

## SHOULD YOUNG CHILDREN CYCLE ?

Dr. E. B. TURNER, writing in the *Day's News*, says :—The question whether young children between the ages, say of 6 and 12 should be allowed to cycle, and, if allowed, how much they may indulge in the pastime without incurring the risk of injury, is one of considerable interest, and has of late provoked discussion. This, like most medical questions, is a subject on which no man, who forms his opinion after due investigation, can pronounce dogmatically or lay down any strict and invariable rules. For there are children and children, and what for one small boy or girl might be merely healthy and beneficial exercise, for another might mean physical ruin. But while each case must be judged on its own merits, one fundamental principle may be clearly enunciated, namely, that no young child with any organic weakness, whether of heart, lungs, joints, or nervous system, should be allowed to mount a machine under any circumstances whatever. Eliminating, then, those who, at this period of their lives, are disqualified by nature, there is no doubt that the exercise of cycling, properly regulated and adjusted to the capabilities of the individual, is one of the very best forms of recreation that can be partaken of by children of both sexes at an early age. It develops the body, and the self-reliance and resource entailed by the management of a machine tends to strengthen and enlarge the mental and intellectual faculties. But, granting all this, great care is still necessary, and a few simple precautions, easily taken, may ensure good and avert evil. First, at what age should a child begin to ride? For most children six is quite early enough, and even six for many is too early. Great care should be taken in choosing and fitting a machine to a young rider. Any old cast-off creak will not do, and may even produce disease and deformity. The machine selected should be light, of course, the gearing low enough to admit of a short crank throw (four inches is generally ample for a child of six or seven), and the saddle and spring properly adapted to the weight and size of the rider. But most important of all is the length of reach. This should be quite short; the child should be able easily to touch the pedal at its lowest point with the heel. Nothing is more injurious than a reach so long as the unfortunate boy appears as if riding on a rail, just touching the pedals with the tips of his toes. Then the position must be carefully studied. Young growing tissues are easily distorted, and a saddle too far back and handles too far forward would certainly cause a curved spine and a permanent camel's hump. The

pack of the saddle two inches behind the crank axle, and the handles so brought round and back that the child can sit perfectly upright on the machine, are two things that must be insisted on in buying either a bicycle or a tricycle for a young rider. If these essentials are present the question of tyres may be left to the pocket and inclination of the parents. But when the child is pronounced fit, and is provided with an ideal machine, the very important question arises, How far may he ride it? This is a question that cannot be answered in miles and furlongs. No absolute rule can be laid down, as no two children of the same age are alike. The only thing that can be said is that anything more than moderate fatigue is injurious. A young growing child suffers much from over-exertion. Though at the finish of a ride he may seem fairly fresh, still, if he has done too much the results will be apparent soon after, and a sleepless night and a distaste for food will show that the system is poisoned by the products of its own waste. And it must be remembered, while treating of this subject, that excessive speed, is more injurious than excessive distance—and excessive hill-climbing than either. To sum up in a few words, a sound child, six years old, properly fitted with a machine, and riding in proper form and position, may cycle within the limits of moderation, and derive benefit and suffer no harm from the exercise.