

A PAIR OF SKATES AND A HOCKEY STICK.

By THE EDITOR.

Hockey was a favorite game with the South River boys. They played it every afternoon and all day Saturday, and never seemed to weary of it. Generally on Saturday afternoons they would have a match between the Easters and Westers—that is, between those who lived on the east and those who lived on the west bank of the river. The teams being pretty evenly matched, a great deal of interest was taken in these contests. On fine afternoons there would be a crowd of onlookers, and the whole valley would ring with the cries of the players and the shouts of the spectators. Charlie Wilkie, being not less expert with his hockey stick than with his skates, of course captained one side, the West, the other captain being Buckey Billings, an overgrown chap who was inclined to be a bit of a bully if he saw a good chance.

Charlie and Frank encountered Buckey on their way to the river, and he hailed them in his rough fashion.

"Hullo, Westers? Going to have a game to-night?"

"Guess not," replied Charlie. "We're just going to have a little skate."

"You'd better put in all the practice you can, my hunkers, or we'll beat you clean out of your boots next Saturday," shouted Buckey, who had not been very successful at the last few matches.

"All right," returned Charlie, pleasantly. "If you can do it you're welcome to."

"Have you got a good team for Saturday?" asked Frank, after Buckey had passed on.

"Capital," answered Charlie. "The best I ever had. I'm not afraid of the result."

As the end of the week drew near indications of a change in the weather appeared. Each day proved milder than the day before, and Friday was one of those rare and lovely days in winter which are called "weather breeders," because they are so often the precursors of a storm. The boys were very anxious about Saturday, and felt sure it would be their last chance for a match perhaps for the rest of the winter. Charlie Wilkie could hardly contain himself, so troubled was he about the weather. Buckey Billings had been boasting of the splendid team he was going to bring out, in which it was whispered there would be some crack players from the city, who happened to be visiting in the neighbourhood. So Charlie determined to be in the best possible condition and play as he had never played before. You can imagine, then, what his feelings were when, on coming home early Friday afternoon, his mother greeted him with,

"O! Charlie, I'm so glad you're here. Get your dinner as quickly as you can, for I want you to go down to Uncle Hugh's at the Cape."

"Uncle Hugh's!" exclaimed Charlie in amazement. "Why, mother, how on earth am I to get there? The mare is lame, and I certainly can't walk that distance this time of year."

"No, Charlie, but father thinks you could skate there easily enough. You know it's only a little distance from the shore, and they say the ice is good the whole way."

"But, mother, I've got to play the biggest match of the season to-morrow afternoon, and I'll be dead tired."

"Well, I'm sorry, Charlie; but I have to send an important message to Uncle Hugh to-day, and if you don't go father will have to, and you know he's not feeling over strong just now."

Poor Charlie! He was altogether too affectionate a son to think for one moment of allowing his father to go, but then—ten miles to the Cape, and ten miles back again meant tired legs for the next twenty-four hours at least, and tired legs were not exactly the best thing for a hockey match. Seeing his concern his mother said,

"You can stay all night at uncle's and come back in the morning."

"O, that won't do, mother. I'll be busy in the morning. I must get back again to-night."

"Just as you like, Charlie, but I think it would be better for you to stay all night, for it will be pretty late when you are coming back."

"O I don't mind that, mother. The moon is nearly full, and it'll be plenty bright. So get your note written. The sooner I'm off the better." And while Charlie bolted his dinner his mother scribbled down what she had to tell Uncle Hugh.

It was about four o'clock when Charlie got off, and having given his mother a hearty good-bye kiss, he was soon speeding down the river at a lively rate, swinging to and fro the hockey stick which was his constant companion during the skating season. He took a good deal of pride in this stick, and with reason, for no boy in the neighborhood had a better one. His father had had it specially made for him as a Christmas present the winter before, and many a winning stroke did it score in Charlie's skillful hands. It was a beautiful piece of tough maple, varnished all over, and decorated with red and blue lines in the most artistic fashion, while the handle was lashed with fine twine so as to give the firmest possible grip.

The air was so pleasant and the ice so perfect that Charlie's ill-humor did not stay with him long, and by the time he had gone a mile he was whistling as merrily as a bird. A light heart with a sturdy pair of legs to carry it can make short work of even ten long miles, and Charlie was quite surprised himself when Uncle Hugh's came into sight as he dashed out on to the broad surface of the harbor. Such good time had he made that the family were just about sitting down to supper when he arrived, and they welcomed him warmly to a seat at the table. His ten-mile skate had given him a famous appetite as well as tired him not a little, and his consins were so glad to see him that he lingered with them somewhat longer than he had intended. When he announced his intention of returning home that night the whole family rose up in opposition.

"You really must not leave us Charlie. I could n't think of allowing you to go home to night," said Aunt Ellen.

"O, Charlie, do stay," put in Cousin Alec, "and we'll have a first-class pillow fight before we go to bed."

"Please stay, Charlie," pleaded pretty cousin Mary. "I want to show you the lovely album Uncle Frank sent me from Boston."

"I really think it's not wise for you to go back to-night, Charlie," said grave Uncle Hugh.

But Charlie was proof against all persuasion,