CHAPTER XII

WOMAN AS DECORATION WHEN SKATING

To be decorative when skating, two things are necessary: first, know how to skate; then see to it that you are costumed with reference to appropriateness, becomingness and the outline demanded by the fashion of the moment.

The woman who excels in the technique of her art does not always excel in dressing her rôle. It is therefore with great enthusiasm that we record Miss Theresa Weld of Boston, holder of Woman's Figure Skating Championship, as the most chicly costumed woman on the ice of the Hippodrome (New York) where amateurs contested for the cup offered by Mr. Charles B. Dillingham, on March 23, 1917, when Miss Weld again won,—this time over the men as well as the women.

Miss Weld combined good work with perfect form, and her edges, fronts, ins, outs, threes,
double-threes, etc., etc., were a delight to the eye as she passed and repassed in her wine-coloured velvet, trimmed with mole-skin, a narrow band on the bottom of the full skirt (full to allow the required amount of leg action), deep cuffs, and a band of the same fur encircling the close velvet toque. This is reproduced as the ideal costume because, while absolutely up-to-date in line, material, colour and character of fur, it follows the traditional idea as to what is appropriate and beautiful for a skating costume, regardless of epoch. We have seen its ancestors in many parts of Europe, year after year. Some of us recall with keen pleasure, the wonderful skating in Vienna and Berlin on natural and artificial ice, invariably hung with flags and gaily lighted by night. We can see now, those German girls,—some of them trim and good to look at, in costumes of sapphire blue, deep red, or green velvet, fur trimmed,—gliding swiftly across the ice, to the irresistible swing of waltz music and accompanied by flashing uniforms.

In the German-speaking countries everyone skates: the white-bearded grandfather and the third generation going hand in hand on Sunday
mornings to the nearest ice-pond. With them skating is a communal recreation, as beer garden concerts are. With us in America most sports are fashions, not traditions. The rage for skating during the past few seasons is the outcome of the exhibition skating done by professionals from Austria, Germany, Scandinavian countries and Canada, at the New York Hippodrome. Those who madly danced are now as madly skating. And out of town the young women delight the eye in bright wool sweaters, broad, long wool scarfs and bright wool caps, or small, close felt hats,—fascinating against the white background of ice and snow. The boots are high, reaching to top of calf, a popular model having a seam to the tip of the toe.

No sport so perfectly throws into relief command of the body as does skating. Watch a group of competitors for honours at any gathering of amateur women skaters and note how few have command of themselves—know absolutely what they want to do, and then are able to do it. One skater, in the language of the ice, can do the actual work, but has no form. It may be she lacks temperament, has no abandon, no
PLATE XV
A portrait by John S. Sargent. (Metropolitan Museum, painted about 1890.)

We have here a distinguished example of the dignity and beauty possible to a costume characteristic of the period when extreme severity as to outline and elimination of detail followed the elaboration of Victorian ruffles, ribbons and lace over hoops and bustle; curled hair and the obvious cameo brooch, massive bracelets and chains.
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Late Nineteenth Century
Costume about 1890 A
Portrait by John S. Sargent
rhythm; is stiff, or, while full of life, has bad arms. It is as necessary that the fancy skater should learn the correct position of the arms as that the solo dancer should. Certain lines must be preserved, say, from fingers of right arm through to tip of left foot, or from tip of left hand through to tip of right foot.

"Form" is the manipulation of the lines of the body to produce perfect balance, perfect freedom and, when required, perfect control in arrested motion. This is the mastery which produces in free skating that "melting" of one figure into another which so hypnotises the onlooker. It is because Miss Weld has mastered the above qualifications that she is amateur champion in fancy skating. She has mastered her medium; has control of every muscle in her body. In consequence she is decorative and delightful to watch.

To be decorative when not on skates, whether walking, standing or sitting, a woman must have cultivated the same feeling for line, her form must be good. It is not enough to obey the A. B. C.'s of position; head up, shoulders back, chest out, stomach in. One must study the pos-
sibilities of the body in acquiring and perfecting poses which have line, making pictures with one's self.

In the *Art of Interior Decoration* we insist that every room be a beautiful composition. What we would now impress upon the mind of the reader is that she is a part of the picture and must compose with her setting. To do this she should acquire the mastery of her body, and then train that body until it has acquired "good habits" in the assuming of line, whether in action or repose. This can be done to an astonishing degree, even if one lacks the instinct. To be born with a sense of line is a gift, and the development of this sense can give artistic delight to those who witness the results and thrill them quite as sculpture or music, or any other art does.

The Greek idea of regarding the perfectly trained body as a beautiful temple is one to keep in mind, if woman would fulfil her obligation to be decorative.

Form means efficiency, if properly understood and carried out according to the spirit, not the letter of the law. Form implies the human body
under control, ready for immediate action. The man or woman with *form*, will be the first to fall into action when required, because, so to speak, no time is lost in collecting and aiming the body.

One of the great points in the teaching of the late Theodore Leschetizky, the world’s greatest master in the art of piano playing, was that the hand should immediately assume the correct position for the succeeding chord, the instant it was lifted from the keys;—preparedness!

The crack regiments of Europe, noted for their *form*, have for years been the object of jests in those new worlds where brawn and muscle, with mental acumen, have converted primeval forests into congested commercial centers. But that *form*, so derided by the pioneer spirit, has proved its worth during the present European war. The United States and the Central Powers are now at war and military guards have been stationed at vulnerable points. Only to-day we saw one of Uncle Sam’s soldiers, one of three, patrolling the front of a big armory,—standing in an absolutely relaxed position, his gun held loosely in his hand, and its bayonet
propped against the iron fence. One could not help thinking; *no* form, no preparedness, no efficiency. It goes without saying that prompt obedience cannot be looked for where there is lack of form, no matter how willing the spirit.

The modern woman when on parole,—walking, dancing, driving, riding or engaged in any sport, to be efficient must have trained the body until it has form, and dress it appropriately, if she would be efficient as well as decorative in the modern sense of the term. No better illustration of our point can be found than in the popular sport cited at the beginning of this chapter.