barton Baynes:

(To be opened when he leaves home to go to school.)"

I put it away in the pine box with leather hinges on its cover which Uncle Peabody had made for me; and wondered again what it was all about, and again that night I broke camp and moved further into the world over the silent trails of knowledge.

Uncle Peabody went away for a few days after the harvesting. He had gone afoot, I knew not where. He returned one afternoon in a buggy with the great Michael Hackett of the Canton academy. Hackett was a big, brawny, red-haired, kindly Irishman with a merry heart and tongue, the latter having a touch of the brogue of the green isle which he had never seen, for he had been born in Massachusetts and had got his education in Harvard. He was then a man of forty.

"You're coming to me this fall," he said as he put his hand on my arm and gave me a little shake. "Lad! you've got a pair of shoulders! Ye shall live in my house an' help with the chores if ye wish to."

"That'll be grand," said Uncle Peabody, but, as to myself, just then, I knew not what to think of it.

[END OF BOOK ONE.]

BOOK TWO

Which Is the Story of the Principal Witness.

CHAPTER VIII.

In Which I Meet Other Great Men.

It was a sunny day late in September on which Aunt Deel and Uncle Peabody took me and my little pine chest with all my treasures in it to the village where I was to go to school and live with the family of Mr. Michael Hackett, the schoolmaster.

I remember the sad excitement of that ride to the village and all the words of advice and counsel spoken by my aunt.

I remember looking in vain for Sally as we passed the Dunkelbergs'. I remember my growing loneliness as the day wore on and how Aunt Deel stood silently buttoning my coat, with tears rolling down her cheeks while I leaned back upon the gate in front of the Hackett house, on Ashery lane, trying to act like a man and rather ashamed of my poor success. Uncle Peabody stood surveying the sky in silence with his back toward us. He turned and nervously blew out his breath. His lips trembled, a little as he said:

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"Away with sadness! She often raps at my door, and while I try not to be

rude, I always pretend to be very busy. Just a light word o' recognition by way o' common politeness! Then laugh, if ye can an' do it quickly, lad, an' she will pass on."

The last words were spoken in a whisper, with one hand on my breast.

He turned the strings and played the "Fisher's Hornpipe." What a romp of merry music filled the house! I had never heard the like and was soon smiling at him as he played. His bow and fingers flew in the wild frolic of the "Devil's Dream." It led me out of my sadness into a world all new to me.

"Now, God bless your soul, boy!" he exclaimed, by and by, as he put down his instrument. "We shall have a good time together—that we will. Not a stroke o' work this day! Come, I have a guide here that will take us down to the land o' the fairies."

Then with his microscope he showed me into the wonder world of littleness of which I had no knowledge.

"The microscope is like the art o' the teacher," he said. "I've known a good teacher to take a brain no bigger than a fly's foot an' make it visible to the naked eye."

One of the children, of which there were four in the Hackett home, called us to supper. Mrs. Hackett, a stout woman with a red and kindly face, sat at one end of the table, and between them were the children—Mary, a pretty daughter of seventeen years; Maggie, a six-year-old; Ruth, a delicate girl of seven, and John, a noisy, red-faced boy of five. The chairs were of plain wood—like the kitchen chairs of today. In the middle of the table was an empty one—painted green. Before he sat down Mr. Hackett put his hand on the back of this chair and said:

"A merry heart to you, Michael Henry."

I wondered at the meaning of this, but dared not to ask. The oldest daughter acted as a kind of moderator with the others.

"Mary is the constable of this house, with power to arrest and hale into court for undue haste or rebellion or impoliteness," Mr. Hackett explained.

"I believe that Sally Dunkelberg is your friend," he said to me presently.

"Yes, sir," I answered.

"A fine slip of a girl that and a born scholar. I saw you look at her as the Persian looks at the rising sun."

I blushed and Mary and her mother and the boy John looked at me and laughed.

"Puer pulcherrime!" Mr. Hackett exclaimed with a kindly smile.

Uncle Peabody would have called it a "stout snag." The schoolmaster had hauled it out of his brain very deftly and chucked it down before me in a kind of challenge.

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"You shall know in a week, my son," he answered. "I shall put you into the Latin class Wednesday morning, and God help you to like it as well as you like Sally."

Again they laughed and again I blushed.

"Hold up yer head, my brave lad," he went on. "Ye've a perfect right to like Sally if ye've a heart to."

"A lad in his teens will never know beans if he hasn't an eye for the girls."

It was a merry supper, and when it ended Mr. Hackett rose and took the green chair from the table, exclaiming:

"Michael Henry, God bless you!"

Then he kissed his wife and said: "Maggie, you wild rose of Erin! I've been all day in the study. I must take a walk or I shall get an exalted abdomen. One is badly beaten in the race o' life when his abdomen gets ahead of his toes. Children, keep our young friend happy here until I come back, and mind you, don't forget the good fellow in the green chair."

Mary helped her mother with the dishes, while I sat with a book by the fireside. Soon Mrs. Hackett and the children came and sat down with me.

"Let's play backgammon," Mary proposed.

"I don't want to," said John.

"Don't forget Michael Henry," she reminded.

"Who is Michael Henry?" I asked.

"Sure, he's the boy that has never been born," said Mrs. Hackett. "He was to be the biggest and noblest of them—kind an' helpful an' cheery hearted an' beloved o' God above all the others. We try to live up to him."

He seemed to me a very strange and wonderful creature—this invisible occupant of the green chair.

I know now what I knew not then that Michael Henry was the spirit of their home—an ideal of which the empty green chair was a constant reminder.

We played backgammon and "old maid" and "everlasting" until Mr. Hackett returned.

The sealed envelope which Mr. Wright had left at our home, a long time before that day, was in my pocket. At last the hour had come when I could open it and read the message of which I had thought much and with a growing interest.

I rose and said that I should like to go to my room. Mr. Hackett lighted a candle and took me upstairs to a little room where my chest had been

deposited. There were in the room a bed, a chair, a portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte and a small table on which were a dictionary, a Bible and a number of schoolbooks.

"These were Mary's books," said Mr. Hackett. "I told your uncle that ye could use them an' welcome."

I sat down and opened the sealed envelope with trembling hands and found in it this brief note:

"Dear Partner: I want you to ask the wisest man you know to explain these words to you. I suggest that you commit them to memory and think often of their meaning. They are from Job:

"His bones are full of the sins of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust."

"I believe that they are the most impressive in all the literature I have read."

"Yours truly,
"SILAS WRIGHT, JR."

I read the words over and over again, but knew not their meaning. Sadly and slowly I got ready for bed. The noises of the village challenged my ear after I had put out my candle. There were many barking dogs. Some horsemen passed, with a creaking of saddle leather, followed by a wagon. Soon I heard running feet and eager voices. I rose and looked out of the open window. Men were hurrying down the street with lanterns.

"He's the son o' Ben Grimshaw," I heard one of them saying. "They caught him back in the south woods."

I went with him while he fed his chickens and two small shot.

yesterday. The sheriff said that he tried to run away when he saw 'em coming."

What was the meaning of this? What had Amos Grimshaw been doing? I trembled as I got back into bed—I cannot even now explain why, but long ago I gave up trying to fathom the depths of the human spirit with an infinite sea beneath it crossed by subtle tides and currents. We see only the straws on the surface.

I was up at daylight and Mr. Hackett came to my door while I was dressing.

"A merry day to you!" he exclaimed. "I'll await you below and introduce you to the humble herds and flocks of a schoolmaster."

I went with him while he fed his chickens and two small shot. I milked the cow for him, and together we drove her back to the pasture. Then we split some wood and filled the boxes by the fireplace and the kitchen stove and raked up the leaves in the dooryard and whetted them away.

"Now you know the duties o' your office," said the schoolmaster as we went in to breakfast.

We sat down at the table with the family and I drew out my letter from the senator and gave it to Mr. Hackett to read.

"The senator! God prosper him! I heard that he came on the Plattsburg stage last night," he said as he began the reading—an announcement which caused me and the children to clap our hands with joy.

Mr. Hackett thoughtfully repeated the words from Job with a most impressive intonation.

He passed the letter back to me and said:

"All true! I have seen it sinking into the bones o' the young and I have seen it lying down with the aged in the dust o' their graves. It is a big book—the one we are now opening. God help us! It has more pages than all the days o' your life. Just think o' your body. A brave and tender youth! It is like a sponge. How it takes things in an' holds 'em an' feeds upon 'em! A part o' every apple ye eat sinks down into yer blood an' bones. Ye can't get it out. It's the same way with the books ye read an' the thoughts ye enjoy. They go down into yer bones an' ye can't get 'em out. That's why I like to think o' Michael Henry. His food is good thoughts and his wine is laughter. I had a long visit with M. H. last night when ye were all in bed. His face was a chunk o' laughter. Oh, what a limb he is! I wish I could tell ye all the good things he said."

Barton and the Hackets hear some news that startles them and sets Barton to worrying about a secret that he shares with no one. Don't miss the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



Economy Corner

To wash all wool flannels, sweaters and blankets, (by a method that will prevent them from shrinking, is the ambition of every careful housewife. It is said that this may be accomplished by washing them in cold water in which borax and white soap have been dissolved. The proportion seems to be about a level tablespoonful of borax and one-fourth of a cake of soap to two or three gallons of water, depending upon the degree of hardness of the water. To wash a sweater, use enough water to cover it generously. Let the sweater soak an hour, then squeeze it out, but do not wring it. If necessary put through a second water which has been softened with borax and white soap. Afterward rinse very thoroughly in several cold waters and put through a wringer. Then pull it into shape and dry it. Blankets and flannels may be successfully washed in this way.

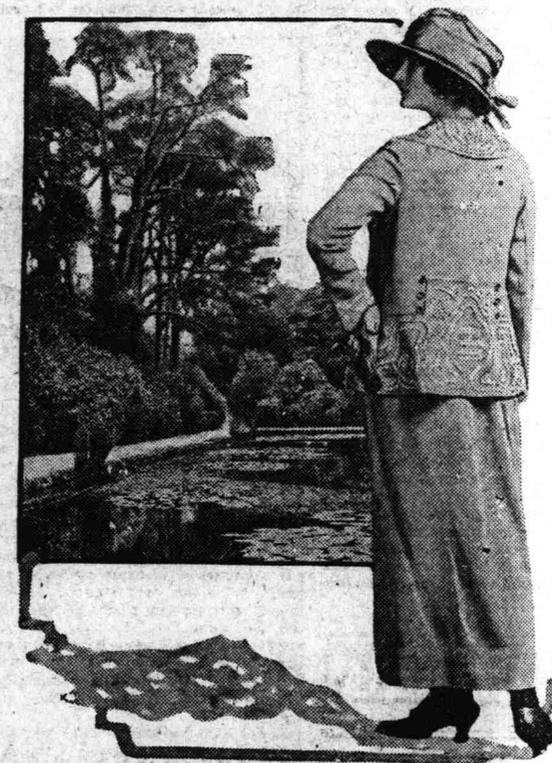
Sounding the Quaint Note.

There is a note of quaintness in the simpler summery frocks this year chintzes in small patterned designs developed in many alluringly demure styles, one with tiny bright red flowers having a little white dotted center, bibbed apron appliqued with red embroidery. Hats are made of fabric to match, and one model with poke bonnet trend is equipped with long green earrings. Peasant frocks in natural or dark colored linens apply border designs of two colors. Simple morning frocks of gingham are ruffled in white and embroidered in wool, and chemise frocks of handkerchief linen also have elaborate embroideries in worsted.

Now the Hemless Skirt.

The fads and fancies of fashion sponsors for the hemless skirt which appears in increasing numbers as the spring season advances. In the beginning of the season the hemless skirt was confined exclusively to separate skirts made in bordered fabrics.

Spring Suits that Appeal



Spring suits make their appeal to us from new angles this season, for there are almost none among them that so much as suggest severity of line or finish. They are easy and graceful and decidedly chic. They look thoroughly comfortable for summer time, and rely upon the vestee to provide warmth for crisp spring days. They are more or less ornamented with narrow, flat or soutache braid, or with long and short stitch embroidery or couching. Among decorations, embroidered band effects are in great demand. Crisscross tucks or narrow silk braid, faultlessly stitched on, in a crisscross band pattern, are among the details that have captivated the devotees of tailored clothes everywhere.

These decorations of embroidery, pin tucks and beautifully stitched braid are among the luxuries, for they add as much or more to the cost of a suit as is asked for the goods it is made of. Some women who are clever with the needle buy a plain, well-made suit and embroider or braid it to suit themselves. This lifts it out of the ordinary plane among those aristocrats in street suits that are priced at something like a hundred dollars or more—usually more. These high prices are explained as the result of the great advance in the price of labor. If this is the case it is some consolation to consider that those who do the work are being well paid for it.

The suit pictured is the most popular of new models and is of beige-colored tricot. The skirt is without decoration and has a four-inch hem. Some tache braid, stitched on one edge forms the attractive ornamental band that enriches the coat. It widens at the center where three small bone buttons are set in each side of the center panel. The round collar and braided sleeves are embellished with a braided pattern.

Julia Bottomley

Jet Buckles, White Shoes.

White buckskin shoes shown for the South show jet buckles of various sorts. Usually they are very effective. One method of mounting the buckle is to place it on a foundation composed of closely placed black ribbon, which extends just far enough to give the buckle a little backing. Sometimes, too, white satin evening slippers show jet buckles of small jet buttons fastened against the tongue section or edge of the shoe as it slopes up at the instep.