

SKATING.

It is winter now, and I can see from my window the smooth ice sheeting the face of the bay, as if to say to the ships, You have had your day, now let these waters be quiet. A great warm cloak for the waves is this sheet of ice, and, without it, I hardly know what would become of the thousands and thousands of fishes who live in the dark water depths. When the winds blow, and the waves curl and dash about, so that no ice can form, the water is far colder; and then you can never catch fish.

But these great ice-sheets are useful in another way, too. In very cold countries, such as Lapland and parts of Sweden and Russia, the smooth ice on the rivers and lakes serves as a road; which is better, in its way, than our plank-roads, and almost as good as a railroad. Sledges fly over it with gaily ringing bells; ice-boats dash from side to side like the wind; and women go to market with their eggs and frozen milk, and men perform very long journeys, indeed, on skates.

In America, people do not travel on skates. Even in Canada, where it is far colder than here, they have railroads and sleighs, which are more convenient than skates, as vehicles for travel. But here, as in Europe, skating is a favorite amusement for men and boys. I do not know of any pastime that is more healthful and pleasant; and if you have never skated, I advise you by all means to learn.

The first thing to be decided is the form of skate to be worn. The Dutch and Laplanders wear very long skates, which project a foot or so beyond the foot, and curl up half way to the knee; the object of this great size being to help the skaters over the lumps of ice and snow which they may meet on their way. Here, in the United States, we use a much smaller skate, either of wood or of iron. The iron skate is made with a spring, and is a pretty contrivance; some people prefer it to any other. For my own part, I like the wooden skate, with a blade about a quarter of an inch thick, and three-quarters of an inch high, and no longer than the foot. It should have a screw in the heel, to screw to the boot of the skater; and one long strap, passing through two slits in the wooden part

of the skate. If you can skate already, a fluted skate will answer best; but for beginners the plain skate is safer.

When you have got your skates, and are upon the ice, take the strap out altogether, and screw each skate to your boot. You will find a strong, heavy laced boot the best, as the strain upon the ankle is severe. Screw the skate as long as it will turn; then fasten your strap firmly but not too tightly. Some people use a heel strap, but if the screw be good, and the boot-heel sound, this is not needed.

Your skates secure, stand upright; and, leaning slightly forward, strike out with each foot alternately. You will find a stick a great help to you, if you hold it in both hands. At first you will find that your feet travel a great deal faster than your body, and the consequence will be that you will come down with a heavy bump. This is the fate of all beginners. Be careful to laugh louder than any one else when you fall, and go ahead. A good way of learning confidence is to get some friend who can skate to take you in tow, and scud over the ice. But without this you will soon learn that it is, in reality, very easy to balance your body on your skates. By leaning forward and to the side on which you are striking out, you will rarely lose your centre of gravity; and the quicker you go, the steadier you will be.

If you have a long river to skate on, straight traveling is good exercise. You will be surprised yourself at the rate at which you can travel. Good skaters can keep up with a fleet horse; in the north of Europe, men sometimes skate fifty and sixty miles in a day. I have heard of much longer distances being traveled on skates. But these long journeys cannot often be made, from the rarity of long smooth sheets of ice.

If you skate on a lake or pond, you will learn to perform the various skating figures. First, you must acquire the art of skating backward, which seems much harder to do than it really is. You have only to lean the body backward instead of forward, and kick out each foot alternately, and the rest will come naturally. Then, you will learn to describe circles, backward and forward, with one foot; to do "the outer edge," to make all sorts of flourishes on the ice. Some good

skaters can write their names on the ice with their skates; others can draw a figure of a cow, a horse, a dog, or a human face. These accomplishments require long practice. I have danced a quadrille on skates, each figure being performed much more carefully than is done in drawing-rooms at balls. This recollection reminds me that skating is good exercise for ladies as well as boys or men. I wish it were more common. I have seen many ladies skate admirably in America, and I am sure they never looked prettier than when they were whirling over the ice, like snow-fairies.

There are a few rules which you will do well to bear in mind in skating. After you have been on the ice some time, sit down and look to your skates: the screws and straps sometimes get loose and require tightening. Always look a long way ahead in skating. A stone, a nail, or even a hard snowdrift may cause you a heavy fall. If the ice cracks under you, keep cool, and skate gently away. If it breaks, spread your arms out as widely as possible, and do not scramble violently to climb the edge, for it is sure to break with your weight. You must keep your head above water, and wait till your friends throw you a rope or plank. Always wear warm flannels next the skin in skating; and when you take your skates off, put on a warm great-coat. Many boys have died of cold caught while skating.—*New York Periodical.*

SPELLING THE DICTIONARY.

One teacher who wielded the hickory-sceptre awhile in the old brown school-house on the corner, where the rudiments of learning were worked into my head, had a daily exercise in spelling somewhat out of the common course. Each member of our class selected from the dictionary any word he pleased, taking care to learn both how to spell it and how to define it. At the close of the ordinary spelling lesson, the scholar who stood at the head of the class spelled the word he had selected, and then the next below gave the definition of it, if he could.—If he could not, the word was passed down farther, till it came to some one able to tell its meaning. Whoever did this took his place in the class above as many as had failed. Then the second from the head spelled his word, and