

SKATING.

ALTHOUGH England is by no means as cold as Russia, Norway, Sweden, or Denmark, and the winters, consequently, not so long, we are far superior to the inhabitants of any of them in the art of skating. The Russians, Norwegians, and Swedes skate very little; they do not pursue it for a pastime, neither do they practise it as a mode of travelling, preferring rather the safer, and, to themselves, less fatiguing, sledge. The Dutch skate a good deal, but they do so more as a means of journeying over their numerous rivers and pools than as a pleasure. It is a circumstance of every-day occurrence to see Dutch peasants, both men and women, skating in their easy sort of "roll," with their market baskets on their arms. But these do not care to extend beyond what is absolutely necessary for a safe and quick progress, while even those who make a pleasure of it do not much improve on the monotonous motion, and are far from attaining to the skill of a good English skater in the more intricate figuring.

Skating, besides being a graceful and pleasant recreation, is an excellent exercise. If not better than, it is, at least, quite as good as, that of walking; and, from its novelty, and the constant occupation it gives to the mind, as well as to every muscle in the body, it is far more amusing both to the performer and spectator.

Many persons, however, care only to attain to plain, straightforward skating. Even this is an amusement, as well as an exercise; and a "straight ahead" excursion up a river, provided only you are attended, and the ice is everywhere sound, is productive of much pleasure. This is, however, very hazardous work; for even after a long and severe frost there are sure to be some places which do not hold. These are generally under trees, or where springs join the river, and they can, if seen, be avoided; but the danger consists in running on to them unawares.

In the frost of December and January, 1860 and 1861, two gentlemen skated up the Dee from Chester to a village some seven or eight miles up river. They performed it in safety; but on the next night a man started down the river on the same journey, and was

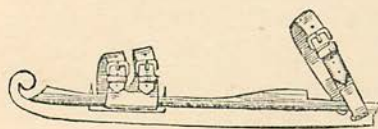
never seen or heard of again; even his body was not found. He must have gone through the ice, and the current, which is rapid, most probably carried his body out to sea. Had he gone in the day-time he might have been able to avoid weak places, or could have gone on the tracks of the two gentlemen; but by going at night he could not, of course, see sufficiently, thus sacrificing his life to a foolhardy adventure.

A person can scarcely begin too early in life to learn skating. The younger the better, and for a very good reason. You cannot become a good skater without many falls—some severe ones—and the younger and shorter the learner is the less likely is he to be hurt by a fall, having, perhaps, only three or four feet to fall, while a grown person's head comes down from a height of five or six feet. Besides that, a heavy adult is much more likely to break through with a fall than is a younger and lighter person. Excepting, of course, the foolish venturing on unsafe ice, a fall is the only real danger in skating. A tall person, falling backwards, stands a good chance of a broken skull; and even limbs are broken or dislocated occasionally. Do not let this, though, frighten the beginner; for the more timid he is the more likely is he to suffer. Courage and perseverance are the great requisites. Dash at it, and if you fall, get up, and try to fall again! If you are constantly on the look-out for tumbles you will get them oftener than if you almost courted them. A skater, who has been some time an adept, rarely falls, unless he comes across "a trip" in the shape of a bit of wood or orange-peel. Such "trips" are always to be found where there are many people who do not themselves skate. They invariably seem to have a delight in practising the dog in the manger. Places resorted to by these persons should be especially avoided by beginners, who should select some quiet pond which is exposed, and not overshadowed by trees; and the shallower the pond is, the safer, both as regards the ice—for shallow places freeze the soonest—and in case you should "get in." If a youth chooses to go on the ice before it "bears," it is his own respon-

SKATING.

sibility; and, if he selects a quiet spot, he should be doubly cautious, from the fact that, if he gets a ducking, and there is no one to help him out, he may not be able to extricate himself. Rivers, as before mentioned, are dangerous, and should be especially avoided. The danger of this I can myself vouch for. When but a "plain" skater, I had embarked on an excursion up a rapid and deep river in the company of another youth. We never for a moment thought of the ice not bearing, for the frost had then lasted for three or four weeks, and every pond and pool was as sound as could be. We accordingly proceeded merrily on our way, now running into narrow nooks and little bays, now dashing through some overhanging bush, first one leading and then the other, until, on passing near where a thick willow-tree hung its branches over the ice, I, without the least warning, went through, having only just presence of mind enough to catch hold of something. I never could tell what it was, until my companion, heedless of his own danger, came to my rescue. That quite cured me of all river skating; and I should recommend all who may read this to take advice, and not to prove the soundness of it by experience, lest they should not get off so well.

A great deal depends on the skates. Of these there are numerous sorts; but the best are those made by Marsden Brothers, Sheffield,* somewhat similar to the accompanying engraving. They are expensive, certainly;



too much so, perhaps, for beginners, who, when they grow older, will require larger ones; still, some of a less polished finish, but having the various improvements introduced into these, are to be got at a cheaper rate. It is a good fault to have skates too long. Never use short ones; they are dangerous for beginners, and many a fall may be attributed to short skates. The chief points to be observed in purchasing a pair are, that

* Skates made by Marsden Brothers can be obtained from any ironmonger, who, if he has not them himself, will order them.

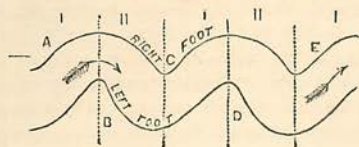
the irons are hard and ground alike, and that they extend beyond the heel-screw, as above represented; this prevents you from falling backwards as often as you would if the iron only went as far as the screw-head; that the straps are few, plain, broad, and strong, for numerous and narrow straps only pinch and hurt the foot. Plain pegs, as above drawn, are quite as good as screws; the latter, as far as holding the skates on is concerned, are useless when the hole in the heel of the boot gets worn a little. If screws were intended to hold on the skate, what would be the good of heel-straps? and if the heel-straps were intended to do so, what is the object of screws? The screw, or rather peg, is only an enlargement of those three smaller ones on the sole of the skate. The latter are intended to prevent the front part of the foot from slipping from side to side, and the former to keep the heel in its proper position; only, as all the weight of the body rests on the heel, the peg there has to be much stronger. Moreover, in the skates where a place is cut out for a heel a screw could not be used, as you could not turn the skate round.

In putting on the skates, the iron should be almost under the ball of the great toe—that is to say, a little to the inside of the middle of each foot: this gives more force to the stroke.

A good way of learning is to put a high-backed chair on the ice, with the back towards you, and your hands resting on it; then push it along by striking out, first with one foot and then the other. In doing this, keep as long as possible on one leg, throwing the whole weight of your body on to it; and, when the impetus slackens, press the toe into the ice, and strike out with the other foot. From the marks of these strokes it is very easy to tell where a good or bad skater has been; those of the former are straight and long, one beginning where the other leaves off; while those of the latter are crooked, irregular, and running into one another. Care should be taken to keep both feet equally proficient; if you find that you are steadier on your right foot than on the left, work the latter more, until both are alike, and *vice versa*. It is bad, however, to accustom yourself to the false help of a chair, or even a friend's arm, after you have once

SKATING.

got the knack of striking out. Scramble along by yourself, nothing daunted at the few falls you will get; do not for anything get timid, for, from the alpha to the omega of skating, intrepidity is the great requisite; and, if you follow this up, you will, sooner than you may perhaps expect, cut along gracefully and easily. When you are able to do so satisfactorily, then try the "plain" backwards. To do this, go straight forwards for a short way, until you have got up some little speed, and then, raising one foot from the ice, turn sharply round on the toe of the other, immediately, on your position being reversed, bringing the disengaged foot on to the ice, behind you, so as to prevent your falling. This requires good practice, and may cost a fall or two; but, after a little time, you will do it so easily that the forward impetus already attained will, when your position is reversed, carry you on some distance. While you are yet moving backwards, with your feet "abreast" of each other, and cutting parallel lines on the ice, wriggle them about from side to side: so:—

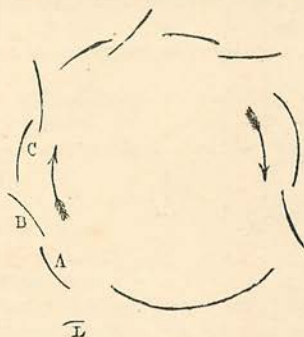


and, as you curve to the right (I.), press your right toe into the ice (marked A, c, and B in I.), taking a little larger stroke with it than you do with the left; and when you curve to the left (II.), do the same with the left foot (marked B and D II.), and so on, until, after some practice, you can attain a tolerable speed, when you can proceed to striking out, by lifting first one foot and then the other, while the one on the ice makes the thick curve or stroke.

Now that you are a "plain skater," both backwards and forwards, you can venture the preliminaries of figuring. Many persons, however, learn to figure-skate without having previously accomplished the "plain" backwards; but it will be found better to learn the latter first, for this reason. In figure-skating, when you are going on one foot, you are liable now and then to be jerked round, in which case, if you have not got the knack of sustaining

your balance in the reversed position, you will, most probably, get a roll, and perhaps a hard one.

The foundation of all figure-skating is the "outside edge," or Dutch roll, as some call it. When you can do this the rest is comparatively easy. But it is easier to imagine than to perform this feat; it is, without doubt, very difficult, and can only be attained by long and constant practice, and, at the same time, it wants a great amount of steady perseverance and courage. What is, perhaps, the easiest way to learn this is by the following method:—Strike out *off* the left foot (L) *on to* the right (A), and when you have gone about two feet on the right, cross your left leg over to the *right-hand side* of



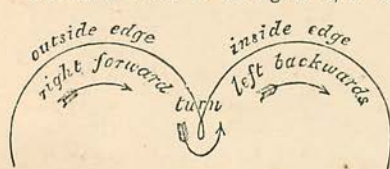
your right one, and bring it down on to the ice at the same time that you lift your right one off; when you have gone another two feet or so on your left foot (B), put down the right again (c), and while on it throw your left leg out before you—until you have to return it to the ice—so as to allow you to lean on to the right side, and a little backwards. Here is the danger; for if you do not lean back and to the right sufficiently, you cannot get on to the outside edge of your skate so as to make a circle; and if you do it too much, so that your left leg is not a sufficient counterpoise, you will fall backwards and get a severe concussion. This process must be repeated round and round, each time, if possible, making the stroke of your right foot longer than the last, for this is the *outside edge* one; the left is inside, and only necessary to relieve the right and give a fresh start, until you can keep up the right one for so long that it carries you round on

SKATING.

that leg, and without stopping, to where you commenced the stroke. When you can do this you have conquered the *pons asinorum* of skating, but only with the right foot. The left is done in the same way, only starting off the right foot on to the left, and leaning to the left and backwards, while you make the left stroke the longest and the curve. Do not, by any means, be content with the outside on one foot; work at it until one is as good as the other, and then you will, indeed, have made a great step.

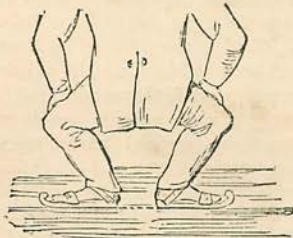
You will now be able to do the "Dutch roll," which is merely the outside edge instead of the inside, and a curve outwards, instead of a straight stroke. The Dutch almost always skate in this way, preferring the less fatigue required by it than that of the stroke.

The next lesson is the figure 3, to do



which you must strike off on the outside edge; and, when you have made a semicircle, turn yourself suddenly round by rising on your toe, and make another semicircle backwards on the inside of the same foot. This is the same on both feet, and, when the knack is once acquired, requires little or no practice. It is a pretty and elegant figure.

The "spread eagle" might next be attempted. Strike out with the right foot,



and, while moving on it, bring the heel of the left one as near as possible to it, bending the knees outwards, and having a hand on each thigh. If you get the irons of each skate exactly in a line with one another,

you will go in a straight line; but if they are so you will make a semicircle. When you can do the spread eagle well, you can easily shoot off for a distance of ten or twenty yards without stopping. But this is, perhaps, the least elegant and least comfortable of all positions. A skater who can perform all these manœuvres is generally accounted a good one. But the reader must not think that such proficiency is to be attained without much trouble, many falls, and long perseverance; for it is not. The reward, however, is worth the learning; and I feel certain that there is not a skater in England who would not, if he had suddenly forgotten (if such a thing were possible) all idea of skating, immediately set to work to re-learn it in order that he might again taste the pleasures of such a recreative exercise. The energetic force and excitement of the headlong stroke contrasts so pleasantly with the easy, graceful, and listless roll, and the intricate figure, as to render this exercise at once one of the most healthy, invigorating, and exciting, and, above all, the least expensive pastime which can be indulged in by boys.

As to the value of skating, a Canadian colonist says, "Skating towards my home on the river, I saw I was pursued by wolves. They gained on me, but a thought suddenly struck me, which was as speedily put into execution. Suddenly and sharply, as they were close to me, I turned, with as small a curve as possible, and the yelling monsters, in vain trying to stop themselves, slid past me. As soon as they could stop, off they set again on the return pursuit. When we had got up a great speed, a second time I repeated the manœuvre. Despite the danger of my situation, I could not refrain from a laugh as they again slid past me, baffled rage being strongly depicted in their gaunt visages. This time I did not slacken my speed, but dashed off up the river, and had got, at least, half-a-mile before they had again started, and even then they had to get up their speed, which was only to be done by degrees. Thus I was able to gain sight of the town before they could gain at all upon me; and, not liking such a near proximity to civilisation, they, with a farewell howl, gave up the chase, instead of my having to give up the ghost."