

A Man for the Ages

A Story of the Builders of Democracy

By Irving Bacheller

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CHAPTER XX—Continued.

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 man 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 Fredeberg. "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 his-

tory. 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 Fredeberg. He 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 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 ingenious and noble ardor. Some of these Anacreontics 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-gearred 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 broad-cloth 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 fathot 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 bulwark 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

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Harry Told of His Adventures in the Great Swamps.

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 that the voice of the people in any one generation may or may not be inspired, but that the voice of the best man of all ages, expressing their sense of justice and of right, in the law, is and must be the voice of God. The spirit and body of its decrees are as indestructible as the throne of Heaven. You can overthrow them but until their power is re-established, as surely it will be, you will live in savagery."

"You do not deny the right of revolution,"

"No, but I can see no excuse for it in America. It has remained for us to add to the body of the law the idea that men are created free and equal. The lack of the saving principle in the codes of the world has been the great cause of injustice and oppression."

Honest Abe rose and walked up and down the room in silence for a moment. Then he added:

"Choate phrased it well when he said: 'We should beware of awaking the tremendous divinites of change from their long sleep. Let us think of that when we consider what we shall do with the evils that afflict us.'"

The boy Joe had been deeply interested in this talk.

"If you'll lend me a book, I'd like to begin studying," he said.

"There's time enough for that," said Lincoln. "First, I want you to understand what the law is and what the lawyer should be. You wouldn't want to be a pettifogger. Choate is the right model. He has a dignity suited to the greatness of his chosen master. They say that before a justice of the peace, in a room no bigger than a shoemaker's shop, his work is done with the same dignity and care that he would show in the supreme court of Massachusetts. A newspaper says that in a dog case at Beverly he treated the dog as if he were a lion and the crabbed old squire with the consideration due a chief justice."

"He knows how to handle the English language," Samson observed.

"He got that by reading. He is the best read man at the American bar and the best Bible student. There's a lot of work ahead of you, Joe, before you are a lawyer, and when you're admitted success comes only of the capacity for work. Brougham wrote the peroration of his speech in defense of Queen Caroline nineteen times."

"I want to be a great orator," the boy exclaimed with engaging frankness.

"Then you must remember that character is the biggest part of it," Honest Abe declared. "Great thoughts come out of a great character and only out of that. They will come even if you have little learning and none of the graces which attract the eye. But you must have a character that is ever speaking, even when your lips are silent. It must show in your life and fill the spaces between your words. It will help you to choose and charge them with the love of great things that carry conviction."

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When the latter had left for his lodgings and Joe and his mother had gone to bed, Samson told Harry the details of his visit to Chicago.

"She may have taken the disease and died with it before now," said the young man. "I'll be on my way to Honey Creek in the morning."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"I remember, when I was a boy over in Gentryville, a shaggy, plain-dressed man rode up to the door one day. He had a cheerful, kindly face. His character began to speak to us before he opened his mouth to ask for a drink of water.

"I don't know who you are," my father said. "But I'd like it awful well if you'd light and talk to us." He did and we didn't know till he had gone that he was the governor of the state. A good character shines like a candle on a dark night. You can't mistake it. A firefly can't hold his light long enough to compete with it.

"Webster said in the Knapp trial: 'There is no evil that we cannot either face or fly from but the consciousness of duty disregarded.'

"A great truth like that makes wonderful music on the lips of a sincere man. An orator must be a lover and discoverer of such unwritten laws."

It was nearing midnight when they heard footsteps on the board walk in front of the house. In a moment Harry Needles entered in cavalry uniform with fine top boots and silver spurs, erect as a young Indian brave and bronzed by tropic suns.

"Hello!" he said as he took off his belt and clanking saber. "I hang up my sword. I have had enough of war."

He had ridden across country from the boat landing and, arriving so late, had left his horse at a livery stable.

"I'm lucky to find you and Abe and Joe all up and waiting for me," he said as he shook their hands. "How's mother?"

"I'm well," Sarah called from the top of the stairway. "I'll be down in a minute."

For an hour or more they sat by the fireside while Harry told of his adventures in the great swamps of southern Florida.

"I've done my share of the fighting," he said at length. "I'm going north tomorrow to find Bim and her mother."

"I shall want you to serve a complaint on one Lionel Davis," said Mr. Lincoln.

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