

Girls and Boys.

A SILVER MUG AND A MULBERRY SUIT.

Johnny Emerson had a new pair of skates. Santa Claus was to blame for that, but in this case Santa Claus had another name, I think; for I am very sure that when I was in the store at Hunter's Corners on Christmas Eve, I saw the little old gentleman buying them, and heard Mr. Hunter call him "Grandfather Emerson." Still further, I had seen a ten-dollar greenback taken out of his pocket slyly, and handed over the counter, and there was not a cent given back in change.

"Dear me!" I thought, "Santa Claus is either very rich or very generous." Now I only paid two dollars for those I had bought to give poor Widow Green's boy, whom I caught crying in the corner of the fence because he had no skates. (I got Santa Claus myself for my pains; just as if I was a little old man, with an icicle on my nose, a pack on my back, and streaks of soot down my cheeks!)

Ten dollars! So Johnny Emerson had a new pair of skates; and if he wasn't in a hurry to try them on New Year's morning, then I am a little mistaken. He was the swiftest and prettiest skater at Hunter's Corners; while Sammy Green, whose mother had been too poor to buy him skates, and who never dared ask the boys to lend him theirs, had never skated a stroke in his life.

"Now, Johnny," said his mother as the boy buckled on his skates by the fire instead of waiting till he reached the lake, "you must surely be back by one o'clock, or the turkey will be cold, and the plum pudding all eaten up."

"Cold turkey is good enough," answered Johnny, "and I'd rather have mince pie than plum pudding any day; but I'll try and be back by one. I don't need to skate more than four hours at a time." And off he went to join the other boys at the skating place.

Now all the village children, nearly, were on the lake by nine o'clock, chattering, screaming, and laughing with happy hearts, bright eyes, and cheeks the color of juniper berries; and oh, how grandly they skated! sweeping off like the wind, gliding slowly back, whizzing away again, in squares, in circles, in parallelograms and triangles,—it fairly takes my breath to think about them.

Sammy watched them awhile, with wondering eyes, and then sat down and put on his skates. How his heart beat as he walked out a step or two on the ice. I think he was trembling a good deal, for after a minute or two, down he fell, and nearly broke his arm, striking against Joe Hunter's new scarlet sled, "Wildfire."

It was bad enough to fall and be laughed at, but it was certainly worse to have a dozen of his mates catch him at it, and raise a great shout, as if getting hurt was the funniest thing in the world. Sammy wanted to cry, but like a sensible boy, got up instead and tried again. This time he made out to slide a little, but threw out his arms so awkwardly, and made such droll faces, that the laugh was louder and longer than before.

"What's all this?" said Johnny Emerson, as he whirled in among them.

"Oh, it's only Sammy Green trying to skate," said Alice Parker, "and he does look so queer in his old patched trowsers and bob-tailed coat that used to belong to Santa Claus, I guess. Only see how awkward he is!"

Just then three men rode up to the edge of the lake, and shouted to the children that they had something to say, which it was important they should hear. So they all flocked together like so many red-winged flamingoes eager to hear what was coming.

Mr. Hunter stood up in the sleigh, and held up a beautiful silver cup. "I will give this cup," he said, "to that boy or girl who shall make quickest time, skating from this bend to Skinner's Point and back again. Who'll try for it?"

"I! I!" answered a hundred shrill voices, and such a clapping of hands, and hurrahing, and questions, that the gentleman could hardly finish what he had to say.

"All right," he said, as soon as he could make himself heard. "Now you may go, ten at a time, starting off at a given signal, and when the first ten have tried it another may follow. I will mark time for you, and these two gentlemen will stand by, and see that you all start fairly. First ten will start in five minutes. Fall into line!"

Then what a hubbub there was among the girls and boys! But Johnny Emerson stood still, thinking, and this is what he thought;

"It would be a good time to teach Sammy to skate, while the rest are so interested watching the races that they won't trouble us. I believe I'll do it! It's a pity if he can't have a little fun on New Year's day, as well as the rest of us fellows. I need not go with the first ten, but if I'm not too tired, I will race with the last. It's hard work teaching a boy to skate, though. Nobody knows when he'll tumble down, and have to be hoisted up again! and for the matter of that, half the time he drags you down after him, and bruises you rather more than is pleasant. But I'll stand it, for I want Sammy to have a little fun."

"Johnny! Johnny Emerson!" called half-a-dozen voices. "We're getting ready to start; come on!"

"Not now," cried Johnny, "go ahead! Now, Sammy Green," he said, in a low voice, "I'm going to teach you how to skate while the rest are racing. Get up and balance yourself again. There! Now take hold of my arm, and when I strike out with this foot, do you strike out with that one, and we'll rush along bravely."

Sammy clutched his friend, and set his feet in order. "One, two, three, and off!" cried Johnny. "Off" indeed it was, for Sammy was so anxious to go fast that he jerked Johnny to one side, and losing his balance, slipped off his feet, and brought his friend with a great bump beside him. It was the back of Johnny's head that felt it, and he "saw stars" for a minute. But he got up pleasantly enough. "Oh, never mind!" he said as Sammy began to apologize: "fellows always fall down when they are learning. We'll do better next time. Just keep steady, and swing out 'slowly, slow,' as the Turks say, and you'll be skating splendidly pretty soon."

Sammy braced himself and tried again. That time he succeeded in sliding several yards; and when Johnny stopped him by main strength from another tumble he looked around with a flash of delight in his eyes, that would have done your heart good to see. So at it they went again, and tried and failed, and tried and succeeded fifty times in the course of the next two hours. At the end of that time Sammy could skate, and skate alone!

But where had Johnny's wits been that he had not looked after the racing a little.

"Time's up," called Mr. Hunter. "Last ten start!" and start they did, just as Johnny, happening to think, left his pupil to himself, and turned about to join the sport.

"May I go yet?" he cried to Mr. Hunter. "Aye! aye! my boy," said the gentleman; and away he shot after them, while Sammy sat down to watch, whispering over and over to himself, "Oh, I hope he'll win! I hope he'll win."

But Johnny's head ached yet with that first fall of his, and he was tired and a little cold. Moreover, the ten had gone fully one-third of the distance before he had started. There was little chance of his winning in that race.

"Why didn't that boy start sooner?" demanded Mr. Hunter. "He's the very best skater on the lake."

"Please, sir," said little Sammy, "he has been teaching me to skate!"

"He might have taught you some other time, I think," growled Mr. Hunter.

"So he might, sir, so he might! but the boys and girls were laughing at me, and he said he would show me how when they were so busy they could not look. That's how it was!"

"And can you skate now without falling down?"

"Oh, yes sir! The last time I tried I went ever so far!"

"H'm! indeed!" said Mr. Hunter; "I'll try your skill, maybe, when the cup is disposed of."

All eyes were now turned to watch the eleven figures, darting on towards Skinner's Point. Johnny was not far behind now, and hardly had the others made a swift curve and turned back on their course, before he passed them like the wind, making a graceful bow, swept up on a line with the point, and whirling, was after them again. They could hear the sharp ring of his splendid new skates on the ice, and one of them, who could not resist turning his head, saw that he was gaining on them rapidly.

"That boy certainly makes the quickest turns," said Mr. Hunter, "and ought to have the cup, even if he gets in after the others. But he should have started when they did. It will hardly seem fair to the hundred boys and girls who were on hand at the right time, and have done their best, to give it to him. Still, if he really wins, I'll talk to them about it."

But Johnny was not going to win. Some thoughtless boy had whirled a stick far out on the ice, to show the strength of his arm, perhaps, and the gleaming edge of a skate struck against it. There