



BICYCLING FOR WOMEN.

BY MRS. REGINALD DE KOVEN.

THE development of the exercise of bicycle-riding has assumed proportions of universality which recall the Egyptian plague of flies; by day and night, in town and country, forked black creatures, with semi-transparent means of locomotion, fly past with bewildering velocity; the human animal has become an air-propelling, exulting creature, with mysterious prehistoric attributes, half beast, half bird.

Invention, the angel of the nineteenth century, has abolished space, shattered time, and now with this wonderful machine, the bicycle, is making a determined onslaught upon sickness and old age, despondency, idleness with its resulting crime, and all the ills which mortal flesh is heir to.

To men, rich and poor, the bicycle is an unmixed blessing, but to women it is deliverance, revolution, salvation. It is well nigh impossible to overestimate the potentialities of this exercise in the curing of the common and characteristic ills of womankind, both physical and mental, or to calculate the far-reaching effects of its influence in the matters of dress and social reform.

As to dress-reform, the possibilities would, indeed, seem limitless. Since woman has taken up the bicycle it has become more and more apparent every day that its use demands a more or less radical change in their costume. Moderate women have met the demand with gaiters and a three-quarter skirt — one reaching perhaps to the ankles, but even

this compromise leaves much to be desired in the way of freedom, and there is some danger of entangling the skirt. Numbers of women who ride a great deal have adopted the short skirt costume, and the bloomer, or knickerbocker costume, is not without popularity in this country. In France, however, it is much more general. For hard and constant riding the short skirt has such a decided advantage over that of three-quarter length that women who are real lovers of the bicycle can hardly be blamed for its use.

The bicycle has existed for men in many forms from the days of the awkward machine of 1830, infinitely absurd to our thinking, on which (according to the old pictures) a long-trousered gentleman in a high stock and a top hat rode a rail fixed between two wheels, paddling with his feet on level ground, and tucking them up some way, some where, while he coasted down the hills.

Next came the wooden-wheeled velocipede, called the "bone-shaker," on which our fathers rode over the stones, unprotected from cruel jolting by any merciful device of springs or pneumatic tires. This wheel was in shape not unlike the safety bicycle of the present day, the wheels being of nearly even size, but there were very many differences in those details which have lately been brought to such astonishing perfection.

Next came the large-wheeled bicycle. There was a period when it was used with very much the same enthusiasm which distinguishes the exercise of the present day. The sensation of riding this wheel was in some respects more exciting than that of riding the safety bicycle, but for practicability and comfort it was in no

way to be compared with it. On this present perfected machine the wayfaring man, though a fool, may learn to ride and become thereby a triumphant, exultant being with racing, bounding, leaping blood in his shrunken veins, hope in his eye, and the lost joy of youth and life returned to his heart.

Some women, lost to all sense of feminine discretion—according to the opinion of most of their sisters—were known to ride the high bicycle in the days when it was in common use at athletic shows, dime museums, circuses, and such like unholy places, and there are many who remember the wild excitement of riding a red-wheeled tricycle, borrowed from a reluctant brother or friend, as one of the unforgotten joys of childhood.



PROPER POSITION FOR MOUNTING.

But it was not until the year 1888 that a woman's wheel was first used on the road. This was an all-nickel ladies' wheel designed by W. E. Smith of the Smith Manufacturing Company, then situated in Washington, and was the model known as the dropped-frame bicycle. To Mrs. Smith, the wife of this inventor, belongs the honor of being the actual pioneer of

bicycle-riding for women in this country. When she first began to ride in the year 1888 upon this wheel, she weighed eighty pounds, her wheel sixty. In the course of a few years her weight increased to one hundred and twenty pounds, and the wheel she now rides weighs twenty-two pounds; an interesting indication of the physical effects of bicycling and in the improvement of the building of the machine itself. This model, with slight variations, was made by all the different firms soon after this date.

In 1892, Humber & Co. displayed at the exhibition which they called the Stanley show, the present admirable model of a woman's machine, where the bar which descends diagonally from the handles to the point where the sprockets are fixed to the descending saddle-bar, is straight instead of curved. This wheel is both lighter and stronger than the former clumsy dropped wheel, and is more desirable in every way. The weight of the wheels should naturally be adapted to that of their riders. A woman of one hundred pounds weight should use a wheel of eighteen to twenty-two pounds;

those who weigh from one hundred and fifty to one hundred and seventy-five pounds should use wheels varying from twenty-five to twenty-eight pounds. Those to whom the constant vibration of a light wheel is fatiguing, should use a twenty-eight-pound wheel.

When the effort of propelling the machine from long practice has become inappreciable, the fatigue which comes from a long ride will be found to be purely nervous, the result of the vibration of a wheel which is in reality too light, although the rider may have been unconscious of the fact. By the use of a moderately heavy machine this result may be avoided.

In adapting the machine for individual use, a natural position must be sought for. The handle-bars should be placed about two inches higher than the saddle. The erect position is always necessary for the proper expansion of the lungs. The saddle should be placed not too directly over the pedals, slightly back of the vertical line, but not too far back over the center of the rear wheel, as that position necessitates too long a reach. The saddle

should not be fixed at too great distance from the pedals; the rider should be able to touch the heel to the pedal at its lowest point of revolution, otherwise a perfect control of the machine becomes impossible. The comfort of the saddle is an imperative consideration. There are many kinds of saddles, spring wire, leather of many weights and shapes, and there is a soft, stuffed, plush-covered saddle invented by Dr. Stimson for the use of women, which has been recommended; there is, however, no beak to this saddle, and it would seem difficult for the rider to retain



THE LONG SKIRT.

her place upon it. Beside, there are devices of small air-cushions and additional leather appliances to soften and make more comfortable the seat upon which the rider must spend so many hours. These must all be chosen with care by each rider to suit her individual taste. The mistake of using the saddle as a chair should be avoided; it is rather a resting and balancing place; the weight should be largely sustained upon the pedals.

The process of learning to ride is apt to be a trifle fatiguing and is productive of both annoyance and bewilderment that what has seemed so easy should prove to be so difficult. There have been known instances of favored,

semi-miraculous people who have ridden right off,—as we have all believed we might,—but they are few, and they should not be sought for or lauded. The conviction is inevitable that they must be far from attractive; perfection is not a lovable quality. The best way for ordinary mortals is to visit in a humble and cheerful spirit one of the bicycling academies, to submit to the indignity of a baby-tending belt, to keep cool, be patient, and follow instructions. The first lesson will not seem too discouraging, the second will leave the rider in a slightly doubtful and desponding state of mind, which by the third will have developed into a condition of irritation and self-depreciation; in the fourth or fifth, as fate will have it, suddenly, and as it were without warning or preparation, the knack is acquired; a mysterious, indescribable, actually unteachable sense of balance arrives as it were from the skies.



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A BLOOMER COSTUME.

Suddenly you feel that you have it, and presto! you are off! The secret is yours, the victor's crown is upon your brow! But do not be too confident; there are many steps to be taken, many hours of patient practice to be endured before one may hope to become a graceful or enduring rider. But after the balance has been attained it is no more a mystery, and the future is in one's own hands; it has become a question of practice and experience.

A woman may learn to ride on the road with assistance, and there are advantages to this method in the fact that the ear becomes immediately accustomed to the distracting sounds and sights of the streets, the necessity of avoiding vehicles and passers-by, as well as becoming used to the uneven surfaces in the road.

Once assisted to the saddle (for mounting alone comes afterwards), one must remember not to grasp the handle-bars

too closely, but endeavor to keep a slight and constant motion in the balance-wheel. The rider will discover ere long that this front wheel is made for balancing, and not for steering, and will be surprised as soon as her senses become clear at the ease with which a slight motion of the body will guide the wheel.

When the balance has once been obtained, the question of practice in turning from right to left and from left to right is the next thing to be considered. After that the next steps are to learn to dismount and to mount alone. To dismount in the legitimate and graceful manner is to ride very slowly, bear all the weight

is that commonly taught in the schools: stand at the left of the machine and advance it until the right pedal begins to descend, then step into the space before the saddle, arrange the skirts so that they fall evenly on either side, place the right foot on the right pedal, give a strong push on the ground with the left foot, and rising on the right foot take the saddle, and without haste find the left pedal, the weight of the body pushes the right pedal down as you rise upon it, giving the bicycle an impulse, and the left pedal rises to the place where the foot can find it easily. The principal difficulty which women find in learning to mount is in giving the bicy-

cle a sufficient impetus with the left foot at the same moment that the rider is compelled to jump into the saddle.

An easy method of mounting for women, and one generally followed in France, is to incline the wheel considerably to the left side, so far as to enable the rider to arrange her skirts and take her seat comfortably in the saddle before she attempts to start the wheel in motion. She should then press hard upon the right pedal while she pushes with her left foot upon the ground, and the wheel by these two motions will be found to right itself naturally, the rider herself being in an upright and proper position. This method of mounting is sur-



THE SHORT SKIRT.—A MODIFIED HUNTING COSTUME.

prisingly easy after an adequate idea of balance is once gained, and obviates the difficulty of arranging the skirts properly, as in the jumping mount which is ordinarily taught.

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rigid; legs straight, but stretched by their weight alone; feet parallel to the axis of the cycle, the ball of the foot rising lightly upon the pedal." These rules are as practicable to women as to men. The stooping position should never be assumed except in racing, which in all probability will never be practised by women; a slight stoop is obligatory in hill-climbing.

When the ground permits, wheel to the left for a full turn, but learn to wheel either way with confidence. Do not attempt to imitate any of the surprising tricks practised by small boys or professional trick-riders; they are neither appropriate nor admirable for women. Learn to ride slowly, practice in moderation, avoid the danger of attempting to ride too long, or too fast, before the muscles have become adapted to their unusual work.

After a few months make the mounting of a hill part of your daily practice, as it is very strengthening to the muscles. Avoid coasting the first season of riding; it is fascinating, but dangerous. To slow your machine, learn back-peddalling. To do this, sit straight and begin to put a gentle pressure upon each pedal at the very lowest point, just an instant before it begins to rise. In riding down a steep hill, the control of your wheel depends largely upon whether you can feel and hold the pedal at that particular point. Practice this first on a level and moderately; learn to use a brake, do not attempt to sit too high. It may be enjoyable and saving of effort on smooth roads, but is extremely dangerous. Learn to pedal without holding the handle-bars, also to steer with the pedals; practice moder-



A KNOCKABOUT BLOOMER COSTUME.

ately, progressively, evenly; be cool, determined, and persistent. Any woman, delicate or strong, by following these rules will learn to ride well in a few months.

The question of the proper dress for bicycling is still in doubt. The English women who first took kindly to the wheel, have used in riding a modification of the shooting dress which has been for so many years in common use among them. This dress consists of knickerbockers, with leggings, a short skirt to the top of the boots, and a Norfolk or cutaway jacket. French women who during the past year have taken so enthusiastically to the practice of bicycling, have characteristically adopted many fantastic and daring dresses: tight trousers, military costumes, Oriental, and all variety of theatrical dress. In America, the present tendency is toward the adoption of short skirts. In smaller cities like Cleveland, Buffalo, and notably in Chicago and Boston, the bloomer costume has been largely used. This tendency must be deprecated. They are a slight gain in convenience, but there is an enormous loss of the gracefulness

which every woman should religiously consider. A short skirt, cut with a very slight fullness at the waist and fitted like a riding habit, will be found to offer little danger in the way of catching in the wheel. Knickerbockers should be worn, as petticoats of lace or linen are productive of innumerable falls. Gaiters should be worn with a short skirt, as the rider will seem to herself and her spectators not to be sufficiently dressed without them. With the long skirt, the ordinary walking length, these gaiters are not necessary, but what is gained by the absence of these certainly heating articles of wear will be more than balanced by the danger of catching in the wheel, which the long skirt indisputably invites. A long coat to cover the bloomers would possibly occupy the place of a short skirt, but would, on the other hand, be caught by the wind and twisted into many awkward shapes. The shoes worn should be low, broad-heeled, and comfortable. Gloves should be loose, and if desired, there are bicycle gloves made for the purpose, open across the knuckles to let in the air.

Nothing has been devised which is superior to the cutaway jacket with the soft shirt underneath, a skirt to the tops of the boots, accompanied by knickerbockers of the same material, and gaiters of cloth, leather, or canvas, fastened to the band of the knickerbockers below the knee. An attractive combination can be used in the shape of a Tartan kilt of dark material, accompanied by a braided black jacket, a white shirt, and black necktie. There is a modest suggestion of costume about this dress which is particularly becoming and artistic. Hats should be close, and undecorated with flowers. A sailor hat, which affords some protection for the eyes, is advisable, or a soft felt hat with a stiff feather.

This exercise is more adapted to the use of women than any which has been discovered. It can be mild or vigorous, according to choice or necessity. It is infinitely preferable to horseback riding for many reasons: the woman who rides a horse is held helplessly in a heavy garment, sits in a position where she is subject to any shock, quite incapable of resistance, is a victim to uneven joltings,

and is in danger of accident from any caprice in the temper of her mount. Her muscles are not brought into action as they are in bicycling, and the exhilaration of the exercise is in no way comparable to that experienced upon the metal steed. Every muscle of the body is used in bicycling; those of the hips and calves of the legs, as well as those in the lower part of the body, the muscles in the back from balancing, the muscles in the arms from holding and directing the handle-bars, and even those in the throat and shoulders. In



THREE-QUARTER SKIRT.

holding an erect position, the lungs are expanded from the necessity of deep breathing, and the chest developed; weak and useless hands and fingers are strengthened by the pressure and use of the handle-bars; the whole body becomes alive, the circulation is increased, indigestion cured, and nerves forgotten. As a cure for insomnia, it is without parallel. It will undoubtedly reduce extra flesh, particularly about the hips, but will as surely increase the weight of those who have become emaciated by indigestion or other ills. In other words, it conduces to a normal condition in every aspect of health and weight.

The rewards which this exercise offers are so great, in the fascination of the free motion, the exhilaration of the sense of power over the wheel, the delight of flying through the landscape, that it is no wonder it is potent to bring delicate, fanciful women off their couches, and to rid them of vapors and nerves. In this respect it is particularly applicable to American women, who have long been in need of some such impetus to healthful exercise and outdoor life. It is, in fact, for its value as a nerve tonic that the exercise for women is principally to be considered.

It is impossible for a woman who has not the control of her nerves to be a successful bicyclist, and this fact is one of enormous import. The bicycle is a sentient thing, uncanny in its intelligence. If there is a weakness in the mental organization, if there are unconfessed failures of will and determination in the character, be sure the bicycle will find them out. If the rider is confident of herself, the bicycle will never play her tricks. The bicycle and its rider become as it



THE FRENCH MOUNT.

were one person. If the will is unsteady, the bicycle wobbles and down comes the rider and her obedient machine. If the rider sees a stiff bit of road, and is confident that she can pass it, she will pass it; if she sees a hill, and knows she can mount it, she will mount it; if she sees an appalling obstacle in the shape of an ice-cart looming up on her vision, and is afraid, the bicycle will swerve, and she will go down ingloriously. It is all a question of confidence, and will-power, and nerve-control. What this means in the increase of mental poise and the development of all that goes to make up character and self-government, is incalculable.

As an exercise for the development of all the muscles together, so that none are overtaxed, the bicycle has never been surpassed, and in its particular adaptability for women, never equaled; but in its applicability to nervous and mental troubles, it may almost be regarded in the light of a specific cure.

The imperative necessity of balance, the constant attention to the mechanical exigencies of the situation, compel a diversion of the mind's attention from

NOTE.—The *Cosmopolitan* is indebted to Mr. Price, of the Michaux Bicycle club, for assistance in obtaining photographs of mounting positions.

itself which is astonishingly beneficial. The bicycle actually has been used by physicians as a means of curing insanity, and there is an authenticated case of an inmate of a retreat in Brooklyn who was restored to sanity by the use of the machine; surely an astonishing proof of what this regular absorbing physically healthful exercise may do for a mind diseased.

For all the minor derangements and weaknesses of character, the bicycle is no less beneficial. It brings not alone physical but mental regeneration; it is a medicinal and an ethical force.

Its influence in the question of dress-reform is one to be regarded seriously and with reticence. What years of eloquent preaching from the platforms of woman's suffrage have failed to accomplish, the necessities of this wheel have in a few months brought into practical use. It is to be hoped that the bicycle will not so far advance the theories of dress-reform held by many of the advanced women suffragists that men's clothes will be adopted by women, but that the exigencies of the bicycle costume will bring about some compromise may safely be expected. There is no such thing as tight lacing for a woman who rides a bicycle, high heels must be abandoned, and pinched toes released.

It is an erroneous assumption that bicycling has any of the dangers which the use of the sewing-machine presents to women. The cramped and bent position of the body in the use of the sewing-machine is in no way repeated in the position which is assumed upon the bicycle. In using the sewing-machine there is a constant and unhealthy pressure of the corset upon the lower part of the body, which results in pelvic congestions and difficulties of all sorts; the eyes are glued to a creeping seam, the back becomes fatigued with the constant and unnatural position, the unfortunate woman inhales a close and unhealthy atmosphere, while on the bicycle she sits erect, breathing the pure air of heaven, flying along in the exultation of the splendid motion, the delight and benefit of the natural use of all her muscles.

It would be difficult to say to which class of women the bicycle is the greatest blessing: to the rich it gives a healthy

distraction and amusement, as vivifying as it is innocent; to the poor it brings a joy of life never before attainable. If testimonies from the scores of overworked teachers and stenographers to whom this exercise has restored happiness, self-control, and ensuing success and comfort in their avocations, some idea might be obtained of the benefit which the bicycle has already brought. Before long, at the present rate of increase in the exercise, not one woman will be without her wheel.

The spirit of comradeship and unselfish consideration of others' wishes and convenience, is another result of the use of the bicycle. There is a free-masonry about bicycling which is of no small use in the development of humanity to man, and that courtesy which is the expression of comradeship and good will. As a means of developing the independent intercourse of men and women it is of extreme importance. The companionship of the wheel is conducted upon a basis of healthy sport, one where the attention at every moment is required for the management of the machine.

The New Yorker who goes out to Claremont of a Sunday afternoon, and counts the bicycles which stand against the fence,—the steeds of this regiment of health-seekers, young and old,—watches them as they fly past by the hundred, the thousand, notes the expression of interest, absorption, often exultation, in their faces. "What madness has fallen upon us!" he will exclaim, and then hastily the contagion will seize him also, and he will take to himself a bicycle, and add one more to the number of those to whom this wonderful machine has brought health, happiness, and a new life.

The woman who dons her knickerbockers and her gaiters and spins out into the open country, will find her mind opening to the wonders of sky and air, the beauties of the fields and streams; she will learn to take comfort in the world about her, will find her mind soothed and her spirits uplifted; she will forget troubles and anxieties, real or imaginary; she will become mistress of herself, as of her wheel, no longer a victim to hysterics, no longer seeking for unhealthy excitement, a rational, useful being restored to health and sanity.