

A SKETCH OF AMERICAN BICYCLING AND ITS FOUNDER.

BY CHARLES E. PRATT.



AMERICAN bicycling dates from 1865 when Pierre Lallement constructed, at Ansonia, Conn., the first road-worthy bicycle* and rode from that town to New Haven; yet prior to the year 1878 it can hardly be said to have had a foundation. Lallement, incapable in every way himself of promoting the use of his machine here;

went back to Paris and interested there some makers of similar carriages, who improved and developed the manufacture and use of the machine for France. The French passed it on to the English. A Frenchman rode a bicycle on the stage, doing with it feats of skill that excited the wonder of spectators. The Hanlon brothers saw it, and they obtained and themselves improved and helped to perfect bicycles, and used them on the boards of the principal theatres of the United States.

Other Americans contributed to the development of the machine, both on and off the stage, but principally in exhibition halls. Rinks sprang up more multitudinous than the roller-skating rinks subsequently became. The carriage makers, seizing upon the new fad, turned out hundreds and thousands of machines, vying with each other to make the cheapest rather than the best for their purposes. Inventors went over almost the whole ground, and left their traces on every line of improvement which has been developed since. Large wheels and small wheels, cranks and chains and levers and clutches,

wood and iron and steel, tube and rubber and spring, two wheels and three wheels and four wheels, all the sensible and all the absurd theories and guesses were aired, and the Patent Office was almost clogged. In 1870 the collapse came, and after July of that year, except in the city of Detroit, you could hardly find a velocipede in use or on exhibition, except in a junk shop

To be sure, after that there was Col. H. de Clermont riding in San Francisco. There was a gentleman in Montreal, I believe, whose name escapes my memory, as does the name of another gentleman living in Philadelphia, who also had learned the art abroad and brought back with him the instrument. W. M. Wright, of New York, also had his bicycle, learned and brought with him from Paris.

In the spring of 1876 John Keen, long so prominently before the public as an English racing bicyclist, brought his bicycle to New York. At the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, the same year, there were some bicycles exhibited. After that Timms & Lawford, of Baltimore, became the first importers in point of time in the revival of bicycling. They imported among others a machine for Alfred D. Chandler, of Boston, who rode it quite constantly in that city; and to that city Mr. J. G. Dalton brought other of the machines of Timms & Lawford. His stock became the nucleus of the later stock of Cunningham, Heath & Co., of Boston, Mass., who, in the fall of 1877, began to take orders for foreign machines, and finally established an importing house, which (and its successors) continued for several years.

In the summer of 1877 Mr. John Harrington, known in America not only for his very agreeable cradle spring for bicycles, but also for his delightful steel-tube chimes, gave the finishing impulse to the conversion of Col. Albert A. Pope, who had had a bicycle made for him and learned to ride it on the back ways and quiet streets of Newton, near Boston. Colonel Pope also ordered machines from abroad, made his company—the Pope Manufacturing Company—an importing house for bicycles, visited the principal

*An account of this most interesting machine and of the inventor's, use of it was written by me after exhaustive examination of all sources of information, and published with illustrations in *OUTING*, October, 1883.

centres of bicycling in England, and in the spring of 1878 entered upon the manufacture in America of the best type of modern bicycle. The foundation of modern American bicycling dates from the

history of bicycling as an art or as a sport, or of the literature of bicycling; I merely offer a sketch of the foundation and the founder of American bicycling. I do not pretend to write this sketch from an en-



COL. ALBERT A. POPE.

spring of 1878, or, if its devotees like to make the most of beginnings, from the summer of 1877, when Colonel Pope and John Harrington made and rode the first American bicycle of the second or re-nascent period.

Now I do not propose here to write the

tirely impartial standpoint, but from an appreciative standpoint. Wheelmen, like all others, look for a personal appreciation; I would show them that they can well find this in bicycling, and that when they find it it will be Colonel Pope.

There were several noticeable differ-



ences between the conditions of the revival of bicycling in 1877 and those of the first introduction of bicycling. In 1867 and 1868 there was, to be sure, the remembrance of the *célerifère* or two-wheeled low machine with seat and steering handles, but no pedals, the driving being either by thrust of the toes on the ground or by gravity on a downward slope. Charles Sumner was the most prominent American who in his youthful days used this earlier machine as an aid to his trips between Boston and Cambridge. However, that was but a pleasant and grotesque memory. The reappearance of the velocipede in the United States in 1867 was in its new capacity as an exhibition machine for the hall, the rink and the theatrical stage. It was there that its capacities first obtained recognition. Its promises were all taken at a premium. The trade had had no discipline; the public had had no experience. Managers of patents collected \$20 to \$27 royalty where they could. Carriage makers made the machines, paying royalties when they had to, avoiding them when they could, making the machines as cheap as possible and selling them as dear as possible. Human power was not weighed by ounces nor thousandths of an inch considered in constructing the mechanism for its use.

Now in the fall, 1877, there were about a dozen gentlemen riding bicycles, and there was a modification in the exhibition phase of the matter. The few gentlemen who rode the machine had much improved instruments, more finely made, lighter in weight, better proportioned and adapted for use, and they used them as a vehicle upon the roads. They made a good impression upon the public, or that portion of the public which could see

them; but "the conies are a feeble folk," and so were the bicyclers then.

The great public that had command of the streets and roads and drove horses, and made the city ordinances and the police regulations and even the State statutes, and had most influence with the magistrates, not only did not use bicycles but did not favor them. If they did not take them for toys and playthings, and look contemptuously upon the men who put on again the short breeches of boyhood and disported themselves upon these acrobatic contrivances, they did at least have a lively sense of the failure and disaster and uselessness of the velocipede. In 1878 this public hardly knew what to do with the bicycle except to suppress it. Horses were sometimes frightened, and people oftener. The Boston police department began to intercept them and warn them off the streets under an old order made years before. Adverse ordinances were revived against them in Newport, New York, Brooklyn, Princeton, Hartford, almost everywhere indeed where in 1878 or 1879 the bicycle made its appearance. But those who rode were now of such character and standing that their example made a comparatively good impression on the community, and they were able to defend their chosen recreation to good effect in the public press.

Now came the opportunity of the patent agent, and the owners of American patents pulled out their dusty parchments and promptly made their claims for royalties, amounting by the beginning of 1879 to about \$27,500 in the aggregate on each machine. The first suit by them after this revival was brought against Cunningham, Heath & Co., and the first license after the revival was taken by the Pope Manufacturing Company.

The first club after the revival was the Boston Bicycle Club, formed in Boston in February, 1878.*

The first bicycling paper after the revival, if that might be called so which was really the irregularly-issued trade journal of Cunningham, Heath & Co., was the *American Bicycling Journal*, the first number of which bears date in December, 1877. The first real bicycling journal was the *Bicycling World*, founded in October, 1879, the first number of which bore date November 15, 1879. The founders of this paper, which has proved

*See a sketch of this club in *OUTING*, Vol. I., p. 401.

to be a hardy and surviving one, were Mr. E. C. Hodges financially and C. E. Pratt, Esq., editorially, neither of whom was in any way connected with the trade. The latter was author also of the first book after the revival, "The American Bicycler," published by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. in May, 1879.

It may thus be seen that 1877 was day-break, and 1878 was morning twilight, and 1879 was sunrise for the revival of bicycling.

To particularize for our readers: in the first period there were the beginnings in exhibitions and on the road; there were achievements, there were patents, improvements, trade royalties, litigation, contests, records, clubs, journals, books; but there was no founder for the industry or the recreation, consequently neither gained a stable foundation, and both, when the floods came and the winds blew, fell.

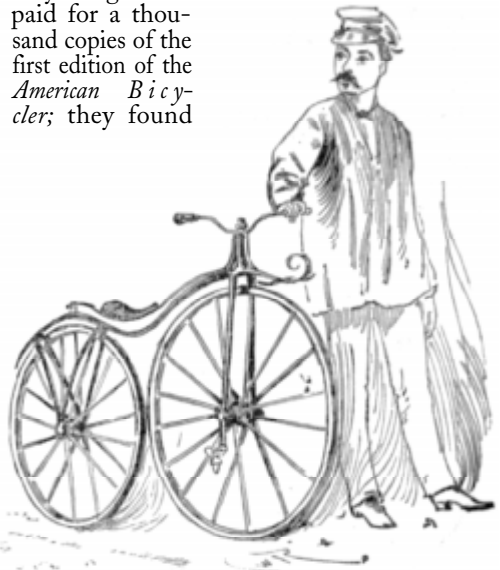
In the second period there was no public welcome, as there had been in the first; the memory of failure and disaster was still alive, the prejudice against a thing which had proved a failure. This public welcome was the thing that the new period lacked which the old period had. But the new period had the thing that the first had not; it had a founder. Colonel Pope organized the Pope Manufacturing Company, and his company not only founded the business, but substantially founded the recreation. Not all that he did in the way of founding it can be definitely narrated in an article like this; but let us look at some of the things. And when I speak of Colonel Pope or of the Pope Manufacturing Company it means substantially the same thing. The first thing they did was to take their bearings as to the proper construction and the practicable uses of the machines and establish the importing business. The second was to examine and find a practicable way dealing with the patent question.

At first they took license under old patents they could not buy, and then they bought the patents they could. The next thing they did was to promote the public good will toward the bicycle, by securing that those with practiced tongues and pens should champion it to the public, and by steady, watchful and strong resistance to public opposition, wherever it showed itself, in park board or police department, or court or legislature.

Colonel Pope was the first to secure considerate and responsible legal opinion

upon the rights of wheelmen in the roads and the parks of the States of this country and to make it available; and his company has seen to it from the spring of 1878, when it procured counsel to appear before a committee of the Boston City Government, until the present, to pay expenses, to supply counsel, to furnish evidence, to defend the cause of the wheelman in the civil and criminal courts, before county boards and city boards and before State legislatures. When it was a question of entire exclusion from Central Park, in New York, under the promises and assurances of protection of Colonel Pope three New York wheelmen rode into Central Park, and were arrested and imprisoned and released upon petition for a writ of habeas corpus, these incidents furnishing the beginning of a litigation which cost the Pope Manufacturing Company nearly eight thousand dollars, and which ended, as things sometimes will, by a sort of perversity of circumstances, in a technical defeat in the court and a substantial victory in the park.

At the same time they promoted the literature of the subject by importing and distributing gratuitously foreign publications and by securing the publication of American contributions. Old wheelmen will recollect that they bought part of the 1878 and 1879 editions of the English "Indispensable Bicyclists' Handbook," bound them and distributed them gratis; they bought and paid for a thousand copies of the first edition of the *American Bicycler*; they found





writers like J. T. Trowbridge, and Mark Twain, and Will Carleton, and induced them to write on the subject; they favored every worthy publication relating to bicycling, and helped by patronage the *Bicycling World* and the *Wheel*; they founded and promoted, to the extent of about sixty thousand dollars, the magazine started under the name of the *Wheelman*, and flourishing now under the title on the cover of this magazine. So much for some instances of their encouragement of the literature of cycling. I might refer to rewards offered in the way of prizes for articles by clergymen and articles by physicians. I might also give a list of the publications actually printed for and circulated by the company itself.

Their contribution to the fine art side of bicycling representation is also not small, not only in the patronage afforded them by their own publications, but by having always employed in their advertising designs and illustrations artists like Ipsen and Copeland and Reed and Yendell. Deserving of special mention is an oil painting conceived in the true spirit of art and of wheelmanship by Henry Sandham and executed with his well-known effectiveness, a large canvas that will be of value in years to come. Another piece of their art work which

will probably endure is the Columbia bicycle prize cup, which was at once the most original, artistic, unique and the costliest of athletic prizes offered in this last quarter century. The artist, Ipsen, was given full freedom and rendered with great spirit the old hunting horn of his Scandinavian ancestry, and the execution in, repoussé silver work was such as to delight connoisseurs.*

All remember the journey of Thomas Stevens around the world on a bicycle, accomplished for OUTING by the pluck and perseverance of that born explorer, and so interestingly told in Volumes VII.-XII. This famous journey would probably never have been accomplished had not OUTING been backed by the encouragement and pecuniary aid of Colonel Pope, but not everybody knows so well how many other excursions and accomplishments, from the "Wheel Around the Hub" in 1879, to the clergymen's tour in 1885 and later, had been substantially aided by the same far-seeing company.

The recent establishment by Colonel Pope's donation of an option in highway engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is but the latest incident in a course of efforts to awaken the public intelligence and stimulate the public volition on the subject of improved carriage highways, a reform that Colonel Pope, while aiding to the extent of his ability with tongue and pen and generous contribution, has believed to promise as much of value to this country in the future as the improvements in the steel-railed highways for railway carriages have accomplished in this last generation.

Now, these are but instances used to illustrate the influence and efforts, and the directions of those efforts, of the Pope Manufacturing Company in founding upon a substantial and enduring basis the industry and the pastime of bicycling in America. What they did of more value, because without it all the others were of no avail, was this: They established a good, substantial, merchant-like, responsible business house devoted to that industry, made it respectable and respected among the business concerns of the country, and gained for the industry a credit which could not have been gained in any other way.

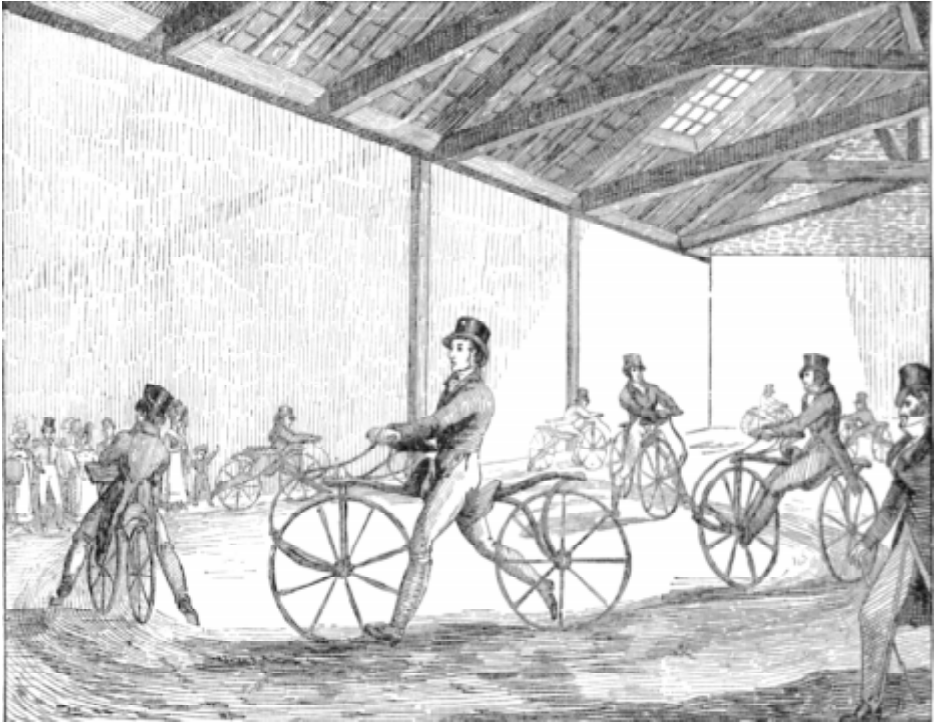
The Pope Manufacturing Company is not only the oldest, but it is the only surviving bicycle concern, whether importing

*See for illustration OUTING, Vol. III., p. 82.

or manufacturing, of the first dozen and of the first five years. Besides establishing and keeping a good sound business itself, it projected and established a network of "agencies," or centres of distribution, information, influence and protection in all the principal cities and towns of the United States, a system still in vogue, and which of those controlled by the Pope Manufacturing Company now numbers about six hundred. It deserves to be clearly remembered that Colonel Pope not only began the manufacture first, but that he did four things,

rate of royalty and licensed other parties as fast as they could be found to make a substantial addition to the business of bicycle construction and distribution; and he so made use of the patent system in vogue as to make it contribute to the building up of the bicycling industry, not only in the hands of his own concern, but of all of those who came helpfully into it.

Third, he projected and established the system of dependent dealers, or agencies, which has been followed, not only by his own concern, but by other concerns in the business. These agencies have been



THE DRAISINE IN ENGLAND. (Reproduced from *Outing*, Vol. III., p. 6.)

for either one of which he might have deserved the title of founder of the industry and the art both.

First, he furnished all the capital and credit required for the business (afterward allowing his associates to share in the increment) when no other good business man or company would contribute either capital or credit for it.

Second, he gathered up the patents that were in existence relating to bicycle construction into substantially one holding, and, instead of using them as a monopolist would, fixed a reasonable, equitable

like the downward rooting branches of the banyan tree, forming so many trees themselves, but still a part of the original growth, and secure of their life because of the sap from the parent stem. Again, he established and has maintained for a dozen years, and has enabled the others in the business to maintain, a uniform price list and a uniform rate or schedule of discounts to dealers. That is to say the price of a Columbia bicycle was the same in Calais, Me., that it was in Denver, Col.; it could be had of the local agents at exactly the price, nothing less

and nothing more; it could be had from the home warerooms by the private purchaser at precisely that price and the purchaser could pay the freight in addition; the agent in Buffalo had the same schedule of discounts as the agent in New Orleans.

Now, this may not seem to be of very great interest to the great multitude of riders of bicycles, but it has this interest—that it caused the various machines to hold their value when they had become the property of the riders, and prevented the business from being cut up and collapsing. Not only was the old prejudice outlived and fought down, but a new feeling of confidence and faith in the art of bicycling was brought about, and a new trust and confidence in the business secured; and the business had practically been conducted for nearly a dozen years before a failure occurred that was sufficient to even jar the trade or to cut the prices to any appreciable extent. The job-lot era, if coming at all, as it must undoubtedly come some time, has so far been indicated by exceedingly mild symptoms manifested in 1890.

I have not meant to intimate in this article that Colonel Pope invented the bicycle himself or that he made one himself; nor do I intend to disparage in the least the many who, whether inventors, or writers, or racing men, or business men, or artists, or club or league officers, have contributed so much to make the great symposium of bicycling what it is. What I mean to say is that, as Robert Fulton, who never invented a steamboat and never made one, was the founder of practical steamboating—because by his faith, and knowledge, and persistence, and pluck, and enthusiasm, and strength of character, he was enabled to carry large experiments to a successful end, to enlist and remunerate capital, and finally to interest the Government of the United States, and cause the art of steam navigation to be firmly established—just in a parallel manner Colonel Pope and his company became founder of the bicycle industry, and by patronage and support, and by founding and sustaining the conditions upon which it depended, became founder of the art.

In 1878 there were two other importers and two other makers in a small way. In 1890 there were twenty importers, and fifty or sixty makers of bicycles in the United States. Of course some of these have

achieved wide repute and great commercial success, but the concern which Colonel Pope has built up out-tops them all; indeed it is the largest in the world and does the largest volume of business of any bicycling establishment in the world.

Time was when nearly every wheelman in the United States knew Colonel Pope personally, and met him on wheel on excursions and at the L. A. W. meets. Now, when they are so many and their opportunities comparatively fewer for seeing and knowing him personally, it may be interesting to them to have from the pen of one who knows him well a little personal description.

At the present time Col. Albert A. Pope is a man physically above the average in height, weight and strength. He is alert in movement and resolute and definite in action. He is of middle age, his hair and beard being flecked with gray. His complexion is clear and tinged always with the pink of good blood and fresh life. His restless and mysterious brown eyes, in which the boundary between pupil and iris is seldom observable, look out from under prominent brows. His lips are full and his teeth perfect, and his voice is deep, strong, modulated and vibrant: He impresses one as being full of life and hope and resolution, made for a master, but benevolent and sympathetic as well as stern and unflinching.

He is as much above the average man mentally as he is physically. He has quick perception, good memory, vivid imagination, logical and rapid mental movement toward conclusions and a judgment of men and things that sometimes appears to go by leaps instead of steps, it is so swift. Decision, precision, promptness he has in himself as well as in his business. He has great tenacity of purpose, the patience to wait and the boldness to seize. I should say his mental appetites are as strong as his physical, and are equally in harness. He is besides a good fisherman of good stories, and is a good fisherman in improving the stories that he tells. He has much of that personal vanity on which, as Alexander Smith has said, "a man receives the shocks of life," and which "is not only instrumental in keeping a man alive and in heart, but, in its lighter manifestations, is a great sweetener of social existence." But there are few men having ability and wealth and position of power as he has so ready to take the advice of others, to suspend or withdraw an

opinion, to accept a suggestion, or to acknowledge an error.

Colonel Pope was born for a career, has the long look ahead and the tenacity of purpose for more than he has attained; and he is yet to be reckoned with. Although still well under fifty and when he took in hand the bicycle industry was thirteen years younger, he had already had two careers before. His mercantile career was begun in boyhood, so to speak, when, owing to the reverses of fortune which his father had to endure, the young Albert learned to find his own spending money and contribute to that of the family, not by being set to tasks which others found for him, but by finding his own pursuits and drawing money for service rendered. He offered his services driving horses for the neighboring farmers when, still too small to keep pace and too light to burden them, he rode on their backs. So he solicited and obtained contracts for vegetables to be delivered at the houses of the neighbors and then purchased his vegetables and filled the contracts at a profit—always at a profit; for, from boyhood on, one of his principles in business has been to do things for a profit. With a parallel principle, give value received to the purchaser.

The career so begun in boyhood had, prior to 1877, in some twenty years of mercantile life been that of a successful merchant, so that he had a considerable capital to bring to the bicycle business, a capital and credit larger than anyone else was willing to stake, which proved sufficient and which was all there was furnished for the beginning of the Pope Manufacturing Company's present large business. He is apt to say with an interesting satisfaction, "I furnished all the capital myself and I staked all the capital I had. Other business men laughed at me then and preferred other enterprises which have proved less successful. I have my smile now."

The other career was that of the successful soldier. The beginning of his career as a soldier illustrates so well the character of the man that it is worth giving a little attention. When the war broke out he was working on Milk street, in Boston, for the munificent income of \$5 a week. Such time as he could snatch from business he devoted to studying army tactics and army regulations. He had a musket in the store, and when business was slack, or his employers would per-

mit, he used to drill the clerks, and even the partners and some of the neighbors who came in. He carried the tactics in his pocket and read them as he went back and forth in the cars. He joined the Salignac's Zouaves as a private, and drilled with them as often as he had opportunity. He also joined the HomeGuards, in Brookline, of which a year later he became the captain. At the same time he joined an artillery company, and drilled with them as often as he could.

When he did join the army in the Thirty-fifth Massachusetts Regiment as second lieutenant in 1862 it was with a preparation, and with habits, and with a purpose and resolution which made him certain of promotion, and which in most other regiments would probably have permitted him to advance to a higher rank than he did attain on account of his bravery and distinguished services during the four years of the war. His title of colonel, like his every other possession, was earned.

There are many things relating to his delightful family life and generous private and personal helps to others, his artistic tastes and special generousities, his personal sacrifices and economies for the sake of larger satisfactions, which cannot be written here; but it may be said there is no man whose public and private life bear better lessons than Colonel Pope's.

This was illustrated the other Sunday, when one of the prominent clergymen in his old home town of Brookline, between his later residence city of Newton and his present Boston home, right where Colonel Pope was best known, referred to him as an example worthy of imitation by the young men whom he was trying to reach; as one whom some of his hearers had seen rise to positions of honor and trust, and who had preserved unimpaired the integrity of his character and the respect of the world.

Wheelmen looking for the founder of American cycling should be proud to find it in such a man, the personal hero or principal figure about which the others are easily grouped, and they will find that his company—beginning so small and growing so large, and with such vitality in every part and such unvarying success and accomplishment—has been and is to be the backbone of an industry that now numbers among its supporters the Reads, Overmans, Lovells, Bidwell, Gormully & Jeffery, Lozier and a score of others equally familiar to the bicycling world.