

Women on the Wheel.

A discussion has been started as to the influence of bicycle riding on the physical and the moral health of women. So far as we have observed, those who oppose the practice as deleterious do not seem to know anything about it experimentally. They are not themselves bicycle riders. Their opposition to the exercise is theoretical purely, or is due to the effect they imagine it has upon those who engage in it. We have seen no notable medical opinion which sustains their assumption as to its necessarily injurious physical consequences, and unquestionably there is no general agreement among physicians that it is hurtful to women especially.

If bicycle riding produced the immorality which a few sensational writers attribute to its use, the evidence by this time would have become indisputable and overwhelming. In many a rural community the great majority of the young women are wheelers, and in all the large cities there are many thousands of the daughters of the most respectable families who indulge regularly in the amusement. Great numbers of matrons also are bicycle riders. This summer there are twice, probably many times, as many feminine wheelers as there were last year. Wheeling has become a fashionable feminine practice; and hence the opportunity is at hand for obtaining a mass of evidence as to its moral and physical consequences upon which to generalize with certainty. If the evils charged as almost inseparable from it really existed, they would appear beyond the possibility of concealment. They would be shown unmistakably in many thousands of households to the watchful eyes of physicians and the anxious scrutiny of parents. Who has seen them? Where have the deleterious consequences been made apparent? Could they be all about us without exciting the restraining influence and positive prohibition of priests and clergymen? How is it that there are so many clerical wheelers if the exercise is demoralizing?

It is enough to ask these questions to show how evil are the minds if not the deliberate intentions of those few who raise the cry against the use of the bicycle by women. It is not a new device to cater to vicious tastes by pretending to discover depravity. That is an old trick, and its revival under the guise of pointing out a danger is an insult to bicycle riders.

The charge against the practice by women that it fosters immodesty is attributable to the depravity or the narrowness of the minds of those who make it. So far from being immodest, the special bicycle costumes of which the so general use of the wheel by women has caused the fashioning are both modest and suitable. They are all becoming. Moreover, they are tending to a change in the outdoor dress of women which is altogether desirable. The bicycle is producing a dress reform demanded by good sense which otherwise would have been long delayed. Women are learning the convenience of shortened skirts for wear outdoors and in business occupations. They are getting accustomed to them, and the novelty which once attracted unwelcome attention to such a costume has passed away. Women have discovered, too, that the dress can be made very becoming, more especially to young and graceful figures. Pretty girls in pretty bicycle costumes are wonderfully pretty to look upon as they sit idly by their wheels or walk about in the intervals of rest from riding. Neither is there anything in their appearance which indicates that they are suffering from the physical ills attributed to the use of the bicycle by writers at a loss for something to say that will attract attention. They look strong, hearty, and vigorous, and seem all the better for the exercise. They have acquired a new freedom of movement which is graceful in its naturalness.

Nothing in recent times has done more for the desirable advancement of women than the bicycle.

ONE WOMAN'S VIEW.

You see women out wheeling who would like to return home except for the torture of putting on house dresses. They are feeling healthy and comfortable, but as soon as they get in the house they must abandon comfort and such health as they have gained and put on long, heavy skirts and tight waists again. The lungs that are now expanded must be laced together. The hips, now moving naturally, must be tied down and weighted with tons of heavy skirts. The knees that are positively reveling in their new-found freedom must go back to the old imprisonment. No wonder the women linger along the high roads and in the byways and on stone fences and in hedges, hesitating about going home and "getting dressed."

It is for the bicycle dress that I am going to speak. Not the bicycle dress on the wheel, but the cycle dress in the house. You have never seen such a thing. Neither have other people; but they will.

The cycle dress in the house is a short one that reaches a little below the knees. It is put on on hot days, or when the cyclist is tired. It can be made as fanciful as one pleases, but it is the length and shape that makes it what it is. It must hang loose from the shoulders and be short. Those two features are requisites.

Now, I expect to be told I am crazy. Mrs. Bloomer suffered a martyrdom in her day for being "crazy" in the same way, and now women have erected a monument to her memory for "the courage of her convictions."

Two years ago the women who went bicycling in short dresses were considered anything but that which they wanted to be. They were looked at askance by nice women and frowned at by men who had their wives along. It was a very "sporty" thing to go cycling in a short dress.

With my house bicycle dress I expect opposition. The feature of this dress is that it is to be put on in the house after wheeling. It is primarily intended for cyclists because they are the only ones who will wear it. They have got used to short skirts, and know how nice they are. They are the ones who will take it up first.

The short dress is a merry little affair of nice materials, and as full of furbelows as you please. It can be absolutely fancy, high necked, long sleeved, ribboned, and trimmed as you like. But it is short.

The shortness is its peculiarity, or one of them. The length is exactly the same as a bicycle skirt, and it is to be worn in the same way, with gaiters, if you must have them, or with dark stockings and slippers. It is sure to be becoming, just as cycle dresses are becoming to every woman, making an old lady discernible from a young one only by her white hair.

The way to wear the cycle house skirt is first with bloomers, just as though a wheel. No women are wearing those muslin underthings nowadays; that is, no women who are athletic. The starched ruffles would drive them crazy.

They jump into tights, perhaps silk ones, and over these, which reach from ankle to chin, they slip a pair of stockings. Next comes this little cycle dress. It is of silk, and made as pretty as possible.

In this rig the woman athlete is ready to go on. Her muscles, now getting strength, continue to improve. She is now dressed for the day at home. In this neat little dress she receives her callers, takes luncheon, lounges on the couch, looks out the window, and spends a happy afternoon. She is not wound up and tightened up into those awful swathing things which women have so long worn. When it comes dinner time she can don her conventional dress, if she pleases, and spend a conventional evening. But many wear them all the time, except for the street, then put on a cycling dress.

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