

## ON SKATES IN FRIESLAND.

(From an English Paper)

THE other day Heerenveen was *en fete*. Thirty thousand Dutchmen had assembled on its spacious flooded meadows to see who were to carry off the gold and silver medals and the bags of guilders which were to reward the winners of the races. There were Friesland men in their skating garbs of black velvet jackets and knickerbockers with ribbons tied at the knee, and parti-colored stockings over their stout calves. Many of them wore peaked velvet caps like jockeys; others favored the seal skin caps which one may buy so cheaply in Friesland towns. With the men were their wives and mothers, and I dare say their grandmothers too, quite as enthusiastic as themselves. These ladies were rather anomalous in their attire. Many, if not most of them, had covered their crowns with the ancient head-dress of gold or silver plates, held at the temples by gold or silver bosses, and with a light lace cap of no small beauty over the precious metal. So far excellent. If they had been content with such a head-dress, one would have been willing to say Bravo! to it. Nothing is more odd and yet picturesque than this valuable local casque upon the fair hair of the girls. And, certainly, of itself it is a sufficiently potent protection against cold, if they needed such protection. But they spoil all, and do but burlesque themselves, by clapping a Paris hat with feathers and pendulous frippery on top of their traditional casques. And, worse still, the white lace which frames the face has a sad trick of making every woman who wears it look as if she were a sexagenarian at the least.

However, as the Frieslanders themselves are content that their women should thus belie themselves, it is none of my business further to condemn them. And so when we were in the outskirts of Heerenveen we all put on our skates, and in long companies speeded away by frozen ditches and meadows to the great space, the flags flying in the midst of which proclaimed the race course of the day. It was a very pretty scene. Snow had fallen and lay to the depth of an inch or two. The surrounding country was flat, of course. A windmill or two, a church spire, some uniform trees—these were the only conspicuous features against the dull-grey horizon sky. But on the meadow were thousands of skaters of all ages, from the six-year-old boy in wide breeches and abundance of self-reliance, to the hale and hearty folks of threescore and ten, who went straight ahead, cigars in mouth and hands behind the back, without

showing one symptom of failing vigor. There were sheds here and there on the ice and divers enclosures. The former were for the obvious purposes of refreshment, for the issue of tickets for the inner spaces and the bands of music which enlivened the nipping wintry day and put fresh impulse into one's fagging feet. Provision of warm milk and gin and other strong drinks, as well as tea and coffee and meat sandwiches and buns, had been made for many thousand persons; and yet the supply was not excessive. It is a standing marvel to the stranger how the Dutchman gets his money from a country apparently often so unthankful for the pains and labor he bestows upon it. In England an admission price of 1s. 8d. would have acted very prohibitively. Here the guilders were thrown out of the pocket as if they were threepenny pieces.

The races themselves were what skating contests always are. There is not much scope for diversity of manner in skating. One man prefers to use his hands like the sails of a windmill, while another keeps one arm folded in the hollow of his back, using the other as a paddle or balance pole, and a third does not from first to last unfold his hands from his back. Some prefer to skate upright, or nearly so, while others go at various angles. When this is said, it seems that all necessary suggestion is supplied. The opening heats were interesting, but not wildly so. The spectators did by no means mass themselves densely near the starting and finishing post. They too had their course, and they circumvented it over and over again, exchanging greetings, and jests, and what not, with cheerful, rosy faces, and the most hearty tokens of enjoyment. The competitors for the medals and guilders were mostly Dutchmen, and of these the majority were Frieslanders; but Altona and England and America each also had their representatives.

There is no doubt about it: the interest of all Friesland was centered mainly upon the performance of Smart, the Englishman, who had gained his laurels ere this; and Donoghue, the American, who, though a youth of but twenty or so (and therefore; in the opinion of Friesland, by no means a mature skater), had come to Heerenveen with very strong credentials. The results proved that this was justifiable. It was certainly a little galling for the honest Frieslanders to see the championship of the amateurs fall to the American, and that of the professionals to the Englishman; while their own countrymen had to take second and third place throughout. But they are a generous race of people. Besides, they feel an affinity with us English that they feel with no other people. The Englishman who asks for butter and