

HOW I LEARNED TO BICYCLE.

BY CONSTANCE HASTINGS.

I WANTED a bicycle, of course I did. Everybody rode the bicycle, and why shouldn't I? But wanting and possessing are by no means synonymous terms with me, so I set about the arduous task of getting one somehow or other. If I want anything I have always found the best way to gratify my desire is to talk about it. I don't mind being generous and giving anyone, who may happen to read this, a hint. If you want anything and cannot afford to buy it, don't keep that want a dead secret locked in your own breast until you have managed to save the requisite amount for purchasing the article. Just mention the thing seasonably and appropriately, morning noon and night.

Now I talked to mother about a bicycle, then I talked to father. I talked to my brothers and I talked to my friends about it. As father rides a bicycle it was very easy to get him to see how very pleasant a companion in his rides would be, and he was the one upon whom I built my hopes of possession.

One morning at breakfast father said, "You are always talking about a bicycle"—it was perfectly true I always was doing so—"if you could only ride I would manage to get you one." "Will you?" said I, feeling much pleased. "I'll soon ride, I'll go over to Battersea Park and see about it to-day." I won't repeat the pretty little speeches I made, but I was quite excited and certainly felt very grateful. It seemed as if I really should soon be the proud possessor of two wheels.

I thought I would not begin to learn until I had a proper riding costume. Hence I ordered a skirt made of a rather heavy black serge with pleats let in at the sides. It is lined throughout and fastens with three buttons on one side, while on the other side there is a pocket also fastened over by three buttons. The advantage of this is that neither the pocket nor the placket-hole can gape open. I have been devoutly thankful that I adopted that style, especially when I have seen ladies riding gracefully but unconsciously with two or three inches of white bodice sticking out from their placket-holes.

Some skirts have little elastic arrangements inside, which seem to require a good deal of fastening before mounting. I do not know how they answer as I have never tried them. Neither do I know whether my skirt is the best sort of thing to have, as I have never tried anything else. I can only say that it is very comfortable and has never blown or worked up at all. It is short and comes to about an inch above my ankles, while under it I wear just ordinary serge knickers.

I have seen some ladies ride in petticoats, but I am sure that that is a mistake. I have also seen ladies wearing knickers with no skirt above them; the "rational dress" as this is called. It may be rational but it certainly is not ornamental. When on a machine, the costume does not look so bad; but of the machine it is quite another matter. The prettiest woman dressed in that style looks a fright when walking or standing; that is, according to my idea. It may be

also much easier to ride in and more convenient in many ways, but I should think it would be a trifle awkward in calling on any friend. At any rate I distinctly object to dressing like a ballet girl, so I wear a skirt and shall continue to do so unless the "rational costume" becomes general. If it does I shall have to follow, I suppose, the fashion.

The morning after my dress came home I walked over to Battersea Park for my first lesson. As we live in Chelsea I had not very far to go, but all the way I was thinking, "This time next week I shall be able to ride." Riding looked so easy and I had heard so

I thought I should never ride at all, and I cast many an envious glance at others speeding merrily by. It seemed to me as if I could not even turn my eyes without upsetting the balance of the thing, and as for my front wheel it went all ways.

"How many lessons do people usually have before they can ride?"

"Well, miss," said Walker, "there are some as learn in ten or twelve lessons and some want thirty or forty. You see that young lady there, I taught her in about three weeks."

I thought I should be about three months but I intended to try to learn at any rate.

"What have I to pay for the lesson, Walker?"

"Each lesson miss, is one and sixpence, but the best way would be for you to have a course. You see, miss, it's this way, you pay ten shillings for the course and we undertake to give you lessons until you know how to ride."

"Oh! I'll have a course, but suppose I want fifty lessons?"

"You won't want fifty lessons, miss, in a week or so you will be able to ride round the park. If you like to fix a time I'll keep it for you and then you won't have anyone else to teach you."

I thought it a very good idea to have the same instructor every day, and I was very fortunate in getting a good one. Walker was a great favourite. I found afterwards that most people wanted him to teach them, and I have known ladies wait for over an hour in the cold rather than have another instructor.

I went to the park every morning and found that learning cycling was not at all pleasant.

I felt so very stupid rolling about on a machine in the vain endeavour to keep straight, while other people looked as if it were the easiest thing in the world. I tried to express these sentiments to Walker but he said consolingly—

"They all had to learn."

"I know a lady who learnt in three lessons," I said to him one day.

"Now don't you believe that, miss, I've taught hundreds, and none of them learnt so easy."

He was very amusing occasionally and told me about the different people we passed. One was a general who had fought in the Indian Mutiny, while among the ladies there were several well-known actresses, with whom he was acquainted. One old lady who amused me very much I had seen once or twice having a lesson. She was apparently about fifty-five years of age, and wrapped up in a long ulster and a big shawl.

"That old lady will never learn, will she?" I remarked.

"No, poor old soul," said Walker, "I had her landed on to me the other day, and I did have a time."

"Did you?" in an interested sort of way.

"Yes, she's that heavy."

By this time I rode just a little bit, well enough for Walker to bring his bicycle and ride by my side, holding my sleeve at difficult places in the road.



IN THE PARK.

many people say something to this effect, "Yes, you know, I learnt in three lessons," or "I could ride the second time I was on a machine." Naturally I believed them and being young and agile thought a week left a large margin. Indeed, I thought I should be very stupid if I did not become quite a grand rider in six lessons. I know better now; but that morning I crossed the Chelsea bridge in a very hopeful frame of mind. I did not even stop to watch the boats, but hurried into the park. I went up to a bicycle stand belonging to a well-known firm and said I wanted a bicycle lesson. One of the men came forward and said that he would teach me, so I walked on a little way and he followed with a machine. I shall never forget the first sensation when I mounted. It really was most curious. Walker, as he told me his name was, held the machine up and trundled me along for some distance. My hopes for riding in a week then vanished into thin air. Indeed, I felt quite hopeless as well as helpless.

"It was this way, there was nobody at the stand but me, and I was waiting for my gentleman to come for a lesson, when that old lady came up and asked me to teach her. She had on that long cloak and that shawl, and I said to her, 'You can't ride in that ma'm, won't you leave it here?'"

"What! take my cloak off? I'm not going to do without it for anybody in such weather as this, young man.' She mounted the machine and I held her up and pushed her along, but, poor old soul, she'll never learn, she's too old. She said the handles were cold, so she took off her shawl and wrapped it round them. Since that time when I see her coming I always get out of the way; but the worst of it is she always asks for me."

"I wonder why she is learning?"

"She said she lived in the country"—she looked like it—"and one night at a farmhouse, near where she lived, five miles away from a town, a fire broke out. One of the girls at the farm cycled, so she took her machine and rode into the town for the fire-engine. The old lady thinks it was a wonderful thing to do, and says she means to learn to ride, but she won't, she's too old, poor old soul."

There evidently is, according to Walker's idea, a period at which people cannot acquire the art of balancing themselves.

I had been round the park once or twice with him, and thought I could manage by myself, so I told father with great pride that I could ride, and he bought me a machine. It is a very good one and looked beautifully bright after the dirty old things I had been using.

I said I would go for a ride with my brother on the Saturday afternoon. In the morning Walker came and took my machine to the park for me, as I wasn't clever enough to ride through the streets.

I was sorry for my brother that afternoon, I was sorry for myself also, and I was intensely grieved for my new bicycle. Whether it was nervousness or not I couldn't say, but I certainly couldn't ride a bit. I kept falling off in the most ignominious style. Not once or twice, but eight or nine times I picked myself up and started afresh, and at last I gave up altogether. Twice it really wasn't my fault. Once somebody ran into me, and the other time, some horses were coming at a great rate behind, and I got so nervous that I forgot to pedal. Of course I fell off, fortunately into the fence and not under the horses' hoofs.

Walker told me afterwards that I was in too much of a hurry.

After that unfortunate episode, in which I bruised both my elbows and both my knees, I got on better. At the end of that week I could ride quite well and *only had to practise getting on and off*. Up to that time, unless Walker were holding the machine, I had usually fallen off somehow.

The accomplishment of mounting and dismounting took a good deal of learning, but I managed it in time. After that Walker declared me "finished" and looked for the "tip" which he had well earned.

There are two ways of mounting a machine, the English and the American. The one is to get on from the curbstone, while the other is to jump on, giving the machine a push at the same time so as to start it.

Walker taught me both ways, and as he has declared me "finished," I have no more to say except that thanks to his teaching, I can ride fearlessly through the London traffic and along the country roads, anywhere in fact, on my beloved friend and companion, my bicycle. And in the extra Summer No. of "The Girl's Own" you may read about a little tour I attempted with father.

CHAFING-DISH COOKING.

By DORA DE BLAQUIÈRE.



I HAVE no doubt that many of my readers will be surprised to hear that the word "chafing-dish" (with a hyphen) is to be found in all the large English dictionaries, and that "chafer" is given as a dish or a pan. The term was originally *chaufe*, an old English word obtained from the French *chauffer*, which came, in its turn, through the provincial *calfer*, from the Latin *calefacere*, to "make warm." Chafing-dish means a dish or vessel to hold coals for heating anything on it; but to-day the meaning has widened, and comprehends not only the means of warming but the thing warmed as well. The word "chafing," as applied to the method of warming the feet and hands by means of friction, is in common use, and familiar to all.

The history of the chafing-dish extends probably back not less than three thousand years. We find traces of it in the domestic life of the Egyptians, when it was used in the way of a heating-dish. There is no doubt that it was a very familiar object at

the tables of the ancient Greeks and Romans, where it performed the office of keeping the choice and costly dishes of their *cuisine* at the proper heat, to please the epicurean diners-out of that classic day, when the hosts wasted fortunes on a single luxury, and fed their fish with slaves!

Both Cicero and Seneca speak of the chafing-dish. The latter gives a full account of the magnificence to which it attained in his time, and says that "each of these elegant utensils is supported by three geese measuring seven inches from the extremity of one bird's beak to the opposite edge. The tray was one inch and a half deep; the supporting geese have their wings spread, and are terminated by neats' feet. The heads are raised and bent over the breast, and form handles; and these dishes, he concludes, arranged on the *sigma*, produce a delightful effect." Now this description, a little less magnificent perhaps, would fit the Swiss dinner-table of to-day, where in private families the silver chafing-dish remains as a family treasure and heirloom in daily use.

The writings of Soyer, the famous French cook, who did so much towards feeding our starved soldiers in the Crimea, mention the chafing-dish frequently; and he wrote a book called *Patropheon*, a history of the culinary art in all times. In this you will find a description of a Roman kitchen of two thousand years ago, in which it is said that the slaves were cleaning the bronze chafing-dishes, used to prevent the plates from becoming cold before they were needed. It is evident from this that we get our ideas about hot plates from the Roman occupation of Britain. On the Continent, however, the Romans do not seem to have inculcated the lesson; or, at least, it has not remained unto this day.

In our English writers before and after the fifteenth century, we find mention of the

chafing-dish as a familiar object, and the word is spelt either chafer or chaffer, the latter being mentioned as a vessel used for frying, which seems to have been done at table, when the guests were seated. In the form of an article to keep meats and vegetables hot, the chafing-dish has always been in use in England; and it may be seen to-day, in one form in the windows of the eating-house, where they keep the sausages always at frizzling point thereby. The frame for the lamp which constituted the chafing-dish in England may be found still cherished by many old-fashioned families, and we illustrate a beautifully fine silver one, which came from Ireland not very long ago. Plenty of similar things used to be found in Switzerland, both for sale in the shops, and used at private tables; and we should do well to introduce them here. When we are worried by the advent of chilled meat and vegetables from the kitchen, the presence of the chafing-frame and its lamp would set all straight, and make our meat hot and palatable.

The heat for the chafing-dish has been supplied in various ways. Hot embers even now form the heat-supply in Russia; charcoal in the brass braziers, the *calderajo* of Italy, and our hot-water dishes are another well-known form. The spirit-lamp, however, is more useful and practical than any other kind of heat-supplier, and I am sure we shall all recall various excellent forms of patented lamps and food-warmers.

Another method of warming-up was the old-fashioned bed-warmer, which is now most generally seen in museums, or hanging up in the halls and dining-rooms of collectors of quaint and curious articles. Some of these are of very fine brass or copper, beautifully chased, and evidently they were, as we know, a very cherished article of household comfort and kitchen decoration, when the latter were more beautiful than they are now, with bright coppers, and lovely big clocks. The bed-warmer used to be called a "bed-chafer," a word which may be found in the dictionaries of the last century.

And now that we have cleared the way by