



WOMEN ON WHEELS.

BY A LADY CYCLIST.

IN these days of the higher education of women, people have gradually come to recognise the fact that if a man's field of study is equally open to a woman, a certain amount of exercise and recreation, hitherto regarded as exclusively the heritage of man, must become the right of woman too. This fact is, as I say, pretty well understood and appreciated nowadays, and lawn-tennis, skating, and boating are as important factors in the amusements of a woman's life as the classics, algebra, and Euclid are in her education.

But of all the healthful and enjoyable modes of exercise now thrown open to women, there is none so beneficial to health and spirits, none so conducive to pleasure, interest, and wholesome excitement, as that to be obtained by the use of the tricycle.

Four years ago a woman on wheels was a rare and conspicuous sight; but to-day there are few parts of England—perhaps I may say of the United Kingdom—where a tricycling maid or matron excites any wonder in the mind of the spectator.

Certainly no more delightful means of locomotion was ever placed within my sex's reach. Women are seldom good walkers; their duties and pursuits confine them far more within-doors than do those of men, and even those who are most ardent over tennis or archery think, as a rule, that they have rather achieved a deed of prowess when they have taken a ten-mile walk. But the tricycle gives them at once a means of wandering far afield; of exploring forest glades and heathery moorlands; of finding close to their own familiar haunts beauties hitherto undreamed of, which, without such aid, they would never have been able to discover. We have slowly grown to realise that, in these days of over-brain-work and over-civilisation, no medicine but fresh air can calm the restless pulses and soothe the fevered mind, and the tricycle offers to women that panacea for over-wrought nerves and tried tempers.

"Why not ride instead?" asks some one. Certainly almost all that can be said in praise of the tricycle applies equally to the horse; but while thousands may enjoy the former, the latter is within the reach of



the rich alone. And it is particularly to the women of the middle class that I wish to recommend the use of the tricycle ; that class which suffers most from

what we have grown to call the "little health of women ;" the class whose lives are the busiest, and whose minds the most heavily taxed, and who, just in proportion to that taxation and that business, need some relaxation which shall

offer them the most complete change and rest from their ordinary occupations.

For it is the very charm of the tricycle that it affords instant change of scene and thought. All worrying cares, all fretting petty details of daily life, seem to fall from one like an ugly shadow when one mounts one's iron steed. Who can keep a wrinkled brow or a heavy heart as one darts swiftly and smoothly through the sweet keen air ; or glides down some long descent with an exhilarating rush which is more akin to flying than any known motion ? Suppose yourself a dweller in some great dull town, where the air is heavy with the smoke of a hundred thousand chimneys, and your heart is sick with the endless roar of the streets. The country seems a dozen miles away ; life seems all grime, and ugliness, and money-getting, with an upper-current of housekeeping cares, or the commonplace round of daily monotonous duties. Your tricycle is at the door ; you mount your saddle, and press the pedals with feet which seem as languid and spiritless as the heart within you. A few turns, and the quickened circulation begins to act upon you. Your sad eye brightens ; the colour mounts to your pale cheek ; you draw a longer breath, and settle down, no longer languidly, to your work. A few minutes, and the dreary town surroundings are left behind. God's own fresh, pure country stretches before you, with smiling meadow and budding hedgerow ; there is a burst of heavenly melody from the lark that hangs on quivering

wing bathed in the sunlight glory ; a rush of perfume in the delicious air that touches with its soft sweet lips your glowing cheeks. You ride and ride, till the calm fair beauty of wood and stream sinks deep into your weary heart, and you feel young and strong, and happy again all on a sudden, and you reach home refreshed and invigorated in body and in mind, feeling as you alight as if you were treading on air, and could scarcely keep from bursting out into singing as blithe as that of the soaring lark you left behind you an hour ago.

That night you sleep the sleep of tired childhood, and you wake to feel the world a very good place. after all, and duties not so irksome by half as you thought them yesterday.

Or if you are fortunate enough to own a lot cast in country places already, your tricycle opens up to you a thousand new joys. What pic-nic parties may be yours in summer ! What long rides with a merry party to visit some distant ruin, or quaint cathedral town ! What pleasant teas in quiet village inns, or gipsy-meals beneath forest oak, or beside the sounding shore ! What nutting parties in the autumn, and what brisk rides to the meet on cold winter mornings, when covering over the fire doesn't seem to warm one in the least, and only your tricycle-ride sends the quick blood tingling and dancing through every vein ! Ah ! the woman who has never been on wheels has not tasted half the innocent joys of life !

At first there was some amount of prejudice against tricycling for women. People looked askance, perhaps rather confounding three wheels with two, and fancying that anything of a cycling description must needs be unfeminine. Time has, as usual, proved the best advocate of a good cause, and there are few districts, and still fewer families, where tricycling now suggests anything fast or unwomanly.

That any prejudice against tricycling for women still exists is due, I fear I must own, a good deal to women themselves. Such lamentable spectacles as those afforded to the public from time to time by some riding women go far towards injuring the whole cause of tricycling in the eyes of the world at large ; and the unwomanly desire to compete in tricycle races, which lately gave rise to such hot discussions in the cycling press, has done still more. But it is palpably unfair to condemn tricycling for women at large because a few clumsy girls dress unsuitably, ride awkwardly, and attract a good deal of unflattering notice ; or because a small minority of silly women pant to win prizes in competition with men in the racing-field.

Of course in tricycling the first consideration must be the tricycle. The question of expense often disposes one to invest in one of those second-hand articles so temptingly advertised on all sides, but as a general rule the few pounds so saved are dearly saved. Never buy a tricycle without a personal examination and as prolonged a trial as possible. Faults, at first unsuspected, often make themselves apparent by use. Avoid rear-steerers—a class of machine which, for some occult reason, were considered, until quite recently, as appropriate for a lady's use. They are less

easy, less pleasant, and far more dangerous than the front-steering build.

The tricycle being secured, the next step is to ride it. Very little practice is needed by any woman of average quickness and common-sense, the motion is so easy. The steering is, of course, the difficult part, and a little usage is required before one grows aware how almost unconscious one's touch must be—as light and delicate as that on the tiller-lines of a boat, or the rein of a horse. Of course, as in all else, it is experience that teaches in tricycling. One learns by degrees to save oneself much hard labour by letting the pedals do most of the work for themselves, and by economising all that outlay of strength and breath with which one was at first so over-lavish. One great secret of graceful and easy riding is having the saddle sufficiently high—*i.e.*, just so that the instep rests on the lower pedal as one sits at full height. To sit low is infallibly to ride awkwardly and to exhaust oneself.

Dress is the next important question in the female mind. The great fault of most costumes devised by men is their excessive weight and warmth. Men never seem able to comprehend that a woman cannot carry what would be a light burden to themselves. The Touring Club uniform, otherwise neat and appropriate, suffers from this grave defect; also from being too expensive for many lady riders. The taste and fancy of the wearer can best decide how much and what quality of clothing should be worn, but there are two or three indispensable points to be considered. The gown must not be over two yards in width, or it may catch in the wheels; it must be guiltless of steels, or other dress-improving arrangements; it must be long enough to touch the instep as it reaches the lowest pedal; it must be made plainly and simply, with no floating flounces or frills. A colour calculated to withstand dust and grease is the most sensible wear, and jewellery, coloured ribbons, artificial flowers, &c., are all entirely out of place. Shoes should always be worn, and the head-gear should be chosen with a view to wind, sun, and possible showers.

I have found it a good plan to carry with me a small fur cape—just sufficient to protect my shoulders in a sudden storm, or to prevent a chill when overheated.

Beginners should be careful to avoid long distances at first; it is better never to attempt riding after one is tired, or to ride up ascents if one feels one's breath failing. By degrees the distance can be increased to almost any extent, and at last one grows to feel it far easier to ride up most hills than to push up the machine.

Touring is one of the great pleasures that tricycling brings with it. I should have mentioned, as another proof of the growing popularity of tricycling as an exercise for women, the fact that the club lists of the Cyclists' Touring Club show monthly an ever-increasing

number of ladies' names. This Cyclists' Touring Club, which is open to all amateur riders, offers certain very real advantages to its members in the shape of official maps, hand-books, &c., as well as a settled tariff of charges at reduced rates at all inns bearing the club badge, of which there is at least one to be found in almost every town in the kingdom. Besides this, there are consuls appointed for the different divisions of the country, whose duty it is to supply information and assistance to all touring members applying for their aid. The subscription to the club is half-a-crown annually, with an additional shilling as entrance fee. Uniform is worn at option.

The club already numbers over sixteen thousand members, and any lady-tricyclist who contemplates touring should certainly add her name to the sixteen thousand.

And what form of touring can equal the utter enjoyment of the tricycle tour? Far longer distances can be covered with less than half the fatigue of walking, and there is far greater independence than in driving, and even riding does not afford such varied pleasure as the tricycle. To rise betimes on a sweet fresh summer morning, to mount one's steed after an early breakfast, and to whirl away mile after mile through fragrant hedgerows, or amid cool forest shades; to rest at some roadside inn through the burden and heat of the day, only to start once more as the sun is waning in the west, and to ride again under broadening shadows or by rising moon; to sleep in quaint old-fashioned hostelries, where the fare is sweet and hearty and the welcome warm and kind; to gain daily strength and health, and tone of mind and body; to learn that the pure healthful joys of life outweigh all its feverish intoxicating pleasures, as the gold outweighs the thistledown—all that is to have lived, and not to have lived in vain! And that is the happy possibility that every tricycle opens up to its possessor.

