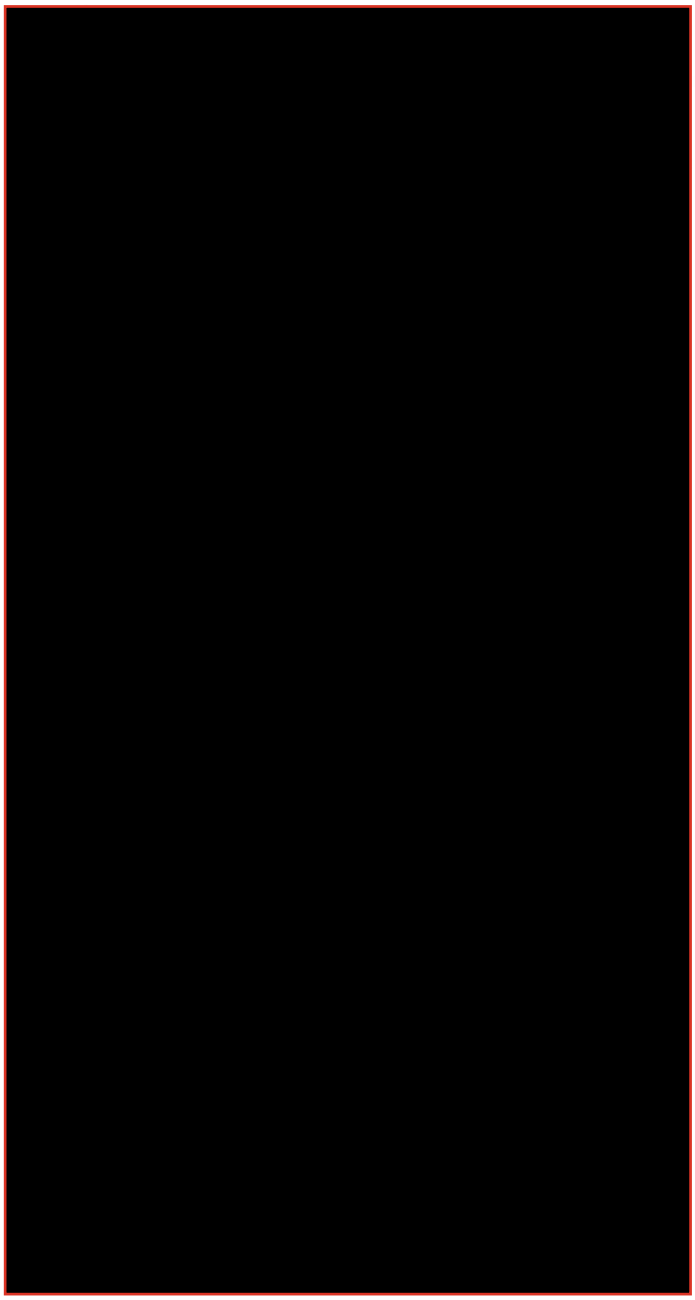


Editor's comments - Gary W. Sanderson

This paper by Carey Williams purports to tell the story of the introduction of pedal-driven bicycles to America, using statements and accounts published at the time that the relevant actions were actually taking place. However, considerable speculation is included to fill in the gaps in the published material and to advance this author's ideas about what actually occurred.

The Editor has previously published an account of the most important events in this story giving credit for initiating the 'velocipede-mania' that enveloped the country in the second half of 1868 and the first half of 1869 to the Hanlon Brothers and the use of velocipedes in their popular, highly successful, acrobatic performances on and off the stage, beginning on August 9, 1868, at Selwyn's Theater in Boston, Massachusetts.[23]

For the most part, William's paper adds useful information to the story of the introduction of velocipedes to America and it is complimentary to the Editor's paper on this subject. However, the Williams' paper contains two suppositions that appear to be in opposition to other authoritative published information on the subject.

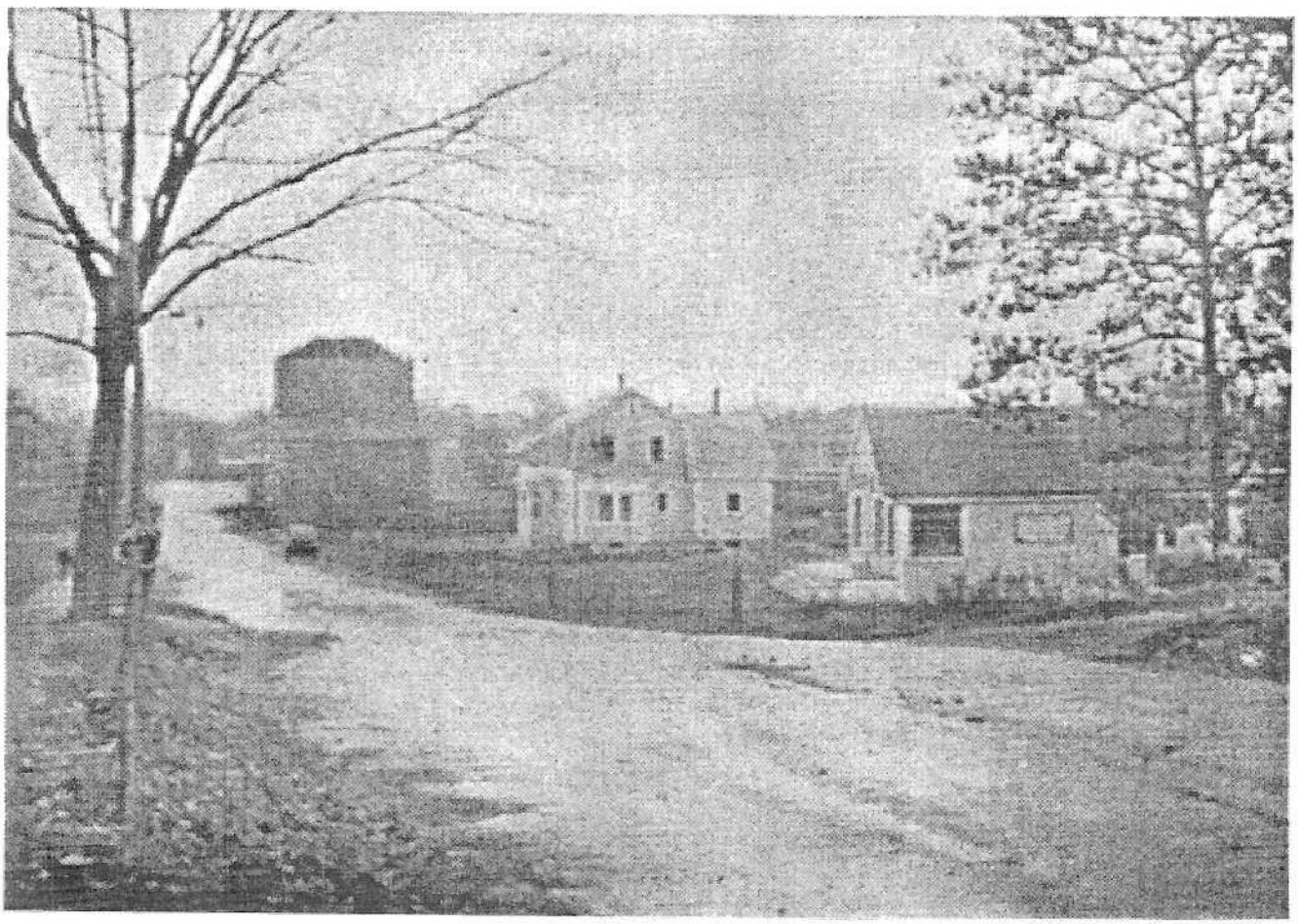
First, it is suggested that Pierre Lallement, one of the first persons to bring a velocipede to America (in 1866) may have stayed in America until sometime in 1868 and that he may have been involved with the Hanlon Brothers in the development of their 'Improved Velocipede'.[24] This notion is contrary to the account by Karl Kron, who reports that he spoke with a mechanic who worked with Pierre Lallement in Ansonia, Connecticut who indicated that Lallement had left America to return to France in 1867 in time to see the 1867 Universal Exposition in Paris.[25]

Second, it is stated in the section of the paper titled '1868' that - "The Hanlon's could have seen the velocipede racing in the Paris streets in 1867, but showed no sign of any velocipede interest or use till the granting of the patent [i.e., the Hanlon's U.S. Patent No. 79,654 (1868) for an 'Improved Velocipede']", which might suggest that the Hanlon Bros. were only marginally invested in the velocipede, whereas in fact the evidence makes it clear that they were deeply involved with it from the time that they first saw one in Paris in 1867:

(a) The Hanlon Bros. were always looking for new daring material for their stage performances from which they derived their income. When they were in Paris in 1867, they undoubtedly saw velocipedes being ridden in the streets,[26] and they were sure to be quick to realize that these had the potential to amaze people, especially people who had never seen a two-wheeled vehicle being ridden before, as was the case for most Americans at the time.

(b) It is reported by a noted biographer of the Hanlon Bros.[27] that they bought one and took it to London, where they used it in a performance there before returning to the United States in January 1868, bringing one or more velocipedes home with them.

(c) The Hanlons were dedicated to perfecting



The Hanlon Practice Studio
Ripley Road, Cohasset, MA

Fig. 17: The Hanlon Practice Studio on Ripley Road in Cohasset, Massachusetts, where the Hanlon Bros. retreated each spring to develop their acts and to build the objects that they would use in these acts

their acts before using them on stage,[28] and it is known that they sequestered themselves for some weeks following the death of their brother Thomas, in Cohasset, Massachusetts, where they had a practice studio (maintained today by the Cohasset Historical Society).[29] **(Fig. 17)** It is virtually certain that it is here in Cohasset that the Hanlon brothers developed the 'Improved Velocipede' for which they obtained a patent, and where they perfected the velocipede act that gained them such notoriety when it was performed on stage at the Selwyn Theater in Boston,[30] and in a public demonstration on Boston Common,[31] in August 1868. Certainly, the Hanlon Bros. were heavily involved with the velocipede from the time they first saw it in Paris in 1867, and they were the ones who first demonstrated it to the American public, thereby sparking the velocipede-mania in this country.

Endnotes

1 *New Haven Daily Palladium*, 5 April 1866.

2 "Bicycle" in this paper refers to a vehicle with two wheels (one behind the other), driven by pedals. Velocipede is a generic term for "fast foot", and is a name for a human-powered vehicle. Many velocipedes were used and patented before and after Lallement's U.S. Patent No. 59,915. The Lallement patent describes the first vehicle that was driven by the feet acting on pedals which were part of a vehicle with two wheels that we commonly call a bicycle today. The term "bicycle" did not become a common replacement for "velocipede" till January 1869, after which the two terms velocipede and bicycle became synonymous in the press. For this

Cycles on Roads, Paths and in the Environment 4:2

Blurring the Line: The "Lively" Bicycle

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As a simple device, the bicycle exposes its rider to the weather and the terrain at a speed slow enough to savor the sights, smells and sounds of the surrounding landscape. As such, can the bicycle be more than a collection of tubes, wires and wheels? Can it become an animate object that has the ability to change the rider?

Jane Bennett,[1] Martin Buber[2] and Ivan Illich[3] are three noted philosophers who have written about our awareness of all that is within the world, both animate and inanimate, and our appreciation of the value of it all. Bennett theorizes that all sorts of objects have the ability to influence human life, that these objects are 'vibrant' (pulsating with vigor and energy, vital or lively) rather than 'dull' (not lively or spirited, listless, sluggish), and that people who recognize this are 'vibrant' as well. Buber sees human beings treating one another either as objects to be used, which he defines as 'I-It' relationships, or as people to be valued and cherished in 'I-Thou' relationships. Illich contends that the industrialized world is controlled by technocrats and that for the sake of humanity people should be allowed to live and work independently. Though none of them mentions bicycles or bicycling, there seems to be a connection.

Over the course of a long cycling career in the mid-twentieth century, the Englishman Bernard Newman spent his summers cycling through every country in Europe. At one point, when an Estonian priest learned that he traveled by bicycle, the cleric incorrectly assumed Newman was too poor to have the means to travel by train.[4] Treating the bicyclist as an object of pity, the cleric created an 'I-It' relation-

ship with him. But Newman journeyed by bicycle precisely because it allowed him the experience of 'I-Thou' relationships, which other conveyances denied. It made him 'vibrant' whereas the passenger in either train or automobile might be all too 'dull.' Here one might consider the possibility that even though alive, human beings might not be 'vibrant,' that going through their daily routines they might become 'dull.' This is not meant to imply that all cyclists are 'vibrant' or that those who do not cycle are 'dull,' but the reality is that because cyclists move under their own power they are more attentive to that which is around them, creating more opportunity for 'I-Thou' encounters. To examine this idea, I am drawing on bicyclists whose experiences began in the late-nineteenth century and continue today.

What then is the relationship between the human and the bicycle? Many cyclists write of their experiences with their wheels as sentient beings rather than simply as objects. Some of the references are relatively brief while others are more extensive and continue over multiple rides and bicycles, but each indicates that the rider has established a connection with the wheel that suggests htat it is more vibrant than dull, that the connection between rider and wheel is 'I-Thou,' establishing the wheel as more than an inanimate object for transportation from point A to point B. Together these ideas point toward Illich's convivial society.

One might argue that these relationships with bicycles are no more than an athropomorphism, in which the rider endows the bicycle with human behavioral traits. On various occasions, for example, Newman wrote that his bicycle, which he named 'George', "climbed painfully," or "groaned continuously," or "plodded sedately," or "rattled down," or had become "satiated with mountain scenery," or that "George refused to be exhilirated."[5] All certainly human characteristics, but Bennett rejects both anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, the placing of humans at the center of the universe, because individually and together these reduce everything to the level of human existence, the premise being that humans represent the pinnacle of the hierarchy. To ascribe human characteristics denies the essential 'vibrancy' of the other. To do so would be to establish, in Buber's terms, an 'I-It' relationship with the other. Both Bennett and Buber require humans to accept their place in the world rather than accepting a simpler, hierarchical order. In like manner, Illich's socialist model calls for humans to create and use tools that can be available to all without the hierarchy.

In the 1890s, the Englishman Charles Edwardes dedicated his journeying tale to his bicycle. "Dear 'Sunbeam,' as a novice in the art of understanding you, I played you a scurvy trick in thus taking you to a strange land . . . but I have now become quite affectionately disposed towards you, since, in rougher lands than Denmark, you have unfolded to me, grown wiser, your many excellent qualities. In recognition whereof, I take leave to dedicate to your bright name this trivial record of our trivial journey together." Throughout, he talked of his cycle, his "Sunbeam," as animate and vibrant, with which he had an 'I-Thou' connection. The bicycle attracted attention wherever he went, with people fawning over it. He was always careful to see that it was safe when he stopped: ". . . . here my cycle was received with extreme respect, and given a nice slender iron pillar to lean against." In one place, he stopped someone who had a cycle, ". . . . a poor old muddied thing, which looked ashamed of itself by my 'Sunbeam,' when he drew it creakingly forward." When he protested having to wait at a grade crossing for a train, the guard told him (and a woman waiting as well) that he was responsible for our two lives (or three, with the 'Sunbeam's') . . . ." He talked to it as he rode; he met a country gentleman at an inn after he rode past him on a downhill. The gentleman told Edwardes he envied him his youth and vitality: " 'You were a spark, sir; I saw you and you were gone.' I told this to my 'Sunbeam' afterwards, and the dear creature quivered to the compliment." When the Sunbeam's rear tire went flat, he referred to it as "indisposed."[6]

Though not as positive, Mark Twain viewed his ordinary bicycle as sentient. He described the process of learning to ride in an 1880s short story, published posthumously. After a steep learning curve, he went out on a Sunday morning to a street he had been familiar with for years and which he believed to be "a dead level; but it was not, as the bicycle now informed me, to my surprise. The bicycle, in the hands of a novice, is as alert and accurate as a spirit-level," so even if the vibrant human could not detect any rise or fall, the vibrant bicycle recognized the change.[7]

A century later, many people in "mid-life crisis" took to the wheel to escape the drudgery of daily existence or to "find" themselves. With neither training

nor planning, the journalist David Lamb determined to bicycle across the United States to break the bonds of convention. He had traveled extensively as a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, but had not ridden a bicycle since adolescence. He wanted to return to past times, when travel meant to experience an intimacy with the towns, valleys and mountains he encountered. The more his friends ridiculed his adventure, the more he determined to complete it. In Bennett's terms, the bicycle allowed Lamb to see the vitality of matter, something he had previously overlooked. Once he started on his journey, he realized that cycling made him a part of the environment. In Buber's terms, the bicycle allowed Lamb to engage in both 'I-Thou' and 'I-It' relationships with those along the way. "Traveling by bicycle returns you to an era when Americans had time to be gracious to a man passing through and weren't afraid of each other. On a bicycle I posed no threat." He found the people he met along the way open and gracious. When, one evening, he found himself in a very small town where the only motel had closed, the owner who had turned the property into a plant shop, rented him the only room with a bed. "Apologizing for the lack of amenities, she found me a plastic glass and filled up a plastic-foam cup with dishwasher soap so I could shower." Strangers talked to Lamb, and women motorists stranded on lonely roads accepted his assistance without either fear or hesitation. Illich applauds such an image of a simpler past as convivial. Lamb found that "no one questioned my intent or greeted me with eyes that looked away." In addition to these positive, 'I-Thou' experiences, however, Lamb had some 'I-It' encounters as well; he wondered why "the sight of an adult bicyclist raises the hackles of so many motorists and people of limited mental capacity." Broken beer bottles and obscenities hurled from pickup trucks led him to conclude that school-yard bullies never grew up.[8]

Lamb considered his bicycle as an extension of himself, but most other long-distance riders viewed their wheel as a companion. Consider the relationship between Frank Lenz and his bicycle. Hired by A. H. Overman and *Outing* to promote both the bicycle brand and the sporting magazine, Lenz set off from Pittsburgh in May, 1892 on a pneumatic safety in his attempt to become the second person to complete a solo round-the-world ride. Lenz freely admitted his bias in favor of his wheel, a "'Victor' in name and in deed." Lenz felt "more than [a] sentimental friendship" for the bicycle that bore "my burden and cheered my pilgrimage."[9] He firmly believed that, if the need arose, he would be happy to carry it as it had carried him. Forty years later Fred Birchmore, an American graduate student studying in Germany, had bicycled to Egypt between semesters where someone stole his passport. When his replacement documents arrived after the next semester began, he determined to ride the rest of the way around the world. Like Lenz, he frequently referred to his wheel as his 'friend' - it became "more than a mere inanimate piece of metal" - and he willingly admitted that he would gladly carry it if necessary in return for all the miles it had carried him.[10] Like Bennett, both Lenz and Birchmore recognized their wheels as vibrant matter that changed their lives. Like Buber, they established 'I-Thou' relationships with their bicycles, in part at least because for long stretches of their journeys the bicycle was their only companion. As Illich wrote, the bicycle allowed these two men to concentrate on the journey rather than just the destination.

Women, as well as men, established similar relationships with their bicycles. In her fifties in the 1890s, temperance reformer Frances Willard learned to ride a bicycle she named 'Gladys,' believing it to have a personality and a mind of its own. "'Behold, I do not fail you; I am not a skittish beastie, but a sober, well-conducted roadster." 'Gladys' introduced Willard to the laws of physics and explained to her the importance of balance, both physical and mental. Willard commended 'Gladys' as a "teacher without pulpit or creed. She who succeeds in gaining the mastery of such an animal as Gladys, will gain the mastery of life, and by exactly the same methods and characteristics." Clearly, according to Bennett, 'Gladys' acted as an agent or force "with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of [its] own." Because "the stress of life has moulded them to harmony," Willard enjoyed an 'I-Thou' relationship.[11]

In the late twentieth century, Bettina Selby took up bicycling after her children had grown and left home. She completed several interesting pilgrimages through Europe, the Middle East and Africa on a bicycle she named 'Evans', after its English frame builder. "To the layman, a bicycle is just a bicycle," but she understood that each wheel has its own personality, and 'Evans' was no exception. On board ship from Venice to Istanbul, 'Evans' rode in

the bowels of the ship. "I felt a little sad at leaving him there in all the stink and clatter, so I suppose I was beginning to think of him as a friend."[12] Bernard Newman had a similar experience a generation earlier when he traveled via ship from England to Danzig. Newman had a stateroom, but his wheel traveled in the hold. When they arrived at their destination, Newman retrieved the bicycle, only to learn that it had feared it would be sold along with the rest of the machinery.[13] Like Selby, Newman identified with his bicycle; not only did both treat their bicycles as vibrant matter, they also established 'I-Thou' relationships with them.

Reaching the same conclusion, Irishwoman Dervla Murphy made two forays into southern Africa in the 1990s, riding a mountain bike she named 'Lear.' Her first journey ended when she contracted malaria, but she returned to South Africa in 1993, during the waning days of apartheid. While resting with friends in Johannesburg, she learned of the murder of Chris Hani, "next to Mr. Mandela, and not far behind, . . . the most beloved and respected black leader." Several months later when thieves stole 'Lear' she offered a no-questions-asked reward equal to the price of a new mountain bicycle, had a long nationwide radio interview, and a front page article in the local paper, all to no avail. "On the practical level a bicycle is just a machine, an inanimate object easily replaced. But not so on the emotional level. To me Lear was my friend, my only companion on quite a long journey that started in Nairobi. I feel utterly desolate without him." While one may forget the 'I-It' associations, such 'I-Thou' encounters make a lasting impact. The following spring she bought a new bicycle which she named 'Chris,' in memory of Chris Hani. "Buying a bicycle is a momentous event, akin to marriage: you are acquiring a partner." While she saw 'Lear' as a thoroughbred who rode like a Derby winner, 'Chris' was a mongrel pieced together from Asian parts assembled in South Africa, with the feel of a carthorse. "But I daresay shared experiences will eventually make that invidious comparison seem irrelevant." Upon completing her journey through South Africa, she sold 'Chris' and returned to Ireland. "Yet I know I'll feel desolately incomplete tomorrow. For three months, over 2,140 miles, Chris and I have been a team." Clearly, Murphy had bonded with her new companion 'Chris,' although he did not replace 'Lear.'[14]

Murphy often compared her bicycles to horses, an experience among cyclists as common as giving their wheels names. When it first appeared, the bicycle often replaced the horse as the favored means of personal, independent travel; many people referred to it as an iron horse or a silent steed, sobriquets that continue to this day. These actions indicate that the rider acknowledged the bicycle's ability to understand what the rider needs and the interest to fulfill that demand. Fred Birchmore named his bicycle after Alexander the Great's war horse, Bucephalus, an apt choice since Birchmore and his bicycle were as inseparable as Alexander and his horse. Shortly after he bought his bicycle in Germany - it was love at first sight - he rode with another student 2,500 miles through Scandinavia in three weeks. Throughout his journey he made references to the bicycle as an "iron horse" on which he "galloped over the hill. . . ." On another occasion, he gave Bucephalus "the reins, the whip and the spur. Riding like an early old Wells Fargo scout with Indians at his heels and in ambush all along the way, we tore through Palestine." Acknowledging his 'I-Thou' relationship, he knew his bicycle had become "more than a mere inanimate piece of metal - it is a real friend." Like so many others before and since, both Murphy and Birchmore knew their wheels to be sentient companions which profoundly affected and perhaps changed them, as Bennett suggests – 'vibrant' matter impacts each of us. These average men and women practiced what Illich sought in *Tools of Conviviality* because they used simple machines, available to most people, to engage in extraordinary activities.[15]

Over the last hundred plus years, the cyclists cited above, along with many, many more of all ages and both genders, acknowledged their wheels as sentient, as an entity with whom they established an 'I-Thou' relationship, beliefs that I share. Over a life in the saddle, I have ridden a variety of wheels, from my childhood companion, a fat-tire Rollfast with a coaster brake to my current friends, three aging Schwinn Paramounts. Though to the untrained eye these three bicycles would seem alike, I can sense the differences in each. Despite similar componentry, frame material and geometry, each has a unique personality, varying from a laid back, forgiving ride to one where I need to pay closer attention to what the bicycle feels. Whether commuting to the office to engage in the daily routine or traveling in the opposite direction to ride away from it, the very act of mounting the bi-

cycle and riding changes my outlook, reminding me that these are sentient objects which affect the way I view and interact with the world around me. Undoubtedly the best known phrase from Twain's "Taming the Bicycle" is his concluding comment, "Get a bicycle. You will not regret it if you live."[16] Turning that around, Bennett and Buber might be persuaded that the only way to completely engage life would be to get a bicycle.

ENDNOTES

1 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010.)
2 Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner Classic, 2000, 1937.)
3 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973.)
4 Bernard Newman, *Baltic Roundabout* (London: H. Jenkins Limited, 1939), p.158.
5 Bernard Newman, *Savoy! Corsica! Tunis!* (London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1940), pp.20, 26, 28, 86, 89.
6 Charles Edwardes, *In Jutland with a Cycle* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ld, 1897), v, pp.157, 158, 162, 174, 175, passim.
7 Mark Twain, "Taming the Bicycle," in *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain*, Charles Neider, ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1963), pp.551-57.
8 David Lamb, *Over the Hills* (New York: Times Books, 1996), passim.
9 Frank Lenz, "Lenz's World Tour Awheel," *Outing*, XXI, Jan., 1893, p.290; March, 1893, pp.446-47.
10 Fred Birchmore, *Around the World on a Bicycle* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1939), passim.
11 Frances E. Willard, *How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle* (original title, *A Wheel within a Wheel*, 1895) (Sunnyvale, CA: Fair Oaks Publishing, 1991), p.22, pp.31-33.
12 Bettina Selby, *Riding to Jerusalem* (London: Peter Bedrick Books, 1986), p.9, 31.
13 Bernard Newman, *Pedalling Poland* (London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1935), pp.16-21.
14 Dervla Murphy, *South from the Limpopo* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1997), pp.50-51, 212-213, 223, 389.
15 Birchmore, *Around*, xi, pp.8, 92, 142.
16 Twain, "Taming," p.557.