

CYCLING FOR WOMEN.

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VERILY this is the age of the New Woman. She shines forth in the pages of the comic illustrated journals, arrayed in coat and knickerbockers, smoking cigarettes, and attempting or doing everything that is unmanly in man. She has claimed an equal footing with her stronger brother in all the pursuits of life where brute force is not a requisite to success, and in the varied fields of pastime and labor which she has entered the question naturally arises in the medical mind, What will be the effect of these changes in her habits and occupation upon her peculiar physical condition as a woman? The scope of this article will simply allow of a consideration of the adaptability of cycling as a pastime, and as a therapeutic means, when indulged in by women.

Apart from her organs of generation, she stands on the same footing as does her brother in the enjoyment of this pastime, which is now recognized by even the most conservative of non-cycling members of the profession as being one of the best forms of out-of-door recreation and gymnastics. To a woman whose uterus and ovaries are in a normal state, and whose perinæum is intact, there has been no doubt as to the fitness of this form of exercise; but to her with the procidentia, the unstitched perinæum, the retroflexion, the antelexion, the irritated ovary, the pus tube, the endometritis, the cervicitis, and the other ills which hover about the pelvis, like vultures about a battlefield, to prey upon the mental as well as the physical well-being of her sex, the question now becomes an important one. In nearly all these conditions we tell her she must not run the sewing-machine, nor hang curtains, nor ride on horseback, nor in any shaky conveyance, nor do anything that will tend to increase the vascular tension which already exists during her monthly siege; and in most of these instances we are right, too, as in the instance of the sewing-machine, where the action of the lower extremities causes an increased circulation, with an increased pressure on the veins of the pelvis, which latter, being stationary and free from activity, becomes a dumping ground for the excess of blood, which its organs, in turn, have not the energy to relieve themselves of.

When the ladies' "safety" made its first appearance in the days of the old cushion tire, I was consulted by letter by an old cycling friend, whose wife had taken the craze to ride a wheel, which her family physician told her under no circumstances should she do. The statements made were to the effect that some fifteen months previously she had a seven-months' miscarriage, with a laceration of the perinæum, followed by inflammation and falling of the womb, that she had been a semi-invalid ever since, some months better and some months worse, but always suffering greatly with her catamenia. I advised him strongly against her taking to the wheel, on the ground that anything that would be injured by horseback riding, or running the sewing-machine, would be affected similarly by the use of the bicycle. In the following autumn I met him in the city at the exhibition, when he hailed me with the information that he and his wife were taking a little cycling tour together. He informed me in the same breath that the bicycle had almost been the death of his wife, according to our predictions, in the first fortnight, as on one of their first runs she nearly ran off the bank into the canal ; but her back aches were gone, and so were her headaches, as was also the occupation of the family physician, as far as she was concerned, and that condition has remained to the present day, judging from the answer I received from a medical man of the same place, of whom I asked the question, "Who was the medical attendant of the S——'s?" His answer was, "They have none, as neither Mr. nor Mrs. S—— is ever sick." Now here was a case that was manifestly unsuited for horseback riding, or running the sewing-machine, or any of the category of the proscribed, and yet this patient regained perfect health, as far as subjective symptoms went, through taking up this fad, and her case is only one of very many similar ones I have since seen, many of whom have taken to the wheel on my recommendation. I hesitated at first in recommending such patients to use the bicycle, but on careful consideration I was forced to the conclusion that, with reasonable exercise of care, it was in many instances a curative process in those cases not attended with pus formation, and not in a condition of acute inflammation.

We all know the close affinity between the nervous system and the uterine organs ; the melancholia and the depression following many of these conditions have often been the bugbear in our gynæcological practice. We have ordered the patient abroad, and she has travelled with a constant mental solicitude towards the uterus, constant thinking of which, like the ghost in "Hamlet," would not down. We have ordered her to take gentle walking exercise, and she has gone forth with every step a drag, as though each foot travelled were an extra drop in the dose of a bitter potion. On the bicycle, however, it is very different, as her whole mental faculties have been called into earnest but not fatiguing activity in

properly guiding and managing her steed, and one great essential in the curative properties of exercise, that of pleasant mental occupation, has been gained. The exertion of pedalling has set up a quickened heart's action, more blood has been pumped into the lungs, deeper breaths have been taken, more oxygen absorbed, and that not from the dust-laden and often germ-laden atmosphere of the gymnasium, but pure oxygen along shady lanes and pleasant drives of the country, with a bit of ozone blown up from the ocean, which has caused a better quality of health-restoring blood to course through the arteries so long carrying only a sluggish stream. But not only is the heart's action increased, but all the muscles of the body are more or less brought into activity. There is no reclining chair to support the spine, and leave the muscles lax ; but, with head and body erect, and spinal and abdominal muscles in a state of active tension, the venous blood poured up from the rapidly moving extremities is quickly hurried past the pelvic region to be repurified in the lungs. Thus are the pelvic organs surrounded by active muscular tissue hurrying and carrying away venous engorgement. The arteries are pumping more and purer blood into them, and the venous circulation is so quickened that this blood is rapidly carried away. Hence a better tissue metamorphosis goes on, and the subinvolted uterus regains its normal dimensions, the weakened ligaments regain their tone as they lose their excessive load, and the loss of the perineal floor becomes a matter of much less importance.

Another effect of cycling is the massage which the abdominal and pelvic organs receive while wheeling, still further hastening circulation, and removing the results of old standing inflammations and exudates. A woman who formerly felt as though her insides were falling out when standing at a shop counter or being fitted by her dressmaker, with the increased muscular strength finds herself much better able to perform her ordinary duties in these regards. The question of injuries, perineal pressure, erotomania, and like subjects I will not stop to discuss, as the first is entirely a question of having a properly fitting saddle, and the second is the most unlikely thing to occur with a person taking brisk exercise, with the healthy mental occupation which comes to the wheelwoman when on a spin. As to the effect of extensive cycling on labor, the woman who has used her wheel up to the fifth or sixth month of gestation, and thereafter leads an active life, comes to her accouchement with strong heart's action and strong muscles, and, although there may be a more resisting perinæum, yet the muscular power to overcome that is so much greater that my experience has been that their labors are more satisfactory, and they much more quickly regain their normal strength. There are other questions that might properly come under the influence of cycling for women, as relating to her association with the opposite sex, and the

moral effect of brisk out-of-door exercise, creating, as it does, more muscular than erotic vigor. For we know that an indolent life is more fruitful of sexual evils than is a busy, vigorous one.

In cases of pus tubes, of acute inflammation, or immediately following inflammation with exudations, in fact, in any condition in which pelvic massage would be contraindicated, the use of the bicycle should be proscribed ; but, given a case of subacute metritis, or subinvolution, to say nothing of the pseudo-hysterical cases of uterine origin, put the patient on a bicycle, give her healthy, cheerful companionship, plenty of country riding, and wholesome country fare, and you may lay aside your curette and your tampon, as they will not be wanted. Another condition in which great benefit has been derived to many of my patients is in the case of the nervous woman whose social duties and pleasures often turn night into day, and make her life a busier one than that of her poor shop-girl sister, who, under the nervous strain develops frequent headaches, with a tendency to insomnia, and too frequently learns to dose herself with the coal-tar products, to her injury. The bicycle takes her entirely out of her artificial atmosphere, fills her lungs to fullest expansion, and rapidly dissipates the unpleasant symptoms complained of. I am of the opinion that it will not be long until a foremost place in our armamentarium will be granted to the bicycle as a therapeutic means whose usefulness is second to no drug in the wide range of cases in which it is beneficial. The New Woman, indeed, is with us, and the bicycle is making her new in the best sense of that much-abused term ; new, because she has a better physical development ; new, because she has discovered a new means of recreation, that enables her to roam the countryside and come in touch with nature as have no other means before offered her ; new, because she has been able to assimilate her tastes and her pleasures with the best of those of her brothers. Pedalling on in her health and her beauty, with her bright, ringing laugh, and her suffused but smiling countenance, we step aside as she whirls by, and salute her—the New Woman.