

# BOYS AND GIRLS

## 'Half a League Thompson.'

(By Emma Huntington Nason.)

'I'm just as indignant as I can be,' exclaimed the pretty and vivacious Belle Atwood; as she stood at the entrance of the recitation room, where a group of schoolgirls had gathered, in evident admiration, around their acknowledged leader.

'It's perfectly hateful in "Half a League Thompson" not to give us the holiday when we wrote that very humble and respectful petition. I don't think it would injure him, nor the trustees, nor us either if we should lose our Latin and French recitations for one afternoon; and by Saturday there'll be a thaw and the skating all spoiled, just as like as not. Besides the Elmwood cadets are coming down to skate in the cove this afternoon. I believe that's the very reason "Half a League" won't let us go. I should like to see him on the ice,' and Belle's merry laugh was re-echoed by her admiring schoolmates.

'Anyway,' continued Belle, "'Half a League Thompson" will find out that he

but the new master had thus far been found equal to the situation. He was now especially pained that one of the brightest and most scholarly girls in school should disclose a very mischievous and rebellious disposition. Although young himself and with but a short experience in teaching he could readily see that Belle was not deliberately malicious. Like many other brilliant and impulsive school-girls, she had been unwisely praised for her wit, which was often sarcasm; while at the same time she had flattered herself with the conscious power of leadership until she was often tempted to venture beyond the bounds which her own good taste and better judgment should have prescribed.

The other pupils, catching Belle's spirit, joined in the undercurrent of mischief; but for some reason which even the brightest or most astute of the boys and girls failed to understand, they were not able to bring about any unpleasant encounter in the school room. Nevertheless, while the new teacher thus held the balance of power, there was an uncomfortable atmosphere of

the military school in the neighboring town, and who, for some unknown reason, had changed their plans and fixed upon this morning for their visit to the Plainfield shores.

Seeing the Academy students in possession of the field, however, they did not at once intrude, but skated up and down the river's middle course.

Suddenly Belle exclaimed: 'Look! look at "Half a League." He is actually going out there.'

In truth, the subject of this disparaging remark was apparently struggling to make his way out toward the ridge of broken ice.

'He'll pitch head foremost,' cried one of the boys in genuine alarm; and the laugh that went up when "Half a League Thompson" suddenly sat down flat on the ice was not entirely devoid of sympathy.

But lo! as the tall, ungainly youth rose from the disgraceful fall, and while the eyes of both parties were fixed upon him, he suddenly struck out with flashing speed, cleared the ridge of broken ice with a flying leap, and to the amazement of the beholders, larded firmly on his feet on the smooth plain beyond, where he circled in and out among the cadets, executing the most astonishing movements and dizzying gyrations, which grew more and more intricate, until the entire throng stood to watch the accomplished skater, as he cut the most ingenious devices with his sharp skate-blades in the smooth surface of the ice.

Cheer after cheer rang from the lips of the enthusiastic Elmwood cadets; while the Plainfield boys and girls stood looking on with bewilderment pictured in their faces.

Suddenly a shriek rent the air.

'It's Bell's little brother, Charlie,' was the cry. 'Quick! quick! He's skated into a hole.'

A dozen swift skaters started for the spot where Charlie's red cap had just disappeared through an opening in the ice. 'Don't scream, Belle! don't faint!' cried Edith, 'He won't drown. They're all after him. They will get him.'

With an almost superhuman effort the girl tore herself from the grasp of her mates, and steadying herself a moment on her feet, she skated feebly down the river.

But there were others that were before her; and far ahead, outstripping all the rest, was the awkward figure which she had so lately held in supreme derision.

Swift as an arrow in its course sped the skater to the spot where two or three small boys were jumping aimlessly up and down, screaming and gesticulating, but not daring to approach the treacherous opening.

The figures of the skaters whirled like black specks before Belle's eyes. She staggered and fell upon the ice.

When she came to consciousness the cry, 'He's saved! saved!' was ringing in her ears.

Still she was mute and powerless, even when the master, with the dripping boy in his arms, sped by, followed by an excited and admiring throng.

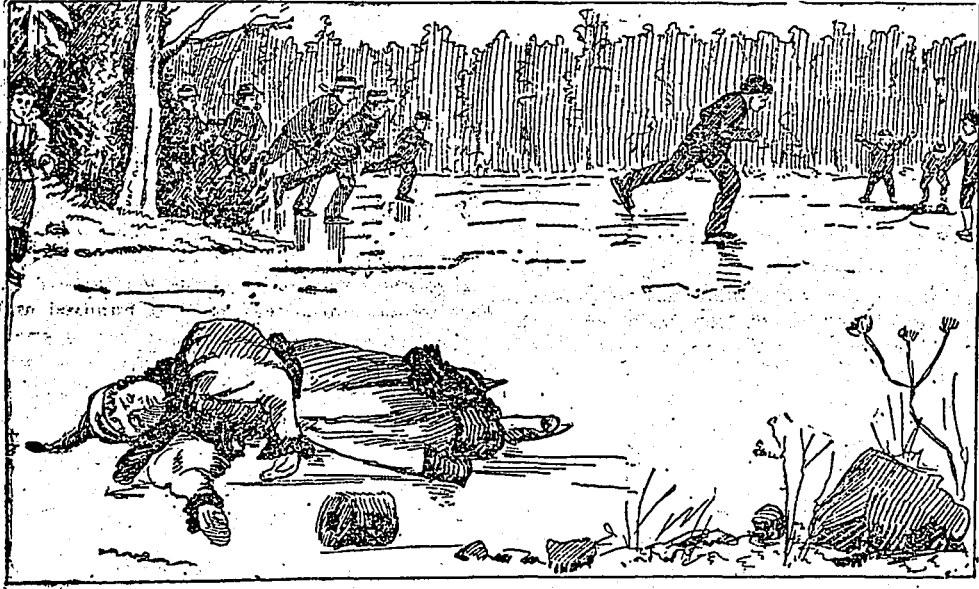
'What's his name?' hastily demanded one of the blue-coated, shoulder-strapped cadets, as they passed the group of girls.

'"Half a League Thompson,"' replied Edith, from sheer force of habit.

'"Half a League Thompson!" I should say so. But—beg pardon,' added the impetuous youth, observing for the first time, Belle's pallid face. 'Is anything the matter? Can I assist the young lady to the shore?'

'No, thanks. I'm quite well,' replied Belle.

On dashed the blue-coated young officer;



BELLE TOTTERED UPON HER SKATES AND FELL.

would better let us have our own way once in a while if he doesn't wish to be obliged to unexpectedly resign, after the example of his illustrious predecessor.'

'Hush! he's coming,' exclaimed little Mary Burton, as a tall, angular, awkward young man, with very light hair, and very large feet, appeared at the opposite doorway and walked down the hallway with the long, swinging stride which had suggested to Belle's fun-loving mind the apt soubriquet of "Half a League Thompson." This name instantly appealed to the fancy of the boys and girls, and from the first day of his appearance in school, the new teacher was known among the pupils by this euphonious appellation.

'I believe he heard every word you said,' whispered Edith Evans, as, with a flush upon his cheeks, but with a pleasant word and smile, the young man passed the group of girls and entered the school-room.

'I don't care,' said Belle, 'I hope he did. He needn't set himself up for a propriety stick to measure off rules for us.'

That afternoon was indeed a trying one to the new teacher, who had entered upon his duties at the Plainfield Academy at an inauspicious time, since his inefficient predecessor, as Belle had intimated, proved himself unable to govern the school, which he left with a sense of ignominious defeat in the middle of the winter term. The school was, therefore in a disorganized condition,

constraint of which all were conscious, and which, by the last day of the school week, had become quite painful. The Saturday holiday dawned cold and clear, and the little river which broadened at Plainfield and indented the shore with a deep, sweeping curve, was crowded with a merry throng.

The boys and girls were all keenly enjoying the exhilarating exercise when their attention was suddenly called to a familiar figure approaching from the shore.

'"Half a League Thompson,"' exclaimed Edith Evans, who was skating beside Belle.

The new teacher clambered down the bank and fastened on his feet a pair of old-fashioned skates, with leather straps, and screws in the heels.

'Graceful, isn't he?' said Edith, as the new comer struck out awkwardly with his right foot, dragging the left after it according to the hopeless fashion of a beginner in the art.

The approaching skater lifted his hat, and at the same time made a frantic effort to maintain his equilibrium.

Some of the older boys at once gathered around with generous offers of assistance and valuable bits of advice; and, after a while Half a League Thompson' appeared a little more confident and more secure upon his feet.

Just at this time also the attention of the boys and girls was diverted from him to a company of neatly uniformed cadets from