

## BICYCLE RIDING AND PERINEAL PRESSURE.

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About a year ago, Dr. Strahan, of Northampton, England, published in the London *Lancet* an article with the above title, which, coming from so respectable a source, and published in so influential a medical journal, created something of a ripple.

The doctor assumed that bicycling caused an injurious amount of pressure on the perineum and prostate gland, and proceeded to draw a most doleful picture of the evil results that must follow, among which were "irritation and congestion of the prostate and surrounding parts, exhaustion and atrophy of the delicate muscles of the perineum, undue development of the sexual appetite, and early impotence;" a sufficiently serious catalogue of evils truly.

To be sure, from a strictly medical standpoint, the *gravamen* of these charges against the bicycle was much lightened by the fact that Dr. Strahan himself stated that "it must be understood that what is said in this article applies only to growing boys, who generally straddle the largest machine their length of leg permits, and so greatly increase the liability to perineal pressure," and that he cited no cases in support of his view, but frankly admitted, in conclusion, "what cycling . . . will do towards the advance of those prostatic affections which often render the closing years of life miserable, time alone will tell."

Now, having myself been for the past five years a cyclist, having ridden pretty constantly both bicycle and tricycle, not only without having experienced any of those evils which the learned doctor so graphically describes as a necessary or probable result of cycling, but on the contrary with great and constantly-increasing benefit to my health, I read the article with great interest. I was, of course, struck by the fact that the case was a purely hypothetical one, and that no facts were cited to support the conclusions drawn, and by the additional fact, equally apparent to any experienced cyclist, that the author was not himself a practical cyclist, but was writing on purely theoretical grounds, and that his argument being based upon false premises necessarily led to a wrong conclusion, and I was tempted to comply with numerous requests and reply to it upon those grounds. I preferred, however, to wait, to investigate the matter for myself, and to see whether there might not be something in it after all.

Theoretically, it is true that if the saddle is too small, or not properly shaped, and the wheel is too large in proportion to the size of the rider, some of the pressure that should be borne by the ischial tuberosities will fall upon the perineum, and the evils described may result.

Of course this would not constitute grounds for condemning the use of properly-constructed bicycles of a size suitable for their riders; but if it could be shown that these results did actually follow the use of the bicycle in any considerable number of cases, it would be sufficient grounds for limiting the use of the bicycle.

In the year that has passed, I have given the matter a very considerable degree of attention, and have made numerous inquiries among cyclists and medical men, without having found a single authentic case of injury to the perineum or prostate, and only a single instance in which even a suspicion of such injury had arisen, and in that case it was charged, by the bicyclist who spoke of it, to the use of an ill-fitting saddle, and disappeared upon the substitution of another saddle of more suitable design and construction.

After a long experience with the bicycle and tricycle, I am prepared to state positively that I know of no other means of locomotion or exercise that can compare with cycling for pleasure, for business, or for health. Even with the crudest machines with which I began my experience as a practical cyclist, this was true, but it is much more so with the improved machines of the present day. The small hard saddle has been replaced by larger and more elastic ones,

and the improvement begun with the so-called suspension saddle has gone on till there are now in the market several forms which seem to be almost absolutely free from any objection on sanitary grounds. The bicycle has been constantly improved in detail, strengthened and lightened, made more rigid where rigidity is desirable, more elastic where elasticity is wanted, till it seems to have closely approached ideal perfection. Given a modern bicycle, with its hollow rims, curved handle-bars, ball-bearings to wheels, and pedals of the right size, neither too large nor too small for the rider, fitted with a Lillibridge or Kirkpatrick combined spring and saddle,—such a machine, for instance, as my own Columbia Light Roadster, which, weighing but thirty-seven pounds, including tool-bags and tools, is nevertheless amply strong for a man of my size and strength, and on any fair road you have an almost ideal mode of travel. Swifter, surer, safer, and more healthy than horseback riding, and, so far as I can learn, absolutely free from objection on sanitary grounds. Even a less perfect and therefore cheaper machine, if selected with due care as to fit of machine and saddle, is equally free from danger to health, and may be the means of improving the health and strength of many a one who needs out-of-door exercise, while at the same time its economy will commend it to people who find horse feed or livery bills burdensome. My own bicycle is in daily use for about eight months of the year, and saves me each year more than its cost in horse hire. My health has never suffered from, but has always been improved by, cycling.

It is not fair to charge upon the improved cycles of to-day the faults of their undeveloped predecessors, nor is it right to cast suspicion on a healthy exercise, and a graceful, speedy and economical means of travel, on grounds that have no real foundation in fact.

Practical cyclists have not been, and will not be, disturbed by Cassandra-like references of non-riders to "the bicycle back," "injuries to the perineum and adjacent organs," "obscure nervous symptoms from the succession of shocks conveyed to the spine in bicycle riding," and other hypothetical evils. They know better. They know, from experience, that neither the causes nor the consequences so graphically described exist outside of the writer's imagination, and it is not for cyclists this is written. Parents and guardians may set their hearts at rest, and give their boys bicycles and their girls tricycles, and send them out into the fresh air and sunshine without the slightest apprehension as to any evil effects on mind or body. "The bicycle back" is usually strong and supple, "obscure nervous symptoms" are unknown among cyclists, and the worst that is likely to happen is that the boys may get sunburned, and develop appalling appetites, and the girls get freckled a little, and have to abandon their corsets.—*Bicycling World*.

Mr. Hillman, of the well-known English cycling firm of Hillman, Herbert & Cooper, drives a carriage constructed mainly of steel tricycling tubing, and the wheels of which are made spider fashion, and tired with india-rubber. Not only is this carriage the perfection of ease to ride in, but its weight—without losing strength—is so much less than that of ordinarily-constructed carriages that the horse labor is enormously reduced. Similar carriages have been made for Lord Granville and others, and the day will shortly come when the rush for similar vehicles will be immense.

The Westfield (Mass.) bicyclists have formed a class for Bible study among themselves. What do they find in the Bible about bicycling?—*Boston Post*. "Their wheels like a whirlwind." Isaiah 5:28: "As for the wheels, it was cried unto them in my hearing, O wheel," Ezekiel 10:13: "He wrought a work on the wheels," Jeremiah 18:3: "So run that ye may obtain," 1 Cor. 9:24: "I have not run in vain," Phil. 2:16: "Let us run with patience the race set before us," Heb. 12:1.—*Daily Union*.

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