

DO BICYCLES HURT BOOKS

PUBLISHERS DISCUSS THE EFFECT OF WHEELING ON THEIR TRADE.

One Says the Popular Sport Has Had a Disastrous Bearing on His Business—Others Believe They Have Been More Prosperous This Spring—One Dealer Declares that Bicycling Has Cost His Firm a Heavy Loss—Some Blessings Pointed Out.

To what extent has the increase of bicycling in the past two or three years affected trade in general and the book trade in particular? This is a subject much discussed and of wide interest, in view of the increasing popularity of the wheel among both sexes and in every class of society.

A reporter for THE NEW-YORK TIMES, desirous of ascertaining the views of the large publishing houses in this city, first visited the firm of G. P. Putnam's Sons, where Irving Putnam gave his ideas on the subject. Mr. Putnam said at once that the immediate effect of the bicycle craze had been disastrous to the book trade. With his firm trade had been unusually dull this Spring, he declared, and, this because a publisher to be successful depended chiefly on the great mass of people with moderate means, which class chiefly is affected by the democratic bicycle.

"It stands to reason," continued Mr. Putnam, "that after a man's business day is over he cannot find time to indulge both in his favorite pastime and in literary pursuits. One or the other must necessarily suffer, and at the present moment it is the library which has given way to the wheel. But, although I have been a financial loser from the present mania, I am and have been an enthusiastic cyclist for the past eighteen years—since the days when the first Columbia wheel was brought out. At that time the bicycle was looked upon as a public enemy, and treated accordingly. It was then impossible to ride down Broadway without being hooted and cursed by an angry mob. Now the tables are turned, and the bicyclist rules the day, and a well-deserved revenge it is."

Mr. Putnam was of the opinion that the present effect of bicycling on the book trade would only be temporary. His theory is that the increase of wheeling means at the same time a general increase of vigor and good health among the people. Once the first and present phase of the question is over, this renewed vigor will exhibit itself in a practical manner as the people once more return to their libraries and books, which they will have been all the better prepared to enjoy.

Mr. Putnam is inclined to believe that while the bicycle has produced a temporarily disastrous effect on the sale of books, it has, on the other hand, been decidedly beneficial to the daily press and particularly to the Sunday newspapers, for, although a man or woman would generally be disinclined to open a book after the fatigue of the wheel, the desire for newspaper reading would, on the contrary, be increased. He contended that when the body is tired the turning of the pages of any book, even if it be the lightest of novels, is far more trying to the brain than a casual glance at one of the great dailies with its varied fund of information suitable to every taste.

Mr. Putnam observed that one of the most beneficial results of the increase in wheeling was in the ultimate exclusion of the horse from cities and towns, which in the interest of public health was a thing much to be desired. By bringing about the disuse of the horse in large centres of population the bicycle is effecting an enormous advance in civilization, he thought.

A member of the firm of E. P. Dutton, on being interviewed concerning the possible influence of cycling on the book trade, expressed the opinion that in his particular class of business the bicycle had produced no change whatever, either good or bad. On the whole, the firm's business had been rather more favorable than usual this Spring. The gentleman acknowledged, however, that it would be difficult for his firm's business to be affected, as its principal trade was in holiday books, a class which could hardly be influenced by cycling.

Edwin W. Morse of Charles Scribner's Sons declared that his firm's business had been good for the past few months, and that the bicycle appeared to have been beneficial to their book trade rather than otherwise. He admitted that he could give no explanation for this assertion, but was convinced that the trade of his firm had not been injured, but was as good as might be expected from the general condition of business throughout the country.

Mr. Dodd of the firm of Dodd, Mead & Co. echoed in substance Mr. Morse's assertion that bicycling had, if anything, improved the book trade, though there had been no appreciable difference in the selling department during the last few months, as compared with the corresponding period in past years.

A member of the firm of Leggat Brothers, booksellers, 81 Chambers Street, expressed himself most decisively in the matter, and exclaimed, with emphasis:

"Bicycling is a killer, and no mistake! Its influence on our business has been deplorable to such an extent that we have lost more money in the past four years than we made in sixteen years before; and bicycling is undoubtedly the chief, if not the only, cause of the trouble.

"Moreover, the evil is ever on the increase as the price of bicycles decreases and the terms of payment become easier. How there can be two opinions on the subject is more than I can understand. There is said to be a capital of \$18,000,000 invested in bicycles in the City of New-York alone. Don't tell me that all the money spent in this manner does not affect our trade. Just look at them any night going down Sixth Avenue like a line of battle. Not that I object to a moderate amount of the wheel in the interest of good health, but what I do condemn is this mania, which is nothing but a fashionable fad, and which drives men and women away not only from their books and intellectual pursuits, but from other elevating pastimes, like the theatre and concerts. Yet I see no prospect of a lessening in the evil, and fear that the book trade will go from bad to worse."

A member of the firm of Harper Brothers gave the opinion that the increase in cycling had had no appreciable effect on his firm's business. He personally favored the wheel, and thought it a strong factor in the onward march of civilization. The business in his firm was just as steady as ever, and he certainly had no blame to place on the favorite recreation of the day.