

Baker Street Elementary
& The Victorian Web

Presents
"The Life and Times in Victorian London"



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The Life and Times in Victorian London
80 - *The New Woman Cyclist* - 11/15/2018



Violet Smith, the solitary cyclist who seeks my assistance, represents the new type of single, working woman who will emerge at the end of the nineteenth century.





Sarah Grand will coin the term "the new woman" in 1894 to describe the increasing number of well-educated and self-supporting woman who emerge as the social climate and demographics shifted.



*At the end of the 1800s,
approximately half of the women
aged 20-40 will be unmarried and
outnumber eligible men.*



With little prospect of ever becoming a wife, William Rathbone Greg will estimate about 300,000 of them are doomed to life devoid of marriage and consisting instead of "celibacy, struggle, and privation."



Despite Greg's insistence that without fulfilling their role as wife and mother, many of those in this age group are finding new prospects opening to them...



*... and the bicycle is both a symbol
and a major contributor to their
new-found freedom.*



*Toward the end of the century,
two major improvements to the
bicycle will make them both
safer, more comfortable, and,
over time, more affordable...*



... the "safety bicycle" with two equal-sized wheels and a chain-driven rear wheel, and the pneumatic tire, transportation.



While both women and men will find these innovations to their liking, this new form of mobility will have a much greater impact on women.



Victorian etiquette proscribed women, particularly those of the middle class, to a very limited set of "respectable" activities: visiting, attending certain cultural events, supporting certain charitable activities, and some recreational outings.

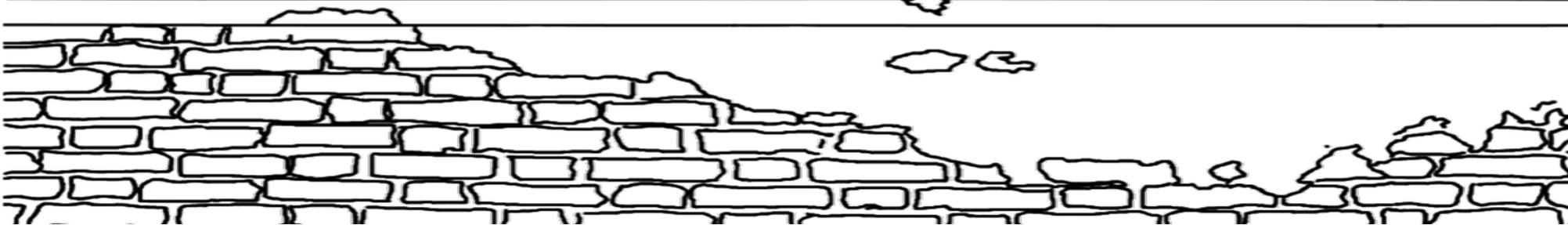


*Bicycling extends women's
geographic and social boundaries.*

*They are able to travel farther and
into areas not previously visited,
and possibly unaccompanied.*



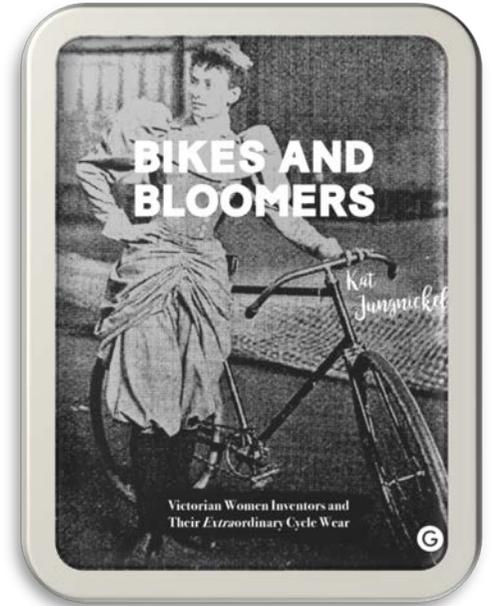
This design, however, requires different clothing, and leads to additional freedom in that arena as well.



At a time when showing her ankle is enough to mark a woman as a prostitute and ladies only ride sidesaddle, many don pantaloons or bloomers, permitting the whole lower leg to be visible (although covered by woolen stockings or boots).



The volume of fabric used in this fashion, however, proves as great, or greater, hindrance than some skirts.



Some forward-thinking cycling and women's rights advocates go so far as to disparage the corset and discourage its use as well.



In the end, the majority of women continue to wear skirts and corsets when cycling.



Bicycle manufacturers develop a number of devices to help maintain the women's modesty, but none are truly effective.



Despite Greg's concerns about women's marital prospects, the situation is not as dire as the one he paints.



The rise in educated women leads to a rise in their involvement within the workforce.



Many single women move into professional positions such as secretaries, teachers, governesses, etc. and are able to live independently, without the support of a father or husband.



In addition, women have a larger pool of prospects from which to choose.

Couples no longer have to live in the same village or neighborhood.





*They are able to travel
outside such areas to meet,
often unchaperoned.*



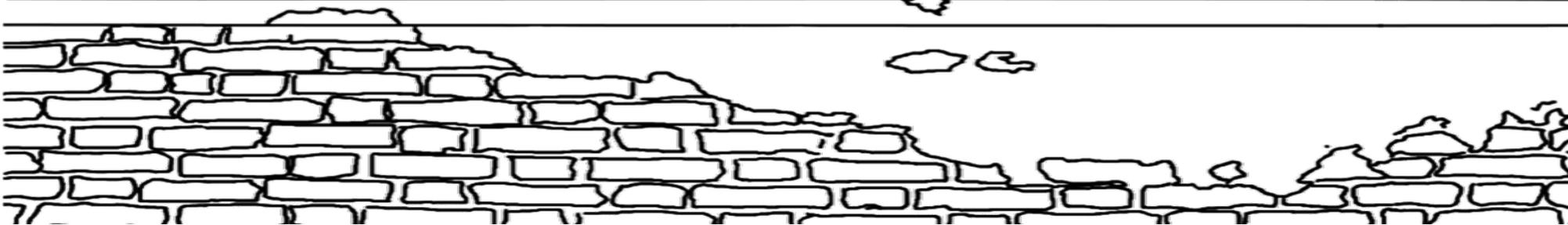
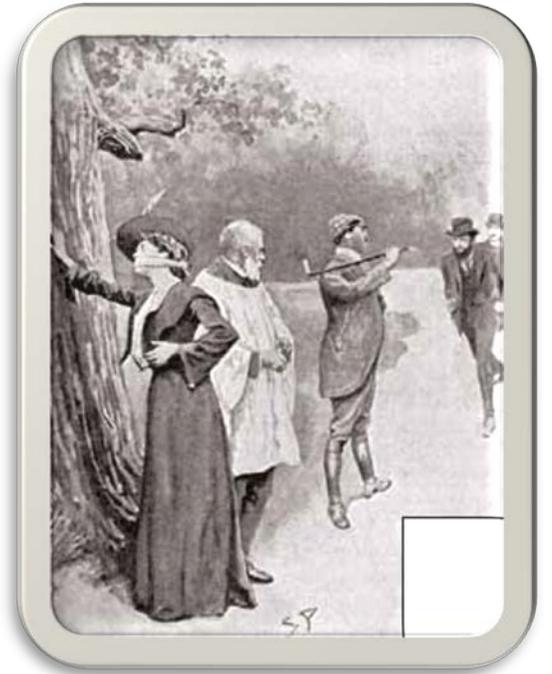
Such an arrangement is common enough to be immortalized in the Harry Darce song "Daisy Bell" and her bicycle "built for two."



Miss Smith will display the aspects physical fitness, freedom of movement, and self-supporting income that might have labeled her as "a new woman," with the exception of her marital prospects.



While some new women might never receive an offer of marriage, she will have the choice of three (albeit were two undesired).



All the same, she will have the freedom to refuse the two unwanted ones, and thanks to you, retain her independence to make that choice.



*So we have completed
topic 80 in our series...*

*Yes, but we'll be back
with another topic
soon...*



Original Source Material for this topic:

- 1) Sarah Grand, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," *The North American Review*, 1894.
- 2) William Rathbone Greg, *Why are Women Redundant?* London: N. Trubner and Co., 1869, page 17.
- 3) <https://victorianist.wordpress.com/2015/04/13/chains-of-freedom-the-bicycles-impact-on-1890s-britain/>
- 4) Clare S. Simpson, "A Social History of Women and Cycling in Late-Nineteenth Century New Zealand."
- 5) Ibid
- 6) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/lifestyle/wellbeing/diet/8419028/Bicycles-The-chains-that-set-women-free.html>
- 7) <https://victorianist.wordpress.com/2015/04/13/chains-of-freedom-the-bicycles-impact-on-1890s-britain/>



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"The Life and Times in Victorian London"

IS CREATED THROUGH THE INGENUITY & HARD WORK OF:

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