"SLOWLY AND DREAMILY SHE PUSHED THE WHEEL UP THE ROAD."
A CENTURY RIDE.

BY GRACE E. DENISON.

YOU never saw such a dear little yellow-haired, dainty-featured maid as Maude Mannering, the successful girl-graduate and medical student.

When she came forward at Commencement, in a delightful little Greenaway gown of white muslin, peppered over with tiny dots, with the very smile of childhood in her wide blue eyes, and her curly hair clustering round her brows—the learned doctors, imported to adorn the Commencement exercises, blinked their eyes and looked twice, and hesitated, even then, to accept her as an established fact. When she knelt to receive her degree, they each and all listened to hear the childish prayer, “Now I lay me—-” issue from her little rosebud mouth. A degree for that child? Impossible! She had come to say her prayers, and be kissed and put to bed. That she could be the medical student, that she could enter a dissecting room, carve up a subject, watch a mortal sickness, stand by a dying bed—preposterous! it might not be. And yet, it all, and much more, had been. Maude Mannering was an enthusiast on matters surgical, and had cleverly sewn up the jagged throat of a would-be suicide—softly rating him, as she did so, for not having made a neat cut—on the very day when she knelt demurely before the Chancellor’s footstool to receive her degree.

The learned doctors stared, with their unbelieving eyes, and the Chancellor smiled as they turned to one another, agape, and shook their heads, while Maude tripped smilingly back to her seat, and the students shrieked and sang to her glory.

“Shall I go?” were the words which would have issued from her pretty lips, one day, a week later (had she been in the habit of talking to herself), as she finished reading a long and chatty letter inviting her to “come away North, and spend the holidays,” and concluding with these words: “We are fifty miles from everywhere, and our roads are splendid, so you had better bring your bicycle, or velocipede, or whatever it is you ride to the horror and confusion of Auntie.” Maude turned the letter thoughtfully over, skimming from page to page. There was a postscript, of course, simply four words, “Carr is with us.” But, whatever the girl read, she saw only those four words, and it was on their account that she asked herself, “Shall I go?” Carr was her correspondent’s brother, her escort at the wedding of that lady, and, subsequently, her own rejected, sweetheart of last year. Last year was a long time ago, to be sure, and Carr had not moped over things; Maude was not vain, she concluded to go.

The station, away up North, was reached by Maude on a sweet June evening, about sunset. Never did a daintier little figure descend from a palace car, and stand forlornly beside a couple of trunks and a bicycle, watching the lessening train as it melted into the distance in the red sunset. Half-a-dozen houses dotted the prairie; a store, a driving shed, a small inn and the combined postoffice and station clustered close together in the vast emptiness. Within half-a-mile stood the last grove of trees, marking the western limit of the timber country. It required some womanhood to accept things, for the first view of the apparently boundless plain was trying to a mortal bred in forested Ontario. Maude turned with a gasp, and found herself confronted by Carr, who raised his straw hat silently. She held out her hand impulsively, too glad to see a familiar face to resent the lack of welcome in it.

“Are these your things?” he asked, gruffly, his confusion making him ungallant.

“My trunks and my wheel. I am the only passenger who got off here,” she faltered.

Carr took her shawl-strap, the boys stowed away the boxes in the station house, Maude walked behind pushing her wheel, to where a pair of horses and a light farm wagon stood waiting. As she climbed nimbly into her place, and turned to help Carr with the wheel,
which refused to lie comfortably in the little well, their eyes met.

Unflinching and reproachful was the look from the cold and distant cavalier, and Maude realized suddenly that she had not done wisely to come; Carr had not forgotten; Carr had not forgiven her!

A grove of half stunted trees partially hid a low, snug-looking farm-house, which stood in the center of one of those immense and fruitful wheat farms, which are the backbone and sinew of Northern prosperity. The warm, sweet welcome of the mistress of the farm was a blessed relief, after the unsociable evening's ride, and the two young women passed chattering under the vine-hung portals of the house, while Carr, with a curious glance at the recumbent bicycle, of mingled contempt and interest, lifted it from the wagon and carried it under the shelter of the wide veranda.

"And have you and Carr made friends?" said Carr's sister, as she affectionately surveyed the fair little traveler.

"We have ridden fifty miles in armed neutrality," said Maude incisively, "Oh Lizzie, it was perfectly awful! Carr hates the sight of me; how could you send him after me?"

Lizzie Dunlop laughed, and then sighed. "He's just as much in love with you as ever, you innocent!" she whispered, and while Maude raised a protesting hand she added coaxingly: "Say, Maudie dear, won't you ever come to care for him?"

"Lizzie," cried the girl, in dismay, "if I'd thought you were going to talk to me like this, I'd never have come!"

Lizzie Dunlop patted the small lady's shoulder soothingly. "There, there, little iceberg," she said, "let it all be buried! It's forgotten. You shall never be worried about it again. You are here to enjoy every moment of your holiday, and to tell me the news of civilization, and to take rides across the prairie. What a blessing we have a decent road for the velocipede—I beg pardon—bicycle! You must have lots of grit to mount that scary machine: and—oh! Maude! How can you want to be a surgeon? I should die if I saw a man cut up and mangled; but you are a marvel!"

The Northwest farm life was some. what lonely, after the crowded University class-rooms, the city bustle, and the odds and ends of amusement which had been tucked into the few vacant corners of Maude Mannering's busy life during the last three years. Carr had been one of those odds and ends. Their acquaintance had begun at a water-party, flourished, like Jonah's gourd, at a carpet dance, and borne the fruit of an impassioned declaration after the wedding of Carr's sister, at which Maude and her suitor had been maid of honor and groomsman.

It had died a sudden death when Maude's pretty lips formed the disastrous monosyllable "No!" as the two tied up boxes of wedding-cake for the bridal guests. Carr had received his refusal silently, and immediately left the town. His precipitate wooing had made little impression upon his sister's student friend, for when that sister had asked Maude to come and visit "the happiest couple in America," that postscript of four words, added in an afterthought of honesty, had seemed of trivial importance. But now, Carr was behaving atrociously. When Lizzie and her husband were present, he was geniality personified, his brown eyes twinkled, and his laugh rang clear; when Lizzie, with transparent diplopia, pleaded delicate health, and retired early, or with pretty wifely demands drew her husband aside, and left the young people en tête-à-tête, Carr knitted his brows in an ugly frown, and sat, stood, or strolled in gloomy silence. Maude began to feel a sense of guilt and responsibility looming over her. She longed to do something to quit herself of the reproaches of her discarded lover.

When Bertram rode far afield, and when the reapers came, and the harvest was gathered in its fair abundance, Maude went beside the farmer for miles along the beaten wagon track on the dainty little bicycle which Carr disapproved of. She could not say how this disapprobation became known to her, but she felt it and resented it in silence.

Meantime, holidays were waning, the August moon, called by the Indians Moon of Harvest, was at the full, the land was reaped and cleared, the endless stretches of prairie spread on every side
to the horizon, and the meager foliage of the North began to turn copper and brown as autumn came on apace. One balmy afternoon, Bertram drove away to a neighboring homestead, a trifle of two-score miles distant, to see about buying some stock. Lizzie was deep in cambric and lace and tiny paper patterns. Auntie, who had come from the South for the winter, sat knitting on the veranda, Maude was oiling her wheel, and Carr and the small emigrant boy were fixing up odds and ends about the barns. Suddenly a loud call from the emigrant boy sent Maude flying to the great barn, only stopping to whisper to Auntie, "Don't frighten Lizzie. I'll see what's the matter!"

The matter was serious enough. Carr lay on the barn floor, beside a broken ladder, and it did not require the eye of a surgeon to discover that the limb which was doubled under him was fractured.

"Oh dear, oh dear," said the young lady, "you've gone and broken a bone! It's a good thing that I know how to set it. I wonder could we carry you in? I don't believe we ever could. Now, Sandy, run to the veranda, and tell the old lady to come to the kitchen door; don't say anything but that, mind, and don't goggle in that idiotic manner. Poor Carr, I am so sorry! Don't try to move till Sandy comes back. Hallo, Auntie! here's Carr with a sprained ankle; (that's for Lizzie's benefit!) tell Lizzie to give Sandy the mattress from his bed, and one of the factory sheets, and a pillow. I don't want her; Sandy and I can fix him all comfey, and she can come out afterward. We'll just make him a bed here until Bertram comes home."

Then Maude turned to Carr, with a very professional air, as she turned back the ruffles from her wrists. "I am going to set your leg," she said; "funny looking splints, aren't they?"

"You're a brick," said Carr, heartily. "Shake hands with a fellow!"

She laughed and gave him her hand, and did not withdraw it, even when he gently kissed it. "How can we get the Doctor to-night," she mused, "it won't do to leave it like that." Carr protested, "You've done it up finely," but Maude shook her head; she was calculating: "Fifty miles there, five hours, fifty miles back," she thought, then suddenly she said: "Look here, Carr, will you promise me something?"

"Anything," cried Carr, with a radiant smile.

"Well, I don't want Lizzie to know about your break; will you stay quietly here, with Sandy, for the night? I'll tell Auntie and we'll send out your tea and your pipe, and when Bertram comes home to-morrow, we'll carry you indoors. Will you just lie here and be good, and let Sandy take care of you?"

So, with a smile and a hand-clasp, she left him lying on the mattress in the sweet-smelling hay barn, and was closeted for five minutes with Auntie. The result of this confab was that Auntie told two deliberate fibs, one to Lizzie, and one to Carr, and Lizzie laughed happily and said, "Auntie, let her stay with him; it's all coming round right!" while Carr smiled benignly and remarked: "It's all right, Auntie, go on in. Tell Dr. Maude to take a good nip of whiskey before she goes to bed, and let her have a good rest. She'll dream of broken legs if she doesn't."

And poor Auntie, with two fibs and a world of care on her mind, tucked Lizzie into her bed, and sat up and watched the front gate until morning.

Down the hard black road skimmed the light wheel, doing a good ten miles an hour in the gathering shades of evening. Maude's eyes gleamed like stars with resolution and daring, her feet flew nimbly, and her baby mouth was firmly set. Once she laughed, a little half-hysterical laugh, and her thoughts, though rather chaotic, revolved round one central idea.

The Doctor lived in the small inn at the railway station. The Doctor had proper splints and bandages. The
Doctor must be had without fail. The Doctor, the Doctor!—and so her thoughts circled with her flying pedals, as the trusty wheel skimmed along the road, and the long twilight of the North crept softly over the wide prairies.

Seven o’clock, eight o’clock. She took a bar of chocolate from her coat pocket and nibbled as she rode. The late birds whirled past her, the tuneful meadow-lark of the West fluted a song of good-night, many little chirrups and faint rustlings sounded on either side of the road, which stretched like a dark ribbon across the plain to the half-way house. She reached the turn to the door of that rude hostelry, and sped past it, looking only straight ahead to the fading crimson of the West. Here rose a faint thread of smoke from a small dell, where were camping a party of Indians, whose mongrel dogs ran yapping after her flying wheel.

An owl brushed past her, and sailed heavily away to a clump of scrub; nine o’clock, and she flashed past a “slough,” as the swampy ponds are called, and a faint quacking of the wild ducks fell softly on her tired ear. How the shadows grew! But the distance was no longer a terror, for she was as good as at her goal. Ten o’clock, and she wheeled breathlessly past the outlying houses, and stepped wearily off on the threshold of the little inn, where the Doctor lived. It was such a parody on a hotel—just two square rooms and a lean-to below, and three tiny bedrooms above, with their sashless windows, covered with mosquito netting, looking blank and deserted. But Maude knew the Doctor was there, splints and bandages were there, and a sudden gleam of light from the furthest window marked the lighting of the Doctor’s retiring candle. She called his name softly, and he came at once, hurrying down the stairs.

“Great Scott!” he stammered, “what’s the matter? Surely ‘tisn’t Mrs. Dunlop?” and he gaped at the dusty little lady, who sat on the door-step, and the wheel which lay on the roadway.

“I’m choking with thirst,” said Maude. “Get me a drink of water, and I’ll tell you,” and the Doctor bounced in for a dipper, and out to the pump for the required beverage.

“Don’t take much,” he stammered incoherently. “I’ve put a drop of whisky in it. Now tell me, in the name of Heaven, what sent you riding across the country in this fashion?”

Maude told him in a few words. “I made him as snug as I could, but you can’t do much with a bit of moulding and a broomstick,” she said, wearily. “Oh, Doctor, I am so tired; but you’ll go right away, won’t you? And be sure and take everything—your horse is good for it, isn’t he?”

The Doctor laughed. “I’ll not try,” he said; “I’ll get a fresh one at the half-way house.” He looked again at the tired girl, and into his face came an expression which meant a great deal. “Go up to my room and lie down. I’ll call the landlady, to make you some tea. You are starving. No, not a word, You’ve done your day’s work, little woman, and earned a rest. You can come home to-morrow on the stage, if you’re rested.”

So he foraged, and brought triumphantly forth half a chicken, a couple of slices of melon and some light biscuits, with a generous noggin of milk to wash it all down. The landlady grunted an inquiry, was informed of the facts, and forbidden to disturb herself, nor emerge from her bunk in the lean-to.

Maude supped while the doctor got his traps together and saddled his horse, and then Maude brought in her wheel and watched him ride off in the dark with a much lightened heart. She was weary and sleepy, and she bathed her face and soused her yellow curls, and said her prayers, and curled up on the Doctor’s bed and fell asleep.

Two hours later she awoke. The prairie was flooded with silver moonlight which streamed in through the unglazed window and made the room as light as day. She ached in every limb; a vague dread seized her; she was so far from home; she yearned for the small, vine-hung farm house, the rustic fence and the little groves of trees, She sat up and pushed the curls from her forehead, she left the small camp-bed, and walked stiffly and painfully to the window. The road stretched like a long black ribbon to the east, she seemed to be drawn by it by it; half asleep, she fastened on her little hat, drew on her light coat and wearily crept down the unpainted stairs. She would ride to the half-way house before the moon
sank; then, she would see! Fifty miles there and fifty miles back—a hundred miles—A Century! Had not some girl in the South told her she had ridden a century? Ever since that day a little envy had been in her heart of that girl, and she sometimes wished very much that she, too, might wear upon her cycling blouse that tiny bar of gold, with its magic figures, recording a ride of one hundred miles.

As she thought, she unbolted the inn door and noiselessly rolled out her wheel. She could not get away fast enough, once she was outside, but leaving the door wide open she sped off along the wagon track with its two wide ruts and central ox-track into the radiance of the silver night. After a few moments she wakened up completely, the aches began to leave her muscles, the clouds cleared from her brain, she fairly flew along! Two o'clock; she got off and walked for half-a-mile, listening, enchanted, to the song of a moonstruck prairie lark.

Three o'clock, and by and by she discerned in the fading light the road to the half-way house. She looked resolutely away from it. It seemed to coax her, to whisper of the long, lonely stretch ahead, of the Indians in their tepees, in the hollow; of a host of vague and nameless terrors; of how lonely and weary and defenseless she was, on that vast plain, twenty-five miles—twenty-five miles—and the half-way house behind! She pedaled mechanically now; it was growing dark in the west, but in the east the dawn was faintly breaking. She imperceptibly lagged, her eyelids were heavy, she roused herself and saw the first of the farm fields! Her heart throbbed; her temples throbbed; every pulse in her body seemed to start into wild action, tingles ran through her limbs; she fancied a dozen times that she had come to the last field, and as she looked to see, only miles of shaven harvest fields stretched before her. She began to doubt whether she was in the right way, then she laughed, for there was only one way, one road—one track.

She heard voices calling, Lizzie's voice, Auntie's voice; she gripped the handle-bars and pedaled faster, she labored hard, but could scarcely move her wheel; it was like riding up a hill; suddenly she fell off, and as she shook herself together and wakened up, she found herself a few yards up the small ascent that ended her midnight pilgrimage. Slowly and dreamily she pushed the wheel up the road, sometimes standing for a moment with her left hand on the rough rails of the fence, and her eyes closed in involuntary slumber. The early morning wakened, the air was full of the song of larks. The sunlight touched her wan cheeks and glistened from the tears of weariness that gathered in her haggard eyes. Her pretty lips were drawn and pale, dust clung to her little hat, and lay thick on her golden curls.

When she reached the gate she would have fallen, but that watching Auntie came running and caught her in her arms. "I am tired," she said softly, and fell sound asleep.

"And Carr?" Oh, his leg knitted finely, and the Doctor said that Maude was a born surgeon, and only her entreaties compelled him to meddle with her bandaging. "And then?" Well, in the Fall she married him. "Who?" Why, the Doctor, of course!

A DEER-HUNT IN OLD VIRGINIA.

BY ALEX, HUNTER.

THERE are two kinds of deer hunters in Virginia, those who hunt respectively for meat and for sport. Of the former every farmer and bondman, tenant and lessee, whether black or white, chases, stalks and hounds the deer and shoots him on sight, to supply the family table. Every kind of gun, from the old Springfield musket to the modern breech-loader, is used relentlessly, and in the settled neighborhoods the deer are simply gunned to death. Only in the wilds of the backwoods, where great swamps afford secure retreat, or in the mountains where tracts of laurel brakes give refuge against men and dogs, do the Virginia deer hold their own.