

## JACK'S MISSING MESSAGE.

It was a glorious day, and the skating on Quicksilver Pond was still fine, although February was half over. Jack Prescott and a dozen other boys, with glowing socks and shining skates, were making the most of it.

Phil Donovan, running by, drew up to see the sport.

"Hullo, Phil!" called Jack; "aren't you coming to skate? Where are you going?"

"To the mission band meeting," answered Phil, a little shortly.

"Oh! phaw! missionary meeting on a day like this! Let it go for once, and come and have some fun."

"Can't," replied Phil, firmly; "there's lots of business on hand, and besides it's all pretty jolly, any way. And then there's Miss Molly, you know."

Yes, Jack knew Miss Molly. He was in her Sunday-school class, and he liked to be with her, too, almost as well as any of the boys. Still he had never joined her mission band.

"You'd better come along with me," added Phil.

"Oh! I can't bother about it," said Jack, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I haven't time, and I don't believe foreign people care about having us fuss over them. Boys can't do much anyway, and there are persons enough to look after them. Besides, I don't have much money, and I'm saving up now for a bicycle. Maybe when I have everything I want and am tired of playing, I'll come round," and, with his merry laugh, Jack was off like the wind.

Phil, however, sped on his way. He was the first boy at the meeting, so had a chance for a short talk with Miss Molly, and before long, because they had troubled him a little, he had confided to her Jack's view of missions.

Miss Molly sighed a bit of a sigh, but in another moment smiled her sweet, hopeful smile. "Never mind, Phil," she said, "we will do our part, no matter what others say, and I think we'll have Jack yet."

The meeting was one of the best the "Busy Bees" had ever had, and Phil was not sorry that he had been faithful to his duty.

The night before Washington's birthday, Jack was hurrying home in the dusk when he ran into a knot of boys talking together in front of Mr. Donovan's house.

"Going to-night, Jack?" called one of the boys.

"Where?" asked Jack.

"Why, up to Bramford, with Miss Molly, and all of us. There's going to be a sort of missionary Washington's birthday celebration given by the band there in the Sunday-school room, and our band's invited. It's to be about our country and other countries, and there will be songs and speeches and exercises with flags, and games and refreshments at the end. I thought Miss Molly said she meant to ask all her class, too, but maybe that wasn't so. It's too bad that you don't belong to the band."

"I never heard a word about it," thought Jack, as he went on alone with a somewhat hurt, heavy heart. An excursion with Miss Molly and the boys was not to be despised, and Miss Molly had never left him out before.

After supper he crawled into a big chair in a corner where he could think by himself in the firelight and his low spirits might be unnoticed. But he soon felt that his mother knew something was the matter, and he could not deny himself the comfort of sharing his trial with her.

As he finished his story there was a sudden sound at the door, and in rushed Phil Donovan and Hugh Wharton, panting like two steam-engines.

"Mistake!" gasped Phil.

"Yes," added Hugh, "not Miss Molly, my fault! Can't wait now! Come catch train! Hurry!"

It was not much of an explanation, but Jack understood at once. He was ready in a trice, and the three boys bounded away toward the station. All was quiet there.

"Just gone," said the station-master, cheerfully, as the anxious faces looked into his.

"That's the end of it then," said Phil, dolefully. Hugh and Jack stole little glances at each other, then they all stood still and stared out of the door in mute despair. At that moment a tall, manly figure came swinging round the corner. It was Miss Molly's brother, whose name also was Jack.

"What's the matter here?" asked Mr. Jack, "Not going after all?"

"We're left," answered Hugh gloomily.

"Too bad," said Mr. Jack, with sympathy, though with a little laugh at the three mournful faces; "there's no help for it now, I suppose. But, wait a minute and I'll see."

The boys felt a thrill of encouragement as Mr. Jack disappeared. In about a quarter of an hour he returned.

"Well," he said, "I don't quite see why anybody should be so crazy to go to a missionary meeting, but I've found an old cart and horse that I think will hold together for two miles, so come along."

"Oh! thank you, Mr. Jack," cried the boys in one breath, and they followed their friend in need with radiant faces, and were soon bouncing round in the back of the wagon like corn in a popper.

They reached the church just at the close of the first hymn. Mr. Jack let the boys out, and then, with the poor old steed, whisked away in the darkness.

Nobody enjoyed the celebration more than Jack. He would not have believed a missionary meeting could be so entertaining. It had been very good in Phil and Hugh to come back for him, but he still had a sore feeling about Hugh for his former neglect.

On the way home in the train Jack managed to slip into the seat next to Miss Molly.

"So you almost didn't come, Jack," she said; "I am sorry that Hugh was careless about my message."

"Oh! did the fellows tell you about it, Miss Molly?" asked Jack.

"Well, of course, I can't be very mad at Hugh now, because he did his best to make up for almost cheating me out of the fun, if he did come near to being too late about it. But I've been thinking it over by myself, and I'm not going to say so to anybody else, but, Miss Molly, it seems to me it was worse than careless, it was up and down lazy and selfish. You see he didn't feel like going up the hill the night that you gave him the note, and in the morning his father told him he might go to the city with him to buy a printing press, and he thought he'd wait until he came home to attend to me. Then they had company at his house, and he thought I wouldn't care much for the celebration, because it was a missionary meeting, or else that somebody else would tell me if he didn't, and then he forgot all about the letter until at the station you asked where I was. Now, Miss Molly, I call that downright mean when you'd trusted it to him. Don't you say so yourself?"

Miss Molly looked down at Jack, with a queer, arch, yet serious little smile.