

SKATING FOR LADIES.

BY J. M. L.

WHY LADIES OUGHT TO SKATE, AND WHY THEY DO NOT.

Learn to skate, and the ice will give you a graceful, sweet, and poetic motion.—*Emerson.*

I LEARNED to skate very early ; I cannot now remember my precise age, but I know that about the time I mastered the "spread-eagle," and the "outside," my Latin grammar was the most serious difficulty of my existence, and I used to wish I could skate through it. Since that time—it is several years ago—I have seldom failed to use my skates on at least one day during each sufficiently severe frost to make sound ice. To my skates I am indebted for many a day's enjoyment—days that might, but for them, have been dull and uninteresting. But this is the least of the advantages I have derived from them ; confidence and strength are among the others. Emerson says, continuing the passage from which I have quoted above—"The cold will brace your limbs and brain to genius, and make you foremost men of time." A "foremost" man himself, and a great lover of skating and all motions and exercises that give grace and strength, he sets upon skating its real value—a very high one. I remember a good doctor saying—"Cricket-balls and skipping-ropes, skates and hoops, are the best physicians in the world if used with moderation, and early enough." He was right. If the people of a country are effeminate, it arises from the luxuries and restraints that are practised, and it is only necessary to extend the circle of outdoor exercises to counterbalance these. This brings me to the consideration of my subject—"Skating for Ladies."

Personally speaking, I have always regretted that more ladies do not skate, and considered that ladies ought to learn, because there are really so many reasons why ladies should skate, that I cannot decide which is the most important and entitled to the place of honor ; let me therefore select the one which will admit of no refutation, and is most agreeable—let me say because it is a pastime in which they would greatly excel. I am not quite sure that my regret has always been of the most disinterested kind. In cold Christmas weather, when a merry party was gathered in my father's house, it would have been much pleasanter not to have had to leave the young ladies at home

while we went to the pool. Does the dear reader say, "Then why go at all?" I answer, "because the opportunities for skating are few and precious." How had the ladies used to beguile those hours that were so merry for us ? Let me draw you two pictures.

It is a bright, keen winter morning. Those of us addicted to the wholesome cold-water bath have to break the ice in our bath-tubs. Little Charlie has to breathe on the window-pane a long time before he can disperse the pictures of Arcadian dells and rough mountain passes which the fairy Frost has traced thereon in the silent night ; and almost before he has looked out the business of a new picture is commenced. The postman brings up the letter and tells us, "Yes, the lads are on the pool, and it would bear a wagon loaded with hay, or an army." The important business of breakfast is speedily dispatched. Skates are rubbed, and, gimlet in pocket, off we go, with—forgive us ladies—an impatient answer to your questions: "Is it quite safe? and how long will you stay?" "Stay? why, till dark, if the ice is good, of course."

After the warm breakfast-room the air is keen and sharp ; but it has a delicious freshness all its own, a briskness unknown to other mornings, that imparts itself to us as we anticipate the delights of a day on the ice. The trees are all draped with lace, to which the most exquisite manufactures of Valenciennes or Nottingham are nothing. The fieldfares and blackbirds are congregated in them, chattering as they make a scanty breakfast on the few frozen hips and haws that remain. The larks start up in a huge flock from the stubble, and utter their winter notes over our heads ; we remark that they have probably had no breakfast, the frost has robbed them of their food ; but then it has made the pool bear. This is to us sufficient, and so we pass on, feeling—if we are not in too great a hurry to reach the pool to feel—that, after all, it is Nature's doing, and not ours, if they are robbed of their breakfast.

At the pool we find the lads from the village, and not a few girls, too, sliding bravely up and down the smooth surface, and greatly exhilarated by the motion. Our skates are soon on, and ten minutes after we are "all a-glow," and in the enjoyment of the most delicious motion

I know. A graceful succession of circles or semi-circles, made with scarcely an effort, to which all the waltzes in the world are "as moonlight unto sunlight." The morning wears on, in the happiest way, and the delicious movements set every generous and pleasurable emotion vibrating.

Meanwhile, how does the morning wear with the ladies whom we left at the breakfast-table? They cannot ride; it would be cruel to the "poor feet" of the horses, to say nothing of the danger of slippery roads. They read and write letters, they gather around the fire and indulge in "small talk"—I beg pardon—or they knit, crochet, or embroider. I am not going to say one word against these pretty occupations. (I may remark, *en passant*, that therein ladies have a great advantage, being able to make nimble and good use of their fingers while carrying on the most animated conversation, whereas the most gentleman can, or, at least, the most they *do* do, under similar circumstances, is to smoke.) But are these the best occupations ladies can have on bright winter mornings? All days and nights answer for the purpose of embroidering; how very few afford an opportunity for skating! Do the fingers never grow tired, and is not the warmth of exercise out in the bracing air more pleasant than the artificial heat of burning coals? Ladies, try it.

I am drawing these pictures from a real experience; for me, the ladies, and the pool, and the frosty mornings to which I have referred, quite incidentally, and by way of illustration, have a real and tangible existence, and some of those ladies are now my happiest skating companions, and look, on a frosty winter evening, when the sun is setting, up to the church vane with as much interest as I do, to see if the wind is still easterly, and the frost likely to make sound ice.

It seldom happened that after luncheon they did not pay the pool a visit, and, thoughtful and charitable as ever, bring some pretty bags well stored with sandwiches. It was then that I felt most keenly what a great loss of pleasure ladies suffered by not skating. To me the cold air was exhilarating, delightful; as they stood upon the banks, it was to them painful, and they hurried back to the fireside for the remainder of the bright day. Perhaps an old arm-chair with runners—say a superannuated rocking-chair from the nursery—was produced, and they, in turn, enjoyed being pushed before me round the pool. Still, that was not self-motion, not the airy, joyous, graceful exercise that dispersed the blood rapidly over my frame.

It was after such a visit that I determined to teach my sisters to skate. They tell me now that making a figure of 8 is the pleasantest occupation and the most enjoyable amusement that the whole year brings them. Clara says: "Walking is like prose, skating is like poetry," and really on the ice one does seem to move in rhythmical numbers. I never had a day's skating that I did not feel benefited mentally as much as physically, and, I believe, morally, too, for the action produces vigorous health, and a new, strong current of generous emotions.

There is no danger in skating, always providing that due precaution is taken relative to the soundness of the ice. Of the difficulties of learning, which by the way are always greatly exaggerated, I shall have more to say anon. The only real ones are the first step—perhaps I ought to say stroke—and the access to a place suitable for learning. I think I shall be able to show that neither of these are obstacles of sufficient importance to deprive ladies of what I am sure they would find as delightful an amusement as dancing, with this advantage, that the one would add to their strength and health as much as the other, by the late hours at which it is practised, impairs it. If I can do this, and can induce ladies generally to follow the excellent example set by a few of their number, I am confident they will be thankful for the addition to their somewhat limited number of amusements, of one of the purest and best sports practised by men. Experience has proved, in cases where ladies have adopted skating, that in it, as in dancing, they greatly excel, and are, if less adventurous than their brothers, far more graceful. But it is not only as an amusement that skating would benefit them, but as a wholesome and highly profitable exercise, which offers itself at a time when others cannot be had, and which will develop their strength and powers of endurance.

Ladies, then, ought to skate. Let me now proceed to consider why they do not.

I shall first of all deal with the weakest objection raised against it; but it is one, though puerile and paltry, which I feel to be very general. Paterfamilias objects to his daughter's skating, because he thinks it is unfeminine. This is one of those deplorable notions with regard to "proprieties," and what women may and may not do—

That seem to keep her up, but drag her down.

Is it unfeminine for ladies to be healthy, good walkers, with an upright gait, and a frame that is physically able to endure as much watching

and working, if need be, as they are willing to undergo? Nothing I know is more conducive to these qualities than skating. Yet, say how many fathers, it is "unladylike," and the very same men do not object to their daughters dancing till long after midnight. When the skipping-rope has become too childish and hoop-bowling has lost its charm, there ought to be some substitute found that will do their work, and for the winter days a pair of skates offers the very best.

The real difficulties are the access to a sufficiently private place for learning, and the friendly initiation. It is, for obvious reasons, very desirable that a lady's first day on the ice should be only in the company of some few friends upon a pond not frequented by others. To ladies residing in provincial towns and villages, this difficulty is but slight. Half an hour's walk, at most, will bring them to some suitable place—some little pool (a large one is not required) where they may practise. The railways, too, offer ladies residing in the metropolis itself almost as great facilities. A day, aye, even the first day upon the ice will be delightful; and the second and third days will bring with them a degree of proficiency that will afford a new and pure enjoyment, and the cold weather will have a charm it has never had before. An occasional fall during the early days—and by no means a violent one—is the very worst that is to be anticipated by a lady who has a brother or friend, used to the ice, to accompany her. I have known ladies so attended learn without falling at all, and make fine, dashing figure-skaters in an almost incredibly short space of time. *Confidence* is the most essential quality; and here is another reason why the first attempts should not be made on crowded ponds, for it is impossible, where skaters are darting about, and many people are looking on, that any one should have confidence unless it has been acquired by experience. I have known strong, sturdy schoolboys so talked to about the difficulties of skating, and the falls they would have to undergo, that they have been timorous on the ice for days, and consequently tumbled about in every direction. This ought not to be. Another mistake is that it needs strong ankles. That is all nonsense; there is more stress upon the ankle in ten minutes' dancing than in an hour's skating.

Another reason why skating is not general among women is a natural objection each one feels towards taking the first step. That is, the first step among her own circle of friends.

A few, a very few, ladies do skate, and have done so now for many years. I have said that the pool to which I have referred has a real existence. It was there I first saw ladies skate, and they were, without exception, the best skaters I ever saw.

I would earnestly exhort fathers to buy their daughters each a pair of skates, and their brothers to teach them how to use them, with the full assurance that they will ever after be their pleasantest skating companions, their *vis-a-vis* in many an eight. It is a great folly, to say nothing of the positive wrong, to narrow the straitened limit of out-door amusements in which ladies are privileged to indulge. Here is one, offering a graceful occupation for days that are spent by them at the fireside, offering itself at a time when riding is generally impracticable, and walking insufficient for warmth; embrace it, and the interest of the scenes of our ponds and rivers during the frosts will be greatly increased, and skating will have a greater attraction, and be productive of more good than it ever has been in England.

MY CASKET OF GEMS.

BY MRS. WOLVERTON.

For thee I'll ope my casket lid,
And thou shalt view my treasures hid;
Here's thought, and feeling, fancy fair,
And rich experience folded there.

And memories too, in golden hours—
Some woven were 'mid drenching showers,
Look closely down and thou wilt see
Each raindrop wove a pearl for me.

And roses fair, and mossy stone,
I gleaned them o'er a pathway lone;
So bright they seemed amidst the gloom,
My casket gave them welcome room.

And sunny hopes to cheer the way,
When through the dark my feet must stray;
And faith and trust, by angels given,
To light me through the doubt to heaven.

And gentle words for those I love,
Sweet as the speech they use above;
And friendship's smile, affection's tear,
And pity's tone are garnered here.

And happy love, so true, so bright,
'Twould break the darkest, deepest night!
By many friends the chain was twined,
Around them all my heart-strings wind.

They share my tear, my smile they claim,
Each joy, each grief to me they name;
'Mid sorrow dark upon my breast,
They soothe the aching heart to rest.

Yes, true, to me are treasures lent,
To weave of life the sweet content;
And one has said, "Where'er you go,
Along your way you sunbeams strew."

SAFETY SKATING FRAME.

FOR BEGINNERS.



Our readers can see the proportions in the cut. The bottom of the runners being slightly curved, the frame is easily turned in any direction. The ends of the runners being turned up, enables the frame to pass over any reasonable impediment, thus saving it from stopping, and being thrown over forwards; the long tails would not allow it to be pulled over backwards. The skater's hands being placed on the hand rail, *between its supports*, prevents her from upsetting the frame sideways.