

A SKATING RINK IN CANADA.

Am I living? awake? or dreaming? Entering from the darkness of a moonless night, I am dazzled and blinded by a blaze of radiance. Gas sparkles in a thousand burners; flashes against burnished reflectors, which glitter like pure silver; lies full upon draperies in blue, scarlet, and white lines; and loses itself in the intricacy of evergreen wreaths, garlands, and festoons. When my eye begins to accommodate itself to what I have to see, it ranges through a vast hall, rather rudely raised, in truth, upon a wooden framework, but brilliant, in effect, like a gala night of the Caliph Haroun. Except a raised platform all round the walls, the floor is spread with an immense mirror, upon whose surface the reflected lights quiver, and which shines, smooth, hard, and bright, like polished steel. It is crowded with figures of both sexes in fantastic dresses, who glide over the surface with a swimming, undulating motion, exquisitely graceful; while a mass of spectators, scarcely less gaily dressed, people the platform. From somewhere overhead floats out a succession of the most brilliant and lively strains that music can produce.

Is it real? modern? and European? European it is not. It is a Canadian skating rink, and this evening is a masquerade night. I gaze with a vivid and eager curiosity. To me, a stranger, it is infinitely novel, strange, and exciting. On the ice hundreds of young girls, every other one of whom is pretty, or certainly looks pretty to-night, and of whom many are strikingly handsome—all alike set off with every device that can aggravate their charms—sway and flit about through the mazes of the crowd, seldom singly, but holding the hand of either a laughing companion or of some favoured cavalier. Sometimes a chain of these young beauties, hand in hand, comes sailing forward in line; sometimes a doubly happy youth leads forth one on either side. The most intricate and graceful evolutions are accomplished with an ease of which it would be hard to say whether it excites the greater wonder or admiration. These coquettish damsels scorch their admirers with a general blaze of scarlet—which is the ruling colour—mercifully toned down, subdued, and harmonised by rich, soft, dark furs. There is fur everywhere—fur encircling the fair, round, rosy cheeks; fur coiled round the white neck; fur on the wrists, and a fringe of fur edging the neat little natty boot. Black eyes sparkle; blue eyes softly gleam; each cast wicked and exasperating glances. There are “affairs” without end. Cupid opens the door of admission, and Hymen closes that at which many a pair passes out.

Now and then a fall happens. A glance of an ankle, perhaps a momentary glimpse of an inch or two more, is lost in enviously voluminous folds of feminine knickerbockers of scarlet cashmere. Officious fair ones hasten to help up their mishappy sister, and ringing and joyous laughter proclaims and celebrates the event. When a gentleman tumbles, the merriment runs over. What fate could he desire better than to afford amusement to these lovely creatures?

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