

SINGING ALONE.

THE salt sea roared in my weary ears,
 And my cheeks were scarred with the salt
 of tears ;
 But the hurrying folks in the road below
 Turned not to gaze on my face of woe.
 Would they have pitied me if they had known ?
 Or would they have said, with a face of stone,
 "Why should the woman's weak heart break
 For a babe who died ere his lips could
 speak ?"
 Oh, the weary roar of the sea in mine ears !
 Oh, the scorching rush of the rising tears !

Yes, the rosy lips of my baby-boy,
 They were pretty, you see, and they smiled in joy,
 And pouted in shyness—and yet, 'tis true,
 They had not learnt to speak—to you.
 Ah, his rosy lips ! Ah, his roguish smile !
 Ah, his steady grey eyes ! looking all the while
 When I moved about in the morning light,
 Doing my work in my darling's sight ;
 Till, stooping over his downy nest,
 I gathered him up to my yearning breast.
 Oh, the weary roar of the salt, salt sea !
 Oh, the lonely tears that are blinding me !

SKATING-RINKS AND RINKOMANIA.



WHEN Winter nowadays "comes to rule the varied year," he must be somewhat surprised to find that skaters, whom he has hitherto patronised, can do without him. Skating is now altogether independent of weather : it can be enjoyed in the merry month of May, or under the harvest-moon, quite as well as in the keen air of January. All we need is a properly constructed

skating-rink and a pair of roller-skates.

The term "rink," by the way, has a curious history. It has for ages been applied in Scotland by curlers to the piece of ice swept clear of snow on which they practise their roaring game. From Scotland, the word was exported to Canada, where it is given to the sheets of smooth ice, under cover, on which our fellow-subjects practise, in their long and windless frosts, such skating feats as are seldom seen in this country. Then "rink" travelled all over the United States, from New York to San Francisco, as the best possible term for the courts with flooring that looked just like ice touched with hoar-frost, where the new pastime of skating on wheels was enjoyed. It crossed the sea again, and now in England is in everybody's mouth.

The origin of almost all popular amusements is hid in obscurity, and we are unable to lay our finger on the benefactor of his race who first thought of roller-skating. The most we can discover is that about forty years since the public had a wheeled skate offered to them by one Tyers, of Piccadilly. It had five little wheels all in a row, that of the largest diameter being in the middle, and the others diminishing slightly towards the heel and toe. By means of this invention, it was said, "persons may rapidly glide over any level surface." The "drawing-room" skate of modern days appears to be based on the same principle.

The next we hear of wheel-skating is at Dresden,

where skating waitresses were introduced at a café. Then, about twenty-five years ago, the famous "Pas des Patineurs" of *Le Prophète* was brought before the public. But in Meyerbeer's opera moving on wheels seemed at least as difficult as walking on stilts ; not unfrequently one of the dancers lost control of her skates, and was carried forward almost into the orchestra.

It is only within the last few years that the pastime of roller-skating has become popular. The credit of its present position is due in a great measure to Mr. Plimpton, of New York, who has invented a "Circular Running Roller Skate," of ingenious mechanical construction, by which a new era has been opened up for skaters.

The skate consists of four wheels about two inches in diameter, and three-quarters of an inch in width, two parallel wheels being at the toe and the other two at the heel. These wheels are so hung on pivots that their axles are moved out of parallel by the transverse rocking of the skater's foot, the wheels setting squarely on the surface, whether the skater be upright or "canted." In this way, to whatever angle the skater may incline, the wheels will "cramp" or turn so as to describe the curve consistent with his inclination.

Everything that can be done with the ordinary ice-skates can be accomplished with the Plimpton skates. Both allow of "twelve fundamental movements," and consequently of nearly five hundred million "combination movements." When one has mastered the balance, he may betake himself at the rink to practising all the mysteries of outside edges and cross rolls, backwards and forwards, threes and double threes, serpentine lines and grape-vines, continuous eights, spread eagles, and what not. Nothing in the beautiful art of figure-skating need be set down as impossible.

The exertion of skating with roller-skates is trifling. "Compared with ordinary skating on ice," says one

authority, "one would have thought that the friction of four wheels on an unslippery surface would have demanded much extra exertion ; whereas the fact is that on a wooden floor the roller-skates save nearly a quarter of the expenditure of physical strength, and on a concrete floor one-tenth."

Roller-skates were first patented by Mr. Plimpton in 1863 : subsequently he secured rights in every country in which patent laws exist. We are informed that it took him fifteen years to perfect his invention. One of his great difficulties was to settle what the wheels were to be made of. Woods and metals of all sorts, bone, ivory, and a host of other substances were tried. Box-wood was at last chosen, it being found that it best suited both wooden and other artificial ice-flooring. As is the case with all good things, Mr. Plimpton's success has conjured up a host of imitators. Before his patent there were only nine patents in England, France, and America for roller-skates ; there are now at least fifty-five.

Every rink has its own flooring, and the question is not yet settled as to what sort is absolutely the best. It is said that Mr. Plimpton prefers wood. The skating-rink at Paris is made by first laying down a layer of concrete, and on that two layers of asphalt, so that the rink is nearly a foot in thickness. The largest skating-rink in London, that of the Royal Avenue, Chelsea, is composed of Portland cement and concrete, laid down to the depth of ten inches, and over this is placed a hard firm substance, which forms the skating surface. Mixtures of crystallised salts have been tried for rink-floorings, but with little success ; metal surfaces have fared no better.

The skating-rink presents a very different scene to the frozen loch with its real ice and wint y surroundings. There is no sitting down on a rock by the water-side to put on one's skates ; no rapid motion through the frosty air ; and there are no blue, chill, starved-looking spectators, blowing their fingers to keep them warm. But the artificial ice of the rink is as good, for all practical purposes, as if it were the result of a long and steady frost, whilst skaters are spared anxiety about either a thaw or a fall of snow. There is also no danger at a skating-rink of their being drowned.

Every one knows the sharp sound that rises from a loch covered with skaters. The noise of the rink is not like that. It resembles nothing so much as a thousand easy chairs all being wheeled at once to the fireside. Perhaps a poetical imagination might liken it to the noise of a brook flowing over a bed of pebbles—a sound "resounding long in listening Fancy's ear." But a fig for sentiment !

One admirable feature possessed by rink-skating is, that it is as suitable for girls as for men. The former do not learn so fast as the latter, but when they have learned the result is pleasing. A fine, graceful skater of a girl is more worth looking at than a man any day.

The rule appears to be that skaters pursue their way alone and with an awful earnestness. To the enthusiast, skating must ever be, more or less, a solitary amusement : his attention is too much engrossed for him to be playing the part of the cavalier. To the beginner it is of necessity solitary : when he is not gliding over the rink, he is engaged in solving the problem as to the softest way to fall. But flirting, or practising, or learning, no doubt the skating hour is a happy hour with everybody. As some one says, "The care to maintain one's perpendicular drives away all other care !"



"MAKING A FIGURE."

Skating on asphalt is easy to learn, even for those who are not expert at skating on ice. On one of the London rinks, a late Minister of the Crown may be seen practising this new amusement with considerable skill. At an advanced age he has become proficient after only a week or two of instruction. The art of figure-skating, of course, is not to be acquired thoroughly without considerable perseverance. But it is worth taking trouble about.

There has been much outcry in some quarters about the dangers of skating-rinks. We have been told of sprained ankles, twisted shoulders, and not a few broken arms. One skater falls on the back of his head, and not only sees stars, but disorders his intellect ; another falls on his face, and breaks his nose. A statistically-minded man was said, some time ago, to have calculated that skating on wheels was twice as dangerous as steeplechasing, and ten times as much so as fox-hunting.

But it is easier to invent rumours than roller-skates.

All the talk about the dangers of the rink is highly exaggerated. Of course there is a risk, but so there is in every game worth playing at. "With care, and a little more provision for teaching," says a well-known medical contemporary, "the risk is very slight for any persons adapted to the exercise." That rink-skating is favourable to health when pursued under proper conditions, cannot be denied. One has but to look at the glowing faces and graceful figures of many of the skaters to rest satisfied on this head.

At the same time, people cannot be too careful in their selection of a rink. One can readily understand that there is a strong objection to places, the only passport to which is the payment of a certain fee. A higher principle of selection is absolutely necessary in order to secure the young of either sex from coming within the pernicious influences that otherwise may creep in—unwise companionships too readily formed, and other evils which need not be mentioned here.

The only safeguard against these contingencies is a rink formed on the club principle, where the character of every member is guaranteed by a committee, which shall be responsible to the members for every person admitted.

No doubt the recreation is still only in its infancy. There is great room for development. In time we shall have the rinks handsomely decorated, maybe in character, with pines, and holly, and artificial snow: the bands—for a band seems to be a necessary accompaniment to a skating-rink—will always play in tune, which they do not always at present: and fancy dress fêtes, rink-balls, illuminated entertainments, and such-like gatherings, will then be of common occurrence. And at last, when all members of the community have become proficient in the art, a paternal Government will lay the footwalks in cities and every country road with asphalt, and we shall go skating about our daily business.

"GREY, BUT NOT WITH YEARS."

TOLD OVER A COUNTER.



DO you ever see any woman's hair at once so long and silvery as this, Mrs. Marbury?" asked Mrs. Chappell, exhibiting a fine tress which she was in the act of replacing in a box when I entered, as I frequently do now, for a rest

and a chat, when my way home lies in that direction.

"Yes!" was my unqualified answer; "once, and once only, and that not on the head of an old woman—if years are to be counted by the parish register. Miss Childers was old

enough and odd enough in all other respects, though she had not reached her fortieth birthday when I saw her, and she had then a mass of hair as white as a snowdrift."

"Dear me! that was remarkably young for grey hair," quoth Mrs. Chappell, putting aside the paper box. "She was not an Albino, surely?"

"Oh, no! she was simply a remorseful woman."

"Then I suppose her hair had turned grey suddenly?" and Mrs. Chappell's speaking eyes were like two notes of interrogation.

I loosened my waterproof and settled myself in the chair, as I answered those eyes.

"No; Miss Childers, who was of a poetic turn, told me herself, in the words of Byron—

"My hair is grey, but not with years—
Nor grew it white
In a single night,
As men's has grown from sudden fears."

And now, Mrs. Chappell, having raised the ghost of Mother Eve, I suppose I had better set curiosity at rest, if you are to have any sleep to-night."

She laughed, and I resumed, her assistant edging a little nearer to listen also, it being past their busy hours.

"You must know that all the eighteen years I have given to nursing invalids have not been spent in the smoke of London. So long as Oliver Marbury was above ground, I shifted from place to place, lest he should, by any strange mischance, trouble me again.

"Nine or ten years back I was located in an old cathedral city, which I need not identify beyond remarking the great height of its spire, and its numerous bridges, consequent on open watercourses running like rivers through the main streets.

"In the Cathedral Close stood one house, so isolated in its mysterious neglect and grime, I could never pass it without a shiver, even at Midsummer, or without a wonder what crime or Chancery suit could have cast such a shadow over that substantial, roomy dwelling. Venetian blinds, which had toned down from a bright green to a dusky olive, shut out alike sunshine and curiosity, except where the laths had proved too heavy for the rotten web, and dropping, let in accidental streaks of light upon the dust and mildewy secrets behind them—such light, Mrs. Chappell, as could force its way through panes of glass which were never cleaned unless the clouds (good scavengers that they are) compassionately washed the dirt off them. The window-frames were of that nondescript grey which white paint assumes in its very old age; and from the seldom-opened door the blistered paint had peeled in patches. The bell-wire was broken, the knocker rusty. No friend, no hawker, no mendicant ever raised it to send an echo through the silent house; even the strange tramp, who glanced up at the windows, passed on and sought no alms, supposing the place deserted.

"It looked desolate enough; nearly twenty years' disuse and dust were upon it; but prior to its abandonment to moth and mildew it had been bright as any in the Close; fitted throughout with taste and