

was a shock, a halt—almost a fall, and the ten skaters brought up, one after another, at the goal, leaving Johnny quite in the rear.

He came gliding up, however, a moment after, in time to hear Mr. Hunter's decision. "Maria Blake went to Skinner's Point in five minutes, forty seconds and a half—that being quicker time by four seconds than was made by any other."

"Hip, hip, hurrah!" cried Johnny Emerson; three cheers and a tiger for Maria Blake." Then there was a great deal of hurly-burly for awhile, of hurrahs and laughter, and shrill voices, and demands to see the beautiful cup of silver, which had been handed to the happy girl.

What was Mr. Hunter saying? The sound of his voice reached them through all the noise, and a hundred bright faces turned, full of eager interest, his way.

"Children," said Mr. Hunter, "Sammy Green has a new pair of skates, which Johnny Emerson has been teaching him to use. Now, if Sammy will skate clear to Skinner's Point and back again without falling down, I will make him a New Year's present of a new suit of clothes."

What a great leap Sammy's heart gave! "I never can do it in the world," he whispered to Johnny.

"Yes, you can, if you'll only keep cool," said Johnny, "and I'd rather see you in a new suit of clothes than to have ten silver mugs myself."

"Then I'll try; and I won't mind a bit if they do laugh at my awkward motions. Mother has been sewing nights more than two weeks, to try and earn me something to wear; and if I only could win, she could take that money and get herself a new dress. I'll try my very best."

Then all the children got out of the way, and the widow's son braced himself for the start. "Steady, now steady," said Johnny; "one, two, three, and—off!"

Sammy's soul was in his eyes. He began to glide carefully along, flinging out his arms to keep his balance, then, moving a little more steadily, he fixed his eyes on the distant Point and forgot everything but the skating.

Nobody laughed at his bob-tailed coat now; nobody even thought of it. On he went, sometimes wavering a little, then bracing himself again, but never quite halting.

"He can't make the turn, I'm afraid," sighed Maria Blake. "That's such a hard thing to do at first. See, he is almost there!"

Then not another word was said, till the boy had made a broad curve, and faced them on his way back. Johnny's heart beat hard, you could almost have heard it. Once he thought his scholar would fail—but no! he had only stopped a little because he was tired,—he was at it again steadier than before, and if you ever saw roses, they bloomed on Johnny's cheeks five minutes later, when panting and trembling Sammy caught his hand, and, overcome with joy because the prize was won, burst into tears.

This time it was not he who called for "three cheers and a tiger," for he hadn't voice to speak, something choked him so; but such a shout went up as had never been heard on that lake before, and never will again till Johnny Emerson wins the silver mug next year, as Mr. Hunter means: e shall.

So the two happy boys were drawn into Mr. Hunter's sleigh, and carried into the village, to select the cloth for Sammy's new suit; and it was none of your common "sheep's gray" either, but as handsome a piece of mulberry as you ever set eyes on.

"Well," said Grandfather Emerson that night, as he shook the ashes out of his brown clay pipe, and settled himself back to count the bills left in his old leather pocket book; "well, I never did a better thing than when I gave that storekeeper ten dollars for a pair of skates. I'll put a gold watch in my pack for that boy next year; if I don't, never call me Santa Claus again.—*Amanda T. Jones, in Alden's Juvenile Gem.*

Tales and Sketches.

DYING FOR A DROP.

BY C. J. WHITMORE.

I was sitting by the quiet house fireside, the wind and the rain beating upon the windows, the fire blazing and roaring as it blazes and roars on winter nights only: the day's work done; pen, desk, and room offering an inviting welcome.

"You are wanted, sir; a wild-looking woman is waiting in the passage to see you. I could not ask her further in for she is ragged and dripping with wet."—So said the trim, quiet servant, who is quite accustomed to all kinds of visitors; she didn't like it at all at first, but is quite used to it now.

I went to my visitor; she was standing on the mat, and the rain was pouring from her garments as she stood.—"What has brought you out on such a night?" I inquired.

"I have come to fetch you to see an old acquaintance," she replied. "Do you remember Maggie Smith? I see you do. Well, she asked me to come and see if you would visit her; she is lying in 'the Rents' in Westminster, and wants you."

One quiet, regretful glance at fire, desk, pen; then the waterproof coat, thick boots, and the beating wind and rain.—Through the choking gutters, over the splashy roads, past the flickering gas-lamps, out of the decent thoroughfares, into courts and alleys that even this rain could not sweeten, and after a prolonged conflict with the tempest, that was not without its pleasantness, we reached "the Rents."

A small square of houses two stories high, worn out, squalid, fever-smitten at their best; at their worst—never-failing, swift adjuncts to hospital and infirmary beds and paupers' graves. A small flickering lamp on the staircase made darkness visible up the rotten, dangerous stairs, and we turned into the small back-room. The only furniture was an iron saucepan, a yellow basin, and an old box. In the broken-down grate a few gray ashes were smouldering away, an old lamp upon the mantel-piece gave light upon some rags in a corner, upon which, dressed in rags and covered with an old quilt, a woman lay tossing in utter unrest of body and soul.—Black hair streaked with gray, piercing black eyes wildly roving, never still; pallid face, full, deep, red lips; over all was clear witness that there lay the wreck of something that might and ought to have been infinitely brighter and better; but, as she lay, her own mother would have hated to recognize the child of her love.

"You have come," she said, in a soft, refined voice, startlingly out of harmony with her appearance and surroundings. "I knew you would, though this is not much of a place to come to, and I hear the wind and the rain. You have come, and I am glad; I have waited for you with such unutterable longing that the minutes have seemed hours as I have watched for you; but now you are here, and I shall get what I am longing and praying for."

"And what is that?" I asked.—"Something to drink!" she replied. "*I am dying for a drop.*"—"Do you mean to say that you have sent for me to tramp miles through wind and rain for this?" I inquired angrily.

"Yes, I do," she replied, "and I don't see why no; but do let Bet fetch the whiskey; give her a shilling, only one, and I will pray for you as I live. I have no money—nothing left to part with, all my friends are tired out, there was only you left, and I am longing for a drop. Don't say no. If I asked you for bread or meat, or tea or coals, you would give at once; the whiskey won't cost more, and it's more to me than all other things put together now."

If she had been starving for food or perishing with cold, she could not have turned more wildly beseeching eyes upon me. I was utterly confounded: all ideas of right and wrong seemed turned upside down; if she had raved, had uttered oaths, had asked food, that would have been ordinary experience; but to hear the soft, refined, beseeching tones so touchingly pleading for that which had wrought her such evil was something so new and confusing that I found myself uncertainly debating what to do.—"I must not, I dare not, I ought not," I said at length. "You know the evil drink has done you, and how can you ask me to give you more?"

"How can I ask?" she repeated, "because I want it so. Come nearer and let me tell you. The doctor was here this afternoon and he told Bet that it was all over with me, that I should be gone before the morning. I asked him to order me something to drink, and he turned and went down stairs without a word. But you won't be so hard-hearted, I know. I should be glad if you would read to me and talk with me, but I could not listen with this raging within. Just a very little would do for a time, and then I want to tell you something before I go. If you will only give me a very little I will tell you the other things that I sent for you to hear, but just a little whiskey first."

"Ask me for anything in reason," I rejoined, "and I will most gladly do it for you, but it would cost me never-ending regret to give you strong drink now. I ought not, I will not."

"Bah!" said Bet, as she left the room, "I told you it would be of no use, and if I had not fetched him I'd have had it out of him for you before now. But I'll try down stairs if I can't get enough for half a quartern. If he hadn't come through wind and rain to see you I'd have made him give it you."—She clattered noisily down the rotten stairs, evidently bent upon procuring strong drink by any possible means. While she was gone I sat looking at Maggie in silence, for I saw it was useless to speak of anything else while that awful look of expectancy was upon her face. It was not long before Bet returned with a white mug lacking its handle, in which was the spirit so craved for. She looked defiantly at me as she tenderly raised her companion, slowly poured the strong liquor between her quivering lips, and after all was gone she left the room.