

* * The Story Page. * *

Old Butts.

BY REV. MITCHELL BRONK.

"Old Butts! Old Butts! Old Butts!" They were not what you would call very bad boys, who stood there by the gate singing out these words, and now and then throwing a stone at the door of the tumble-down house. George Matthews, the oldest of the three, was indeed inclined to be wild; yet his wrong doing was usually of a thoughtless and impulsive sort. The other two, Philip North and Nicholas Bley, were generally regarded as manly and well-behaved. The boys and girls of Ridgewood never seemed to think it wrong to persecute old Butts. For years he had been the object of innumerable schemes and jokes. No one undertook to defend the old man, and few pitied him. He was a hardened sinner and outcast and drunkard, whose wickedness had long ago driven away from him relatives and friends; he shunned everyone, and repulsed roughly every kindly overture. The fact that he was always on the lookout for the boys who tormented him, that he threatened them with hard words and with his shotgun, and that he set his dog to chase them as they passed his house, only served to make them more persistent in their mischief.

The three boys had been over to Jones' Pond that Saturday afternoon, looking at a rowboat which Philip's father talked of buying for him, and on their way back they stopped, half out of habit, here in front of Butts'. George began to call out to the old man, and to throw small stones against the door. Phil and Nick had never done that before, but they followed, carelessly, the example of their companion.

"He's off, and the dog's with him," said George, at length; "you may be sure of that; and I have a great idea; let's roll that chicken-coop behind the house there, around in front, and set it up against the door; we can do it before anyone comes along, and won't old Butts be jolly mad when he returns home!"

It took them only a few minutes to follow out George's suggestion. The other two boys were not so brave in mischief making as their leader, and as they turned around after placing the coop carefully against the door, they looked anxiously toward the street to see if any one had seen them. Of all persons in the world, there, right by the gate, was Miss Holmes! The two boys could not look her in the face, and even George blushed and looked ill at ease. They belonged to Miss Holmes' Sunday-school class, and in a boyish way fairly worshiped their teacher. She waited for them at the gate. They understood Miss Holmes well enough to know that she would not proceed to scold and lecture them for what she had seen, but they certainly expected some kind of a rebuke. In this they were mistaken. She greeted them pleasantly, and as they walked along the street together, inquired about their school work for the week and about the games they had been playing that Saturday holiday. When she left them, down in the village, George broke out:

"Gracious! but I thought she would give us a talking to! She's a queer woman, Miss Holmes, isn't she?"

The Sunday-school lesson the next day was about the call of Matthew. The last verse in the passage which they studied was Christ's words, "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick." As Miss Holmes closed her Bible, at the end of the lesson, she dwelt upon this thought, and explained it in detail to her dozen boys. She told them how Jesus meant that the wicked, rougher, and more uplovable men were, the more they needed his love and gentleness and salvation; and how his followers ought always to be on the lookout for such diseased souls, whom they might try to relieve and cure. She spoke of how, frequently, when men are thus sin-sick, they have their badness aggravated and intensified by the people among whom they live. Her closing words were:

"Now boys, I want each one of you, whether you call yourself a Christian or not, to try to be like Christ in this respect, to try to heal some soul of its wickedness, and not to make any heart harder and more evil than it was before." She did not look at George and Phil and Nick as she said this; but to the trio her words had a peculiar significance, and at any rate they thought that what she said was meant for them.

George Matthews was a great boy to have, "cleas"; nor were they always plans for mischief-making. That next Monday he was quiet and thoughtful, and when he approached Phil and Nick at the close of the school his companions knew that something was up.

"I'm going to see Miss Holmes; you come along; you'll hear the rest when we get there."

George was out of breath and rather embarrassed, as they faced Miss Holmes in the parlor of her father's house, but he summoned up courage and explained why he and they had come.

"You see, Miss Holmes, we're awfully sorry that you saw us plaguing old Butts, and fixing up his door, last

Saturday. We didn't mean anything bad, but we're sorry we did it; and ever since you talked to us yesterday about trying to help hard cases like old Butts, and not doing things to make them meaner, I've been wondering if we couldn't do something to cure the old man a little. I thought that maybe we could go up to his house next Sunday before church, our class and some more of the boys and girls from the Sunday-school, and hold a sort of prayer meeting there; at any rate, you could pray, and we could read some Bible verses and sing, or something like that. I've heard it said that Butts hasn't been inside of a church for more than twenty years, and it might do him good."

When George had ended his hurriedly-delivered speech, Miss Holmes looked happy and pleased. At first, she smiled at the thought of George's plan of a prayer meeting, but then her face became sober and thoughtful. After a moment, she said:

"Your idea is in every way praiseworthy and noble, George, but let me suggest that we change the plan a little. I'm afraid that if such a company of us were to seek admission at Mr. Butts' house, we would only be met with repulse. My idea would be that, before trying to hold a prayer meeting there, we endeavor to soften his heart a little in some other way. You know that he is very poor; I doubt if he often has much to eat. He doesn't work, and what little money he gets is spent for liquor. You know how dilapidated his house is on the outside, and it is probably much worse within. Now couldn't we go there, some time when he is away, and tidy up everything, and leave a lot of provisions, and some clothing and books and papers, and a letter explaining that you boys and girls wished him well?"

The boys entered at once, and with enthusiasm, into Miss Holmes' scheme. It was arranged that they should invite the others to join in the work, and that a meeting should be held at her home the next Thursday evening to consider the matter. It was amazing how the news about old Butts' "surprise party" spread among the boys and girls of Ridgewood! Some of those who had been his worst tormentors wanted to help. Many, of course, became interested in the project simply for the fun's sake, but a current of pity and sympathy for the old wretch, who had been for years the town's disgrace, rapidly set in. The grown-up people looked on with wonder and probably distrust, but said nothing; they had seen many attempts made, unsuccessfully, at the reformation of old Butts.

On Friday morning of the following week, one of the boys learned by chance that old Butts intended to go fishing the next day, up at Radley Lake. That was a long way off, and it could be taken for granted that he would be absent nearly all day. This would be a most opportune time for the "party," and word was passed around. Everything was in readiness, and they met in front of the school-house Saturday morning. There must have been at least thirty boys, and half as many girls. Miss Holmes was the only grown person in the company. They marched, with their generous burdens, to the house. One of the neighbors assured them that Butts was certainly away. They entered by the back door, which was never fastened. Some of the boys set to work to clear up the yard and to chop into firewood a big log that lay back of the house. Inside, Miss Holmes directed everything. The girls scrubbed, and cleaned, and mended. A few pretty lithographs, with improvised frames, that had been brought along, were hung on the walls. Two of the boys, who were handy with tools, made various repairs around the house. Glass was provided, and Ned Baker, who could "do anything," as the others said, set a number of empty window panes. The cupboard shelves were covered with clean papers, and then loaded with the provisions. Over a chair they hung a lot of men's clothing, not new, but in good condition, which they thought would fit Butts. It was nearly noon when everything was finished. On the table they left this note, which George Matthews had written and copied on his father's typewriter:

"DEAR MR. BUTTS: It was Miss Holmes, Sunday school class and some more of the boys and girls of Ridgewood, who came here while you were away. We hope you won't be mad because we made ourselves at home. Some of us have acted mean toward you in the past, but we want you to forgive us."

No one ever knew what happened when the old man came home that evening: Was he angry at first? people often wondered. If so, his anger could not have lasted long; for indeed his heart was touched at last.

That following afternoon a man came into the Sunday-school room whom Mr. Rogers, the superintendent, did not recognize at first. He asked if he might go and sit with Miss Holmes' class. Mr. Rogers wondered at his request, but conducted him to the little room where the class met. Miss Holmes and the boys recognized their visitor at once although the change in his appearance was really startling. His beard had been closely trimmed, his hair was neatly combed, and his clothing carefully

brushed and arranged. There were evidences upon his face of the years of dissipation and hard life; his hands trembled and his eyes were cast down; but there was something dignified and gentle about his bearing; and it did not seem possible that this respectable middle aged man was "Old Butts." Miss Holmes manifested no astonishment; she greeted him with a friendly hand shake, and "We are glad to see you, Mr. Butts," then went on with the lesson. At the close of school she said, "We hope that you will come again; as often as you can."

For several weeks he was not absent a single Sunday. Then, at Miss Holmes' suggestion, he joined the Bible class of the school. At first he did not attend the church services, but now he is regular in this also. Though modest and retiring, he does not keep aloof from the people. Through the efforts of Miss Holmes and the pastor, he has been brought to know Christ as his Saviour, and is soon to be received into the church as a member. He is rapidly becoming popular with the boys of Ridgewood, and George and Phil and Nick are his warm friends. He takes them fishing with him up to Radley Lake, and tells them many things that boys always want to know about the out-of-door life with which he is so familiar. Almost never now is he called Old Butts.—The Standard.

Robbie's Temptation.

Robbie Norris wanted a watch, especially after he put on long pants and felt that he was a man. He turned over a great many schemes to earn one, but had never succeeded. His father laughed and suggested a "Waterbury," but Robbie declared he would have a good silver watch or he would have none at all.

A day or two after he was fourteen years of age something very strange occurred. He was walking along a certain avenue in the early morning, on his way to do an errand for his mother, when he found a gold watch and chain. He could scarcely believe his own eyes, but picked it up quickly and slipped it into his pocket. The first moment he found himself alone within his own room, he took the watch out of his pocket and turned it over and over. "Ge whizz!" he exclaimed, "it is a beauty, though. I wonder who lost it!" Some of those rich men who were here prospecting yesterday, I suspect; but they are miles away by this time, and the watch is mine just as sure as if I bought it. I wonder what the boys will say when they see me carrying a gold watch! S'pect they'll want to know where I got it, but I shan't tell them. Guess I'll run downstairs and show it to father and mother. No I won't, either. They'd be sure to advertise it in some old paper. I'll just hide it away for a week or two, and then, perhaps, I can make our folks believe Uncle Jack sent it to me from California," and with a long, lingering, parting look, he locked it up in his trunk, and ran downstairs, whistling gaily.

All that day he could think of nothing but the watch, and as soon as school was out he hastened home to look at it again. Several times during the week he dressed up in his best clothes and slipped the watch into his vest pocket to try the effect. How the chain glittered over his blue vest! Not a boy in school had so handsome a watch. If he only dared to wear it!

Two weeks later, on Friday afternoon, when he was to give a recitation, he determined to carry the watch. He wanted to surprise the boys and see what they would say. While he was reciting the chain was seen suspended from his vest pocket to a convenient button hole. At the close he paused a moment on the platform to take out the watch and look at the time.

Of course, after the school was out the boys all wanted to see the watch and know where he obtained it.

"That's a secret," laughed Robbie, "I'm not going to tell any one. I didn't steal it though."

"Don't s'pect you did, you lunkhead. Let's see your old turnip," called out a very rough boy, jostling against Robbie's arm.

"No you don't, Joe Mitchell!" exclaimed Robbie, clapping his hand down tightly over his pocket. "You wouldn't look at it two minutes before you'd break it."

"Ah-h you!" exclaimed the boy, disdainfully.

"Does it keep good time?" asked another.

"You bet your life!" exclaimed Robbie proudly.

"Is it a stem-winder?" asked another.

"Yes, it is a stem-winder. Anything more you'd like to know?" snapped Robbie.

"Mr. Holdcraft lost his watch," spoke up one of the boys.

Robbie started guiltily, but no one noticed, because some one was asking, "Who is Mr. Holdcraft?"

"Why, don't you know?" said the boy. "He is the old gentleman that is visiting up to Judge Lamont's. He is Mrs. Lamont's father. He thought an awful lot of the watch because it belonged to his son, a Rough Rider who was shot in Cuba."

The boys were all interest now. They forgot the

watch; all but nothing but the Robbie was given to his home.

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"God bless you did you get it?

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