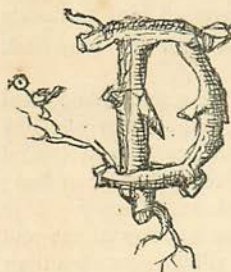


THE GAMES AND AMUSEMENTS OF THE MONTH.

DECEMBER.



ECEMBER and Christmas holidays, and snow-balling, and skating, and sliding, seem to be all very closely associated in our minds, and happy is the healthy boy or girl who hears that Jack Frost has laid his strong hand on the pond, and who can run out of

doors to enjoy that form of motion which winter alone can make possible. But pleasant as is the exercise in the keen frosty air, skating and sliding should not be indulged in without a certain amount of prudence. A swimmer can do but little if the ice gives way, so cold is the water and so blocked is it with broken ice; and all who venture on frozen ponds deep enough to drown a person should see that a rope or ladder, or some other possible means of escape, is close at hand.

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It is very important to know how to tell *safe* from *unsafe* ice. It should be clearly understood that there is a great difference between *black* ice and *white* ice. Black ice, which follows severe frosts, is the stronger and more durable. It is very elastic, and has the adhesive power as well as the elasticity of india-rubber. It bends like whale-bone without giving way, and cracks only under a strain that shows it is being tried very much beyond its powers. It is said that this black ice an inch thick will bear the weight of a man without danger of breaking, whereas ordinary ice should be at least an inch and a half thick.

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When *white* ice bends, look out for a break-up. The bending is then a sign of softness or rottenness, resulting from a weak frost or gradual thaw. White ice will often crack when it is perfectly safe for skaters, and it should not be forgotten that almost all ice, unless it is of immense thickness, will crack when a large expanse of water is covered. As a rule, however, the edges of such cracks remain close together. It is the soft quiet cracking, extending everywhere over the ice, which betokens peril. Above all it is imperative to avoid white ice which is full of *air-holes*. These are so many traps through which the unsuspecting may fall.

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The great art in Skating, and the first point

which the beginner has to learn, is to keep the body balanced properly. The tyro should endeavour (1) to keep the weight of the body well in front, and on the inside of the feet; (2) to turn out the toes; (3) to allow one foot to complete its stride before the other foot begins; and (4) to keep the ankles stiff and firm. As to this last requisite, practice is absolutely necessary; but after two or three hours' hard work the ankles will rapidly acquire strength. The beginner will find that a stick is no aid at all: he may, however, push a chair along in front of him if he will, or, better still, get a friend to support him in his early attempts. When he can stand and move about on his skates without fear of falling, he should endeavour to take as long strides as possible, keeping the knees straight, the hands down, and the toes turned out. In this way he may hope to acquire a good style.

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A word or two about Sliding. For this exercise there is nothing like a moderate-sized pond—one, maybe, which is much too small for skaters; and the reason for this is evident: the slider requires a good long run upon the ground before he starts on the ice, otherwise he will not get sufficient impetus. Two slides running parallel to one another should be made right across the whole length of the pond, so that the sliders may go up one slide, and back again down the other. If the ground over which the sliders run be covered with snow, well and good; but if not, the "run" should be covered with straw, or earth will continually be carried on to the pond, and the slide will soon be spoilt.

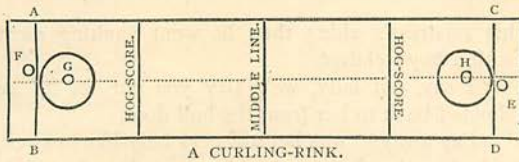
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Positions in sliding are many and various, but perhaps the most approved is when the feet are close together, the right foot in front and pointing forwards, while the left foot is drawn up sideways at the back of the right heel. A very difficult position consists in turning both feet out until they are in the same straight line, the toes of the right foot pointing straight forward, and those of the left pointing straight behind, while the heels are close together.

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Several ordinary out-door games may be played upon the ice—Hockey, for example; but the frozen field has one special game of its own, very popular in Scotland and the north of England, known as "Curling." It is not at all unlike quoits, and is

played on a strip of ice, about forty-two yards long, and eight or nine feet wide, kept thoroughly swept, so that the surface is like glass. The playing



ground is marked out, as in the accompanying diagram, the distance between the lines A B and C D being $39\frac{1}{2}$ yards. The large circles at either end are fourteen feet in diameter. The "middle line" is of course drawn in the centre of the ground or rink. Seven or eight yards from A B and C D, two other lines are drawn, called the "hog-score."

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The players stand at one end of the rink, each in turn placing his front foot in the smaller circle, or "foot-circle" (E or F in the diagram), and hurling thence his "curling-stone," endeavouring to send it as near as possible to the smaller circle (G or H) at the other end of the rink. The



A CURLING-STONE.

curling-stones are of circular shape, with flattened sides, and in the orthodox game must not weigh more, including the handle, than 50 lb, or less than 30 lb., or be of greater circumference than thirty-six inches, or of less height than one-eighth of the greatest circumference. Of course young players could not expect to use such heavy stones, and lighter ones should be employed by them. The length of the ground, too, should be proportionately reduced.

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Each player generally uses two curling-stones, and there may be one, two, three, or four players on each side. If a stone be hurled beyond the lines A B, or C D—that, is beyond the larger, or "tee-circle"—it is considered dead, and is removed from the ice, just as a quoit is dead if it lies with its concave side uppermost. Similarly, if the stone does not pass the "hog-score" it is removed from the play. No stones outside the larger circle count; but

they may be left in the play if between the "hog-score" and A B or C D, so as to obstruct an opponent. The counting is very much as in bowls, those nearest to the small circle, or tee, scoring. Thirty-one points generally constitutes a game.

* * *

For very little girls, "The Princess Prisoner" forms a good game. One child raises a handkerchief or antimacassar over her head, which is then held up by several other little girls so as to hide her head. She is then supposed to be the castle in which the Princess is imprisoned, and her companions the stones of the wall round her. All the other little girls in the room are in league to relieve the Princess. Two of their number come up and ask, "Where is the pretty Princess?" The reply is, "Shut up in her castle." They then carry off, one by one, the little girls who are holding the covering over the Princess, until one only is left. This last one lets the antimacassar fall and rushes off, followed by the Princess, who must catch some one to take her place.

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In another game, known as "Old Mammy Tip-pety," the children sit in a row on a form, or on chairs, except the one who is to personate the "old mother." When all are ready she goes up to the last child with a slipper in her hand, and says, "How did you tear your dress [or coat]?" After hearing each child's reply, she goes down the row again and shows each one where to mend the supposed rent, saying—

"I give you this much work to do,
Use thread and needle and thimble too.
If you don't have it done
By the time I come home
You'll be beaten black and blue
With my old shoe."

She then turns to go, singing—

"I'm going to Lady Washington's
To get a cup of tea,
And five loaves of gingerbread,
So don't follow me."

This is the signal for the children to follow her, when she suddenly pounces upon them, and chases them, trying to catch one, while they try to get back to their seats. She comes back and asks—"Have you been out to-day?" "No." "You have! Where have you been?" "To see Grannie." "What did she give you?" "Strawberries and cream." "Where is my share?" "In your bonnet-box." "You naughty children! you have spoilt my best bonnet!" "I wish we had!" they all exclaim, and rush round the room. She gives chase to them, and the first one whom she catches is out of the game, and so on until she captures all.