



LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

A little journey on skates : Milwaukee to Thiensville. 1895

Bell, Joseph McClellan, 1870-1951
[Milwaukee? Wisconsin]: [s.n.], 1895

<https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/GCK3IWPHUCGXL8T>

Based on date of publication, this material is presumed to be in the public domain.

For information on re-use, see
<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/Copyright>

The libraries provide public access to a wide range of material, including online exhibits, digitized collections, archival finding aids, our catalog, online articles, and a growing range of materials in many media.

When possible, we provide rights information in catalog records, finding aids, and other metadata that accompanies collections or items. However, it is always the user's obligation to evaluate copyright and rights issues in light of their own use.

G902

MI

Pam 57-2140



A Little Journey
on skates.

Milwaukee
to Chienerville.

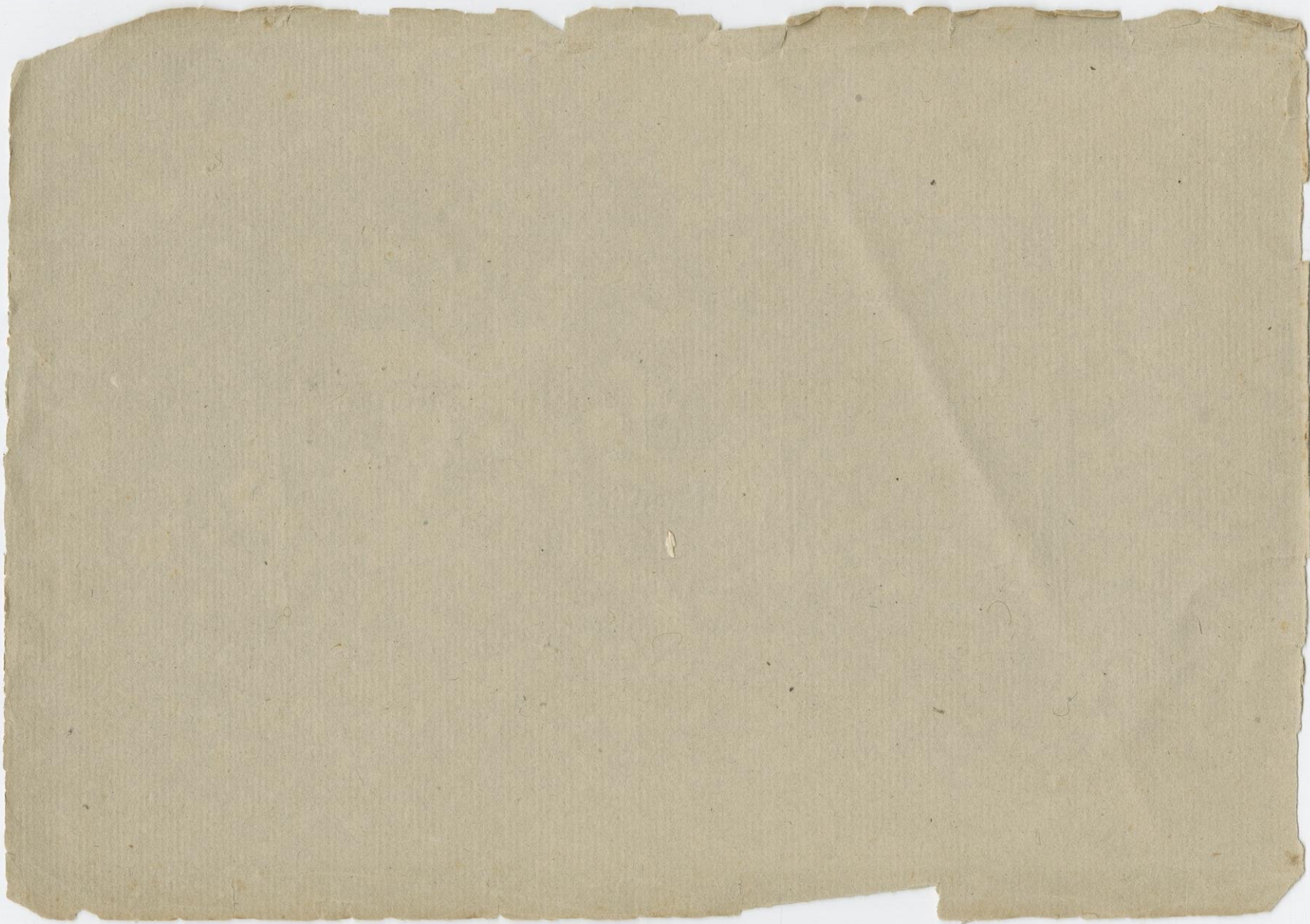
Jan. 1. 95.

2 502

Ilman Grey '95

G902

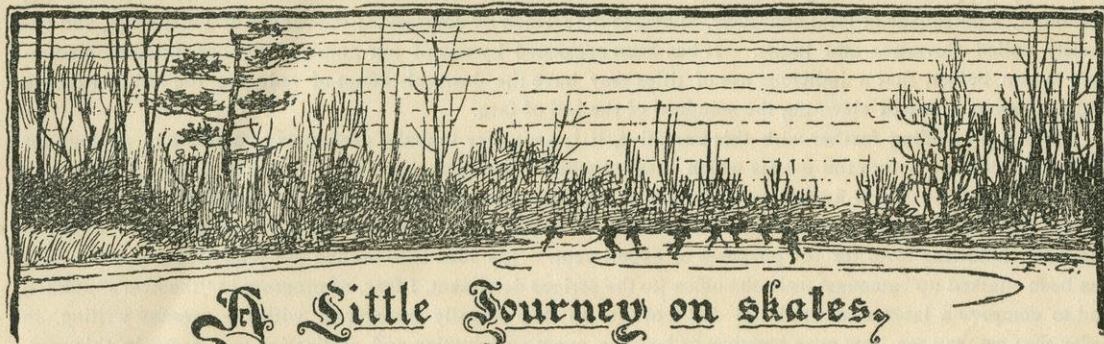
MI



MAR 2 - 1944
ESTATE OF GEORGE B.
AND ROBERT WILD

Pam 57-2140

Bell, Joseph McClellan, 1870-1951



A Little Journey on skates,

DECEMBER 31st, 1894.

To be named the chronicler of a certain adventure, incident or event, in which a number of people are directly interested, implies a responsibility of no trifling order—it matters not how insignificant the record may be as a contribution to general history, nor how valueless in point of interest to the general public. It is in deference to the actors themselves and their individual powers of appreciation, that one feels his best efforts called upon and all his tact and ability to be in requisition.

It is therefore with some hesitation that I undertake to sketch the events of a day (the first day of the new year to come) on which it is proposed by the young fellows of "our office" to start upon a "long pull and a strong pull" upon skates, for eighteen miles up the Milwaukee River to the village of Thiensville. We have

ordered by telephone a smoking hot dinner, to be served at two o' the clock in the tavern of the place, kept by one Memmler, a personage of local character, known to his friends by courtesy as the Mayor of Thiensville, and variously called Governor and Judge. It has been suggested by one of our number who has dined at Memmler's tavern before, that a judicious use of titles may have the desirable effect of reducing the bill of expense and at the same time of elevating the standard of the bill of fare.

Before proceeding farther with this narrative, it is necessary to make certain explanation and apology for its commencement before the events which it is intended to set forth have actually taken place. I am aware that in so doing I exercise an unusual privilege or perhaps more properly speaking, a great licence; but in the present instance, where the entertainment of a critical public is not the first object of composition, I desire to adopt the following form for the purposes of experiment. My idea is to outline the plan of our journey as it has been "talked up" amongst us in the office (to the serious detriment, I fear, of progress in "the firm's" affairs) and to compare a later account of the day's events as they actually transpired, with the present writing, in order that we may see how near together or how far apart anticipation and realization may come in this case. As our dabbler in philosophical research remarked only yesterday; 'all the fun is not in 'the proof of the pudding' by a long bow, and even if the cold snap gives out, or heaven should 'send its snow like cotton and scatter its hoar frost like ashes' to the entire spoilation of the skating, we shall still have had a most abundant pleasure and the firm a sufficient reckoning of profit and loss (especially the latter) in the anticipation of what might have been and the talk and jest had in connection therewith." This was one time when our philosopher couldn't find any one to disagree with him, our anxiety for the continuance of skating weather and our fear lest something might interfere with our beautifully planned day, sufficing to keep us all pretty quiet on the subject. The weather is ideal—will it remain so?

There is a certain game, of which the name escapes me, but which consists in whispering a sentence rapidly into the ear of your neighbor (close up and a long one, if she be a pretty girl), and in this way passing

the impression of the original, that each receives, around a circle of merry makers, until it arrives at the place of beginning, when a comparison is made between the sentence first given, and the impression last received, often with most absurd contrasts as a result. Now this is about what I wish to do in this account of our proposed journey. I wish to compare beginning and ending, anticipation and realization.

As I have said, a smoking hot dinner is ordered to be in readiness on our arrival—a well browned turkey gobbler to be placed upon the table whole—I myself intend to illustrate the graceful (sic) paterfamilias like art of carving the same—some roasted sweet potatoes, and “whatever else the landlord may desire to serve withal,” though not overmuch; for we are modest gentlemen and would not willingly shock the jurisprudence of even a country landlord, nor begin the new year with over eating—an evil habit and one to be greatly discouraged from many bases of reasoning. (But this would require an essay to itself.) However we have also stipulated for a pudding and some dark brown *café noir*, but it was thought best to say nothing of *demi tasse* as it might cause our honest host some unnecessary perturbation of mind. Bearing in mind the rurality or suburbanity of the locality of Thiensville, we have also carefully refrained from suggesting other liquid accompaniment to our dinner than the dark brown black coffee with cream colored cream above referred to, preferring not to invite instant death at the proverbial forty rods, nor slow capitulation to a siege by blood poisoning through the absorption of unknown and strange liquors. In order however that we may not lack altogether that cordial reception at the end of our long journey, which alone is to be found in “the cup that cheers”, it is proposed that one of us carry a knapsack with the necessary “spirits”, of good familiar stock, together with certain spices and other condiments not likely to be found in quality on unclassic ground; from all of which the writer has been accorded the pleasing if responsible duty of constructing a tenable Tom and Jerry on the arrival of the party at its destination. Of the success of this delectable concoction I am certain, providing always that directions are followed,—for the receipt that I have is Patsy McCartin’s own—Patsy of the prize ring, of the bar, (not Temple bar) of the road; and who now, having awakened to a sense of family responsibility, has “shaken” (as he himself would express

it) these by gone callings and become "One of the Finest" on our city's force of uniformed protectors. But he hasn't forgotten how to make a Tom and Jerry, and the secret of it is, he says "to bate the batter well".

Frequent observations of the sky and temperature indicate a continuance of the dry cold air that gave us the ice and suggested the trip. The order is to meet at the office at nine o'clock sharp, dressed *cap a pie* in proper skating rig, light marching order as far as possible, and with the steadfast purpose of reaching Thiensville, a well earned rest and a good dinner, with good keen appetites and a lustry thirst—"root, hog or die," as they ineligantly express it out west.

We are seven in number from the office, and as this little chronicle is for our own personal pleasure and later on to recall past days perhaps, I shall at least set down their names, real or fictitious as will best serve in after years to conjure up their several images, simply prefacing the roll call with the statement that our common pursuit is the noble profession of architecture—that profession in which science and art are met on common ground.

First there is Elmer Grey (he protests against this but we'll put him first in spite of himself). Elmer is the "Little Billee" of our office, and deserves all the admiration for his talent, that the application of this title implies. Then there is Frank our office Sandow (Bader is his other name), whom we sometimes call Taffy, because he is strong and good natured; and to add one more of Du Maurier's household of "Trilby", there is Mr. Didrik Ottesen, nicknamed "Svengali," which he doesn't altogether relish, and small blame to him. To give the devil his due however, Dietrich is one of the best fellows going and the supervising engineer of all our work. The only attributes by which he merits the application of that name of odious memory are not of character, but only a few of personal appearance—long and untrimmed hair and beard, tall, slim figure and a soiled velveteen office coat. He is a blue eyed descendant of the sturdy Norsemen. Next comes Peter Brust, good old Pete, so quiet yet so appreciative, whom we all admire and respect; one of those whose place would be hard to fill. And next come Julius and Richard, otherwise Jake and Dick, good fellows both, whose surnames I never can

remember, because we never use ceremony amongst ourselves, at 419 Broadway; and lastly your humble servant, the writer of this sketch.

We count upon Frank's broad shoulders to bear the weight of a portable camera, which it is proposed to carry by way of illustrating this written account, and thus to render it of some value to the participants as a memoir of the day.

And now we're off, at least we hope to be at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning. If "dull care" o'ertake us, it will have to get its skates on. I believe that literary tenets might here permit a stanza or two of verse; in fact it seems to me a highly proper place to stick one in, if I only knew one of appropriate character. There is still a dim impression upon my mind of a skating chorus I once knew, but it is very dim, in fact I can recall only a fragment and this needs the music to give it the proper swing. Still here it is:

Swiftly gliding
Darting to and fro
Like the wintry wind
Over the ice we go.

JANUARY 2nd, 1895.

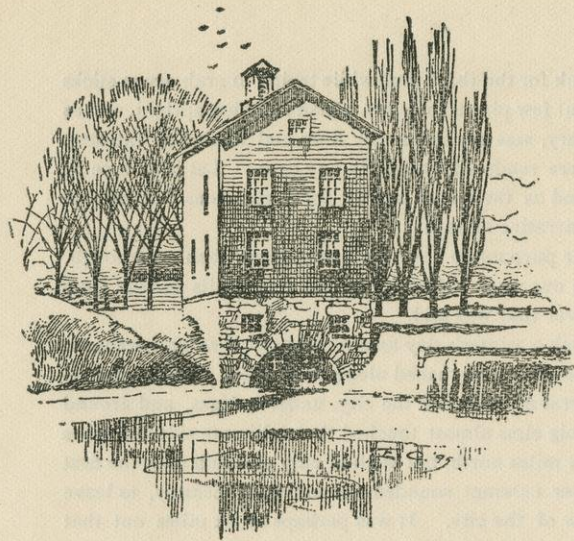
In settling down to complete the telling of this story, I am conscious of a distinct sense of humility. To say that our day was a success is merely to state a fact, without giving an idea of the enthusiasm which prevailed during the entire trip and which to-day, in spite of stiff joints and weary muscles has not abated. I am conscious of a feeling of humility I say, because unconsciously I suppose, I had had little faith in as happy a fulfilment of our plans as actually took place. Hoped for it? certainly; prayed for it too—but never the less I was agreeably surprised at the result. Now I wish I hadn't "hedged" even in my own mind. The only disappointment we had in fact, was in our failure to make connections with the photographic supply man for a film for our camera, which we were therefore forced with great reluctance to leave behind us. The sketches which accompany this account and which were the occasion for several stops on the way out, were made as a sort of substitute for the camera's work and will have to serve us as insufficient reminders of the beauty of the river landscape on this still cold winter's day, and of the various incidents of the journey. All were prompt at the *rendez vous*, with one exception, and in waiting for Svengali, we probably missed the farewells of our chief, who had promised to see us off at North Street bridge at about ten o'clock, though he could not be induced to accompany us.

Finally leaving a note for the delinquent to follow us, we set out, and during our progress through the city were much gazed at on account of our unusual dress—knickerbockers, "sweaters" and many varieties of head gear. Being in force however we did not mind, but rather enjoyed the novelty of being thus observed. It is somewhat remarkable how many things are done in concert that would never be attempted singly; what moral courage is derived from companionship is a thing unusual. Our garb was a departure from local convention, but as we thought and still think—a sensible departure. Every man was armed with a stout stick, and it was agreed that if any should break through the ice, each fellow should advance as near as possible to the unfortunate and reach him a stick; which reminded me of the precautions of the famous Peterkin family and which I doubt not

would so have bewildered a poor devil that he would have sunk for the third time while trying to grab seven sticks with two hands. However as the river is deep enough in but few places to drown a man standing upright, and as the ice, as noted by our statistician and observer in ordinary, was conspicuously finer and thicker in the deep places than in the shallows, our precautions on this head were rendered naught in any case. Let it at once be said that we met with no Baron Munchausen adventures, and as the writer sets up for a veracious and reliable chronicler, the reader for romance only, should drop this narrative at once.

Dinner had been ordered for ten (people) as it was our purpose to have too much rather than not enough. This was fortunate, for we had not gone many strides upon our way, before we picked up recruits enough from friends we met upon the ice, to supply a diner for every cover that was laid.

But the skating! such skating as it was! such ice and such a winter's day as one might wait an entire season for to see—not a stirring of the air, save that we made ourselves as we rushed along the smooth black surface—past the summer residences that border the stream for several miles out of the city, under bridges, and around little bayous or returning branches of the river, where the big elms almost touched their ultimate side branches over head. Many skaters were upon the ice for the first few miles north, but we had only to climb over the first weir of frozen water falls, where the dull roar of the under cateract sounded solemn and uncanny, to leave behind all these ephemeral merrymakers and the last view of the city. It was perhaps at six miles out that questions began to be propounded concerning the distance to be traveled. I think most of us had got our second wind by this time and the first muscular pains caused by the unwonted exercise had begun to pass out of our legs and fetlock joints; but the speed was having its natural effect upon our body temperatures, jackets were swinging wide, and we began to realize it was to be warm work. "How many miles did you say it was Frank?"—first one and then another would ask the original suggestor of the plan. I don't believe there was a quailing heart or a tottering purpose in the crowd, but most of us were on skates for the first or second time in several years and had not yet quite arrived at that confidence which is born of experience. Those who came



home the way the way they went out knew how it was to feel otherwise. Those who did not will forgive us for this one fling at their preference to return home by train.

The first halt for a sketch was made at a small bridge crossing a bayou, but an attempt at a pen drawing failed utterly, the ink freezing upon the pen, so that later cold lead was brought into the service with better results. Some sort of pictures we must have. How we regretted the camera business, as page after page of lovely winter laudscape appeared in every bend of the stream—groups of white birches in symmetrical conclave adorning projecting points, and weeping willows growing close to the margin and trailing their slender branches in the frozen water. In the shallow parts of the mid stream we could see the fishes through ice clear as window glass, basking in the reflected sun light at the bottom, and entirely unafrighted at our presence, as though fully aware of the protection the ice afforded them.

And now we approached the first of the big flouring mills which at intervals find their motive power in the stream, and where it was thought we should have to remove our skates for a portage. Here befell our first mishap. Our man of muscle who was acting as pilot, and who had set us an heroic example in climbing the frozen steps of a weir with skates on at a flying scramble (which nobody had the nerve to follow), was still in the lead, when we were confronted with what looked like an impassable place, mostly open water with the ice

surface slanting toward it from the edges—a ticklish spot. To make a short story, as short as possible, Frank missed his calculations and got into the ice cold water up to his waist. We were sorry, but of course we smiled when he wasn't looking, at the same time exhorting the poor chap to dry out at the miller's house. This he would not hear of doing however, and rendered reckless by his soaked condition, he pushed his way around the edges of the treacherous ice, we following at a respectful distance underneath the over-hanging branches, until once more he lost his footing and slipped into the water—this time wetting his jacket as well as his nether garments. At this we all sought refuge on the bank and renewed our solicitations anent the miller's house—but Frank was mad and would, I think, have waded in water all the way to Thiensville, rather than take our advice. Somebody said they had heard of soldiers wetting their clothes to keep warm in cold weather. If any body was skeptical of this he kept his own counsel—wishing to deny no chance of comfort to him that needed all that was available. However Frank was soon as merry as ever, his ardor undamped with the cold wetting he had received, and he was telling me how exactly in line with his usual luck the late occurrence had been. I admitted it was strange how ill luck seemed to follow some people, but suggested that it was largely a matter of carelessness. I confided to him *sotto voce* (recollecting how "Pride goeth before a fall"), that it had been so at one time with me, adding with thoughtless haste, that of late years my luck had changed, that probably as the years settled down upon my devoted head, I grew more careful and crafty. Now, would that somebody had hit me with a club, ere ever I had said that thing, for not over a half mile further on and while I was giving rather close attention to that grace of movement, which some fool once told me was all mine, upon skates, I ran right into a two-inch layer of slush water spread over a surface of sunken ice, my skates were blocked and I slid for about ten feet on my stomach, with arms spread out before me. I got up gasping and too surprised even to use bad language (immediately), squeezing the water out of my woolen gloves as from wet sponges.

It was now decided that as some of our party were willing to own the pace too rapid for them and as two of

us were pretty well soaked and would require constant motion to stave off possible pneumonia, we two should separate from the rest and cover the remaining miles, whatever they were to Thiensville, with what speed we would, while the others should come on at a more leisurely rate; we the forerunners of the party to have the hot water and the Tom and Jerry batter ready for use on the arrival of the others. With this permission we let no ice thaw under our feet, to vary the old saying, and were considerably surprised, I think, to hear ere long from a farmer who was cutting a water hole for his cattle, that Thiensville was only about a mile farther on. Along here somewhere we met a fellow with a paper bag of lunch, standing over and contemplating as he ate, the dead body of a large muskrat, which he said he had killed with his skate. The animal had started across the ice as he came along and he had given chase upon his skates. (How natural is the spirit of the hunt in man, and how strong the impulse to destroy when brought in contact with the wild creatures of our streams and forests, whether with or without a decent excuse). Of course with the superior advantages which skates afforded for speed upon the ice, the man soon overtook the muskrat, who thereupon in the strength of his instinct to die hard, had turned upon his oppressor and shown fight. It was however an unequal battle, and the rat lay dead upon the ice. By the time the rest came past this spot, the little body of soft brown fur had been removed and our fellows were considerably alarmed on our behalf, not knowing what the pool of red blood upon the ice might possibly betoken. But I find I am stringing out a simple narrative of just the most ordinary occurrences into such an unconscionable length that I must hurry on and perhaps curtail the account of what was probably the most satisfying part of our day's outing, the royal good dinner had in the cosey dining room of "Memmler's Hotel" at Thiensville, after our jaded bodies had been warmed and rejuvenated by that aforesaid Thomas and Jeremiah, In the opinion of those of our party "who occasionally imbibe" and of the paunchy little publican, our jolly landlord himself, who ought to know, the batter was a great success, at least they all did ample justice to it.

Frank and I with Herbert Allan, one of our recruits, arrived at two o'clock (having been just three hours

and forty minutes on the way). Memmler was at the brink to meet us and said in answer to our enquiry on the subject, that we had come a distance of just 21 miles, a figure he had wisely forborne to mention, previous to our ordering preparations at his tavern; as belike, had we known the actual distance, our courage would have oozed out at the tips of our fingers after the manner of Bob Acre's valor.

I wouldn't be sure, in fact I had a little rather leave it in doubt, but I don't believe there was a man in that hungry crowd who had time to wash his hands or dry his wet clothes before getting his legs underneath that steaming smoking board which the women folk had ready spread for us as the rear guard flocked into the bar. We did not stand on the order of our sitting down, but dropped into the most vacant chair, and I am afraid the smiling folk, who gazed at us through the sliding panel from the kitchen, must have wondered if we had ever had a square meal before in our lives. Somebody with his mouth full, quoted Shakespere, concerning good digestion waiting upon appetite, but got no further. "And with thy spirit" irreverently came from somebody else, and then no more was heard. However it isn't every day that one has an appetite such as we had for that dinner. There are those who would give hundreds for the like of it. I know now how wisely the landlord's good *Frau* had calculated in providing a roast goose well as a roast turk, and roast apples as well as cranberry sauce, together with a proportionate array of vegetable comestibles, which pleased our dietaries, for we have dietaries in our office. It was perhaps ten minutes before anybody spoke, except to demand food, and in half an hour the table looked as if a young symoon had struck it amidships. I devoutly hope no one did violence to his digestion, but I should hesitate to vouch for the fact.

Memmler, the younger, sat him down with us at our invitation, while Memmler, the elder, attended the public in the next room; but after dinner, as we sat smoking Missouri meershaums around the big stove, the old fellow with his bar apron still tied around him and at ease in his shirt sleeves, was relieved by his son, and for a time unbent himself to the amusements of our party. He showed himself quite a performer on the piano; as one of our fellows had it "he could certainly thump the box". He gave us *Die Wacht am Rhein* with much



DIE WACHT
AM RHEIN.

spirit, and we all joined in the song as best we might, making much noise if little harmony and having a very jolly time indeed. In this wise the time passed so merrily, that we who intended returning to the city on skates, were suddenly confronted with the fact, that if we wished to get below the rapids before darkness set in, we would most certainly have to set out at once. Frank and I were still very moist, steaming in fact around the great stove, but the erstwhile contents of the bowl had not yet ceased to warm our inner men, so to speak, to the exclusion of all exterior sensations of discomfort. Our friend Didrik had meanwhile put in a belated appearance, and one of our recruits had taken his departure on the plea of having to dine out at 6 30. He figured that he could get there about 7.30 if he had no accidents and lost no time. I hope he was forgiven. His name is Dexter, and should his disappointed

hostess of that evening chance ever to see this veracious account, which of course she will not however, I hope she will accept a word in extenuation of Ned's shortcoming.

Three out of those remaining, decided to skate back to town, the rest betaking themselves to the dam above the Thiensville flour mill, (where the youth of the town were still enjoying the fast waning winter's day), as a means of passing the time until the train should come through. They did not escape a final taunt or two on the

score of their weakness, but they were in that physical condition of exhaustion, where humility enters not into surrender of purpose. What they missed I fear they will never know, for they refuse to credit our account. They prophesied for us many dire accidents, some few of which did in fact happen to us. Several somersaults were taken in treacherous "white ice", and one of us skated into a water hole two feet deep, in spite of the warning cry sent back from the man ahead. In this hole a skate was lost and was only recovered by the aid of the light of a sweet quarter moon, which had come up to keep the stars company, and after much fumbling around with bared fore arm in the icy water. Poor Frank, the fates were not kind to him in little things yesterday, though as he truly said, the fellows that missed a wetting, also missed half the experience of the trip, and surely in variety of experience lies half the fun of retrospective enjoyment.

Truly it was entrancing, that return trip, and romantically beautiful—by far the most conspicuous recollection that remains to me of the entire outing.

That strange stillness of evening that settles down over the open country as darkness falls, lay upon the river; and as the sharper air of oncoming night began to steal into the atmosphere, our vigorous bearing upon the ice occasionally sent loud and ominous boomings across its surface, reverberating to the farther shore and reminding one of summer thunder.

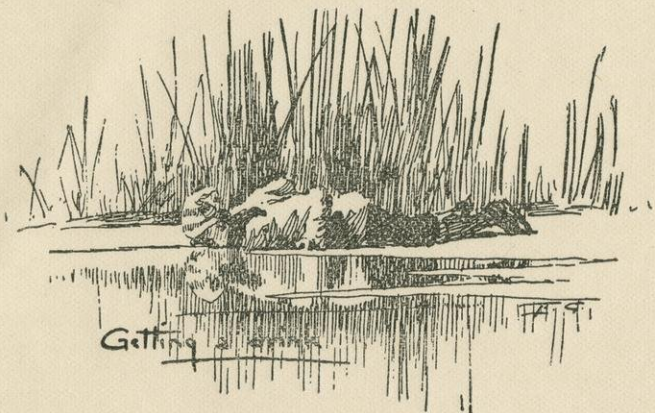
On we sped at an ever increasing pace, until we had reached the limit for safety, and only tempering our speed when crackling surface ice and an opaque appearance of the river ahead, warned us of the vicinity of rapids underneath and ticklish skating above. I have often noticed with what greater freedom a horse travels at night, pricking his ears first to one side, then to another, ever on the alert for something to avoid or to shy at, and so forgetting in his excitement that there is any exertion in movement. And so it was with us. We were too busy keeping a sharp lookout ahead, in the "queer" places, and too dazzled with the beauty and splendor of the night and with the moonlighted surface of the glassy ice in the fine stretches, to think of calculating on the distance traversed or yet to cover. Never once we halted for the first six miles or thereabouts, when we

were brought to a sudden halt by Frank's mishap. On the straight southern courses of the stream, a single large bright star (which I am not astronomer enough to name), was our constant companion, piercing the darkness immediately ahead of us and as it seemed, almost near enough to hail. Had we known her name we could not have enjoyed her presence more. Now and then a bend in the river would appear before us, all darkened by a high timbered bluff shutting out the moon light, and in such places the pale glow of the stars took on an added lustre.

However all things must come sooner or later to an end, the pleasant things of life generally sooner, and this day was no exception to the rule. It was like leaving a beautiful introspective reverie for the common place of ordinary conversation, to find ourselves gradually nearing the outskirts of the city, where, upon that portion of the river included in alderman Doelger's resolution, as a skating preserve, we began to meet and pass increasingly large numbers of skaters—for the hour was still an early one. And I think with the recollection of that quiet pastoral panorama, (in which the very loneliness of the situation was its chiefest charm,) still fresh in our minds, that this is as good a place as any in which to bring to a close this already too lengthy narrative of one day's sport. I remember that as we landed at North Street bridge, at just the stroke of eight o'clock, with our clothing frozen hard and clanking like steel armour, I for one heartily wished that I might dispense with the long street car ride before me and step at once into the presence of a warm bath and a warm supper, and so end abruptly, in the zenith of its pleasures, a day that had begun, continued and ended so altogether delightfully as had this New Year's day.

J. McC. BELL, JUN.

NOTE.—We regret to say that a newspaper mention of W. H. Graves, as a member of the party was an error. Billie is our lady's man and we found it impossible to wean him from his favorite excitement.



Getting a drink

* Sweaters furnished for this Trip by the

PETLEY SHIRT CO.

86 WISCONSIN STREET.

ATHLETIC GOODS OF ALL KINDS.

NEW FANCY SHIRTINGS FOR SPRING AND SUMMER WEAR
ARRIVING DAILY.

Skates for this trip furnished by * *

PHILLIP GROSS,

126 & 128 GRAND AVENUE.

* * * Fine Builders' Hardware.

Compliments
of
W. E. B. D.

