

## Bicycling for Women

### The Puzzling Question of Costume

By R. L. Dickinson, M.D.

**T**HERE are four critics before whom woman's dress must pass—fashion, fitness, health, and artistic beauty. The first is at odds with all the rest.

As for art in personal adornment, it cannot be said to exist in a nation tolerating our masculine evening dress, or the deformed woman of our fashion journals. Yet the principle at the foundation of the dress question seems simple. Is it not—shaped clothes for work, draped dress for leisure? For muscle-play, freedom is the first requisite, whether in skating or in scrubbing a floor. It would seem that the principles

said by Veblen to govern modern dress, conspicuous expensiveness, novelty, and ineptitude—waste and unfitness in order to prove wealth and leisure—need not apply at all to our subject. But they do, and we shall have to try to adapt them and to secure, notwithstanding, the greatest possible good from this fine exercise. The physician willingly studies details to understand any treatment. He is met with no problem that troubles him more than



FIG. 1

Skirt smooth over hips; pleats front and back. Tam, with brim.



FIG. 2

The Silvia, with front flap half turned back and buttoned.

the prescription for outdoor exercise for woman; for her chances for physical development outside her household duties are limited to a degree that would be ridiculous if it were not pitiable. For instance, in the Greater New York there is no opportunity for a woman to swim in the cooler months except in a poor little tank of very cold water in the cellar of a Turkish bath. House habits, dress habits, and resignation have brought it about that the demand for body-building facilities is small.

It is supposed to be sufficient exertion for the sister to wave her handkerchief from the grand stand. With growth comes weakness instead of strength. The physical director tells us that the girls of fourteen can jump one foot higher than the girls of eighteen. The gymnasium, with all its games, is voted dull; the bowling-alley means broken corset-bones under one-sided, sudden strain; dancing is done in a close atmosphere, in wrong dress, during sleep-hours; and horseback riding, especially at a trot or with the close seat, involves a certain jouncing within the snug corset that the tailor-made basque demands. Only the summer presents opportunities that attract, but most of these



FIG. 3

The Silvia: divided skirt with front flap that can be folded back. A jacket loose in the front is better than the shaped form.

require much time, and the cost of long vacations. So we turn to wheeling.

There are four types of bicycling costume for women—the full knickerbocker, resembling the regulation wheelman's suit; the fuller, longer bloomer; the short skirt with leggings; and the skirt to the top of the shoe.

The last is the one decreed by fashion. For the woman

who is too thin, for the leisurely rider on level roads in fair weather, and for the woman shy of comment, it gives a suitable garb, together with that comfort which conformity brings. Its convenience at present is that the cyclist can step off her wheel into the shop or house and be clad as her uniformed sisters are.

Even though the skirts measure no more than two and one-half to three yards about the bottom, there is some danger of catching in the rear sprocket; there is always the discomfort of the knee that must tug to lift forward and upward one-half of the garment; and whether there is wind or not, there is with all skirts a certain flop or swing hardly pleasing to the eye. All these difficulties are overcome in some measure by the cut of the skirt falling in two equal pleats, box or folded, on each side of the rear wheel (Fig. 1), by the satin or silk knickerbocker underneath, or by a slippery lining, and by certain recent improvements in the hang of the skirt and the fit in front. Moreover, a broad band of leather or rows of stitching help to keep the skirt down, and lessen the chance of accident.

The skirt, the separate jacket, and the shirt-waist form the best combination for comfort. The body-covering that can be taken off on hot rides is hygienically desirable. Here the stout rider, who must shun the horizontal lines that emphasize breadth, and whose success in all costume lies in lines carrying the eye from shoulder to heel, encounters difficulty. For cooler weather it may be overcome by the princesse idea, with the long perpendiculars behind, where breadth most shows, and by a false jacket in front to conceal abdominal prominence (Fig. 5). With these riders it is especially important that no fullness of the skirt should be placed over the hips, but that it should lie in pleats front and rear. The low position of the waist-line of usual street dress has resulted in a figure that is disproportionately short

from hip to heel, as shown by the impossible length of leg and skirt in every fashion-plate (Fig. 9). Now, if the skirt is curtailed, the result is a squareness of effect disastrous to the stout woman. The root of the difficulty is that nature ran no horizontal division across the body, and all our attempts to do it result in cutting the dress into parts that cannot be fitted together or designed

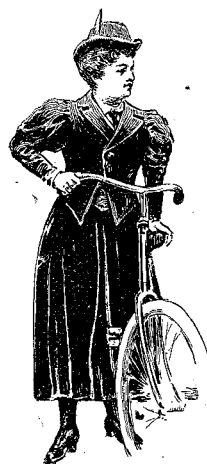


FIG. 5

The gown in one piece, with false jacket for stout woman.



FIG. 4

The stout rider emphasizing her defects by wide sleeves and horizontal lines.



FIG. 6

The long bloomers. (By permission of the "Metropolitan Magazine".)

alike. For the thin woman, however, the skirt stitching and the cross-line of a longish jacket make a broader appearance, and the baggy shoulders are allowable.

Many devices are pictured in the cycling columns of the papers and "The Wheelwoman" for changing the long into the short skirt, and for converting the skirt into bloomers by means of tapes or cords running through eyes. In

some the lower edge of the skirt is gathered in at the bottom, and a front piece unbuttoned and removed. In others the center of the lower edge, front and back, may be drawn together. The latter practice, however, produces an undesirable bagginess.

The bloomer falling to the top of the calf, well hung, moderately full, with leggings or stockings below—is not this modest, well adapted to its use, and, to the right women, rightly designed, also becoming? Our standards will shift in that direction, it is safe to predict, and we shall see, as we have not often seen in the past, a happy adaptation of color and design, in this as in all other dress, to increase and set off the beauties of the wearer while masking her defects. It is simply out of artistic question that all women be arrayed after the same pattern or style. Indeed, the writer believes that with the right honor to the body that is sure to come with the lessening of prudery, the closer-fitting clothes for arduous work or play will find their natural place, and that at no distant day.

How long a time will pass before we shall laugh at the idea of baggy sleeves on the wheel? The Eton jacket is not ungraceful, but hardly as useful as the longer jacket fitted at the back but loose in front. Coat-tails falling below the saddle, on the other hand, blow in the wind.

As for the head-covering, a doctor makes but one point. He speaks for protection for the eyes. The so-called "bicycle face" is mainly a sun-glare scowl. A variety of brims offer sufficient choice: the Alpine hat, the Tam O' Shanter with visor, or with soft, stitched brim all around like the "Beefeater's," or the plain "Tam;" the narrow-brimmed felt often seen with hunting costumes; and, if one dared to say it, the golf cap, and the forbidden yacht- ing cap. Only the usual feminine street hat, compounded of nothing and feathers and flowers, is artistically and practically unsuitable. For sensible foot-coverings there is need of less and less pleading. The high shoe is warmest, and keeps out sand and wet, but its top makes an ugly line. The low shoe with a gaiter fits the need and looks well, and now one can buy high-reaching shoes with long cloth tops. The foot is our one deformed feature, and it claims room. Corns and blisters belong to wheeling as well as to walking.

You know what I am going to say about corsets? Doctors and artists tell the same old tiresome story? True enough. For in the end the glory and beauty of health will turn all doctors into artists, except for the sanitarians and surgeons, the preventers of disease and menders of accidents. Meanwhile, we who are told that our medicines (without fresh air) and our operations (with no regular muscle-training following) do not cure, are smiling to see the general adoption of a body-swaying exercise that will do more to break corset-bones than all our preaching. To wheel far one must breathe. One-fifth of the breathing capacity is done away with by the loose corset or health waist; the sweep of the diaphragm with each breath, that is wrongly said to belong only to men, is nearly stopped, with all the sluggish action

and circulation that follows. Better clothing will develop in civilized women what all savages or animals of either sex practice, and that is like habits of respiration and muscular activity.

Practically, the steps of the change are, when taken gradually, these: Loosened corset, waist-bands, and basque; health waist, union undergarments, and substitution of equestrian tights for the woolen petticoat; and, lastly, abolition of waist-bands except for light skirts, though leaving the hips a certain share of weight to carry, by the general princesse or Empire form for heavier dresses, or a gown-form for every heavy skirt, the dress lining being carried up into a skeleton basque, and the breasts being supported from above, not from below.

Abroad, both in England and on the Continent, the short corset is in general use. Redfern says he can persuade no woman to wear them in New York. It may be noted here that at a meeting of prominent specialists at the New York Academy of Medicine, in the discussion of bicycling for women by men who rode themselves, each speaker had words of strong commendation for this exercise, but each emphatically added his warning against riding in corsets and tight clothing.

My random sketches are chiefly from photographs. Therefore they look stocky beside the woman in "Life" and the "Bazar," whose figures are often drawn nine heads high (Figs. 8, 10) instead of six.

We must see ourselves as the camera sees us before we shall demand art in dress, and we must know ourselves as the trainer and physician know us if we care to grow vigorous, comely, and free from disease, defect, and deformity.



FIG. 7  
Tam, Eton jacket, shirt-waist, and short skirt.

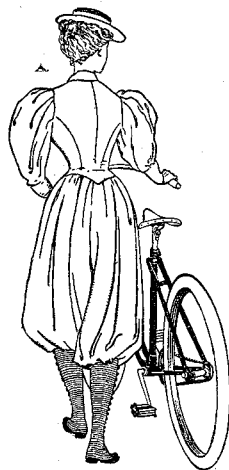


FIG. 8  
Well-designed bloomers with ugly waist lines.



FIG. 9  
A removable skirt.

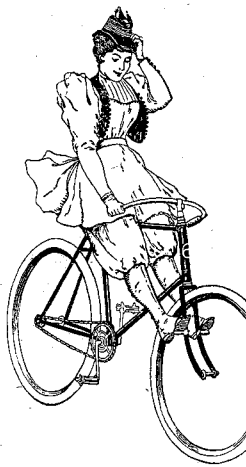


FIG. 10  
Short skirt over bloomers flies up.



FIG. 11  
Shorter bloomers.

## A New Philanthropy

By Frank A. Hutchins

The free traveling libraries which have grown to be very successful branches of the State libraries in the cities and villages of New York and Michigan are being developed in a somewhat new line in Dunn County, Wisconsin. Senator J. H. Stout, of Menominee, Wis., is now putting into operation a system of free traveling libraries intended to give each rural resident of the county something of the same library privileges which residents of the cities enjoy. He has purchased a library which will be subdivided into sixteen smaller libraries of thirty volumes each. Each small library will be put up in a strong, substantial

case, with doors, shelves, lock and key, a library record, and, with all its equipments, will be ready to be set up anywhere and managed independently as a complete library.

To secure one of these libraries the people of any neighborhood in Dunn County have only to organize a local library association of responsible people, who will agree to care for the library and return it safely. Each association will pay a fee of \$1, and Mr. Stout will bear the expense of transportation both ways. This fee may be