

## THE DRESS FOR BICYCLING.

By DORA DE BLAQUIÈRE.

THERE can be no doubt of the interest taken in the subject of the cycle as a new form of exercise for women and girls, and this year in England it has been unquestionably quite the rage. All these things are, however, so much a matter of fashion unhappily amongst ourselves, that when next season arrives we may find the fad of this year to have become the old fashion of the next, and something else to have taken its place in the way of exercise and amusement. But behind this purely fashionable view of the matter there is the other view, that the bicycle seems to have come as a great emancipation to women, and that, when carefully learnt and used intelligently, it promises to be to her a source of pleasure beyond anything she has already had, and that it is more than probable it has "come to stay." As a means of getting about, without expense and with little fatigue, a practicable method of locomotion for everyone, youthful as well as middle-aged, it possesses advantages which appeal to all, and which will secure it a permanent acceptance as a well-beloved and useful friend. Its best

motto, where women are concerned, would be, "Use, not abuse," as all the medical profession seem to declare with one accord that the abuse only is dangerous. An American doctor, who has given much attention to the subject says, that "It ought to be a law for every woman that her bicycle ride should terminate when a distinct feeling of weariness comes over her. No ordinary woman, who rides for pleasure once or twice a week, should ride at first over ten miles at a time. This represents, perhaps, an hour's or an hour and a quarter's ride, and if at the end of it she does not feel fresh and in a glow, she may be certain that she has ridden too long. The healthy, tired feeling, which anyone can recognise after athletic exercise, can never be mistaken for that weariness which comes from too much exertion, and overstraining of the muscles and nerves." The other danger pointed out by this authority consists in that arising from a high rate of speed. This is natural enough. The machine runs so easily, perhaps, that there is a strong temptation to increase the rate of progress, and every woman

must learn to put a deliberate check on herself, to avoid dropping into it.

Yet another doctor, and this time an English one, must be heard: "Of all means of training the respiration, Dr. Fortescue Fox thinks cycling is the best. When a person first takes to cycling, he is troubled with shortness of breath, his heart beats uncomfortably, and his legs get tired, but after some training these discomforts all disappear. Why should not people liable to attacks of asthma also train their respiration by such kinds of exercise—of course, on condition of the heart and lungs being in perfect health? Cycling exercise first of all increases the depth of breathing, and that without fatigue, as the respiratory movements are automatic; at the same time it will accustom the rider instinctively to take in at each respiration the volume of air required to aerate the blood and to eliminate a fixed proportion of carbonic acid, leaving in the circulation the precise amount compatible with health."

And now that I have devoted a short space to the healthful nature of the exercise, I will turn to the doctors' opinion of the nature of the dress to be worn, so far as they have given it; but first will give an account of the dress as used in America and in France, in both of which this exercise has advanced, and been practised longer than with us, as women were using the wheel in both these countries more than two years ago.

In France it seems that women never ride, nor have ridden, in skirts. The Bloomer costume was accepted as the proper thing from the beginning; and excepting a little ridicule from the comic papers, the question of the propriety of it has never been discussed. All French women appear to agree on the subject, that the Bloomers are an advantage; but their costume seems to me to leave much to be desired on the score of beauty. In the environs of Paris, where women-bicyclists are as thick as flies, one may see fifty costumes in a morning's walk, exactly alike as to cut and pattern, and only differing in colour or in material. All wear low shoes, which are smart and well-fitting, and stockings of various colours. This summer many wore pretty-coloured silk ones, but the really smart riders are wearing the heavy English woollen ribbed-hose. Gaiters are seen in very few instances. The Bloomers come next, and are ungainly-looking articles, like full bags, from which the legs protrude, looking diminutive and out of drawing. The jacket is tight-fitting, and reaches only to the waist; this is discarded on a long trip, and its place is taken by the "sweater," which completes the ugliness of the costume, by emphasising the sharply-defined curves of the figure, which look most ungainly. Some of the Bloomers are cut after the fashion of a man's breeches, and fit tightly about the hips, then full to the knees. Others have the fulness laid in pleats over the hips, which of course increases the apparent size of the wearer. The hat worn is generally a "deer-stalker," with or without feathers on one side.

Dr. I. Championnière, of the French "Academy of Medicine," has written in the *Nouvelle Revue* an article very strongly in favour of bicycling for women, which he considers will create a great and favourable modification in women's physical condition, especially in that of French women, who, when they become wives and mothers, drop their habits of exercise to a greater extent than their sisters of England and America. In three points he considers it will benefit



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HOW NOT TO DRESS.



women. It will insensibly cause women to train, and to modify their meals. Secondly, it will increase their habits of attention; and, thirdly, they will gain in courage and self-control.

There is no doubt of the immense mania for the bicycle in America, for the comic papers are full of jokes, the fun of which is furnished by the cycle. "How does George get along since he began bicycling?" an interested friend is reported to have asked. "On crutches," is the reply; which shows a certain amount of cruel sarcasm on undeserved misfortune. But Chicago, and her board of Aldermen, has quite exceeded everything in the ordinance recently passed, to regulate, locally at least, the dress of riders, both male and female—neither tights nor knickerbockers are allowed; whatever is worn must be baggy, from the ankles upwards. No stockings are permitted to be shown, and no gaiters to be worn; and all jackets must button up tightly to the throat. But the other day I suddenly dropped upon

knee-breeches, without any fulness at the knees, brown sweaters fitting the body closely, and brown bicycle hose and shoes. Topped off with soft brown felt hats of generous dimensions, these costumes make a very striking effect. The wheels ridden by the couple are precisely alike, and but for the masses of yellow hair and slightly smaller size of the woman, the couple could scarcely be distinguished, each from the other."

In America, as in France, the doctors are loud in praise of bicycling. In fact, in the former country, it was the wife of a leading New York physician who first learnt to ride, and became a pioneer amongst the fashionable women, and it seems remarkable that the higher ranks were also the first to adopt the cycle in England; and that London, not the country, should have been the place of its *début*. A recent writer, Lord Onslow, thinks that, in London, the craze will probably not last beyond next season, but that in the country cycling will have come to stay.

In America, too, the wheelwomen have adopted, almost with unanimity, some form of "Bloomer Costume;" but knickerbockers, the divided skirt, and short tunics and gaiters, are all adopted, as well as the tailor-made skirt. Many of the costumes

A RATIONAL COSTUME.



Richardson. This little book is well worth reading, especially by those who are on the wrong side of fifty; and its advice, as to attempting slow progress in learning to ride being the surest and wisest plan, shows it worthy of adoption by all. First learn all the parts of your steed, and then learn how



THE BLOOMER COSTUME.

the following extract from the *Chicago Tribune*, which made me think that perhaps the Board of Aldermen had had a great deal to put up with before they issued the sweeping ukase above recorded.

"One of the most notable cases of unseemly dress was that of a woman bicyclist who was seen during the week on Grand Boulevard clad in a pair of long trousers, which were evidently borrowed from her husband or brother. They fitted her rather loosely, and were held around the ankles by an ordinary pair of trouser guards, just as they are usually worn by men. The remainder of her costume consisted of a shirt waist, a lady's jacket and a man's soft felt hat. She rode a man's wheel, and, except that the coils of her hair showed plainly under her hat, would have been easily mistaken for a man.

"A pair of noticeable costumes have been frequently observed on the South Side. They are worn by a man and his wife, and are exactly alike in every detail. The two costumes are made up of handsome corduroy

ous. Indeed, it seems likely that neither the late Mrs. Bloomer, nor Dr. Mary Walker, in her semi-masculine garb would be much noticed to-day.

Meanwhile, the literature of the bicycle is steadily increasing. Beginning with *Scribner's Magazine* in June, we find the *Nouvelle Revue*, *Engineering Magazine*, *Homiletic Review*, *Lippincott's Magazine*, and *The Idler*, all discussing the subject; and lastly, Miss Frances Willard has written a small volume, brought out under the auspices of the "Mowbray House Woman's Bicycling Association," with an introductory note by Sir Benjamin



BICYCLE COSTUME, OPENING AT THE SIDES.



to mount. This last is the most difficult part of the advice to follow.

In England, as well as on the continent, the list of well-known women who have adopted the cycle is a long one, and comprises the Queen of Italy, the Duchesses of York and Connaught, Princess Maud of Wales, the Duchess of Portland, Lady Hastings, Lady Dudley, the Ladies Norreys, Wolverton, Lurgan, Yarborough, Brassey, Gerrard, and many others. It does not seem to be known who first brought Battersea Park into fashion as a retreat for cyclists, probably some well-known women who wished for a quiet place for practising the wheel. But there is no doubt that Battersea is now a rival to Hyde Park. It is farther away from crowded streets, and in its arrangements for *al fresco* meals it reminds one of a continental resort. One only wonders why we never had breakfasts under the sky long before now! The learners are there early, and at half-past ten the more expert cyclists begin to arrive, remaining in the park till nearly one o'clock. Hundreds of girls, as well as older people, are to be seen there; and one writer declares that the West End cabmen complain of fewer fares; while the livery stables also have fewer patrons, and after this "you will not be surprised to hear" (using the well-known phrase of the Tichborne trial) that an American writer opines "when cycles fall to £10, horses will go out of fashion."

In Battersea Park, as well as elsewhere, the women of position who have taken to the bicycle, have entirely held aloof from anything like masculine habiliments—knickers and gaiters, and the divided-skirt, have found no favour in their eyes. Skirts have been worn only ending above the shoes, and looking trim and neat either on or off the wheel.

During the very hot weather, skirts of serge, cloth, or *crêpon*, with shirts of silk or muslin, have been universally used. When it is a little cooler, a jacket and skirt of some light material; the "sailor hat" being in very general favour; but summer hats of lace and muslin will be also constantly seen. Dainty black or brown shoes, and generally gauntlet-gloves to protect the hands and arms.

The "Rational Costume," though more seen, does not find favour in the eyes of any but people who are not of the aristocratic world, for women of high rank are much prejudiced against it. Still, a recent writer on the subject in a contemporary gives it as her opinion that the skirt is doomed, and says that nothing can exceed the ugliness of it on a windy day when it balloons-out, and the limbs are far more displayed than they would be with any form of "rational dress." Meantime, the question is a vexed one, and the apparition of a lady in "knickers" will draw a small crowd any day in Pall Mall or Piccadilly.

Country people look with unsympathetic eyes on lady-cyclists who don "knickers" and affect a mixture of masculine and feminine costume generally. Not long ago the landlady of a hotel refused to allow two of them to enter the dining-room unless they covered their nether garments with skirts, and a correspondent recently wrote to a daily paper—"I was at Dorking one afternoon, and while waiting at the railway-station noticed a lady-cyclist dressed in the latest style. She was an object of great interest to a number of natives on the platform, who looked at her with much astonishment. To a man, apparently a ploughman wearing his best clothes, who was watching the lady with staring eyes and open mouth, I whispered, 'What is that?' The countryman grinned and answered, 'I've been hanged if I knaws, but I thinks it's an oastrich.'"

This is however a state of things that will pass away as the dwellers in the country get more used to seeing women on wheels; and we must always remember that, as an old country, we are more Conservative in our ideas and cling more to old ways than a new land like America—and things will right themselves, each woman will choose the dress that suits her fancy, or else she will abide by the wishes or the prejudices of father, brothers, or husband in her selection.

Dozens of ladies' tailors and shops in the West End are producing various descriptions of cycle costumes at all prices, many of them moderate enough to suit the most modest of purses. My own idea on the dress-question is, that there will always be those who will prefer the skirt, for one good and sufficient reason, that it is of more use when touring about, and looks better when off the wheel. In support of this opinion, I find an account of the dress adopted by a party of twelve Americans—six gentlemen and six ladies—who brought their cycles across the Atlantic this summer to use in a tour throughout England and France. The costumes were constructed by Redfern in New York. They were not uniform as to colour, but the general shape was a short coat, full in the back, and open in front, with three large buttons on each side, and short *rêvers* with a collar like a man's coat. A wide belt passed round the waist at the back, on the outside, and went underneath under the arms, and fastened on one side of the front. The skirts reached the ankle, and were well lined, but not stiffened. Underneath them were worn full knickerbockers to match the skirt, and gaiters were worn over the shoes; a small hat of straw trimmed simply with ribbon, and an *aigrette*, and kid gloves. The skirts worn were of washing silk, or cotton. Now, these dresses would look smart and ladylike anywhere, for walking or riding, and so would allow of the luggage being left behind or sent in advance, for some days' touring. It seems to be generally conceded that the "Eton," or short jacket to the waist, is not a becoming form of jacket for the wheel, and that some form of basque has a better effect, especially if it has a belt. The "Norfolk jacket," with box-pleats and a belt, and the skirts extending over the hips, is a popular shape; and so is a short jacket-bodice which has full basques at the back and buttons, with one button in front, over a blouse. The sleeves of this must be sufficiently ample to take in those of the blouse, without unduly crushing them.

With reference to the shape of the skirt, some are made with a broad box pleat in front in the genuine style of the Highlands. In others the skirts are shaped by gores, with the fulness at the back laid in two broad pleats, that separate when the wearer is seated.

Many skirts open, and button down the entire left side; but the best tailors button them down half way, on either side of the front, as they are easily dropped. The skirts are sometimes stiffened, and also weighted; and are always well lined. But no rule can be given about the width, as each skirt, if made by a tailor, is fitted and cut with the utmost care; just as a habit-skirt is fitted. The general width is about three yards, and the back placket-hole is always done away with, as it looks ugly, and sometimes catches on the point of the saddle. The skirt lining should be, if possible, of silk, as it steps over all other materials, and does not cling and impede movement.

The knickerbockers or "bloomers" of this year are not full, but they take the place of all under-petticoats. They are put on a yoke, which fits smoothly over the hips, and buttons at the back; expand over the knees to a

greater fulness, and are gathered just below them into a band, with buckle and strap, or else buttons and button-holes. When these are made to match the skirt, they require lining with silk or a fine sateen. If gaiters be worn, they should match the skirt and the knickers in colour.

In the *Badminton Magazine* Lord Onslow gives an account of the skirt invented by, and called after, Lady Margaret Jenkins, and thinks that it most nearly meets the exigencies of the case. This consists of a deep hem inside the skirt, which, at a sufficient distance apart (to allow of the necessary play of the knees when pedalling), is brought round each leg to fit tightly, like a garter under the skirt.

Underneath the knickerbockers a woven combination of wool, cotton, or silk and wool, should be worn, according to the season; and garters taking the shape of elastics, or any tight ligatures must be entirely dismissed in favour of the long elastic supporters, which are sewn to the edge of the corset, and fastened or tied with a loop and ribbon to the top of the stocking. Ribbed stockings are better than plain ones, and they should be of a sensible shape, with flat heels and a medium toe.

"Last but not least" you must remember that there is no gain, either in grace or beauty, in a small waist for bicycling; and an ungraceful "peg-top" look is given to the figure if the size of the hips be unduly accentuated. Whatever is worn, the long-waisted corset ought to be dismissed at once in the pursuit of any out-of-door recreation, especially cycling, where the heavily-boned stay is dangerous to health, and even to life. A pair of short riding stays is best, or else a buttoned, slightly corded, or boned under-bodice. Several modern makes of corset come up entirely to the ideal thing for wearing; and they are obtainable at any good draper's. The appearance of the tight corset on the cycle is more than ungraceful; and forms one of the eyesores in the dress of French cyclists.

Nor do I think what is known as the "sweater" (or the woven Jersey) are pretty or graceful garments for riding in, for they reveal the figure too much, and are too plain and too tight-fitting for grace or beauty. Hats must be of such a texture as to stand a shower, and the trimming should be of ribbon or velvet, in preference to feathers or lace. A wide-brimmed hat is unsuitable, but the brim should be of a sufficient width to shade the eyes. A light felt seems to be the best, on the whole, and some are both pretty and becoming. The hair should be dressed very simply, in close coils or plaits, that will not become untidy in the swift passage through the air. Nets should always be used, and veils are sometimes a great comfort. *Chiffon* and silk gauze are the most sensible, and such a length should be bought that it may be fastened securely at the back, or else the ends brought round and tied in front.

Last of all, I must mention that one of the burning questions of the hour is relative to the seats used on the cycle, and several French doctors have spoken of the danger of their producing irritation of the spine. They should be much broader and softer, and of an entirely different shape. Much discussion is taking place over the adoption of the sliding-seat, on the same principle as applied to boats. But I find that experienced wheelmen are not unanimous in their favour, and that there is much to be said against them. This subject has always been a difficult one for men, and the invasion of the fair sex makes it likely that some fresh departure will be taken, to make the present seats less objectionable.