



How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle: Reflections of an Influential 19th Century Woman

By Frances E. Willard

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In 1893 Frances Willard was at the height of her power and influence as leader of the women's social reform movement. It was also a time when bicycles were wildly popular. And so, when her doctor recommended she exercise out-of-doors, Willard was determined to learn to ride. It was not easy for a woman in her fifty-third year, hampered by long skirts, but she was eager for the challenge. She hoped her example would help other women seek "a wider world." She saw cycling as a way for women to gain independence, develop confidence, and be seen by men as equals in skill. A best-seller when originally published a century ago, Willard's fascinating account of her adventure continues to enchant and inspire readers today. An introduction by Edith Mayo, curator of political history at the Smithsonian Institution, describes the life and work of Frances Willard and her role as an early leader of the women's movement. The book concludes with an illustrated essay on the history of women and cycling.

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Editorial Review

Review

Willard "muses with sagacity and charm, on the sport's philosophical implications." (Publishers Weekly, February 1, 1991) "This delightful, uplifting and unique bit of history is bound to attract both browsers and researchers." (Booklist, February 15, 1991) "It's a wonderful study in social change and expanding freedom for women. (Feminist Bookstore News, February 1991) "Her account of the bicycle as a liberating force freeing women from home and long skirts is sweetly inspiring." (San Jose Mercury News, March 10, 1991) "daring little classic" (Washington Post Book World, April 21, 1991) "charming and disarming memoir" (Los Angeles Times, March 3, 1991)

"Willard took up cycling in an effort to forestall her deteriorating health in 1893, a period that coincided with the bicycle's emergence as a catalyst for sweeping social change. 'How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle' gives an appreciation of the enormity of that undertaking in the 1890s, and Willard relates her cycling tribulations with an easy wit reminiscent of Mark Twain. Willard became a passionate cyclist and in this book she encourages other women to participate in the sport." (Bicycle Guide, June 1991)

"The book is a charming and insightful parable that relates women's mastery of 'machinery' to the mastery of their own lives. . . Willard was clever enough to see a parallel in her struggle to ride a bicycle with the larger struggle of her WCTU sisters to control their lives. Corsets and long skirts curtailed the potential for freedom a bicycle could bring; women's mental bondage of dependence and subservience in Victorian society were equally prohibitive. . . Willard's subtlety in linking her bicycling experience to the broader issue of women's rights was her gift to her contemporaries, as well as to the generations of women that followed. As she wrote, 'I would not waste my life in friction when it could be turned into momentum.'" (Sacramento Bee, March 13, 1991)

"This charming essay is more than a how-to manual, for its not-so-hidden agenda encourages women to live their lives to the fullest, to engage in activities as controversial as ride a bicycle. The book contains a series of photographs in which the heretofore sedentary Willard mounts the machine and aided by friends who help her keep her balance, begins her lesson. The last photo shows her zipping down a byway, as free as the air." - *Minneapolis Star Tribune, April 7, 1991*

About the Author

Frances E. Willard (1839-1898) was widely known in the United States and abroad for her social reform efforts. Her causes included temperance, women's suffrage and education, eight hour workday, prison reform and public kindergarten. She served as president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union from 1879 until her death in 1898, building it into the largest women's organization of its time. She also founded the World WCTU, the first international organization of women. She was a popular and prolific writer, outstanding educator, astute politician and strong advocate for the emancipation of women.

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"She who succeeds in gaining the mastery of the bicycle will gain the mastery of life."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dolores Parker:

Do you have favorite book? In case you have, what is your favorite's book? Guide is very important thing for us to find out everything in the world. Each publication has different aim as well as goal; it means that guide has different type. Some people experience enjoy to spend their the perfect time to read a book. They can be reading whatever they get because their hobby is actually reading a book. Think about the person who don't like reading through a book? Sometime, man or woman feel need book after they found difficult problem or exercise. Well, probably you will want this How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle: Reflections of an Influential 19th Century Woman.

George Jamison:

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Martin Norwood:

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Ronald Peyton:

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