

THE EVOLUTION OF THE LADY CYCLIST.

BY GRACE E. DENISON.

ONLY some six or seven years ago there were no lady-cyclists in Canada. Can you fancy it, my sisters? In one short demi-decade we have learned a new enthusiasm, gone through the Battle of the Bloomer, taken into our lives a new pleasure, the like of which we never before experienced or even in our dreams imagined.

Is it only seven years, or seventy, since we knew of no better way of reaching our goal than by Shank's Mare, Irish Tandem—one foot in front of the other—or the uninteresting, stupid and antiquated conveyance by carriage, coach, or tram?

The whole world (excepting the makers) balked at the bicycle—at least, for women's use. Men must have been at the bottom of this attitude which made the world look foolish, for I don't recall any decided pose of the sort against man as a straddling enthusiast, nor any protest whatever, previous to that first shipment of English wheels for ladies to Canada. Talk about the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers on Plymouth Rock! Believe me, that the disembarkation of the first woman's bicycle was the real event of this or previous ages. Ah! that bicycle! It had an iron tire, and a saddle formed to torture, and pedals that were apt to refuse to be pedalled, and the contour like a nightmare for the reckless she to ride. The same she was neither very trim nor very tasty, nor good to watch upon her devious way. Poor pioneer woman bicyclist, one hesitates to call her a lady, with her skirts modestly touching the ground, and occasionally winding themselves about her pedals, and giving her a toss which she took weeks to forget. Her feet were encased in hideous canvas and rubber-soled shoes (tennis left-overs, were these abominations), her hats were wonderful and altogether hideous, as she tried to evolve something "sporty" in head-gear, and did

not just know how. Do you remember those horrid peaked caps, that put ten years on one's face, and were hot and heavy, in the first struggling midsummer? But the first woman cyclist was so bumped, and bruised, and battered, and scratched, and wrenched, and twisted, and torn, and rasped on the shins and ankles, and tortured with a mis-fitting saddle, that she did not care how she looked, and her indifference was the tempering of the wind to the shorn lamb. Could she have suffered as she did, and realized how she looked, at one and the same time, the evolution of the lady cyclist would have come to a dead stop, and bicycles would have been sold for old iron—as, indeed, many of them eventually were!

Besides her philosophy, she was so absorbed in this new sport, in mastering the idiosyncrasies and eccentricities of her exasperating but adored machine (we got that word from England with the first shipment of wheels, and returned it with thanks as inartistic and insulting to our idol), that such lesser affairs as skirts and boots and hats took a back seat, and only obtruded themselves when some candid and inconsiderate bystander greeted the preoccupied wheelwoman with that frank criticism which pioneer bicyclists recall now-a-days in wonder that they survived it! Our wheels of six years ago were built for endurance, and bore their scars bravely; with them we ran down street-cars, policemen, senators, old ladies, baby-carriages—was it not the most exciting experience of my life, that palpitating moment when I overturned a smart perambulator full of twins while riding, by special permit from the chief of police, on a Hamilton sidewalk? Then, with my heart in my mouth, did I ride off scot-free, owing to the blessed maternal impulse to rescue the dual blessings from the gutter proving more potent than its conflicting yearning to thrash the "brazen creature" escaping on the wobbling bicycle.