

Mock Turtle Soup, Cosmetics, Bicycles, and Psychical Study: Exploring Victorian Scientific

Culture

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Procuring, Preparing, and Cooking Calf's Head in Victorian England

When reformers began advocating for improving the treatment of animals, some people became vegetarians; the majority of people did not. This does not mean that they did not care about animals, but rather that a huge change in diet was not appealing to many. Through cookbooks we can see that people supported humanely treated animals by buying meat that they could tell had been raised in that way. Humane carnivores spread the knowledge that the treatment of the animal, the flavor of the meat, and the health of the diner, were all connected. These cookbooks also show that Victorians did not pretend that meat was not the result of the death of an animal; whole calf's head was a popular dish that exemplified an inability to hide from this fact. Victorian cookbooks reflect the way that people were able to reconciling the increasing sense of obligation that animals should lead the best lives they possibly could, while still eating meat without feeling guilty, by preparing it with care and not wasting any of the animal.

The advances in technology that were the result of the Industrial Revolution facilitated improvement in the quality of ingredients and utensils available to the home cook, as well as the overall quality of the meals that could be prepared. In particular refrigerated train cars meant that meat and other groceries could be shipped over longer distances than was previously possible, adding more variety to the diet. Standardized measuring cups and spoons came into use, and advances were made in wood and gas burning stoves. (Wilson, 57) The enclosed stove made Victorian cooking and dining possible; before it was invented cooks were limited to using the open flame of the fireplace. The cast iron stove was relatively affordable and accessible, and it offered an oven, an indirect heating surface, and access to open flame if desired. (Flanders, 109)

These improvements in cooking led to the rise of the modern cookbook “aimed at the substantial middle-class housewife.” (Wilson, 51)

Eliza Acton wrote the very first, entitled *Modern Cookery*, in 1845. It contains directions for a wide variety of culinary tasks from roasting coffee to properly carving a pheasant. (Acton, 588 and xlii) The far more famous Mrs. Beeton later plagiarized much of this book in her bestselling *Book of Household Management*; part cookbook, part lifestyle guide, it contained information on everything the Victorian Housewife needed to know to run a stylish kitchen. There was another style of cookbook that developed at the same time in the late 1800s intended not for the mistress of the household, but for cooks and those aspiring to become cooks. The most well known in the United States was *The Boston Cooking-School Cookbook* by Fannie Farmer. This no nonsense cookbook was completely focused on cooking and has variations of recipes for different budgets. Women dominated the genre of cookbook writing, and the domestic service profession, “menservants were for the wealthy” but even modest households could afford a kitchen maid. (Flanders, 100) Men did work as professional chefs in hotels and restaurants, a career with much more prestige. One of these men was Robert Wells who used his decades of experience to write *The Pastry Cook and Confectioner’s Guide*. The recipes in this book are far more complicated than those found in any other cookbooks mentioned and detail how to go about making jellies and butter sculptures. (Wells, 72 and 99) One of the most unique collections of Victorian recipes is not a cookbook at all but a work of fiction originally serialized in the *Good Housekeeping* magazine. *Living Well on Ten Dollars a Week* is fictional but the recipes are real, as are the prices given for ingredients. Author Catherine Owen explains she “decided to take the average New York retail prices and not go below them.” (Owen, iv) The story follows a young housewife who teaches her neighbor how to cook, this is by no means

riveting but it contains details of procuring ingredients, like placing weekly orders with the butcher and grocer, which are not included in cookbooks.

Yet each of these books contains instructions on how to clean and prepare a calf's head, despite their coming from a span of several decades, two countries, and authors of vastly different backgrounds. Additionally, all but Wells include at least one recipe for mock turtle soup, and calf's head to be served whole. These dishes took considerable effort, skill, and time to make, and there were many pitfalls where a cook could ruin the meat. Both these dishes spoke to the grandiose sensibilities of Victorian society, and were designed to impress guests. Mock turtle soup uses calf's head to imitate the costly green turtle soup eaten by royalty, and tête de veau was served as the centerpiece of multicourse dinner parties. These cookbooks give information about raising animals, but always with the knowledge that the animal will be eaten. This does not mean that the life and well being of the animal while it is alive is disregarded, in fact the authors recommend buying meat from animals that were raised in a humane way. Practically, this was because the meat would taste better and be less likely to make those eating it sick, but there is evidence of compassion for potential suffering too.

Calves raised for veal required a lot of effort before they got anywhere near the kitchen. Mrs. Beeton makes note in her section on general directions for making soups that the "circumstance greatly affecting the quality of meat is the animal's treatment before it is slaughtered." (Beeton, 5. 95) She explains in 1861, "it is now readily understood" that a mistreated animal would taste worse and be more likely to spoil if circulation had been increased by "ill-use" when slaughtered. (Beeton, 5. 95) Although *Household Management* was not written for vegetarians, vegetarians were not the only Victorians capable of feeling compassion towards animals. Mrs. Beeton demonstrates this by appreciating that "self-interest and humanity alike

dictate kind and gentle treatment of all animals destined to serve as food for man.” (Beeton, 5. 95) This necessity for care when raising livestock was even more necessary when it came to calves.

Calves raised for veal had very short lives. The authors of these cookbooks disagree slightly about the perfect age for a calf to be slaughtered but the range seems to have been between four and ten weeks old. Any younger than four weeks and the veal was “liable to provoke serious gastric disturbances,” any older than ten weeks and the meat became tough. (Farmer, 201) This means that the calf was “destined to die young- to be, indeed, cut off in its comparative infancy.” (Beeton, 18. 845) Once born, the calf had to be weaned much faster than would occur naturally, and so was fed by hand. It needed to be fed high quality milk or it would be too thin; over the course of several weeks the milk was gradually thickened with additives like softened bread, fat, and steamed turnips. This process could not be rushed or the calf would eat itself to death, overloading its digestive system. (Beeton, 18. 852) Once the calf reached ten weeks old it would be slaughtered. Mrs. Farmer warns against buying veal with extremely white flesh as this meant that the calf had been slowly and painfully bled to death over a series of days. (Farmer, 202) Mrs. Beeton calls this method of slaughter “inhumane and disgraceful,” reassuring her readers that this practice was no longer used in England and instead the throat is quickly slit with a sharp knife. (Beeton, 18. 853) The manner of slaughter she describes was probably the best-case scenario, but her book was intended for housewives not animal rights activists.

This neat explanation contrasts with the reality of slaughterhouses in the 19th century. By the time Mrs. Beeton was writing there had been some improvement but in the first half of the century there were thousands of slaughterhouses across England in small, poorly lit locations that did not always match their purpose. (Lee) The sound and smell were a part of life, especially in

London; the abattoir system of large slaughterhouses that were removed from residential areas was not implemented until the end of the 19th century. (Lee) Before this change to a more mechanized system, the biggest problem with slaughter was not that the men doing it were unskilled, they were usually highly skilled; the problem was that they were often intoxicated. (Lee) The unsanitary nature of these slaughterhouses was what finally led to the centralization. Consequently, death was no longer a visible and olfactible part of daily life facilitating a shift towards the dynamic of seeing meat purchased already cleaned and dressed from the butcher as something separate from the death of animals.

Now that the calf was dead and had been split into various cuts of meat by the butcher, it was ready to be cooked. One large exception to this was the calf's head: a cut that while almost impossible to buy today was easily accessible in the 19th century. Preparing and serving calf's head was a complicated and multi-step process that took hours. It began with the household ordering it from the butcher's shop. They would need to specify if they wanted the skin on or off, most recipes recommend leaving the skin on. (Owen, 242) Once the calf's head was delivered it needed to be scalded and scraped. Each one of the five authors gives this direction at the start of a recipe using calf's head with varying levels of detail from Wells who simply directs the cook to "soak the head in water and well clean it," to Acton who clearly details every step of the process. (Wells, 84) She gives direction about how hot the water should be, the length of time the head should be left in the water, and how to scrape off the hair using the blunt side of a knife. (Acton, 210) Owen in contrast simply has her main character Molly ask the butcher to scald and remove the hair for her. (Owen, 242) All of these authors discuss this process but they go about it in different ways. Acton gives clear directions, Beeton gives some, Wells and Farmer seem to assume the reader already knows how to do this, and Owen avoids the issue altogether.

After it is cleaned the head is split and the brains and tongue are removed. This needed to be done very delicately “so as not to injure them,” the head and brain are then rinsed. (Owen, 243) The brain is set aside and the quartered skull would be boiled between 30 minutes and four hours depending on the recipe. If the head needed to be whole for presentation purposes the brain was carefully removed and the whole head was carefully boiled for several hours. (Beeton, 18. 911) This labor-intensive process got the cook to the point where the calf’s head was finally usable for whichever recipe they were using. The “fashionable dish” of choice to make with calf’s head was mock turtle soup. (Owen, 243) All the cookbooks give approximately the same directions for preparing the soup but the ingredients vary from Mrs. Beeton’s extravagant recipe full of spices, to Mrs. Farmer’s which only calls for onion, carrots, stewed tomatoes, cloves, peppercorns, allspice, thyme, and sherry in addition to staples like butter, flour, and stock. (Farmer, 116) The differences in ingredients show the differences in income of the intended audiences of these books. The housewives Mrs. Farmer wrote for were very different from the well to do women running households who Mrs. Beeton wrote for. This also shows, however, that people regardless of their income wanted to be able to serve the fanciest dishes they could.

The most fascinating difference between Acton in 1845 and Beeton in 1861 is their attitude about serving and carving whole calf’s head at the table. Acton states “an entire calf’s head served in its natural form recalls too forcibly the appearance of the living animal to which it has belonged not to be very uninviting.” (Acton, xlii) This is the unavoidable truth of eating calf’s head there is no way to pretend the meat being eaten did not come from a living animal when it was staring from the plate. Mrs. Beeton does not have the same squeamish reaction and instead directs how the head is best carved with special instructions that “the eye is a favorite morsel of many and should be given to those at the table who are known to be the greatest

connoisseurs.” (Beeton, 18. 913) Her position remains consistent throughout the chapter on veal: she accepts the mildly tragic nature of an animal destined to die before it ever has a chance to live, advocates that it has the best life possible, but never forgets that it is an animal destined to be food.

These are cookbooks, not philosophical books about animals; however they recognize that animals play a large part in the lives of humans. In the predominantly agricultural past animals and people worked together as a labor unit, but with industrialization a large segment of the population became removed from livestock and animals became food more than anything else. As the connection between humans and animals grew steadily to be more recognized, so did the obligation of people to do their best to care for livestock before their death and to waste as little of their meat as possible after it. Victorians did not stop eating meat because of animal rights advocacy, they did however carefully select their food and support more humane practices through the meat they bought.

Rouge and the Soap Age: Female Beauty in the Victorian Period

In a period when women's clothing was increasingly restrictive, when the corset and other layers of framework created a fashionable, but artificial silhouette, the face was supposed to be entirely free from artifice. This was not the case. Although there persists a pervasive myth that the only women who wore makeup, especially the dreaded rouge, were actresses and prostitutes, in reality most middle and upper-class Victorian women used cosmetics. The style of makeup explains why this misconception exists. Victorian makeup was, for the most part, homemade, and applied so subtly that it was nearly imperceptible. The overt use of makeup and shop-bought cosmetics were frowned upon by society, but skincare carried none of that stigma. The fashion of lightly applied cosmetics coupled with the urban middle class with its modest disposable income led to the explosive growth of the skincare industry. Victorian facial beauty ideals began with a clear bright complexion; the best way to achieve this ideal was routine skincare, and overall cleanliness, the result of which was the overall improvement of personal hygiene and general health.

One particularly useful guide in discovering the secrets behind the Victorians' so-called natural beauty was Lola Montez's 1858 *The arts of beauty, or, Secrets of a lady's toilet*, containing guidance on comportment, health, and recipes for cosmetics and skincare. Montez was one of the most celebrated beauties of her time. Born in Ireland; she was the mistress of Louis I of Bavaria and had significant influence over him. (Corson, 324) It is unknown whether Montez authored the book herself, but it nevertheless offers an insightful look at the intersection of makeup and morality.

The beauty standard against this ideal Victorian women were measured was that of perfect natural, God-given beauty. The epitome of which was pale glowing skin and blushing

cheeks, plump rosy lips, and “a pair of sparkling eyes fringed by soft, fluttering lashes.” (Marsh, 21) These ideal features are laid out in a pithy manner in a short list entitled “Thirty Points of Beauty Required to make a Woman Perfect,” published in the *Ladies Supplements* section of an 1830 issue of the *London Journal* which neatly divides all aspects of a woman’s body into ten groups of three: “three things white- the skin, the teeth, the hands; three things black- the eyes, eyebrows, and eyelashes; three things red- the lips, the cheeks, and nails.” (The Secrets of Beauty) If the Victorian woman was not born with these gifts there were plenty of compensatory products available to her. “After 1828 those who preferred to buy their cosmetics could go to Guerlain, which supplied lip pomades.” (Corson, 305) By the 1860s, women could purchase translucent and tinted powder, rouge, and dyes for the eyebrows, and in the 1880s, non-toxic mascara. (Marsh, 27) Even earlier than the mid-nineteenth century many recipes could be found for homemade products in magazines and style guides. (Corson, 291) Poudre de riz from China could be used to even out skin tone and whiten the skin, and the elite ladies of the “haut ton” used slightly metallic powders to give the appearance of glowing skin. (Corson, 350) Rouge was used to add a healthy blush to the pale skin favored by the Victorians. Dyes for the eyebrows and eyelashes made from the husks of nuts or soot were used to darken the lashes. The most extreme makeup that existed in the nineteenth century was the practice of face enameling. A lady’s face would be painted with a red and then a white paste that filled in all lines and wrinkles before it was left to dry and harden into a mask for several hours. (Corson, 353) Every text that discusses the practice is forcefully opposed to it because the result was so unnatural and stiff.

Regardless of the products used, the most important characteristic of Victorian makeup was subtlety. In the middle, and certainly near the end, of Victoria’s reign “how much paint was used was beginning to be less important than how much could be seen.” (Corson, 375) It needed

to be totally unobtrusive; Montez advises her readers that when powdering they must pay careful attention to the base of the nose and the hollow of the chin as those were the two areas where “particles might be left visible.” (Montez, 49) Another anonymous authoress, advocating the use of a modest amount of rouge, warns that it must always be applied lighter than the woman’s natural flush or it will look artificial. (Corson, 295) Montez summarized the key principle of Victorian makeup succinctly; “the lady should be careful that sufficient is not left upon the face to be noticeable to the eye of a gentleman.” (Montez, 49) As long as men could not detect whether a woman’s beauty was natural or artificial, makeup could be used clandestinely. The Victorian attitude toward makeup was overwhelmingly negative and judgmental, but it did not result in the abandonment of cosmetics. Instead, women used a much lighter hand compared to the eighteenth-century style of heavy obviously, unnatural makeup.

The best method for achieving this coveted English rose complexion using as little makeup as possible was to focus on skincare. Hair and skincare products did not carry the same stigma that cosmetics did, and were considered to be completely respectable purchases. (Marsh, 24) In addition to the makeup trend of a seemingly bare face, and the repeal of the soap tax in 1852, advances in soap making led to the creation of delicate toilet soap intended for facial use. Before these nineteenth-century developments the same “highly-alkaline common yellow soap” made from animal fat and lye was used to clean the body, hair, face, laundry, and dishes. (Scoffern, 213) These new soaps were much more effective at improving the appearance and health of skin and had moisturizing ingredients and lathering agents to create foam without the need for harsh scrubbing. Unfortunately, by the 1870s the market was flooded with tastefully shaped, colored, and scented soaps that in reality were “made from coarse and deleterious

materials.” (A Perfect Toilet Soap) Soaps meant to feel pleasant on the skin resulted in what Margaret Cunliffe-Owen called “the soap age.” (Cunliffe-Owen in Corson, 370)

William Hesketh Lever launched a new soap in 1885 contained vegetable oil and “after two years the company was selling 450 tons of Sunlight Soap a week.” (Marsh, 33) Procter and Gamble in the United States created their famous Ivory soap in 1879. They marketed it based on the purity of its ingredients and the fact that it floated in the bath. (Marsh, 35) Due to clever marketing Pears transparent soap, invented in 1789, became very popular in England in the 1880s. (Marsh, 36) These soaps were an absolute revelation for skincare and overall cleanliness.

Certain entrepreneurs took advantage of this emerging industry and the new middle class customer with her modest disposable income. In addition to soap, cold cream, skin whiteners, and lip-salve all came to be staples of the Victorian dressing table. (Corson, 316) Although cold cream can be dated to the Second Century CE it was only in the nineteenth century that it became an essential product that could be purchased from virtually every chemist and perfumer. (Marsh, 24) In 1872, Robert Cheeseborough patented his recipe for refined petroleum, which he called Vaseline. (Marsh, 27) This new product was marketed as a medical remedy for minor cuts and burns, but women quickly began to use it as everything from lip balm to hair oil. The skincare industry seduced consumers with the tantalizing idea that they could buy perfect skin.

There were risks involved with using skincare products, and especially cosmetics purchased from a shop. There was no legislation requiring manufacturers to disclose the ingredients of these products. This unknown factor meant that women were advised to make their own concoctions whenever possible. Some of the most common ingredients in store-bought makeup were lead, bismuth, and vermilion. (Corson, 318) Metallic paints in particular were dangerous as they were the most likely to contain lead. The result of which, ladies were warned

was “paralysis, contraction, and convulsion of the limbs, loss of strength,” and “faded, wrinkled, and ghastly” skin. (Walker in Corson, 317) Mass-produced rouge contained vermillion, a pigment made by crushing cinnabar, which contains highly toxic mercury. Mrs. Walker, the author of the 1840 *Female Beauty*, tells her readers that rouge made with vermillion was a “poisonous substance” that would also corrode the teeth. (Walker in Corson, 318) Montez also strongly recommends in the foreword of her book that each lady “become her own manufacturer- not only as a matter of economy, but of safety- as many of the patent cosmetics have... induced diseases of the skin, and of the nervous system, and prematurely ended the days of their victims.” (Montez, xii) Social taboo was not the only deterrent preventing women from purchasing makeup; women were literally putting their lives at risk by using store-bought products.

Safer alternatives included using burnt cork or clove to darken the brows and lashes, and vegetable dyes mixed with white wax as blush and to tint the lips. (Montez, 47) In the case of skincare, which was slightly less dangerous because there was little secrecy surrounding its use, affordability was the main factor that led women to compound their own products. Montez gives a recipe for a skin scrub made from “well sifted bran, white vinegar, five egg yolks, and two grains of ambergris.” (Montez, 33) Ambergris is a waxy substance found in the bile ducts of sperm whales; in this recipe it would have added fragrance to the scrub. Women could easily make their own cold cream by mixing almond oil, white wax, and rose water. (Cold Cream) These homemade preparations were favored because ladies could know with certainty that there were no filler ingredients, or toxic additives in their products.

These artificial aides to beauty were never the first recommended methods for a woman to use in order to improve her looks. Victorian experts stressed the importance of good character as the primary means of becoming beautiful. Physiognomy was widely considered to be

scientific fact that linked morality with health and beauty. (Scoffern, 210) As such, women were advised to rise early, partake in modest exercise, eat light meals, and cultivate her mental acuity. (Montez, 29) It was understood that without this moral and healthy base even the best products would be ineffective. Above all the largest impact Victorian beauty had was on health and hygiene. "Cleanliness is a subject of indisputable consideration in the pursuit of beautiful skin." (Montez, 31) Bathing regularly in addition to washing the face daily were highly recommended for everyone who had the ability to do so. Montez, Scoffern, and Walker all advocated the use of collected rainwater or distilled water whenever possible for washing the face, and for use in products because it felt softer. (Montez, 90) (Scoffern, 212) (Walker in Corson, 319) More importantly for hygiene distilled water and rainwater were much more sanitary than the other water available, especially in London.

Even in the last decades of the nineteenth century, makeup was still hovering between deception and permissible grooming in popular opinion. Slightly more ostentatious makeup found its way back into common usage in the early twentieth century by way of famous actresses promoting the products they claimed to use to women who wanted to look like them. In the Victorian period itself, however, makeup was seen as *déclassé*, which caused skincare to increase in quality and especially availability for the first time. Many women achieved the ideal of healthy natural beauty with the assistance of homemade natural cosmetics. Cleanliness was an essential and explicit part of beauty for the first time, which promoted healthy and hygienic habits to all classes at whatever level they could manage them. As upper-class women tried to distinguish themselves from their working class counterparts by maintaining clean pale skin, lower class women had enough money to buy their own skincare products beginning the democratization of beauty.

The Bicycle Boom of the 1890s and the Women's Health

The Bicycle Boom was a period of time in the 1890s when bicycling became very popular for all classes and genders; this was due in large part to advances in bicycle technology and an economic depression in 1896 during which the bicycle industry was one of the only parts of the economy showing growth. The rise in popularity of cycling, especially among women, led to debate in the medical field about whether cycling was detrimental or beneficial to women's health. Despite the debate among experts, the general consensus was that medically the advantages outweighed the risks for female cyclists. The bicycle had a social impact that needs to be acknowledged before the opinions of doctors can be discussed. Much of what doctors wrote about the bicycle in the 1890s was written to assuage the fears of the public. This does not mean that doctors believed the bicycle to be completely safe for women. Indeed, medical men tended to be cautious especially when it came to potential risks related to reproduction.

In the 19th century bicycles underwent a drastic change from bizarre contraptions without pedals in the 18 teens, to rover safety style bicycles in the 1880s, which were nearly the same as modern bicycles. The bicycle was the vehicle for considerable social change. It was an egalitarian machine that people of any class, age, and most importantly for this paper, any gender could use. For women, the bicycle enabled for the first time freedom with the ability to travel completely unaccompanied. The bicycle helped dispel the myth that women were frail and weak by nature. It brought about changes in fashion away from the restrictive corset, to looser clothing that promoted mobility. The bicycle enabled women to leave the gendered "sphere" they had previously inhabited. (Brock, 1) Women in France and the United States took to the bicycle as early as the 1860s, much earlier than their English counterparts. (Herlihy, 138) It was only with the invention of the tricycle in the 1880s, which made possible cycling without sacrificing

modesty and propriety, that English women finally accepted this new form of transportation. (Herlihy, 208) The rover style bicycle was invented in the mid-1880s, with all the components of a modern bicycle. It was relatively lightweight, had a pair of matching wheels, pedals in the middle of the bike connected to the back wheel by a chain, tires with an inflated tube inside, and a seat at approximately hip height. The Rover bicycle was called a “safety” bicycle because it was relatively low to the ground compared to high wheel bikes like the Penny Farthing. By the 1890s women of all classes had embraced the rover bicycle, and 1/3 of cyclists were women. Workingwomen especially appreciate the ease of travel and the break from spending a day hunched over at machines. (Herlihy, 266) Cycling changed the lives of women by giving them the chance to exercise in less constricting clothing, and the ability to travel independently.

With the so-called Bicycle Boom of the 1890s concerns increased about how healthy cycling actually was for women. As with most issues there was a great deal of debate and contention within the medical community about the pros and cons of cycling for people in general, but especially in regard to women’s reproductive health. The public was especially concerned that taking up the habit of cycling would cause horrific and irreparable damage to women’s bodies. These fears included the uterus becoming displaced or falling out of the woman’s body, women losing their innocence and sexual purity, and loss of fertility. These concerns were not as irrational as they might seem at first glance. Women in the Victorian period rode horses sidesaddle and the idea of sitting astride anything was totally foreign to them. Uterine prolapse, when the uterus drops down and presses against the top of the vagina, is a real medical condition that can be caused by vaginal childbirth, natural aging, or pelvic tumors, but not exercise. In a society where relatively few children survive to adulthood, and married couples are expected to have children, it makes sense that any drop in fertility would be a serious fear,

and something to be avoided at all cost. There is evidence to support that early on in the mid 1880s to the early 1890s doctors were encouraging these fears. Most notably an editor of the *Dominion Medical Monthly*, an Ontario based medical journal, is quoted as saying, “Bicycle riding produces in the female a distinct orgasm.” (Canadian Lancet) This outrageous claim was shot down in the next line, the writer going so far as to say they were embarrassed to admit that *Dominion Medical Monthly* was a Canadian journal.

Many doctors wrote pieces praising the virtues of cycling especially for women. Regularly riding a bicycle was a treatment and cure for a multitude of ailments. Cycling was allegedly beneficial for women’s respiration and digestion, and was a treatment for “insomnia, headache, anemia, and asthma.” (Is Cycling bad?) Dr. O’Neil, an M.D. and a member of the Royal Colleges of Physicians in London, was especially in favor of the bicycle for its “admirable effects on young people, especially girls who spend the greater part of the day shut up in houses.” (In Praise of Cycling) Cycling was also a treatment for hysteria and “in general terms cases where the patient is more or less an invalid, but without the existence of any definite organic disease.” (Bicycling for Women) These articles were all written to address the concerns of the public; *Cycling for Women* was written as a direct response to a *Lancet* reader’s request to answer the question “is cycling good for women?” as his patients were increasingly asking for his advice on the subject. (Cycling for Women) O’Neil also recounts the story of a patient with diabetes whose condition improved greatly after he started cycling even though he had abandoned his strict diet and had stopped taking the medicine he had prescribed. (In praise of cycling) Notably, all these articles were published in 1896, with one 1895 exception, suggesting that that year marks a tipping point in the overall opinion of medical professionals on the nature of the bicycle as a vehicle of health rather than a potential threat to the health of their patients.

Cycling was even preferred by some doctors over horseback riding. Dr. Dickenson of Brooklyn argued, “The fashionable contorted seat does not develop the body symmetrically” and that women put undue strain on one side of their bodies by riding sidesaddle. (Bicycle or Horse) Dr. Garrigues, a professor of gynecology and obstetrics, also was in favor of women riding bicycles instead of horses. He found cycling to be “more wholesome than horseback riding” and “freer from accidents.” (Is cycling bad) Dr. W. S. Playfair, a Scottish obstetric physician, had a similar opinion that any chaffing that occurred from the saddle of a bicycle could just as easily have been caused by a horse saddle, and that there was “no reason for cycling to be hurtful.” (Cycling for Women) It appears that by the middle of the Bicycle Boom doctors agreed that cycling promoted healthiness in their patients and that several considered the bicycle to be an improvement over horseback riding.

This is not to say that doctors universally encouraged all to take up cycling, or that they thought that there were no risks involved. Those who were already ill, severely out of shape, had some variety of pelvic disease, young girls, and older women were all recommended to avoid cycling. While it was generally accepted that moderate exercise with the bicycle was excellent for healthy young women, becoming an avid cyclist was not recommended to all. (The Bicycle and Diseases) People became caught up in the bicycle craze with regard “neither to age, nor previous habits, nor their physical condition” which led to injuries and accidents. (Is cycling healthy) It is noted that the same result would have occurred if society flocked to “running or rowing or mountain climbing,” and that this outcome was inevitable but unrelated to the bicycle itself. (Is cycling healthy) The succinct conclusion from the *Lancet* article “Is Cycling Healthy?” was that cycling was not good for everyone and “if abused good for nobody.” Moderation was

key especially for women who were expected to preserve not only their health, but also the health of any children they might have in the future.

The issue of maternity and the impact of cycling on both a woman's ability to have children and the potential difficulty of her labor were fiercely debated. Dr. McVitie, a member of the Royal College of Physicians of England, shared two of his cases with the *Lancet* in his article on the impact of cycling on childbirth; he found that "frequent bicycle exercise... may act as a cause of delay in the second stage of labor." (McVitie) He concluded that cycling must have caused the "unusually tough and unyielding" perineum. Fortunately, both babies were eventually delivered with some assistance from forceps and a considerable delay. (McVitie) Garrigues had an opposing view, believing that the fear "that the enlargement of muscle consequent on cycling might take place where it would aggravate the ordeal of maternity" was entirely groundless. (Is Cycling Bad) He argued that cycling leads a woman to be healthier and better prepared for labor than her counterpart who did not exercise.

The pelvis itself was also a concern with regards to the potential impact of cycling on a woman's ability to have children. The pelvis was not considered totally mature until women were 20 and the bone was fully ossified; "before that time its shape is decidedly influenced by pressure."

(Bicycling for Women) This led to the fear that the saddle of the bicycle would cause the pelvis to be "pushed upwards and inwards, so as to seriously curtail the... outlet of the pelvis."

(Bicycling for Women) Women were advised against cycling during pregnancy because it could cause a miscarriage or bring on premature labor.

One anomaly in this pattern of doctors who were cautiously in favor of the bicycle was Dr. Keith, a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, who recounted the stories of three in which he found the bicycle to be the direct cause of pelvic trouble in his patients. His

first case was that of a 22-year-old unmarried woman who fell off her bicycle, but had no apparent injuries. Over the next few months her menstrual period was very light and then halted entirely. At the same time she “had the typical appearance of a patient suffering from melancholia.” (Three Cases) When the Keith examined her he found that “the uterus had gradually turned over. Of this there can be no doubt.” (Three Cases) He describes the process of returning the uterus to its proper place and tells the reader that she is now married and “has been delivered of her first child.” (Three Cases) After the initial mention of the accident Keith does not mention the bicycle again; it has almost nothing to do with the case itself. The other issue is that retroverted uteruses are genetic and perfectly normal. Occasionally factors like fibroids, childbirth, or endometriosis can cause the uterus to become retroverted, but it is unlikely that a fall from a bicycle would have this result. Keith goes into much less detail with the second and third cases, but in both he states that “the symptoms began very definitely at the time when the patient was learning to bicycle.” (Three Cases) This article was published in 1899, three years after the flurry of doctors writing about the benefits of cycling, and Keith’s position against the bicycle seems outdated. An article in the *British Medical Journal* from the same year contradicts these stories citing several studies showing that “exercise does not depress the abdominal viscera” and therefore “the fear of ‘displacements’ is exaggerated” (The Bicycle and Diseases) Keith’s cases reflect societal concerns about the safety of women in regards to their ability to have children, but he does not see the bicycle as anything more than a threat.

The opinion of the medical community was generally that the bicycle was a means of exercise safer than horseback riding and more beneficial than walking. Cycling was used to treat a multitude of mental and physical ailments from hysteria to anemia. The greatest point of contention about the bicycle was the potential impact on women’s reproductive organs. Some

doctors claimed that cycling made childbirth more difficult, while others argued made labor easier. The bicycle contributed to dispelling the idea that women were naturally weak and frail, and the medical discussion surrounding women cyclists reflects this shift in opinion.

Skeptical Belief and the Coexistence of Science and Spiritualism: Frank Podmore 1856-1910

Frank Podmore exemplified the nuanced position Victorians held; he brought scientific skepticism and spiritualism together, which facilitated psychical research being taken seriously by the broader scientific community.

Podmore, born in 1856, was the third son of Reverend Thompson Podmore and his wife Georgiana Elizabeth. He attended Oxford and earned a first in natural science, and got his master's in the same field in 1883. (Gauld) Podmore's three lifelong interests can be traced back to his time at University: science, socialism and reform, and spiritualism. It was while he was at Oxford that he met Edward Pease at a séance. (Sidgwick) Pease and Podmore, inspired by the utopian philosophy of Thomas Davidson, formed the Fellowship of New Life in 1884. This would later become the Fabian Society. (MacKenzie) The goal of this socialist group was to "transform society by setting an example of clean and simple living for others to follow." Members of the Fabian Society sought to do so by means of political involvement. Although this paper will not focus on the Fabian Society it is important to understand its inception and goals, as they were congruent with Podmore's involvement with the Society for Psychical Research. Podmore was one of the first members of the SPR and contributed extensively and consistently over the course of his involvement with the society. Podmore worked at the London post office for most of his life, but was forced to leave without pension in 1907 because of allegations of homosexuality. (Gauld) Podmore was found drowned in a pond in 1910, and despite the odd circumstances suggesting suicide, it was ruled an accident. (Frank Podmore Dead) Podmore served on the council of the SPR for an unbroken 27 years from the beginning of the society until his death.

Over the course of his years as a member of the SPR Podmore investigated many cases of psychological phenomena and critically reviewed the works of other psychological researchers. Podmore's reports of his investigations tend to follow a pattern. He starts by explaining why he was brought in to investigate a place, and then he lists the people involved before describing in detail the layout of the room or building. (Podmore, *Telepathic*) After this Podmore reports all previous instances of the disturbance, and then finally gives an account of everything he witnessed during his investigation. (*Studies in Psychological Research*) At the very end, if anything unusual occurred, he offers an explanation for the events that took place. (*Poltergeists*) The very first of these investigation reports follows this exact pattern, and Podmore explains the Worksop Disturbances as being the result of mechanical disturbance and the probable involvement of some of the people who witnessed the events. However, because the results were inconclusive Podmore reports them as such along with his own suspicions. (*Report of the Worksop Disturbances*)

Podmore's scientific background that made him such a good researcher also led him to be incredibly skeptical of most psychological ideas, especially when it came to the intersection of the physical and spiritual worlds as in the case of poltergeists and séances. After his death Podmore was memorialized in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research*; "He was essentially a critic, and in his later years a skeptical critic." (Smith) Podmore's criticism was an important aspect of the investigations of the SPR; he slowed the impatient passion of enthusiastic members and reminded them of "the necessity of making haste slowly," which led the findings of the Society to be taken more seriously. (Smith) Despite his well-known criticism Podmore was not entirely skeptical, and the aspect of spiritualism he was most open to was telepathy. Even in this field, however, he had doubts. Podmore believed in the ability of two living people to

communicate telepathically, but was highly skeptical of communication between the living and the dead. (Sidgwick) Podmore did not dismiss the results of his investigations as erroneous, but he did not accept “the explanation... of communication from the dead;” he found telepathy to be a more reasonable explanation for the phenomena he witnessed. (Podmore in Sidgwick)

Podmore thought of ghosts as “collective telepathic hallucinations.” (Podmore in Lang) This way of thinking eliminated the complication of death from the situation, which made the prospect of investigating ghosts and telepathic communication in general more reasonable for Podmore.

(Apparitions) Despite his skepticism and interest in one particular aspect of psychical research, Podmore seems to have been willing to investigate anything the SPR asked him to. He investigated haunted houses, poltergeists, hallucinations, trances, premonitions, séances, and mediums among others. (Proceedings for the Society of Psychical Research) His interest in the field did not impair his ability to question his own findings and those of his colleagues.

The membership of the Society for Psychical Research was respectable and from its inception. The roster of members included respected scientists, scholars, university professors, medical doctors, members of the clergy, nobility, and military, as well as both married and single women. (Officers and Council for 1883) The Victorian fascination with spiritualism was an intersectional phenomenon, and could even be observed in the lower classes in the form of penny dreadfuls. As such, Podmore’s writings were seriously examined as scholarly works. His 1897 book *Studies in Psychical Research* was given a glowing review in the *British Medical Journal* the year after its publication. The review praised Podmore’s commitment to scientific investigations, as well as his ability to recount events “with no little dramatic skill.” (Reviews) The conclusion of the anonymous reviewer was that “Mr. Podmore’s book is well worth reading, and it is agreeable reading, for the style is generally vigorous, and not infrequently brilliant.”

(Reviews) The *British Medical Journal* did not receive all works on spiritualism with the same level of warmth; a published lecture titled “Science and Immortality” given by a Professor Osler at Harvard was heavily criticized and the reviewer recommends Podmore’s *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism* “to any one who wishes to understand the present” understanding of immortality. (Science and Immortality) Podmore’s work is recommended because he recounts “a long series of incidents in which sometimes fraud and sometimes self-deception preponderated,” whereas Osler discusses a single case and is overly emotional about his subject, allowing his faith in the idea of immortality to cloud his judgment. (Science and Immortality) These disparate reviews show that psychical research was taken just as seriously as other scientific investigations, and even though Podmore’s work was imperfect the fact that he recounted events as precisely as he could and made an effort to remove all possible variables made his work scientifically credible. This in turn demonstrates that even though the scientific community might seem to be wholly against spiritualism, this was not the case. Their position seems to have aligned with Podmore’s, not closed to the possibility of spiritualism, but skeptical.

Despite this praise for the scientific nature of his investigations, some felt that Podmore’s work was at times obstructed by his skepticism. The person who pointed this out most succinctly was Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle who joined the SPR in 1893. (List of Members and Associates) Doyle said of his *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism* that, “Mr. Frank Podmore brought together a large number of the facts, and, by ignoring those which did not suit his purpose, endeavored to suggest the worthlessness of most of the rest, especially the physical phenomena, which in his view were mainly the result of fraud.” (The History of Spiritualism) This criticism shows that not every spiritualist and psychical researcher believed in every aspect of the supernatural incidents they investigated.

In his memoirs Doyle recounts an investigation into a haunted house in Dorchester he had participated in at the request of the SPR. Doyle, Podmore, and another member of the society Dr. Scott, performed a two-night investigation of the house; in the middle of the second night Podmore and Doyle heard “a fearsome uproar broke out” and the two men along with the master of the house searched the property but found nothing. (Memories and Adventures) According to Doyle, Podmore sent in a report on the investigation to the society in which he concluded that the young master of the house must have been responsible for the tumult. (Doyle) Doyle claimed that this was “absolutely impossible” because the man had been in the room with them the entire time. (Memories and Adventures) Several years later the house burned down, and the body of a young girl was found. Doyle saw this as absolute proof that the spirit of the girl had been haunting the house and his belief in the spirits and the metaphysical world was proven beyond any doubt. Podmore’s conclusions about the case rankled Doyle, as he believed Podmore had misrepresented the events; “I learned from this... that while we should be most critical of all psychic assertions, if we are to get at the truth, we should be equally critical of all negatives and especially of so-called ‘exposures’ in this subject.” (Memories and Adventures) In spite of this disagreement, Doyle cites Podmore as an inspiration for his two-volume work *The History of Spiritualism*.

Frank Podmore was an integral member of the Society for Psychical Research in its early years. His scientific background, and skepticism led him to be a great asset to the SPR and a necessary counter balance to other members who were anxious to prove the existence of the spiritual world and other psychical phenomena. While Podmore was cautious he was not wholly skeptical of all aspects of spiritualism. He believed in the possibility of telepathic communication between living people and researched it thoroughly. Podmore facilitated a connection between

the SPR and the broader scientific community, and the *British Medical Journal* in particular supported his works because of their thoroughness. Some, like Arthur Conan Doyle, felt that Podmore took this skepticism too far at times and was unable to accept the possibility of spiritual explanations. Membership in the SPR was just one aspect of Podmore's life, but he made a large impact of the field by demanding serious scientific research influenced as little as possible by the biases of the researchers.

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