

CHAPTER THREE

The Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter holidays took great preparation in the Butler household and were occasions of great festivity for as far back as I can remember. The advent of these holidays always marked a cessation of hostilities within the household and called for a truce in the cold war between the Butler family and the world outside. Mother and the girls usually spent days baking and cooking and dressing the turkeys or geese and whatever else we had. At Christmas there were knitted socks, mittens, sweaters and other apparel for the children and altho we knew it represented a year's accumulation of Mother's handiwork we just knew these articles came to us by Sante Claus. But I was a grown man before I saw my first decorated Christmas tree.

As Walter, John and Bill grew older they began to feel a natural urge for more contact socially with our neighbors and with acquaintances they had made in far away Northfield six miles away. Father fought this growing urge as long as he could. But the boys were sixteen or seventeen years old before they dared defy Father and take a horse and wagon and later a buggy, spark the girls in the neighborhood.

At school the Butler boys and girls either had to be at the head of the class or in Father's estimation they were no good. Because of the friction between Father and the school board and the rest of the community school days for the Butler children were short and irregular at best, but I suppose, looking back on it now, that Father's personal instructions of his children made up in great part their lack of more formal education.

Brother Pierce who later was to serve his county, state, and nation with a certain distinction was always a brilliant student. He had mastered Robertsons Arithmetic, the academic equivalent of high school mathematics by the time he was ten. I was considered a delicate youngster, was a frequent victim of quinsy sore throat and I played on my ailment for all it was worth whenever I felt it offered any opportunity to stay out of school. I might have spared myself considerable difficulty in later years had my pursuit of knowledge during my teens been more diligent. There was a continual discord among the boys. Brother Cooley, altho a bit awkward in his youth, was heavy handed and used to push me around a good deal. Once I was headed for the barn to milk the cows, carrying two empty milk pails with me, when Cooley hit me in the head with a snowball ^{and} knocked me down. By way of proving that a Butler never forgets I waited my time.

Some months later Cooley was sitting on the top rail of a fence, when I noticed that the nails supporting the cross pieces were rusted. I ran and got a piece of wood, smashed the fence, and watched Cooley roll into the creek.

There was seldom a day that Walter, Bill and Cooley got to school that there wasn't a fight. Letting my memory wander I see Walter now living out his adolescence in the vain hope that ~~he would~~ he could best a boy named Hunter with whom he fought on an average of three times a week. Walter never was interested in licking his equals. As a boy or a man his adversary always had to be bigger or more powerful in one way or another for Walter to derive any satisfaction out of whipping him. At Carleton College where he spent one term Walter became acquainted with a man by the name of Henry Martin, owner of a lumber yard and contracting business, and he taught Walter the rudiments of the plastering trade. Subsequent events in the lives and fortunes of Butler Brothers would tend to prove that Walter's chance acquaintanceship with Mr. Martin probably was the most important contact he or any of his brothers ever made.

It was the spring of 1880. John S. Pillsbury was governor. Minnesota as a state was rounding out twenty one years of adolescence and Minneapolis and St. Paul, the hub and gateway to the great northwest, were expanding rapidly.

The construction industry in St. Paul was calling for men and with a journeyman plasterer and bricklayer's ticket tucked away in his pocket, Walter set out to St. Paul. After a few months of driving team, Walter got a job with Boyd and Burrows Construction Company laying brick. His talents for his craft and his abilities as a leader must have been recognized early. His employers made him foreman on the brickwork of the then new Merchant Bank Building, which is at the site of the present First National Bank of St. Paul at Fourth and Roberts Streets, at about the same time that he became president of the bricklayer's union. In the meantime brother Bill also had gone to St. Paul and began learning the bricklayer's trade under Walter's direction. An incipient dissatisfaction with wages, hours, and working conditions was generated by Walter, a strike was voted among the men and Walter led the crew off the job. It was about that time that Walter and Bill determined that if possible, they would never work for an employer again. The result of that determination was that in the winter of 1886 Walter formed a partnership with a man by the name of Dominic Feeley. Walter took charge of the construction crews with Feeley as business manager, but the partnership was short lived.

Feeley's lack of managerial ability soon became evident and the partnership went broke. The following year, 1886, Walter and Bill formed the first Butler Brothers partnership, sub-contracting for the brick work under the general contractors Taylor and Craeg, who gave Butler Brothers their first big job at Macalester College, St. Paul. Late that same year Pierce was graduated from Carleton College, Bill got married, and Cooley left the farm to join Walter and Bill in St. Paul.

The young construction firm could hardly have been called prosperous, because about that time, I remember Walter coming to the farm to get a two hundred dollar loan from brother John. Pierce was having his financial troubles too. He and father operated a milk station near Seven Corners, St. Paul, and my recollection is that the venture was not too successful. I know it was only a few months later that Pierce got his first law experience in the Finch and Roshey Law firm in St. Paul. It seems to me now that everybody must have been hard up. Some records I saw many years later indicated that brother John had to mortgage one hundred head of cattle and twenty head of horses in order to get a loan of two hundred dollars at an interest rate of twelve percent a year.

But fortune smiled broadly for the first time on Butler Brothers in 1867 when they got their first contract from the Street Railway Company doing some construction work on the East Seventh street and Selby Avenue power houses.

Back on the farm at Waterford Mother kept house for John and I and we directed most of our efforts to raising horses for Butler Brother's operations in St. Paul. I recall that a good team of horses brought four hundred dollars cash, a fabulous sum for those days.

It was in June 1868 when neither John nor I could resist any longer pressure from my older brothers combined with a lure, in my case at least, of the bright lights of the Twin Cities, that John and I pulled out lock stock and barrel. We left in charge of the farm my sister Belle and her new husband Mr. Pennington, and they lived there for many years afterward. We weren't in the big city two hours until Bill put us to work with our teams hauling brick from the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railway terminal to a new construction project of the Jewish Synagogue near Wabasha street and College avenue. I had less trouble in later years finding my way around Chicago, Pittsburg, Cleveland, and New York than I did directing my team on the streets of St. Paul those first days.

My propensity for getting lost irked my brothers. By the end of the first week Walter's irritation had reached the limit and he took away from me my fine job as a teamster and put me to work as a laborer. I was crestfallen. It is true that a man learns the building construction business from the ground up then I learned it the hard way too. And if the hod carrier is the backbone of that business then there is a little bit of me in those buildings we built forty and fifty and sixty years ago. But the tortures of carrying the hod, with one shoulder bloodier than the other inspired me to what I like to consider is my first invention. I knew something about horses and at lunch one day with brother Bill I suggested "Bill, isn't there some way we can pull those bricks up the side of the buildings with a horse."

Bill didn't think so, but in my subsequent spare time I rigged up a platform, block and tackle, pulleys, ropes and one night I tried my invention. It worked. A few weeks later the general contractors under whom we were working perfected a double balanced skip, horsedrawn, pulling brick up the side walls of buildings. The following year when Butler Brothers were working on the Noyes Brothers and Cutler Building in St. Paul the American Hoist and Derrick Company perfected a steam derrick which considerably lessened our former labors.

It was about that same time that the first discord in the otherwise tranquil partnership of Butler Brothers shook the organization. It had been only under the incessant urging that John had consented to join Walter and Bill in the construction business. It was but a natural conclusion of John's that he was an equal partner in the Butler Brothers business. An audit of the books made just before Christmas in 1881 showed that the partnership had earned four thousand dollars above expenses, a not inconsiderable sum sixty years ago. I can still see the bitterness and disappointment in John's face when, inquiring about his share of the profit, Walter and Bill told him that he wasn't in. My own wages at that time were three dollars a week and John had to settle his accounts with the brothers on the bases of twelve and one half cents an hour for the hours he had worked. What was more aggravating about this financial situation was that Walter and Bill always drew all of the money they needed. After that session with Walter and Bill, brother John decided "the hell with the whole business", and he spent the next several weeks trying to talk me into going back with him to the farm. All parties to the financial controversy sulked publicly and privately for several days, and eventually Walter and Bill must have agreed that John had had a bad deal.

In the following spring they made John a full partner. I continued to learn the bricklaying trade. By the time I was twenty one I knew just about all there was ^{Know About} to bricklaying and I had acquired some experience as ^a the timekeeper, cashier and ^a as production man keeping track of materials.

Then the strangest thing happened. I had just had my twenty first birthday at the time. Whether my time-keeping and bookkeeping efforts were found to be faulty or not I don't know to this day, but my older brothers put their heads together and decided I should go back to school. I hadn't been inside of a classroom in seven years. But it had been determined that I was going to finish the eighth grade come what may so I signed in at the old Madison school. To my amazement I found some of the pupils even bigger and older than I was. I remember a General Smith was the principal. One day after school a couple of twenty two and twenty three old ^{EIGHTH} graders jumped me and there was a free for all. The story got around pretty fast but even if it hadn't my blackened eyes and some unusual markings on the faces of my adversaries ^{two} told General Smith all that he needed to know ^{about} / what had happened. By some strange twist in the story General Smith got the impression that I had started the brawl. A Butler start a fight? Preposterous. General Smith insisted that I apologize to one of the chaps. a boy named Houghton, and when I refused General Smith expelled me.

The following winter I tackled business college where I reaffirmed my dislike for school and I quit and went back to the bricklaying trade. The conditions attached to living and working in St. Paul during those first years provided a sharp contrast to life on the farm back at Waterford. This was true for all of us. Our first house on Carrell Avenue where Mother and sister Kate kept house had all the modern conveniences known to any city dweller. The most remarkable of these at that time were gas lights and centralized heat. Back at the farm the only method we had for heating the house was a pot belly ^{je^d} stove on the first floor with connecting pipes to a heating drum on the second floor. It seemed to me the farmhouse was always cold. It seemed that we were forever cutting or splitting wood for the fire. At the farm it seemed the principal reason we raised geese was to get the goose feathers to make the quilts to keep warm. In bed you covered everything but your nose and there was always a chimney of frost from your breath when you woke up in the morning. And we always slept in our underclothes. A farm breakfast generally consisted of fried salt pork, home made bread and butter and coffee with sometimes chicory substituted by the grocer for coffee.

The coffee we did have was always purchased green and we roasted it ourselves in the oven. The infrequent breaks in the monotony of farm life generally occurred when some wandering Irishmen singled us out for a stopover. Father never knew whether to welcome these wayfarers or not, and seldom did, until he found out from what part of Ireland they came. Some of these men were headed for the Irish settlements around St. Paul and others were striking out for the West. If they were from Father's home county in Ireland, Father would jump up and down, grab them by the hand and holler, "By God we're from the same county," or "Welcome, come on in."

To those from County Mayo he would shout, "God help us," and if they were from County Tipperary, he'd say to them, "You're a roaring tip from Nana."

But we took them all in, fed them and somehow or other made a place for them to sleep. Some times sleeping meant sleep in our stables which were made of straw. Their visits never failed to give Father a nostalgia for his homeland.

In politics, I think Father was a democrat. Mother told me years later that at the outbreak of the Civil War, Father had been a southern sympathizer, a Copperhead, and this fact helped to alienate him from his neighbors.

Mother also told us in later years that when Dad was drafted for service in the Union army, he walked from Northfield to Fort Snelling. Apparently he was excused from active military duty because of his family. But there were others in the area who shared Father's lack of sympathy with Union cause. There were some who shot off their own fingers and toes and others who hurt and crippled themselves so that they couldn't march, in order to escape war service. Father supported Stephen A. Douglas in his presidential campaign against Lincoln, and made speeches for Douglas at Northfield.

Money on the Butler farmstead was in short supply as far back as I can remember. We used to exchange butter, lard, eggs, livestock and wheat in the markets ~~at~~ at Northfield for the supplies we needed. There was a time when brother Walter had set his heart on a pair of ice skates which were made of cast iron and probably cost a couple dollars. That meant at least fifteen or twenty pounds of butter on the exchange rate.

"You can have those skates just as soon as we save enough butter to get them," Father told Walter.

But Walter discovered there were other ways of accumulating twenty pounds of butter. He filled a jar nearly to the top with lard and then spread a thin layer of butter across.

Next day he set off to the general store operated by a man named Skinner at Northfield. Obviously Mr, Skinner had been subjected to similar shennigans before. In any event he was equipped with a tool which would ^{tell} him how far down into the jar the butter went. Walter got a lecture in honesty instead of the skates.

My biggest thrill on the farm stays with me. The last fall that I was there singlehanded I planted and plowed two hundred acres of oats and wheat and sixty acres of corn. The following spring and summer when the crops matured brother ^{John} paid me the highest compliment that I can remember.

"You can plant and plow straight furrows, lad," he told me.

That was the test of manhood.

Despite the scores of business differences Walter and I had, thruout most of our adult years, I can never forget the great patience, kindness and devotion he showed me when I was a boy. I can remember him teaching me to ride horseback, how to break in young colts, buying me presents, defending me against older and tougher boys, generally safeguarding my welfare. He was a hard man to get along with in later years, but he was an idol to me in my boyhood. The business difficulties that we were to have stemmed in part I think from the fact that Walter never quite recognized that I too, had grown up.

It was considered good farming practice to be able to outsmart the merchants. We accepted as truth that the elevator men always had their scales to cheat you on the weight and that the cheating probably amounted to several bushels of grain for each load weighed. We sold our wheat and oats in sacks of about two and a half bushels each and John was continually complaining about the short weight. In those days as now, it was the custom to weigh the driver both with the load and without the load. The difference would be the amount of your saleable cash grain. It became almost uncanny how brother John could distract the elevator men long enough to be off the wagon when he should have been on it and to be on it when he should have been off of it during the weighing process. John weighed about a hundred and eighty pounds. I would hate to guess how many times John sold himself for wheat in this manner. There were no laws or regulations covering short weights in those days.

Among the few friends Father did have in his farming days was John Phillip Crowley who was superintendent of the Dakota County schools system and William King whom I was to meet in later years.

Anative of Ireland, Crowley seemed always to manage to reach our house toward evening as he was winding up his school affairs in the district. I can remember he drove a sorrel mare which ~~wasn't~~ didn't need to be tied no matter how long Crowley remained away from the rig. When he came to our house, particularly in the winter time, he always threw a buffalo robe over her back and the mare seemed as content as if she were home in her stable. Mr. Crowley's visits always meant a relaxation of discipline at the dinner table. This probably was because Father himself went so far out of bounds in his noisy discussions about academic questions and problems with Mr. Crowley. The children knew Mr. Crowley never meant it but every few minutes he'd look at the clock and remark that it was time to go home. Along about nine pm. there was general agreement that it was probably too late for Mr. Crowley to go home. It was my job to unhitch the mare, take off the harness, curry her fur, give her oats and hay and then go to bed myself. But Father and Mr. Crowley would wrangle long into the night.

Crowley's place was on a line road between Dakota and Ramsey Counties and in the course of a state survey, the surveyors discovered that Crowley's house was on the Ramsey side of the road and because of regulations this fact would have made Mr. Crowley to have continued in his lucrative job as superintendent of schools.

Father who was a trained surveyor entered the controversy where angels would have feared to tread. He outshouted and out argued the official surveyors and he so harassed and harangued them that he talked them into putting a bend in the road in front of Mr. Crowley's house so that,officially at least, the Crowley homestead continued to be in Dakota County.

That father had a falling out with his old friend Bill King was reflected in this incident in my life in later years. It was at a time when I was building in the name of Butler Brothers the Jefferson Highway from St.Paul to Northfield and the section of the road on which I was working was called Dodd Road. I was walking downtown in Northfield one day talking to a friend of mine when Bill King came along and my friend stopped him.

"Mr. King"he said, "I want you to meet a friend of mine, Emmett Butler."

Bill King at that time was about eighty years old. I put forward my right hand to shake his in greeting and Mr. King just stood there looking at me with a down look on his face.

"What Butler," Mr. King asked.

"My name is Emmett Butler",I told him. "My father was Pat Butler."

"You son of a bitch," he said. "I wouldn't shake hands with a son of Pat Butler if he was the last man living."

Then I heard this story of their difficulty. Many years before Father had gone from Waterford to St. Paul with a load of grain, ~~saw~~ and a young team of oxen. Darkness had overtaken Father enroute and he stopped at Bill King's house to have a drink, get fed and spend the night. Instead of unhitching the team of oxen and putting them down to a bed of straw, Father fastened one of a long rope to the halters on the heads of the oxen, and knotted the other end of the rope to the bedstead/^{on} which Mrs. and Mr. King were to sleep. Some time during the night the oxen grew uneasy and must have decided to go home on their own accord. The first thing Mr. and Mrs. King knew they were out of their beds and onto the floor and what was left of their four poster was last seen going out thru the door in pieces and down the road.

When my friend reminded Mr. King that Emmett Butler isn't to blame for that Mr. King retorted;

"The breed is wrong, that's all."

Until he got old and was forced to retire from the farm I don't believe Father's hunger and love for the land was ever quite satiated.

Starting with an eighty acre tract he gradually added to his holdings until at the time of ~~his~~ his retirement he owned ^a half a section of land. At one point Father acquired from John Sackett a tract known as the Sackett eighty a few years after Sackett had taken it as a school land claim from the Land Grant Office. Altho it had a pretty fair house on it at the time, Father bought this eighty for five hundred dollars plus a small mortgage against it. Father moved the house across the creek and joined that and our own house together. A Bill Bowe, a Civil War veteran who later was to marry my sister Kate did the carpenter work. In acquiring his land holdings it was Father's idea that ultimately all of his sons and daughters would settle near him. But as each of the Butler brothers grew up, left the land for work and business in St. Paul, Father ~~s~~ saddened. Father liked to climb to a certain high bluff nearly in the center of the farm and dream that one day he would be the master of all he surveyed.

~~End Chapter.~~

I couldn't have been more than six or seven years old but I remember an epidemic of smallpox which swept thru southern Minnesota, and I suppose infected other parts of the country as well. Until then the disease in our area, at least, was not too well known or too easily recognized. The only doctors in our part of the country were a Doctor Armington and his son. My father was the first member of the family stricken. Young Doctor Armington who knew something of father's reputation as a drinker categorically diagnosed father's illness as what he called whiskey blossom. When father got worse the senior Doctor Armington was called and immediately began treating father for smallpox. Down the line Doctor Armington went vaccinating each of the children against the disease. The medical efficacy of antitoxin must have been less than it is today because only two of the seven children escaped. it But we had a fine time while we were sick. I recall that it was during that illness that father and mother gave me my first religious instruction. Father bought a second hand organ which was pumped by foot and sister Belle took lessons from a girl named Julie Oakens. I can remember the whole family used to crowd around the instrument singing hymns.

The Cannon River was about a half a mile from our land. All the boys learned to swim with the exception of myself, Father's sole recreation during his farming days as I remember them was swimming and walking. And occasionally he got a chance to indulge in wrestling. The school meetings and town meetings he ignored. Until his final illness there wasn't a son among us who could best Father at a wrestling match. His favorite hold was to place his two arms around your waist and apply pressure; the hold was brutal. If you were strong enough you might break loose; if you weren't you either gave up or took a chance on his crushing your ribs. In later years Father and I took in many of the wrestling bouts in the Twin Cities and saw such famous topnotchers of that day as Frank Gotch Farmer Burns and a fellow by the name of Dwyer. There was a Cornish style of wrestling in which the wrestlers wore a jacket with tights. The jackets were loose fitting garments and the idea was to take up the slack in the center of the garment, twist it in your hand and somehow or other use your feet to trip your opponent. Another favorite pastime in those days was horseshoe pitching.

The principal crop in my early years was wheat, but the rust plague swept the country even that long ago and for a number of years we mixed wheat with oats and called the results succotash.

And we raised corn after we got into the dairy business. Under Father's direction we developed one of the largest dairy herds in southern Minnesota at that time, and shipped our milk to a St. Paul distributor by the name of Peck and Johnson.

It was nature's law even then that the quality and quantity of milk you got from your herd of cattle was dependent upon the quantity and quality of the feed you gave the cattle. It seemed that every winter Johnson and Peck complained by letter against the lowering quality of our milk. It was recognized in good farm practice that cornstocks of themselves were poor milk producers and that high butter fat test milk could only be produced by feeding the cattle corn and other small grains as a supplementary diet.

We were keeping the cattle on good rations but the fact of the matter was we were adding good spring water to the milk cans. There was great hilarity at the dinner table one night as John opened and read a new complaint from Peck and Johnson. It said as I remember it, "Please John, do not feed the livestock so many cornstocks." Finally towards Spring Mr. Johnson came to see us personally and warned us against the thin milk. And after that we were pretty good for a while.

There was a time on the farm when both Kate and Belle were teaching school, each earning thirty five dollars a month. On pay day their money went into the Butler jackpot. The same practice prevailed with the money that the boys earned, while they were living at home. What cash there was left from the sale of the crops and the livestock also went into the pool with brother John in charge of the finances.

(EndChap.III. R/2/S/I)