

THE ADVENTURE OF THE INQUISITIVE AMERICAN

Grant Allen

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IN one week I had multiplied my capital two hundred and forty-fold! I left London with twopence in the world; I quitted Schlangenbad with two pounds in pocket.

'There's a splendid turn-over!' I thought to myself. 'If this luck holds, at the same rate, I shall have made four hundred and eighty pounds by Tuesday next, and I may look forward to being a Barney Barnato by Christmas.' For I had taken high mathematical honours at Cambridge, and if there is anything on earth on which I pride myself, it is my firm grasp of the principle of ratios.

Still, in spite of this brilliant financial prospect, a budding Klondike, I went away from the little Spa on the flanks of the Taunus with a heavy heart. I had grown quite to like dear, virulent, fidgety old Lady Georgina; and I felt that it had cost me a distinct wrench to part with Harold Tillington. The wrench left a scar which was long in healing; but as I am not a professional sentimentalist, I will not trouble you here with details of the symptoms.

My livelihood, however, was now assured me. With two pounds in pocket, a sensible girl can read her title clear to six days' board and lodging, at six marks a day, with a glorious margin of four marks over for pocket-money. And if at the end of six days my fairy godmother had not pointed me out some other means of earning my bread honestly well, I should feel myself unworthy to be ranked in the noble army of adventuresses. I thank thee, Lady Georgina, for teaching me that word. An adventuress I would be; for I loved adventure.

Meanwhile, it occurred to me that I might fill up the interval by going to study art at Frankfort. Elsie Petheridge had been there, and had impressed upon me the fact that I must on no account omit to see the Stadel Gallery. She was strong on culture. Besides, the study of art should be most useful to an adventuress; for she must need all the arts that human skill has developed.

So to Frankfort I betook myself, and found there a nice little pension 'for ladies only,' Frau Bockenheimer assured me at very moderate rates, in a pleasant part of the Lindenstrasse. It had dimity curtains. I will not deny that as I entered the house I was conscious of feeling lonely; my heart sank once or twice as I glanced round the luncheon-table at the domestically-unsympathetic German old maids who formed the rank-and-file of my fellow-boarders. There they sat eight comfortable Fraus who had missed their vocation; plentiful ladies, bulging and surging in tightly stretched black silk bodices. They had been cut out for such housewives as Harold Tillington had described, but found themselves deprived of their natural sphere in life by the unaccountable caprice of the men of their nation. Each was a model Teutonic matron manque. Each looked capable of frying Frankfort sausages to a turn, and knitting woollen socks to a remote eternity. But I sought in vain for one described, but found themselves deprived of their natural sphere in life by the unaccountable caprice of the men of their nation. Each was a model Teutonic matron manque. Each looked capable of frying Frankfort sausages to a turn, and knitting woollen socks to a remote eternity. But I sought in vain for one kindred soul among them. How horrified they would have been, with their fat pudding-faces and big saucer-eyes, had I boldly announced myself as an English adventuress!

I spent my first morning in laborious self-education at the Ariadneum and the Stadel Gallery. I borrowed a catalogue. I wrestled with Van der Weyden; I toiled like a galley-slave at Meister Wilhelm and Meister Stephan. I have a confused recollection that I saw a number of stiff mediaeval pictures, and an alabaster statue of the lady

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who smiled as she rode on a tiger, taken at the beginning of that interesting episode. But the remainder of the Institute has faded from my memory.

In the afternoon I consoled myself for my herculean efforts in the direction of culture by going out for a bicycle ride on a hired machine, to which end I decided to devote my pocket-money. You will, perhaps, object here that my conduct was imprudent. To raise that objection is to misunderstand the spirit of these artless adventures. I told you that I set out to go round the world; but to go round the world does not necessarily mean to circumnavigate it. My idea was to go round by easy stages, seeing the world as I went as far as I got, and taking as little heed as possible of the morrow. Most of my readers, no doubt, accept that philosophy of life on Sundays only; on week-days they swallow the usual contradictory economic platitudes about prudential forethought and the horrid improvidence of the lower classes. For myself, I am not built that way. I prefer to take life in a spirit of pure inquiry. I put on my hat: I saunter where I choose, so far as circumstances permit; and I wait to see what chance will bring me. My ideal is breeziness.

The hired bicycle was not a bad machine, as hired bicycles go; it jolted one as little as you can expect from a common hack; it never stopped at a Bier-Garten; and it showed very few signs of having been ridden by beginners with an unconquerable desire to tilt at the hedgerow. So off I soared at once, heedless of the jeers of Teutonic youth who found the sight of a lady riding a cycle in skirts a strange one—for in South Germany the 'rational' costume is so universal among women cyclists that 'tis the skirt that provokes unfavourable comment from those jealous guardians of female propriety, the street boys. I hurried on at a brisk pace past the Palm-Garden and the suburbs, with my loose hair straying on the breeze behind, till I found myself pedalling at a good round pace on a broad, level road, which led towards a village, by name Fraunheim.

As I scurried across the plain, with the wind in my face, not unpleasantly, I had some dim consciousness of somebody unknown flying after me headlong. My first idea was that Harold Tillington had hunted me down and tracked me to my lair; but gazing back, I saw my pursuer was a tall and ungainly man, with a straw-coloured moustache, apparently American, and that he was following me on his machine, closely watching my action. He had such a cunning expression on his face, and seemed so strangely inquisitive, with eyes riveted on my treadles, that I didn't quite like the look of him. I put on the pace, to see if I could outstrip him, for I am a swift cyclist. But his long legs were too much for me. He did not gain on me, it is true; but neither did I outpace him. Pedalling my very hardest—and I can make good time when necessary—I still kept pretty much at the same distance in front of him all the way to Fraunheim.

Gradually I began to feel sure that the weedy-looking man with the alert face was really pursuing me. When I went faster, he went faster too; when I gave him a chance to pass me, he kept close at my heels, and appeared to be keenly watching the style of my ankle-action. I gathered that he was a connoisseur; but why on earth he should persecute me I could not imagine. My spirit was roused now—I pedalled with a will; if I rode all day I would not let him go past me.

Beyond the cobble-paved chief street of Fraunheim the road took a sharp bend, and began to mount the slopes of the Taunus suddenly. It was an abrupt, steep climb; but I flatter myself I am a tolerable mountain cyclist. I rode sturdily on; my pursuer darted after me. But on this stiff upward grade my light weight and agile ankle-action told; I began to distance him. He seemed afraid that I would give him the slip, and called out suddenly, with a whoop, in English, 'Stop, miss!' I looked back with dignity, but answered nothing. He put on the pace, panting; I pedalled away, and got clear from him.

At a turn of the corner, however, as luck would have it I was pulled up short by a mounted policeman. He blocked the road with his horse, like an ogre, and asked me, in a very gruff Swabian voice, if this was a licensed bicycle. I had no idea, till he spoke, that any license was required; though to be sure I might have guessed it; for modern Germany is studded with notices at all the street corners, to inform you in minute detail that everything is forbidden. I stammered out that I did not know. The mounted policeman drew near and inspected me rudely. 'It is strongly undersaid,' he began, but just at that moment my pursuer came up, and, with American quickness, took in the situation. He accosted the policeman in choice bad German. 'I have two licenses,' he said, producing a handful. 'The Fraulein rides with me.'

I was too much taken aback at so providential an interposition to contradict this highly imaginative statement. My highwayman had turned into a protecting knight-errant of injured innocence. I let the policeman go his way; then I glanced at my preserver. A very ordinary modern St. George he looked, with no lance to speak of, and no

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steed but a bicycle. Yet his mien was reassuring.

'Good morning, miss,' he began—he called me 'Miss' every time he addressed me, as though he took me for a barmaid. 'Ex—cuse me, but why did you want to speed her?'

'I thought you were pursuing me,' I answered, a little tremulous, I will confess, but avid of incident.

'And if I was,' he went on, 'you might have conjectured, miss, it was for our mutual advantage. A business man don't go out of his way unless he expects to turn an honest dollar; and he don't reckon on other folks going out of theirs,. unless he knows he can put them in the way of turning an honest dollar with him.'

'That's reasonable,' I answered: for I am a political economist. 'The benefit should be mutual.' But I wondered if he was going to propose at sight to me.

He looked me all up and down. 'You're a lady of considerable personal attractions,' he said, musingly, as if he were criticising a horse; 'and I want one that sort. That's jest why I trailed you, see? Besides which, there's some style about you.'

'Style!' I repeated.

'Yes,' he went on; 'you know how to use your feet and you have good understandings.'

I gathered from his glance that he referred to my nether limbs. We are all vertebrate animals; why seek to conceal the fact?

'I fail to follow you,' I answered frigidly; for I really didn't know what the man might say next.

'That's so!' he replied. 'It was I that followed you; seems I didn't make much of a job of it, either, anyway.'

I mounted my machine again. 'Well, good morning,' I said, coldly. 'I am much obliged for your kind assistance; but your remark was fictitious, and I desire to go on unaccompanied.'

He held up his hand in warning. 'You ain't going!' he cried, horrified. 'You ain't going without hearing me! I mean business, say! Don't chuck away good money like that. I tell you, there's dollars in it.'

'In what?' I asked, still moving on, but curious. On the slope, if need were, I could easily distance him.

'Why, in this cycling of yours,' he replied. 'You're jest about the very woman I'm looking for, miss. Lithe—that's what I call you. I kin put you in the way of making your pile, I kin. This is a bona—fide offer. No flies on my business! You decline it? Prejudice! Injures you; injures me! Be reasonable anyway!'

I looked round and laughed. 'Formulate yourself,' I said, briefly.

He rose to it like a man. 'Meet me at Fraunheim corner by the Post Office; ten o'clock to—morrow morning,' he shouted, as I rode off, 'and ef I don't convince you there's money in this job, my name's not Cyrus W. Hitchcock.'

Something about his keen, unlovely face impressed me with a sense of his underlying honesty. 'Very well,' I answered, 'I'll come, if you follow me no further.' I reflected that Fraunheim was a populous village, and that only beyond it did the mountain road over the Taunus begin to grow lonely. If he wished to cut my throat, I was well within reach of the resources of civilisation.

When I got home to the Abode of Blighted Fraus that evening I debated seriously with myself whether or not I should accept Mr. Cyrus W. Hitchcock's mysterious invitation. Prudence said no, curiosity said yes; I put the question to a meeting of one; and, since I am a daughter of Eve, curiosity had it. Carried unanimously. I think I might have hesitated, indeed, had it not been for the Blighted Fraus. Their talk was of dinner and of the digestive process; they were critics of digestion. They each of them sat so complacently through the evening—solid and stolid, stodgy and podgy, stuffed comatose images, knitting white woollen shawls, to throw over their capacious shoulders at table d'hote—and they purred with such content in their middle—aged rotundity that I made up my mind I must take warning betimes, and avoid their temptations to adipose deposit. I prefer to grow upwards; the Frau grows sideways. Better get my throat cut by an American desperado, in my pursuit of romance, than settle down on a rock like a placid fat oyster. I am not by nature sessile.

Adventures are to the adventurous. They abound on every side; but only the chosen few have the courage to embrace them. And they will not come to you: you must go out to seek them. Then they meet you half—way, and rush into your arms, for they know their true lovers. There were eight Blighted Fraus at the Home for Lost Ideals, and I could tell by simple inspection that they had not had an average of half an adventure per lifetime between them. They sat and knitted still, like Awful Examples.

If I had declined to meet Mr. Hitchcock at Fraunheim, I know not what changes it might have induced in my life. I might now be knitting. But I went boldly forth, on a voyage of exploration, prepared to accept aught that fate held in store for me.

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As Mr. Hitchcock had assured me there was money in his offer, I felt justified in speculating. I expended another three marks on the hire of a bicycle, though I ran the risk thereby of going perhaps without Monday's dinner. That showed my vocation. The Blighted Fraus, I felt sure, would have clung to their dinner at all hazards.

When I arrived at Fraunheim, I found my alert American punctually there before me. He raised his crush hat with awkward politeness. I could see he was little accustomed to ladies' society. Then he pointed to a close cab in which he had reached the village.

'I've got it inside,' he whispered, in a confidential tone. 'I couldn't let 'em ketch sight of it. You see, there's dollars in it.'

'What have you got inside?' I asked, suspiciously, drawing back. I don't know why, but the word 'it' somehow suggested a corpse. I began to grow frightened.

'Why, the wheel, of course,' he answered. 'Ain't you come here to ride it?'

'Oh, the wheel?' I echoed, vaguely, pretending to look wise; but unaware, as yet, that that word was the accepted Americanism for a cycle. 'And I have come to ride it?'

'Why, certainly,' he replied, jerking his hand towards the cab. 'But we mustn't start right here. This thing has got to be kept dark, don't you see, till the last day.'

Till the last day! That was ominous. It sounded like monomania. So ghostly and elusive! I began to suspect my American ally of being a dangerous madman.

'Jest you wheel away a bit up the hill,' he went on, 'out of sight of the folks, and I'll fetch her along to you.'

'Her?' I cried. 'Who?' For the man bewildered me.

'Why, the wheel, miss! You understand! This is business, you bet! And you're jest the right woman!'

He motioned me on. Urged by a sort of spell, I remounted my machine and rode out of the village. He owed, on the box-seat of his cab. Then, when we had the world well behind, and stood among the sun-smitten boles of the pine-trees, he opened the door mysteriously, and produced from the vehicle a very odd-looking bicycle.

It was clumsy to look at. It differed immensely, in many particulars, from any machine I had yet seen or ridden.

The strenuous American fondled it for a moment with his hand, as if it were a pet child. Then he mounted nimbly. Pride shone in his eye. I saw in a second he was a fond inventor.

He rode a few yards on. Next he turned to me eagerly. 'This ma-chine,' he said, in an impressive voice, 'is pro-pelled by an eccentric.' Like all his countrymen, he laid most stress on unaccented syllables.

'Oh, I knew you were an eccentric,' I said, 'the moment I set eyes upon you.'

He surveyed me gravely. 'You misunderstand me, miss,' he corrected. 'When I say an eccentric, I mean, a crank.'

'They are much the same thing,' I answered, briskly. 'Though I confess I would hardly have applied so rude a word as crank to you.'

He looked me over suspiciously, as if I were trying to make game of him, but my face was sphinx-like. So he brought the machine a yard or two nearer, and explained its construction to me. He was quite right: it was driven by a crank. It had no chain, but was moved by a pedal, working narrowly up and down, and attached to a rigid bar, which impelled the wheels by means of an eccentric.

Besides this, it had a curious device for altering the gearing automatically while one rode, so as to enable one to adapt it to the varying slope in mounting hills. This part of the mechanism he explained to me elaborately. There was a gauge in front which allowed one to sight the steepness of the slope by mere inspection; and according as the gauge marked one, two, three, or four, as its gradient on the scale, the rider pressed a button on the handle-bar with his left hand once, twice, thrice, or four times, so that the gearing adapted itself without an effort to the rise in the surface. Besides, there were devices for rigidity and compensation. Altogether, it was a most apt and ingenious piece of mechanism. I did not wonder he was proud of it.

'Get up and ride, miss,' he said in a persuasive voice.

I did as I was bid. To my immense surprise, I ran up the steep hill as smoothly and easily as if it were a perfectly-laid level.

'Goes nicely, doesn't she?' Mr. Hitchcock murmured rubbing his hands.

'Beautifully,' I answered. 'One could ride such a machine up Mont Blanc, I should fancy.'

He stroked his chin with nervous fingers. 'It ought to knock 'em,' he said, in an eager voice. 'It's geared to run

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up most anything in creation.'

'How steep?'

'One foot in three.'

'That's good.'

'Yes. It'll climb Mount Washington.'

'What do you call it?' I asked.

He looked me over with close scrutiny.

'In Amurrica,' he said slowly, 'we call it the Great Manitou, because it kin do pretty well what it chooses; but in Europe, I am thinking of calling it the Martin Conway or the Whymper, or something like that.'

'Why so?'

'Well, because it's a famous mountain climber.'

'I see,' I said. 'With such a machine you'll put a notice on the Matterhorn, "This hill is dangerous to cyclists."'

He laughed low to himself, and rubbed his hands again. 'You'll do, miss,' he said. 'You're the right sort, you are. The moment I seen you, I thought we two could do a trade together. Benefits me; benefits you. A mutual advantage. Reciprocity is the soul of business. You hev some go in you, you hev. There's money in your feet. You'll give these Meinherrs fits. You'll take the clear-starch out of them.'

'I fail to catch on,' I answered, speaking his own dialect to humour him.

'Oh, you'll get there all the same,' he replied, stroking his machine meanwhile. 'It was a squirrel, it was!' (He pronounced it squirrel.) 'It 'ud run up a tree ef it wanted, wouldn't it?' He was talking to it now as if it were a dog or a baby. 'There, there, it mustn't kick; it was a frisky little thing! Jest you step up on it, miss, and have a go at that there mountain.'

I stepped up and had a 'go.' The machine bounded forward like an agile greyhound. You had but to touch it, and it ran of itself. Never had I ridden so vivacious, so animated a cycle. I returned to him, sailing, with the gradient reversed. The Manitou glided smoothly, as on a gentle slope, without the need for back-peddalling.

'It soars!' he remarked with enthusiasm.

'Balloons are at discount beside it,' I answered.

'Now you want to know about this business, I guess,' he went on. 'You want to know jest where the reciprocity comes in, anyhow?'

'I am ready to hear you expound,' I admitted, smiling.

'Oh, it ain't all on one side,' he continued, eyeing his machine at an angle with parental affection. 'I'm agoing to make your fortune right here. You shall ride her for me on the last day; and ef you pull this thing off, don't you be scared that I won't treat you handsome.'

'If you were a little more succinct,' I said, gravely, 'we should get forrader faster.'

'Perhaps you wonder,' he put in, 'that with money on it like this, I should intrust the job into the hands of a female.' I winced, but was silent. 'Well, it's like this don't you see; ef a female wins, it makes success all the more striking and con-spicious. The world to-day is ruled by advertizement.'

I could stand it no longer. 'Mr. Hitchcock,' I said, with dignity, 'I haven't the remotest idea what on earth you are talking about.'

He gazed at me with surprise. 'What?' he exclaimed at last. 'And you kin cycle like that! Not know what all the cycling world is mad about! Why, you don't mean to tell me you're not a pro-fessional?'

I enlightened him at once as to my position in society, which was respectable, if not lucrative. His face fell somewhat. 'High-toned, eh? Still, you'd run all the same wouldn't you?' he inquired.

'Run for what?' I asked, innocently. 'Parliament? The Presidency? The Frankfort Town Council?'

He had difficulty in fathoming the depths of my ignorance. But by degrees I understood him. It seemed that the German Imperial and Prussian Royal Governments had offered a Kaiserly and Kingly prize for the best military bicycle; the course to be run over the Taunus, from Frankfort to Limburg; the winning machine to get the equivalent and of a thousand pounds; each firm to supply its own make and rider. The 'last day' was Saturday next; and the Great Manitou was the dark horse of the contest.

Then all was clear as day to me. Mr. Cyrus W. Hitchcock was keeping his machine a profound secret; he wanted a woman to ride it, so that his triumph might be the more complete; and the moment he saw me pedal up the hill, in trying to avoid him, he recognised at once that I was that woman.

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I recognised it too. 'Twas a pre-ordained harmony. After two or three trials I felt that the Manitou was built for me, and I was built for the Manitou. We ran together like parts of one mechanism. I was always famed for my circular ankle-action; and in this new machine, ankle-action was everything. Strength of limb counted for naught; what told was the power of 'clawing up again' promptly. I possess that power: I have prehistoric feet: my remote progenitors must certainly have been tree-haunting monkeys.

We arranged terms then and there.

'You accept?'

'Implicitly.'

If I pulled off the race, I was to have fifty pounds. If I didn't, I was to have five. 'It ain't only your skill, you see,' Mr. Hitchcock said, with frank commercialism. 'It's your personal attractiveness as well that I go upon. That's an element to consider in business relations.'

'My face is my fortune,' I answered, gravely. He nodded acquiescence.

Till Saturday, then, I was free. Meanwhile, I trained, and practised quietly with the Manitou, in sequestered parts of the hills. I also took spells, turn about, at the Stadel Institute. I like to intersperse culture and athletics. I know something about athletics, and hope in time to acquire a taste for culture. 'Tis expected of a Girton girl, though my own accomplishments run rather towards rowing, punting, bicycling.

On Saturday, I confess, I rose with great misgivings. I was not a professional; and to find oneself practically backed for a thousand pounds in a race against men is a trifle disquieting. Still, having once put my hand to the plough, I felt I was bound to pull it through somehow. I dressed my hair neatly, in a very tight coil. I ate a light breakfast, eschewing the fried sausages which the Blighted Fraus pressed upon my notice, and satisfying myself with a gently-boiled egg and some toast and coffee. I always found I rowed best at Cambridge on the lightest diet; in my opinion, the raw beef regime is a serious error in training.

At a minute or two before eleven I turned up at the Schiller Platz in my short serge dress and cycling jacket. The great square was thronged with spectators to see us start; the police made a lane through their midst for the riders. My backer had advised me to come to the post as late as possible, 'For I have entered your name,' he said, 'simply as Lois Cayley. These Deutschers don't think but what you're a man and a brother. But I am apprehensive of contingencies. When you put in a show they'll try to raise objections to you on account of your being a female. There won't be much time, though, and I shall rush the objections. Once they let you run and win, it don't matter to me whether I get the twenty thousand marks or not. It's the advertizement that tells. Jest you mark my words; miss, and don't you make no mistake about it—the world to-day is governed by advertizement.'

So I turned up at the last moment, and cast a timid glance at my competitors. They were all men, of course, and two of them were German officers in a sort of undress cycling uniform. They eyed me superciliously. One of them went up and spoke to the Herr Over-Superintendent who had charge of the contest. I understood him to be lodging an objection against a mere woman taking part in the race. The Herr Over-Superintendent, a bulky official came up beside me and perpended visibly. He bent his big brows to it. 'Twas appalling to observe the measurable amount of Teutonic cerebration going on under cover of his round, green glasses. He was perpending for some minutes. Time was almost up. Then he turned to Mr. Hitchcock, having finally made up his colossal mind, and murmured rudely, 'The woman cannot compete.'

'Why not?' I inquired, in my very sweetest German, with an angelic smile, though my heart trembled.

'Warum nicht? Because the word "rider" in the Kaiserly and Kingly for-this-contest-provided decree is distinctly in the masculine gender stated.'

'Pardon me, Herr Over-Superintendent,' I replied, pulling out a copy of Law 97 on the subject, with which I had duly provided myself, 'if you will to Section 45 of the Bicycles-Circulation-Regulation-Act your attention turn, you will find it therein expressly enacted that unless any clause be anywhere to the contrary inserted, the word "rider," in the masculine gender put, shall here the word "rideress" in the feminine to embrace be considered.'

For, anticipating this objection, I had taken the precaution to look the legal question up beforehand.

'That is true,' the Herr Over-Superintendent observed, in a musing voice, gazing down at me with relenting eyes. 'The masculine habitually embraces the feminine.' And he brought his massive intellect to bear upon the problem once more with prodigious concentration.

I seized my opportunity. 'Let me start, at least,' I urged, holding out the Act. 'If I win, you can the matter more

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fully with the Kaiserly and Kingly Governments hereafter argue out.'

'I guess this will be an international affair,' Mr. Hitchcock remarked, well pleased. 'It would be a first-rate advertizement for the Great Manitou ef England and Germany were to make the question into a casus belli. The United States could look on, and pocket the chestnuts.'

'Two minutes to go,' the official starter with the watch called out.

'Fall in, then, Fraulein Englanderin,' the Herr Over-Superintendent observed, without prejudice, waving me into line. He pinned a badge with a large number, 7, on my dress. 'The Kaiserly and Kingly Governments shall on the affair of the starting's legality hereafter on my report more at leisure pass judgment.'

The lieutenant in undress uniform drew back a little

'Oh, if this is to be woman's play,' he muttered, 'then can a Prussian officer himself by competing not into contempt bring.'

I dropped a little curtsy. 'If the Herr Lieutenant is afraid even to enter against an Englishwoman——' I said, smiling.

He came up to the scratch sullenly. 'One minute to go!' called out the starter.

We were all on the alert. There was a pause; a deep breath. I was horribly frightened, but I tried to look calm. Then sharp and quick came the one word 'Go!' And like arrows from a bow, off we all started.

I had ridden over the whole course the day but one before, on a mountain pony, with an observant eye and my sedulous American—rising at five o'clock, so as not to excite undue attention; and I therefore knew beforehand the exact route we were to follow; but I confess when I saw the Prussian lieutenant and one of my other competitors dash forward at a pace that simply astonished me, that fifty pounds seemed to melt away in the dim abyss of the Ewigkeit.

I gave up all for lost. I could never make the running against such practised cyclists.

However, we all turned out into the open road which leads across the plain and down the Main valley, in the direction of Mayence. For the first ten miles or so, it is a dusty level. The surface is perfect; but 'twas a blinding white thread. As I toiled along it, that broiling June day, I could hear the voice of my backer, who followed on horseback, exhorting me in loud tones, 'Don't scorch, miss; don't scorch; never mind ef you lose sight of 'em. Keep your wind; that's the point. The wind, the wind's everything. Let 'em beat you on the level; you'll catch 'em up fast enough when you get on the Taunus!'

But in spite of his encouragement, I almost lost heart as I saw one after another of my opponents' backs disappear in the distance, till at last I was left toiling along the bare white road alone, in a shower-bath of sunlight, with just a dense cloud of dust rising gray far ahead of me. My head swam. It repented me of my boldness.

Then the riders on horseback began to grumble; for by police regulation they were not allowed to pass the hindmost of the cyclists; and they were kept back by my presence from following up their special champions. 'Give it up, Fraulein, give it up!' they cried. 'You're beaten. Let us pass and get forward.' But at the selfsame moment, I heard the shrill voice of my American friend whooping aloud across the din, 'Don't you do nothing of the sort, miss! You stick to it, and keep your wind! It's the wind that wins! Them Germans won't be worth a cent on the high slopes, anyway!'

Encouraged by his voice, I worked steadily on, neither scorching nor relaxing, but maintaining an even pace at my natural pitch under the broiling sunshine. Heat rose in waves on my face from the road below; in the thin white dust, the accusing tracks of six wheels confronted me. Still I kept on following them, till I reached the town of Hochst—nine miles from Frankfort. Soldiers along the route were timing us at intervals with chronometers, and noting our numbers. As I rattled over the paved High Street, I called aloud to one of them. 'How far ahead the last man?'

He shouted back, good-humouredly: 'Four minutes, Fraulein.'

Again I lost heart. Then I mounted a slight slope, and felt how easily the Manitou moved up the gradient. From its summit I could note a long gray cloud of dust rolling steadily onward down the hill towards Hattersheim.

I coasted down, with my feet up, and a slight breeze just cooling me. Mr. Hitchcock, behind, called out, full-throated, from his seat, 'No hurry! No flurry! Take your time! Take—your—time, miss!'

Over the bridge at Hattersheim you turn to the right abruptly, and begin to mount by the side of a pretty little stream, the Schwarzbach, which runs brawling over rocks down the Taunus from Eppstein. By this time the

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excitement had somewhat cooled down for the moment; I was getting reconciled to be beaten on the level, and began to realise that my chances would be best as we approached the steepest bits of the mountain road about Niederhausen. So I positively plucked up heart to look about me and enjoy the scenery. With hair flying behind—that coil had played me false—I swept through Hofheim, a pleasant little village at the mouth of a grassy valley inclosed by wooded slopes, the Schwarzbach making cool music in the glen below as I mounted beside it. Clambering larches, like huge candelabra, stood out on the ridge, silhouetted against the skyline.

'How far ahead the last man?' I cried to the recording soldier. He answered me back, 'Two minutes, Fraulein.'

I was gaining on them; I was gaining! I thundered across the Schwarzbach, by half-a-dozen clamorous little iron bridges, making easy time now, and with my feet working as if they were themselves an integral part of the machinery. Up, up, up; it looked a vertical ascent; the Manitou glided well in its oil-bath at its half-way gearing. I rode for dear life. At sixteen miles, Lorsbach; at eighteen, Eppstein, the road still rising. 'How far ahead the last man?' 'Just round the corner, Fraulein!'

I put on a little steam. Sure enough, round the corner I caught sight of his back. With a spurt, I passed him—a dust-covered soul, very hot and uncomfortable. He had not kept his wind; I flew past him like a whirlwind. But, oh how sultry hot in that sweltering, close valley! A pretty little town, Eppstein, with its mediaeval castle perched high on a craggy rock. I owed it some gratitude, I felt, as I left it behind, for 'twas here that I came up with the tail-end of my opponents.

That one victory cheered me. So far, our route had lain along the well-made but dusty high road in the steaming valley; at Nieder-Josbach, two miles on, we quitted the road abruptly, by the course marked out for us, and turned up a mountain path, only wide enough for two cycles abreast—a path that clambered towards the higher slopes of the Taunus That was arranged on purpose—for this was no fair-weather show, but a practical trial for military bicycles, under the conditions they might meet with in actual warfare. It was rugged riding: black walls of pine rose steep on either hand; the ground was uncertain. Our path mounted sharply from the first; the steeper the better. By the time I had reached Ober-Josbach, nestling high among larch-woods, I had distanced all but two of my opponents. It was cooler now, too. As I passed the hamlet my cry altered.

'How far ahead the first man?'

'Two minutes, Fraulein.'

'A civilian?'

'No, no; a Prussian officer.'

The Herr Lieutenant led, then. For Old England's sake, I felt I must beat him.

The steepest slope of all lay in the next two miles. If I were going to win I must pass these two there, for my advantage lay all in the climb; if it came to coasting, the weight scored a point in their favour. Bump, crash, jolt! I pedalled away like a machine; the Manitou sobbed; my ankles flew round so that I scarcely felt them.

But the road was rough and scarred with waterways—ruts turned by rain to runnels. At half a mile, after a desperate struggle among sand and pebbles, I passed the second man; just ahead, the Prussian officer looked round and saw me. 'Thunder-weather! you there, Engländerin?' he cried, darting me a look of unchivalrous dislike, such as only your sentimental German can cast at a woman.

'Yes, I am here, behind you, Herr Lieutenant, I answered, putting on a spurt; 'and I hope next to be before you.'

He answered not a word, but worked his hardest. So did I. He bent forward: I sat erect on my Manitou, pulling hard at my handles. Now, my front wheel was upon him. It reached his pedal. We were abreast. He had a narrow thread of solid path, and he forced me into a runnel. Still I gained. He swerved: I think he tried to foul me But the slope was too steep; his attempt recoiled on himself; he ran against the rock at the side and almost overbalanced. That second lost him. I waved my hand as I sailed ahead. 'Good morning,' I cried, gaily. 'See you again at Limburg!'

From the top of the slope I put my feet up and flew down into Idstein. A thunder-shower burst: I was glad of the cool of it. It laid the dust. I regained the high road. From that moment, save for the risk of sideslips, 'twas easy running—just an undulating line with occasional ups and downs; but I saw no more of my pursuers till, twenty-two kilometres farther on, I rattled on the cobble-paved causeway into Limburg. I had covered the forty-six miles in quick time for a mountain climb. As I crossed the bridge over the Lahn, to my immense surprise, Mr. Hitchcock waved his arms, all excitement, to greet me. He had taken the train on from Eppstein, it

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seemed, and got there before me. As I dismounted at the Cathedral, which was our appointed end, and gave my badge to the soldier, he rushed up and shook my hand. 'Fifty pounds!' he cried. 'Fifty pounds! How's that for the great Anglo-Saxon race! And hooray for the Manitou!'

The second man, the civilian, rode in, wet and draggled, forty seconds later. As for the Herr Lieutenant, a disappointed man, he fell out by the way, alleging a puncture. I believe he was ashamed to admit the fact that he had been beaten in open fight by the objurgated Englanderin.

So the end of it was, I was now a woman of means, with fifty pounds of my own to my credit.

I lunched with my backer royally at the best inn in Limburg.