

THE LIGHT IN THE CLEARING

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

By IRVING BACHELLER

AUTHOR OF
"MIN HOLDEN, DICK AND L. DARREL OF THE BLESSED ISLES,
KEEPING UP WITH LIZZIE, ETC., ETC.

Oh, yes, indeed, Washington was a fair of beauty and gallantry those days. I saw it all. I have spent many years in the capital, and I tell you the girls of that time had manners and knew how to wear their clothes, but again the magic of old memories kept my lady on her throne. There was one of them—just one of those others who, I sometimes thought, was almost as graceful and charming and noble-hearted as Sally, and she liked me, I know, but the ideal of my youth glowed in the light of the early morning, so to speak, and was brighter than all others. Above all, I had given my word to Sally, and—well, you know, the old-time Yankee of good stock was fairly steadfast, whatever else may be said of him—often a little too steadfast, as were Ben Grimshaw and Squire Fullerton.

The senator and I went calling that New Year's day. We saw all the great people and some of them were more cheerful than they had a right to be. It was a weakness of the time, I shall not go into details for fear of wandering too far from my main road. Let me step aside a moment to say, however, that there were two clouds in the sky of the Washington society of those days. One was strong drink and the other was the crude, rough-coated, aggressive democrat from the frontiers of the West. These latter were often seen in the holiday regalia of farm or village at fashionable functions. Some of them changed slowly, and by and by reached the stage of white linen and diamond breastpins and waistcoats of figured silk. It must be said, however, that their motives were always above their taste.

The winter wore away slowly in hard work. Mr. Van Buren came down to see the senator one day from his country seat on the Hudson. The president had been solicited to accept the nomination again. I know that Senator Wright strongly favored the plan but feared that the South would defeat him in convention, it being well known that Van Buren was opposed to the annexation of Texas. However, he advised his friend to make a fight for the nomination and this the latter resolved to do. Thenceforward until middle May I gave my time largely to the drafting of letters for the senator in Van Buren's behalf.

The time appointed for the convention in Baltimore drew near. One day



I Took the Stage to Baltimore Next Day.

the senator received an intimation that he would be put in nomination if Van Buren failed. Immediately he wrote to Judge Fine of Ogdenburg, chairman of the delegation from the northern district of New York, forbidding such use of his name on the ground that his acquiescence would involve disloyalty to his friend the ex-president.

He gave me leave to go to the convention on my way home to meet Sally. I had confided to Mrs. Wright the details of my little love affair—I had to—and she had shown a tender, sympathetic interest in the story.

The senator had said to me one day, with a gentle smile:

"Bart, you have business in Canton, I believe, with which trifling matters like the choice of a president and the Mexican question cannot be permitted to interfere. You must take time to spend a day or two at the convention in Baltimore on your way. . . . Report to our friend Fine, who will look after your comfort there. The experience ought to be useful to a young man who, I hope, will have work to do in future conventions."

I took the stage to Baltimore next day—the twenty-sixth of May. The convention thrilled me—the flags, the great crowd, the bands, the songs, the speeches, the cheering—I see and hear it all in my talk. The uproar lasted for twenty minutes when Van Buren's name was put in nomination.

Then the undercurrent! The South was against him as Wright had foreseen. The deep current of its power had undermined certain of the northern and western delegations. Ostensibly for Van Buren and stubbornly casting their ballots for him, they had voted for the two-thirds rule, which had accomplished his defeat before the

balloting began. It continued for two days without a choice. The enemy stood firm. After adjournment that evening many of the Van Buren delegates were summoned to a conference. I attended it with Judge Fine.

The ex-president had withdrawn and requested his friends in the convention to vote for Silas Wright. My emotions can be more readily imagined than described when I heard the shouts of enthusiasm which greeted my friend's name. Tears began to roll down my cheeks. Judge Fine lifted his hand. When order was at last restored he began:

"Gentlemen, as a friend of the learned senator and as a resident of the county which is the proud possessor of his home, your enthusiasm has a welcome sound to me; but I happen to know that Senator Wright will not allow his name to go before the convention."

He read the letter of which I knew. Mr. Benjamin F. Butler then said: "When that letter was written Senator Wright was not aware that Mr. Van Buren's nomination could not be accomplished, nor was he aware that his own nomination would be the almost unanimous wish of this convention. I have talked with the leading delegates from Missouri and Virginia today. They say that he can be nominated by acclamation. Is it possible that he—a strong party man—can resist this unanimous call of the party with whose help he has won immortal fame? No, it is not so. It cannot be so. We must dispatch a messenger to him by horse at once who shall take to him from his friend Judge Fine a frank statement of the imperious demand of this convention and a request that he telegraph a withdrawal of his letter in the morning."

The suggestion was unanimously approved and within an hour, mounted on one of the best horses in Maryland—so his groom informed me—I was on my way to Washington with the message of Judge Fine in my pocket. Yes, I had two days to spare on my schedule of travel and reckoned that, by returning to Baltimore next day I should reach Canton in good time.

It was the kind of thing that only a lithic, supple, strong-hearted lad such as I was in the days of my youth, could relish—speeding over a dark road by the light of the stars and a half-moon, with a horse that loved to kick up a wind. My brain was in a fever, for the notion had come to me that I was making history.

The lure of fame and high place hurried me on. With the senator in the presidential chair I should be well started in the highway of great success. Then Mr. H. Dunkelberg might think me better than the legacy of Benjamin Grimshaw. A relay awaited me twenty-three miles down the road.

Well, I reached Washington very sore, but otherwise in good form, soon after daybreak. I was trembling with excitement when I put my horse in the stable and rang the bell at our door. It seemed to me that I was crossing the divide between big and little things. A few steps more and I should be looking down into the great valley of the future. Yet, now that I was there, I began to lose confidence.

The butler opened the door. Yes, the senator was up and had just returned from a walk and was in his study. I found him there.

"Well, Bart, how does this happen?" he asked.

"It's important business," I said, as I presented the letter.

Something in his look and manner as he calmly adjusted his glasses and read the letter of Judge Fine brought the blood to my face. It seemed to puncture my balloon, so to speak, and I was falling toward the earth and so swiftly my head swam. He laid the letter on his desk and, without looking up and as coolly as if he were asking for the change of a dollar, queried:

"Well, Bart, what do you think he had better do about it?"

"I—I was hoping—you—you would take it," I stammered.

"That's because the excitement of the convention is on you," he answered. "Let us look at the compass. They have refused to nominate Mr. Van Buren because he is opposed to the annexation of Texas. On that subject the will of the convention is now clear. It is possible that they would nominate me. We don't know about that, we never shall know. If they did, and I accepted, what would be expected of me is also clear. They would expect me to abandon my principles and that course of conduct which I conceive to be best for the country. Therefore I should have to accept it under false pretenses and take their yoke upon me. Would you think the needle pointed that way?"

"No," I answered.

Immediately he turned to his desk and wrote the telegram which fixed his place in history. It said no.

Into the lives of few men has such a moment fallen. I looked at him with a feeling of awe. What sublime calmness and serenity was in his face! As if it were a mere detail in the work of the day, and without a moment's faltering, he had declined a crown, for he would surely have been nominated and elected. He rose and stood looking out of the open window. Always I think of him standing there with the morning sunlight falling upon his face and shoulders. He had observed my emotion and I think it had touched him a little. There was a moment of

silence. A curious illusion came to me then, for it seemed as if I heard the sound of distant music. Looking thoughtfully out of the window he asked:

"Bart, do you know when our first fathers turned out of the trail of the beast and found the long road of humanity? I think it was when they discovered the compass in their hearts."

So now at last we have come to that high and lonely place, where we may look back upon the toilsome, adventurous way we have traveled with the aid of the candle and the compass. Now let us stop a moment to rest and to think. How sweet the air is here! The night is falling. I see the stars in the sky.

Just below me is the valley of Eternal silence. You will understand my haste now. I have sought only to do justice to my friend and to give my country a name, long neglected, but equal in glory to those of Washington and Lincoln.

Come, let us take one last look together down the road we have traveled, now dim in the evening shadows. Scattered along it are the little houses of the poor of which I have written. See the lights in the windows—the lights that are shining into the souls of the young—the eager, open, expectant, welcoming souls of the young—and the light carries many things, but best of all a respect for the old, unchanging way of the compass. After all that is the end and aim of the whole matter—believe me.

My life has lengthened into these days when most of our tasks are accomplished by machinery. We try to make men by the thousand, in vast educational machines, and no longer by the one of old. It was the loving, forgiving, forbearing, patient, ceaseless toil of mother and father on the tender soul of childhood which quickened that inextinguishable sense of responsibility to God and man in these people whom I now leave to the judgment of my countrymen.

I have lived to see the ancient plan of kingship, for self-protection, coming back into the world. It demands that the will and conscience of every individual shall be regulated and controlled by some concealed prince, backed by an army. It cannot fail, I foresee, to accomplish such devastation in the human spirit as shall imperil the dearest possession of man.

If one is to follow the compass his can have but one king—his God.

I am near the end. I rode back to Baltimore that forenoon. They had nominated Mr. Polk of Tennessee for president and Silas Wright for vice president, the latter by acclamation. I knew that Wright would decline the honor, as he did.

I hurried northward to keep my appointment with Sally. The boats were slowed by fog. At Albany I was a day behind my schedule. I should have only an hour's leeway if the boats on the upper lakes and the stage from Plattsburg were on time. I feared to trust them. So I caught the west-bound train and reached Utica three hours late. There I bought a good horse and his saddle and bridle and hurried up the north road. When he was near spent I traded him for a well-knit Morgan mare up in the little village of Sandy Creek. Oh, I knew a good horse as well as the next man and a better one than she I never owned—never. I was back in my saddle at six in the afternoon and stopped for feed and an hour's rest at nine and rode on, through the night. I reached the hamlet of Richville soon after daybreak and put out for a rest of two hours. I could take it easy then. At seven o'clock the mare and I started again, well fed and eager to go on.

It was a summer morning that shortens the road—even that of the young lover. Its air was sweet with the breath of the meadows. The daisies and the clover and the cornflowers and the wild roses seemed to be waving a welcome to me, and the thorn trees—shapely ornament of my native hills—were in blossom. A cloud of pigeons swept across the blue deep above my head. The great choir of the fields sang to me—bobolinks, song-sparrows, meadowlarks, bluebirds, warblers, wrens, and far away in the edge of a spruce thicket I heard the flute of the white-throated sparrow.

I bathed at a brook in the woods and put on a clean silk shirt and tie out of my saddlebags. I rode slowly then to the edge of the village of Canton and turned at the bridge and took the river road, although I had time to spare. How my heart was beating as I neared the familiar scene! The river slowed its pace there, like a discerning traveler, to enjoy the beauty of its shores. Smooth and silent was the water and in it were the blue of the sky and the feathery shadow-springs of cedar and tamarack and the reflected blossoms of iris and meadow rue. It was a lovely scene.

There was the pine, but where was my lady? I dismounted and tied my mare and looked at my watch. It lacked twenty minutes to eleven. She would come—I had no doubt of it. I washed my hands and face and neck in the cool water. Suddenly I heard a voice I knew singing: "Barney Leave the Girls Alone." I turned and saw—your mother, my son. (These last lines were dictated by his son.) She was in the stern of a birch canoe, all dressed in white with roses in her hair. I raised my hat and she threw a kiss at me. Old Kate sat in the bow waving her handkerchief. They stopped and Sally asked in a tone of playful seriousness:

"Young man, why have you come here?"

"To get you," I answered.

"What do you want of me?" She was looking at her face in the water.

"I want to marry you," I answered bravely.

"Then you may help me ashore if you please. I am in my best, white slippers and you are to be very careful!"

Beautiful! She was the spirit of the fields of June then and always.

I helped her ashore and held her in my arms and, you know, the lips have a way of speaking then in the old, convincing, final argument of love. They left no doubt in our hearts, my son.

"When do you wish to marry me?" she whispered.

"As soon as possible, but my pay is only sixty dollars a month now."

"We shall make it do," she answered. "My mother and father and your aunt and uncle and the Hackets and the minister and a number of our friends are coming in a fleet of boats."

"We are prepared either for a picnic or a wedding," was the whisper of Kate.

"Let's make it both," I proposed to Sally.

"Surely there couldn't be a better place than here under the big pine—it's so smooth and soft and shady," said she.



"Then You May Help Me Ashore, if You Please."

"Nor could there be a better day or better company," I urged, for I was not sure that she would agree.

The boats came along. Sally and I waved a welcome from the bank and she merrily proclaimed:

"It's to be a wedding."

Then a cheer from the boats, in which I joined.

I shall never forget how, when the company had landed and the greetings were over, Uncle Peabody approached your mother and said:

"Say, Sally, I'm goin' to plant a kiss on both o' them red cheeks o' yours, an' do it deliberate, too."

He did it and so did Aunt Deel and old Kate, and I think that, next to your mother and me, they were the happiest people at the wedding.

There is a lonely grave up in the hills—that of the stranger who died long ago on Battleroad. One day I found old Kate sitting beside it and on a stone lately erected there was the name, Enoch Rone.

"It is very sorrowful," she whispered. "He was trying to find me when he died."

We walked on in silence while I recalled the circumstances. How strange that those tales of blood and lawless daring which Kate had given to Amos Grimshaw had led to the slaying of her own son! Yet, so it happened, and the old wives will tell you the story up there in the hills.

The play ends just as the night is falling with Kate and me entering the little home, so familiar now, where she lives and is ever welcome with Aunt Deel and Uncle Peabody. The latter meets us at the door and is saying in a cheerful voice:

"Come in to supper, you rovers. How solemn ye look! Say, if you expect Sally and me to do all the laughing here you're mistaken. There's a lot of it to be done right now, an' it's time you 'fined in. We ain't done nothin' but laugh since we got up, an' we're in need o' help. What's the matter, Kate? Look up at the light in God's window. How bright it shines tonight! When I feel bad I always look at the stars."

(THE END.)

RYAN.

W. F. Drummy is dangerously ill at his home southeast of town. Rev. W. J. Drummy and Dr. Drummy of Illinois are at his bedside.

Miss Hogan, who teaches in St. Xavier's school at Manchester, visited her cousin, Mildred Harrington, over Sunday.

The teachers from Ryan and vicinity were in attendance at the meeting at Waterloo last week.

E. E. Coakley returned home after spending a few days in Chicago.

J. E. McEllitt, who has been in Stuttgart, Ark., returned home during the week.

P. F. Drummy had business in Manchester Monday.

Mrs. W. H. Ward was in Dubuque Friday.

R. M. Merrian was a business visitor in Marion, one day during the week.

Mr. and Mrs. James Duncan returned from Cedar Rapids and report their son, Gordon, who underwent an operation for appendicitis, as doing nicely.

Mrs. Burke of Montpelier spent a few days last week with her daughter and family, Mrs. Dan Lyness.

Mrs. Sarah Connor is visiting friends in the state of Washington.

John Brayton of Manchester had business here during the week.

J. E. Cody, who is starting a new residence in the north part of town, has the foundation begun. Contractor White of Delhi is doing the work.

Two gentlemen from Manchester were here Sunday in the interest of the K. C. Council.

Misses Foley and Turner were elected teachers in the Public school for the coming year.

Rev. Mr. Melchert was a business visitor in Chicago last week.

Birnadene Duggan spent Sunday with home folks.

A nurse from Waterloo came Saturday evening to care for W. F. Drummy.

John Britt from near Hopkinton had business in Ryan Saturday.

Henry Brayton and family were in Spring Branch during the week, called there on account of the death of Mr. Brayton's aged mother.

State of Ohio, City of Toledo, Lucas County, ss. Frank J. Cheney makes oath that he is senior partner of the firm of F. J. Cheney & Co., doing business in the City of Toledo, County and State aforesaid, and that said firm will pay the sum of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS for each and every case of Catarrh that cannot be cured by the use of HALL'S CATARRH CURE. FRANK J. CHENEY sworn to before me and subscribed in my presence, this 8th day of December, A. D. 1888. A. W. GLEASON, (Seal) Notary Public. Hall's Catarrh Cure is taken internally and acts through the blood on the mucous surfaces of the system. Send for testimonials, free. F. J. CHENEY & CO., Toledo, O. Sold by all druggists, 75c. Hall's Family Pills for constipation.

Life's Minor Worries. Frequently a woman worries a great deal over the question of calling on another woman who doesn't care in the least whether she calls or not.—Boston Transcript.

Valuable African Tree. A tree known as the shea is beginning to attract commercial attention in Western Africa. It supplies the natives not only with nuts, which they highly prize, but with a butter that may become an article of commercial importance. It is already exported to Europe, where makers of artificial butter find use for it.

Secret of Concentration. One reason for the remarkable powers of concentration possessed by some is the intense love of their work. Into which they throw themselves with such ardor as to forget everything else about them. And this, after all, is the secret of all success—to forget oneself in one's work and to become a part of that work itself and so achieve "forgetting and forgot" of all about except the one task to which force, physical and mental, has been brought.

How Diphtheria is Contracted. One often hears the expression "My child caught a severe cold which developed into diphtheria," when the truth was that the cold had simply left the little one particularly susceptible to the wandering diphtheria germ. If your child has a cold when diphtheria is prevalent you should take him out of school and keep him off the street until fully recovered, as there is a hundred times more danger of his taking diphtheria when he has a cold. When Chamberlain's Cough Remedy is given it quickly cures the cold and lessens the danger of diphtheria or any other germ being contracted. For sale by A. C. Philipp.

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