

# A Man for the Ages

A Story of the Builders of Democracy

By IRVING BACHELLER

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CHAPTER XX—Continued.

They had a happy half-hour at the table. Mrs. Brimstead being in better spirits since her husband had got back to his farming. Annabel, her form filling with the grace and charm of womanhood, was there and more comely than ever.

"I heard him say once that when he saw a beautiful young face it reminded him of noble singing and the odor of growing corn," said Samson.

"Well, what's the news?" Samson asked.

"Nothing has happened since we saw you but the fall of El Dorado," Brimstead answered.

"There was the robbery of the mail stage last summer a few miles north of here," said Mrs. Brimstead. "Every smith of the mail was stolen. I guess that's the reason we haven't had no letter from Vermont in a year."

"Why don't you leave Joe here while you're gone to Chicago?" Annabel asked.

"It would help his education to rattle around with Robert and the girls," said Brimstead.

"Would you like to stay?" Samson asked.

"I wouldn't mind," said Josiah who, on the lonely prairie, had had few companions of his own age.

So it happened that Samson went on alone. Near the sycamore woods he came upon a gray-haired man lying by the roadside with a horse tethered near him. The stranger was sick with a fever. Samson got down from his horse.

"What can I do for you?" he asked. "The will of God," the stranger feebly answered. "I prayed for help and you have come. I am Peter Cartwright, the preacher. I was so sick and weak I had to get off my horse and lie down. If you had not come I think that I should have died here."

been terribly pecked up by a stiff-necked, rebellious wife. We'll stop there for a cup of tea and if she raises a rumpus you'll see me take her by the horns."

Mrs. Cawkins was a lean, sallow, stern-faced woman of some forty years with a face like bitter herbs; her husband a mild-mannered, shiftless man who, encouraged by Mr. Cartwright, had taken to riding through the upper counties as a preacher—a course of conduct which his wife heartily disapproved.

Solicited by her husband she sullenly made tea for the travelers. When it had been drunk the two preachers went in a corner of the room and Mr. Cartwright began to pray in a loud voice.

Mrs. Cawkins showed the table about and tipped over the chairs and dropped the rolling-pin as a counter-demonstration. The famous circuit rider being in no way put out by this, she dashed a dipper of cold water on the head of her husband. The praying stopped.

Mr. Cartwright rose from his knees and commanded her to resist. On her declaration that she would not he laid hold of the woman and forced her out of the door and closed and bolted it and resumed his praying.

Having recorded this remarkable incident in his diary, Samson writes: "Many of these ignorant people in the lonely prairie cabins are like children. Cartwright leads them on like a father and sometimes with the strong hand. If any of them deserve a spanking they get it. He and others like him have helped to keep the cabin people clean and going up hill instead of down. They have established schools and missions and scattered good books and comforted sorrows and kindled good desire in the hearts of the humble."

As they were leaving, Mr. Cawkins told them that the plague had broken out in the settlement on Honey creek, where the quarterly meeting was to be held, and that the people had been rapidly "dyin' off." Samson knew from this that the smallpox—a dreaded and terrible scourge of pioneer days—had come again.

"It's dangerous to go there," said Cawkins.

"Where is sorrow there is my proper place," Cartwright answered. "Those people need comfort and the help of God."

"I got a letter from a lady there," Cawkins went on. "As high as I can make out they need a minister. I can read print handy but writin' bothers me. You read it, brother."

Mr. Cartwright took the letter and read as follows: "Dear Sir: Mr. Barman gave me your name. We need a minister to comfort the sick and help bury the dead. It is a good deal to ask of you but if you feel like taking the chance of coming here I am sure you could do a lot of good. We have doctors enough and it seems a pity that the church should fail these people when they need it most. If you have the courage to come you would win the gratitude of many people. For a month I have been taking care of the sick and up to now no harm has come to me.

"Yours respectfully,  
"BIM KELSO."

"A man's heart deviseth his way but the Lord directeth his steps," said Cartwright. "For three days I have felt that He was leading me."

"I begin to think that He has been leading me," Samson declared. "Bim Kelso is the person I seek."

"You can see her but only at a distance," the doctor answered. "I must keep you at least twenty feet away from her. Come with me."

They proceeded to the stricken house. The doctor entered and presently Bim came out. Her eyes filled with tears and for a moment she could not speak.

"Why didn't you let me know of your troubles?" Samson asked.

"Early last summer I wrote a long letter to you," she answered.

"It didn't reach me. One day in June the stage was robbed of its mail down in Tazewell county. Your letter was probably on that stage."

"Harry's death was the last blow. I came out here to get away from my troubles—perhaps to die. I didn't care."

"Harry is not dead," said Samson. Her right hand touched her forehead; her lips fell apart; her eyes took on a look of tragic earnestness.

"Not dead!" she whispered. "He is alive and well!"

Bim staggered toward him and fell to her knees and lay crouched upon the ground, in the dusky twilight, shaking and choked with sobs, and with tears streaming from her eyes but she was almost as silent as the 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."

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 grew 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 hallooed:

"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 cover."

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 buy a piece of silver on the block," Samson called.

"Not a darned cent," the man answered. "I hate like plow to turn a feller away in the night, but we're awful skeered 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 hitched and fed his horse in one end of it—the best 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. 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.

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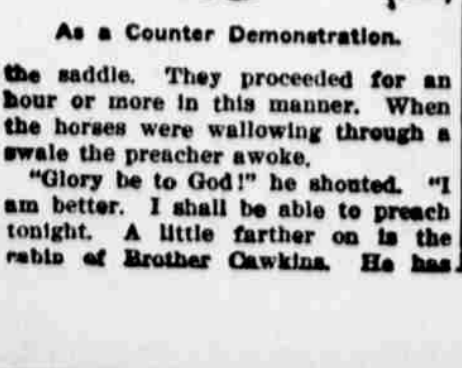
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