15.

Cycling Between the Boons

Duncan R. Jamieson

Conventional histories of the bicycle emphasize the 1890s "bicycle boom," and may mention a resurgence of interest in the 1960s or 1970s, but devote little time to the decades between. *Scientific American*'s bicycling articles peaked in 1897 and 1898, after which attention shifted to the automobile. In March 1900, *Outing* introduced a section entitled "The Automobile." Two years later the "Bicycling" section disappeared.

The internal combustion engine created the opportunity for swift, independent transportation without the physical exertion required by the cycle. Motor-driven cycles began to appear at the 1900 shows, even though only a year earlier exhibitors had treated them with contempt. Light enough to be pedaled, they were small enough to take indoors. They met Joseph Pennell's demands for "a bicycle that would carry me onward when I did not want to work, at a pace that would distance anyone else, that would take me, without effort, up hills and against the wind—the dream, I believe, of every cycling tourist."

Pennell happily tried out a motor bicycle; unfortunately, when he flooded it with oil, the engine caught fire. Frustrated, he pedaled twelve miles and returned it. People told him he got what he deserved. "Now it so happened that some 25 years ago, exactly the same counsel and observations were addressed to me by horse owners and users, because I ventured to ride a tall bicycle." He believed the motor would be to the 1900s what the boneshaker had been to the 1870s, except that it would evolve into a broadly used machine in a much shorter time. The following year, Pennell took a motor bicycle across Europe. He liked it for the ease of personal transportation. "I am certain that, in a comparatively short time, the motor will have a far greater revolutionary effect on the traffic of the world than the bicycle has ever had."

J.W. Allen and F.W. Bockett also recognized the power and influence of the motorist. Allen thought motors posed more of a problem for cyclists than flat tires. Bockett dedicated his book on

bicycle touring in England to the one who taught him to ride, to those who showed him interesting places to visit, and "to the scorchers and motorists who have left me thus far with a whole skin…"[1]

Other bicycle travelers abandoned their wheels to take up motoring. In 1901 Robert Louis Jefferson left his position with the Cycle Press and his bicycle to venture off to the Rover Car Company, exporting their product to Australia. Until his death on August 31, 1914, in Melbourne, Australia, Jefferson continued to wander and explore as a motorist. In 1905 he reprised his journey to Constantinople by motor, over twenty-five hundred miles in thirty-one days. The next year he drove over ten thousand miles through India and the Far East. His last major motor trip took him eighteen hundred miles across South Africa. Charles Freeston wrote one book about traveling by bicycle before he authored an additional eight books on motor car travel. The accepted belief indicates a sharp decline bicycling after 1900, which does not end until the resurgence of interest in the 1960s and 1970s. Even as bicycles gave way to automobiles, however, Colonel Pope encouraged vacationers to take their wheels because the bicycle made them "independent of slower and less convenient means of getting about." While these writers all proved prophetic, the bicycle continued to provide long distance travel opportunities to dedicated riders. Both men and women continued to enjoy life in the slow lane, riding bicycles long distances and writing about their travels for the reading public.[2]

The Literary Cyclist

F.W. Bockett combined his interests in literature and cycling. He believed that cycling would replace angling as "the gentle art" once the novelty wore off and fewer scorchers littered the roads. Bockett believed cycling taught humans about nature and life in ways not even poetry and painting had explored: to call "this marvel of skilful mechanism, this monument of man's ingenuity, this instrument that gives you almost birdlike powers, that responds to your gentlest touch, that becomes at last your confidential friend, your fetich—to call it a mere machine, a bicycle, a bike—it is too bad."[3]

Mrs. Edward Kennard, a huntswoman who lived and wrote in England's East Midlands, developed a following as a sports novelist. In *The Golf Lunatic and His Cycling Wife*, the bicycle represented freedom, especially for women. Whenever the cycling wife grew tense or confined at home, a ride always put her right. "It was such a blessed relief to roll along the peaceful country roads, think my own thoughts, and right my ruffled temper. However irritable I might have felt at starting, the sight of the green fields and wide sky, accompanied by the smooth gliding motion of my conveyance and the sense of freedom it conferred, never failed to exercise a soothing influence upon me." Her wheel drew her closer to her Maker and eased her troubled spirit.[4]

J.W. Allen believed cycling, "the one really good thing the nineteenth century invented," justified human civilization. Allen's dog often cycled with him. The dog became excited when the bicycle was wheeled out, but despondent if his lead and biscuits were not packed. Like Allen, the dog had little idea of what the day held, but found it all, including flat tires, accidents and misadventures, good. Allen occasionally envied the long distance rider, once setting out on a century run. He stopped to rest halfway through, excited at what he had accomplished. He started off again, reeling off mile after mile until at seventy miles his "whole body, quite suddenly, became a dead-weight." This was his first ride of the season, and he was out of condition. While he considered packing it in, he realized there were only thirty miles left. He remounted and rode on through the pain. Ten miles from home, it started to rain, but he continued on, splashing and stumbling through the dusk to home. Whenever winter or the hustle and bustle of encroaching civilization depressed him, Allen would go into the hall where his bicycle rested. "It has an air of waiting. I look at it fondly for a moment and smile to myself." It had the ability to carry him out from "the shadow of any cloud, far beyond the reach of London, into the open sunlight and beside the green pastures."[5]

Written during the height of the high wheel bicycle's popularity, Mark Twain's "Taming the

Bicycle" did not appear until the early years of the twentieth century. In this essay Twain described his lengthy, difficult, and painful attempt to learn to ride. Twain succumbed to the rising interest in high wheel bicycles, bought one and brought it, along with a riding instructor referred to as "the Expert," to his home. He described his fifty inch wheel as not full-grown, "only a colt… and skittish, like any other colt." To demonstrate the ease of cycling, the Expert rode it around Twain's backyard, explaining that since dismounting "was perhaps the hardest thing to learn," they would leave that to the last. Twain proved him wrong; every time the instructor got him mounted, Twain fell off, generally on top of his teacher, with the bicycle on top of both of them. Staying with it, the author learned to ride following eight days of ninety minute lessons.

On his own for the first time he chose a quiet Sabbath morning and an exceptionally wide back street. Unfortunately, Twain was not alone; a boy sat on a gate-post enjoying the show. Twain had walked the street innumerable times and believed it level, "but it was not, as the bicycle now informed me, to my surprise." When a wagon approached, the boy delighted in shouting instructions to help the drover avoid a crash, all to no avail. Still, Twain persevered, and finally reached such a level of proficiency the boy could no longer keep up with him. "He had to go back to his gate-post, and content himself with watching me fall at long range." Twain's concluding advice was to "get a bicycle. You will not regret it, if you live."[6]

Charles Brooks visited England twice between the world wars and, although he had not ridden in decades, traveled by bicycle: "for the first time in many years I heard the soft whir of the tire—a melody that recalled truant hours almost forgotten. As Dervla Murphy tried to explain to Africans half a century later, Brooks found that middle class Americans could take a cycling vacation and spend less than they would if they did nothing and stayed at home. The bicycle offered the advantages of healthy exercise and sufficient speed to enjoy the sights without feeling rushed. On a second journey several years later he found the automobile had reduced bicycle travel so significantly he found no wheels for hire, and ended up buying a bicycle. Traveling freely and at his own pace, he saw sights motorists rushed by. Near Marlborough he rode to the top of Oare Hill and rested. "It is only the cyclist and pedestrian who can know the joy of lying on a hilltop; for its restful view may be valued except by him who buys with the coin of effort."[7]

Touring Scotland and Ireland

Tony Hammerton and three friends spent eighteen days in late May touring the Scottish Highlands, from Glasgow to Loch Ness. They had breakfast and supper at their lodgings, and carried a picnic for the noon meal. He made frequent references to Robert Louis Stevenson, who used the landscapes they visited for scenes for *Kidnapped*. Hammerton cited Boswell's description of Fort Augustus and Robert Burns' song about Aberfeldy. Hammerton and his friends had such a grand time that even a day's ride in the rain along Loch Ness was not enough to dampen their spirits. Another time, even though they fought "the cyclist's direst foe—a contrary wind" they enjoyed the ride through great pine woods. Hammerton and his friends thoroughly enjoyed their sojourn and dreaded its end. The last towns, villages, roadsides and streams they passed seemed different than they would have if they had been visited earlier in the trip. "Try as you may the last day of a tour is always tinged with sadness. It is then that a sense of our transient life comes heavy upon us, and every scene of "the last day" is viewed through a screen of soft regret."[8]

It especially bothered E.E. Henderson that English speaking people knew more of the continent than they did of their own country. He so thoroughly enjoyed bicycle travel through Scotland words failed him. He could "only feel it, and dream of it afterwards, treasure it in his heart as one bright spot in a long and dismal life of painful imprisonment in a crowded city, where every tenement seems but an additional bar in his cage, the horrible smoke stacks the corner pillars, and the ever present smoke, like a funeral pall, the roof." The memory sustained him until next year. No matter how uncomfortable he might have been, each year he gladly repeated the experience.[9]

With a friend, Walter Arnold Mursell spent a week riding north from Edinburgh, over the Forth Bridge as far as Gairloch. He rode a two speed Sunbeam, "the height of cycling luxury" while his companion rode a machine recently fitted with a Sturmey-Archer three-speed gear. Mursell saw each ride as a miracle: "he who is thoroughly possessed by the Spirit of the Road can no longer talk of his bicycle as a machine; it is a dragon, an albatross, a wind, a chariot of fire—anything that signifies life, vigour, movement, mystery."

Even mundane events like flat tires or head winds failed to ruin the joy of being on one's wheel. "The one and only drawback to the Tour was the motors." The automobiles chewed up the road, filled the air with noxious fumes, dust and "the bray of their hooters." Their drivers, who acted as if they owned the road, "added appreciably to the terrors of life. There is something so infernally aggressive and provocative about them." Despite the inconvenience and dangers created by automobiles, Mursell enjoyed the ride and the scenery, traveling for its own sake, not for the destination. Those interested only in speed and record breaking missed the joy of cycling, and found themselves slaves to their machines.[10]

An Irish nationalist living in Buenos Aires, William Bulfin spent seven months riding his Irish built Pierce around Ireland. So proud of his machine, while in Wexford he stopped at the factory to show the workers how their handiwork had performed at home and abroad. He visited with school children at the crossroads and older folk at the half-door or beside the hearth, but the sectarian split in the north repulsed him. Fewer than ten Catholics worked among the ten thousand in the Belfast shipyards because their lives would be in constant danger. He called Londonderry either Derry or Derry-Columcille. There he saw the religious conflict fanned by William Pitt, but Bulfin longed for the day when Gaelic would again be spoken. He believed bicycling in Ireland to be sufficient to "charm a cyclist out of his grave."[11]

France in Peace and War

Fletcher Hanslip and Frank Rutter bicycled to Paris along the Seine in August, 1906, one of the hottest months on record, avoiding the main roads "infested by automobiles…" Riding one afternoon Rutter saw a man and boy approaching on bicycles. The "boy" turned out to be a girl, "a very charming creature, I assure you, her shapely figure admirably set off by the masculine attire." After continuing for a while he scorched back; although he never caught them, he did talk to a few people who had seen them, some of whom thought her clothing style a disgrace. Rutter, however, thought the "tight-fitting breeches are infinitely more sensible and certainly more beautiful, than the lumpy divided skirts or baggy knickerbockers which advanced womanhood champions." When they reached Paris, Rutter and Hanslip were so enjoying themselves they continued to ride until reality set in and they had to end their sojourn.[12]

In September, 1914, Fitzwater Wray, "Kuklos" in cycling circles, followed the Marne to investigate the battle in a series of articles for London's *Daily News*. He saw shallow trenches hastily dug for riflemen, evidence of recent fighting. Shell holes large enough to bury a horse and cart often forced him to dismount. For a time, Wray rode with a French dispatch rider on a one speed racing bicycle he had used to compete in the Tour de France. The Frenchman admired Wray's three-speed Raleigh, which permitted the Englishman to ride up hills the Frenchman walked and to pull the Frenchman on descents. Hungry, and tired from riding through the mud against a headwind, and with little food, Wray found "there are times when one seems to ride a bicycle more by nerve tension than muscular effort." He passed hastily dug graves, shell blasted trees, and other detritus of the Marne conflict. On his way to the coast a French captain arrested him, stating "cycling was absolutely forbidden in the war zone," but the journalist had already seen the front and willingly returned to England to file his stories.[13]

Traveling in the United States

To win a five thousand dollar wager, Claude Murphey and Clarence Darling set out to bicycle through each state and territory within eighteen months. The traveler had to start penniless, earn his way through the sale of photographs or trinkets carried along, and collect signatures and postmarks along the route. They left from Jackson, Michigan, in May, 1904 and rode west to the Pacific and then across the south to the Atlantic. They rode up the Atlantic coast, where in New Jersey they saw "hosts of automobiles" taking people to the shore for the weekend. On their return through Vermont they ran out of money. Over two days and ninety miles they sold no souvenirs, and had nothing to eat. In Burlington, when a crowd gathered a policeman told them they needed a three dollar permit before they could sell anything, They accepted defeat, entered a restaurant and washed dishes in exchange for room and board. Still, they determined to finish the ride, returning to Jackson after thirteen thousand miles in fifteen months. Murphey then published their experiences for an interested readership.[14]

Separated by a generation, two couples who lost their jobs during different depressions took tandem bicycles to their futures. Ethel Lynn and her husband Dan, a physician and an engineer respectively, fled San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake and migrated to Chicago. When he lost his job and his wife contracted tuberculosis, they bought an old tandem bicycle cheaply, "since cycling is out of date," and set out for San Francisco on May 4, 1908. They slept in barns and worked or exchanged tales of their travels for food. She offered healing advice and risked writing prescriptions. In Iowa, a physician attempted to rape her, and in Nebraska a cyclone flipped them off their bicycle. On another occasion soft sand caused her to fly over the handlebars, which resulted in a concussion. Still, they reached San Francisco.[15]

Thirty years later, Elizabeth and Jim Young had better success bicycling. When they both lost their jobs with a San Francisco magazine publisher, they decided to ride an English three-speed tandem they named "Daisy Bell" to the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration at Gettysburg. They came east along a southern route and then west through the middle of the country. They claimed their trip of one hundred sixty-four days, "The Spirit of Fun," to be the longest tandem trip in the United States, the longest mixed couple tandem trip in the world, and the first tandem crossing from west to east. They averaged seventy-five miles a day across the United States, staying in auto camps, tourist homes, or with relatives. "Riding a bike [came] to be our natural way of life, and we loved it." Wherever they went they faced "a curious, question-asking crowd." Forty members of the St. Louis Cycling Club, formed in 1887 and the oldest continuous club in the United States, met them. "It was a wonderful feeling to be among them. They were our own kind—cyclists—people who immediately understood what our adventure was all about." Unlike the Lynns', who traveled without money, the Youngs used their savings to take this adventure.[16]

Around the World

After a generation's hiatus, Kai Thorenfeldt of Denmark rode around the world, reigniting the reading public's interest in this form of bicycle travel. An ex-naval wireless operator, he rode "in the tracks made by Sir John Foster Fraser and his brave companions." A small group showed up to witness his start from Copenhagen on February 1, 1925, riding a second hand bicycle southeast to India, and then a new wheel the rest of the way. He demonstrated the same cultural imperialism of those who went before.

It did not surprise him to learn he was the first foreigner to ride in Albania, especially when he saw the uncivilized villagers eat with their hands from a communal bowl. In India he crashed into ox-carts and ran over natives. In Hong Kong the Danish consul persuaded him not to ride through China due to the revolution, so he went to Japan where he faced the same embarrassment with communal bathing as Thomas Stevens and Frank Lenz had forty years earlier. After so much time in Asia, it shocked him to see whites doing menial tasks in Australia. "Now for over a year I had felt a certain superiority over ordinary workmen, servants and so on, a feeling which is almost unavoidable in the

tropics—but now it is evident that I should have to re-adjust my standards."[17]

In South America, Thorenfeldt recorded numerous situations faced by earlier travelers. When mules saw him they stopped and refused to move, which caused the drovers to curse, first the mules and then the cyclist. To cross one bridgeless river, he floated his bicycle across in a dugout canoe. In Buenos Aires a reporter interviewed him for an article which appeared the next day. In Uruguay he averaged eight punctures a day, with a high of forty-eight, from the sharp thorns. He crossed the Andes from Argentina to Chile, hacking a trail as he ascended to eleven thousand feet to the summit. "Dare I confess how proud and thankful I felt, as I looked at my old machine with the little faded and tattered Danish flag which fluttered in the breeze?" As he recuperated in Santiago two Germans arrived posing as globe trotting bicyclists who had traveled fifty thousand miles to Thorenfeldt's thirty. Clearly fraudulent, he realized why people "lose interest in helping the genuine adventurer…"[18]

Thorenfeldt crossed the United States on the Lincoln Highway. People repeatedly asked if he rode on a bet and how much the expedition cost. He rolled into New York with "crowds of motor vans, (…) feeling very elated as I rode down Broadway, passing the Central Park and dodging in and out of the traffic." From New York, he rode north to Canada, where a car hit him from behind. He escaped with only a few scratches, and the driver paid to repair his "trusty friend's" two broken wheels and shattered fork. In Montreal he got a berth on a ship bound for Scotland. He rode to England, stopping in Birmingham to visit the factory where his bicycle was made. He steamed to Denmark, where he rode through small villages, past farms and churches, and saw children on their way to school: "this was Denmark after almost three long, eventful years!" He returned to Copenhagen's Town Hall, where the crowd raised him from the bicycle saddle to their shoulders, two and one-half years after his departure. He had bicycled seventeen thousand miles through thirty countries on five continents. He used two bicycles, fourteen tires, eight pairs of boots and eleven of pants.[19]

While Thorenfeldt planned to bicycle around the world, Fred Birchmore did not. He graduated from the University of Georgia with a Bachelor's degree in 1932 and a law degree in 1934, at which point he became an exchange scholar to the University of Cologne, Germany. In Germany he bought a Reinhardt bicycle which he named Bucephalus. He bicycled twenty-five hundred miles through Scandinavia and then traveled through Italy, England, Eastern Europe, and Egypt, where he met people who had never seen a bicycle. Despite the intense sun, Birchmore thought Egypt an ideal country for cycling in the spring, as the weather was cool and dry. When someone stole his traveler's checks and passport, he had to remain in Cairo for six weeks awaiting a replacement. Unable to return to Germany for the start of the semester, he decided to continue bicycling east around the world. He became the first to cross the Sinai from Cairo to Jerusalem by bicycle. When he reached Beersheba, the local customs house officials breathed a sigh of relief. Camels, desert lorries and airplanes had made the journey, "but to make the trip alone, and on a bicycle, was unheard of." Birchmore met a Bedouin who "heartily agreed that the bicycle was the most reliable of all vehicles and capable of going anywhere that the rider was willing to take it…"

In Iraq Birchmore met a passing native who, like all Arabs, "termed me a "traveling man" and as such, it was his solemn duty to see me safely through his country." A man who had just completed a horseback ride through central Afghanistan helped him become the first foreigner to travel through central Afghanistan. Two hundred miles from Kabul, with broken ribs suffered in a fall, his right pedal sheared off, his tires punctured and his chain held together with a safety pin, he met a detachment of cavalry sent by the king. From Kabul he went to Peshwar and rode sixteen hundred miles along the Grand Trunk in the summer heat to Calcutta.[20]

In Southeast Asia, trailed by a tiger and suffering with a malarial fever of 107, Birchmore "trudged wearily, leaning heavily on old Bucephalus." Exhausted, he climbed a bamboo platform to rest near the remains of a young goat. He passed out, regaining consciousness in a missionary hospital, where the doctor presented him with the tiger skin—the goat was laced with poison

which killed it. From Bangkok to Saigon, nine hundred miles, Birchmore followed the railroad, impeded by drainage ditches cut across the right of way. Between Bangkok and Saigon Birchmore lost the screw that held the left crank arm. "Without my trusty steed, it was almost impossible to complete the journey on my bruised and battered feet. It looked as if the venture would end in inglorious defeat." Using a sharp stone Birchmore cut a piece of metal from his canteen, made a wedge, and reattached the crank arm. Even though he feared it would fall off, he made it to Saigon, where he ended his bicycle passage. The wedge remained in place when he donated Bucephalus to the Smithsonian.[21]

Birchmore developed the same attachment to his wheel as so many of the earlier (and later) riders. "It may sound silly and sentimental to some, but when one's only companion during eighteen months of awful, beautiful, and horrible experiences is a bicycle, it becomes more than a mere inanimate piece of metal—it is a real friend." Like Frank Lenz, Birchmore found the bicycle an ideal means of transportation because either could carry the other. "When Bucephalus found it impossible to plough through jungles or surmount rugged peaks, I had merely turned carrier instead of rider—that, to me, was a feeling of real power, freedom, and a mastery of one's fate."[22]

The bicycle portion of Birchmore's journey totaled fifteen thousand miles; a decade later, Jesse Hart Rosdail traveled around the world, riding eleven thousand six hundred miles through New Zealand, Australia, and Africa. He named his used, fifty year old bicycle with a two speed shift and coaster brake Jacqueline. He rode in overalls, carrying fifty-five pound pack, with an additional thirty pounds of food and water as needed. Traveling by bicycle allowed Rosdail to meet all kinds of people, "and with it all I found friendliness and hospitality."

He traveled through Africa during its colonial period, noting the influence of the European powers. He thought the English narrow minded and high handed while he found the Portuguese and French officials provided much better service. In Uganda, Rosdail found a typical Eurocentric attitude toward the different ethnic groups. One local told the bicyclist that the Indians handled the commercial activity as the natives could not do it and the English, the ruling class, would not do it. Even though his passport and visa were in order, illiterate Ethiopian local officials arrested Rosdail, holding him for four days. Freed without explanation he immediately left for Eritrea, his forty-eighth country. Near Victoria Falls he had "a pleasant afternoon, a fine road—just gently rolling; fine weather for cycling; and bush with trees sufficiently high to provide shade for resting. What could be sweeter!" On the Ivory Coast he shocked people when he explained forty-seven miles by bicycle to be a very short distance.[23]

Bernard Newman

The Englishman Bernard Newman remains the most prolific cycle author, writing more bicycle travel books than his closest competitor, Dervla Murphy, and in a shorter span of time. Newman's entire production took place during the interregnum; his first bicycle travel book appeared in 1934 and his twentieth in 1959. He wrote for the armchair traveler, although he occasionally gave specific directions. He missed his family, dedicating one book to his wife who permitted him to go off "with great understanding." Like Murphy, he wrote books not related to bicycle travel; unlike Murphy, with the exception of a wartime journey to the United States and Canada, he limited his excursions to Europe, congratulating himself when he had ridden through every European country.[24]

Despite his family's excellent equestrian skills, young Bernard fell off horses so consistently his father bought him a bicycle. At an early age he knew he wanted to write and lecture, so he rode thirty miles to hear the popular novelist Joseph Hocking. He rode five miles each way to primary school, and much greater distances during holidays to visit historic sites. He rode to London, "a mere 110 miles—what was that to a boy with a bicycle?" In the army during the First World War, Newman fixed a puncture for the Prince of Wales. "I think he preferred a bicycle to a horse for business purposes in those days, and I think he was right: certainly I copied his example myself for the

greater part of the war." After the war, Newman joined the government's Office of Works, which twice tried to sack him because of his outspoken views on European politics. At the same time he followed his heart and commenced a career as an author, publishing his first travel book, *Round About Andorra*, in 1928, followed by four novels.[25]

In 1932, he proposed following the route of the *Three Musketeers* to an editor at Herbert Jenkins. When the editor learned that England had ten million cyclists, he saw an additional market and asked Newman if he could ride a bicycle. "Could I ride a bicycle! *In the Trail of the Three Musketeers* was the first of my long series of cycle-travelogues—they have provided me with bread and butter, and sometimes jam, for more than twenty years." Newman began his ride on a Sunday morning, feeling like d'Artagnan "off to make his fortune." After several miles of lonely riding he stumbled into an Orleans road race. When spectators sarcastically scoffed, he turned onto a tow path, where a runaway horse forced him into the Loire. "Already I had perceived that I was no d'Artagnan: those spectators would not have jeered twice at him!" Despite this ignominious beginning, he continued on to Paris, where he found cycling "a nerve-wracking business."

Except when he had to carry it, "my steed faced all difficulties with a spirit that would have amazed d'Artagnan's yellow horse." A bicycle approximated the speed of a horse, which allowed the rider to savor the atmosphere. Newman stayed whenever possible with local people or in youth hostels—"cradles of peace." Riding six to ten miles an hour, he effortlessly covered fifty or sixty miles a day, which left him ample time to explore. By traveling modestly, he demonstrated how people on restricted incomes could do it as well. After a month's travel he returned to England and applied for life insurance, wondering why he had not completed the application before the journey. In response to the question about his nerves, he replied he had just come from cycling in Paris, and the company accepted his application without further question.[26]

As he became established as an author, he "determined to wander father afield—by bicycle of course." Newman had everything he needed on his wheel. He carried a minimal amount of currency, and avoided letters of introduction. He spoke English, German, and French, but not Yiddish which would have been useful. On his second excursion, during which he followed the Danube from the Black Forest to the Black Sea, he "made a great friend of my bicycle." He refused to see his only link to England, which served him faithfully every day, as merely a collection of steel tubes. "I called him George. I used to argue with him as we rode along together—it was nice to speak English occasionally. Often he agreed with me, but as I compelled him to go along these rough and narrow paths he protested strenuously. But he never gave in." When thick mud forced Newman to carry the wheel, he "complained bitterly about this, and George was very much ashamed."

Generally, Newman complemented George for carrying him with few breakdowns or punctures, and at minimal cost. In a chauvinistic lapse, Newman doubted "if any cycle other than British could have done the journey." As Newman left one Serbian village, facing a stiff climb, he intended to show the Serbs what an English bicycle could accomplish; proud of his nationality George did not disappoint him. For his part, George enjoyed the rides, telling how Newman "had ridden him with reasonable care and understanding." Everywhere they went people expressed tremendous interest in George; demands to ride an English wheel delayed him repeatedly. Newman found it hard to believe English cycle manufacturers had a hard time selling their machines in Europe. "On every one of my journeys I could have sold George a hundred times without effort."[27]

Newman occasionally rode with others. In northeast Poland cyclists joined him for pieces of his journey. In Finland he rode with a local club whose members had "cumbrous heavy-weight machines." In Tartu, an Estonian university town, the students had cheap German wheels, "which can only by courtesy be called a bicycle at all." He thoroughly enjoyed cycling with an English-speaking Swedish girl. Newman called her modest because, unlike most females whose skirts rode up, she wore dress guards which kept her discretely covered. At a refreshment stop, she removed them; when they started riding again, her dress had ridden up above

her knees, displaying both legs and lingerie. He enjoyed her company so much he missed his destination. Then he rode with a teenager who thought his Swedish bicycle superior to English wheels. When challenged to a race, Newman suggested a coasting competition and easily outdistanced him. When the young man learned who he rode with, he exclaimed in awestruck terms, "so this is George!" Between tours, Newman frequently appeared on the BBC's Children's Hour, which received a letter from a young girl who remembered George but forgot Newman: "When is that man coming on again who has a bicycle named George?" Actually, George was a series of bicycles—Mussolini murdered George I, George II went to a Rumanian Prince when the Russians refused to admit him, and George III arrived in 1938 to join Newman in a ride around the Baltic.[28]

Unlike Paris, Newman enjoyed Copenhagen, a cyclist's paradise. The government supported bicycles over automobiles, reserving streets too narrow for mixed traffic for cycles. The number of Danish cyclists also impressed Arthur King, who rode to the Artic Circle in 1938. Young and old, rich and poor, appeared riding one speed, upright bicycles. "Danes are more at home on cycles than on their feet. They even go courting astraddle and I was amused to see one man place a hand to the back of his fiancee and gallantly assist her up any slight incline or against a head wind. Rarely do these ardent cyclists dismount: they would rather ride round and round a lamp-post until traffic signals turned to green than put one foot on the ground."[29]

Throughout his travel books, Newman told of his "trivial encounters of the road" focusing on "comedy—which is in keeping with my temperament." Late one day, rushing to reach a village before dark, George's left pedal bent when it hit a half-buried tree root. Newman borrowed tools and repaired it. Later, needing more extensive repairs and unable to reach a bicycle shop he took George to a blacksmith. As Newman wandered about the village, the blacksmith took George apart, losing two ball bearings in the process. He gave one of the remaining bearings to his assistant and told him to go across the village to a shop where balls of a similar size might be found. The youth put the ball in his mouth to safeguard it, only to swallow it. Unwilling to trust this operation any longer, Newman borrowed the smith's tools "and set to work on George myself. Never have I received so warm a welcome. It seemed as if George knew that a friendly hand was caressing him." In the Balkans he ate dog stew. In parts of Rumania no one had ever seen a bicycle, and horses reacted to it as did English horses to "motor cars thirty or forty years ago." Newman believed himself to be at fault "for, after all, the road belonged to the peasant and not to me, and it was my intrusion that had caused the accident[s]."[30]

Neither the weather nor the roads always cooperated. In Russia sand eight to ten inches deep proved unridable, so he took to the railroad tracks, alternating between the worker's path and bouncing over the sleepers. In Sweden he entered Stockholm covered in mud, "the result of the unequal contest between a cyclist and heavy vehicles on a sloshy road." At the local bathhouse he disrobed and soaked in the tub. After a time the female attendant entered and despite his protests, proceeded to scrub him. Then she insisted on drying him, again ignoring his modesty. Later he tried saunas, sharing them with both men and women. "I saw more of the human body among Scandinavian peoples than any others in Europe, but a cleaner and more moral outlook I never knew." Arthur King often stopped for a swim, joined by Swedes who never bothered with swim suits. "Nobody seemed at all interested in the peculiar physique, contours or proportions of their fellow bathers."[31]

Newman's social conscience shows through his writings. Having served in the Great War, he feared the approach of another. He recalled a wartime memory of a child screaming; her mother lay on the bed, nearly cut in half from shrapnel. "The terror in her eyes haunts me yet; could those who to-day talk so glibly of the "next war" experience such a ten minutes as I did then, you have my solemn word that their tone would be changed for the rest of their natural life." In one small Rumanian village he came upon another little girl sobbing and hanging on to an older woman. Two men had just been murdered when they protested that their land had been stolen. Newman went to the police, who remained unconcerned as the dead "were only

Bulgars." Newman tried to comfort the little girl, offering her chocolate "to make her forget that her daddy was dead." He promised the people that he would tell their story in England, but one Bulgarian priest remained unconvinced. "I hope the people of England will take more notice of these things than they did of the massacres by the Turks."[32]

During one ride Newman went to hear Hitler. The speech failed to impress him, but the crowd responded to Hitler's platitudes and banal phrases. When Newman's riding outfit of khaki shirt and shorts attracted the chancellor's attention, an aide took him to meet Hitler. They chatted comfortably for a few minutes, "not about European politics, but about the relative advantages of shorts and breeches. I feel happier after it: I was glad to know that Hitler was human." In Danzig, swastikas appeared everywhere, and "there were far more people gazing in adoration at photographs of Adolf Hitler than there were before the altars in the churches." Arthur King agreed, writing "Heil Hitler" had replaced all other salutations. Despite the Hitler Youth and other militaristic images, King found the Germans "nice and hospitable, comparing favorably to any other race in Europe."

Newman thought the difference between the Germans and the English was one of outlook; "it is precisely the difference between 'Heil, Hitler!' and 'Good old George!'" In East Prussia, Newman talked with school masters who believed the English hated the Germans, and wronged them at Versailles. Newman agreed about the treaty, but believed that while the English did not care for the present regime, they "had only the friendliest feelings toward the German people. The English point of view is very simple: 'we want peace; we have nothing to gain in any way by war; therefore we look askance at anyone who disturbs the peace." In Pomerania, Newman visited a Labor Corps camp, "another German organization which is capable of wide and wilful misunderstanding." When someone suggested a cycle race he thought it a good opportunity, even though he was not a racer. A Starley with a three-speed Sturmey-Archer gear, George raced over a two-km road course in a series of elimination heats, romping "home an easy winner by fifty yards."[33]

Newman had many interesting encounters with border guards. Once, crossing from Hungary to Yugoslavia, officials forced him to ride to a border post fifty miles away where he gained permission after posting a bond. When the exit officials deducted ten percent, Newman protested. The customs official explained the system over lunch, and since the food cost more than the missing money, Newman left satisfied. On another occasion two smugglers took Newman from Yugoslavia to Rumania, whereupon the Rumanians arrested both him and George. The officer who interviewed Newman offered him a cigarette and left the room. He returned a few minutes later, checked the cigarette case, and reprimanded the cyclist for not smoking. Only later did Newman realize the officer wanted a bribe to settle the incident.[34]

During World War Two, the Ministry of Education sent Newman to North America to strengthen the Anglo-American relationship. Even though the American cycling population was only a tenth of England's, gasoline and rubber rationing caused furious bidding on eighty-eight unclaimed bicycles while automobiles went to the scrap yard. Cartoons showed young children teaching their middle-aged parents how to ride. Newman found the poor quality of American wheels surprising, given the nation's history of mechanical ingenuity. He returned to England to lecture about the United States.

Hundreds of CTC members from Coventry cycled to Leamington Spa to hear him. Workers at the Raleigh works in Nottingham who believed only their wheels could have survived his rides through Europe teased him for riding a BSA. Generally Newman gave a mid-day lecture at a school, factory or club and then an evening one for the public. Speaking to an audience of American doctors and nurses in an empty hospital awaiting the Normandy wounded, Newman reiterated his belief the 1930s governments had failed. "If we had displayed one-tenth of our war-time determination in the "peaceful" days of difficulty; if we had not attempted the impossible compromise with evil; if we had not abandoned principle in favour of our own selfish ease, standing by while others less fortunate bore the brunt; then it would not be necessary to

make skilled preparations to receive tens of thousands of men mauled in battle."[35]

When he wandered in Europe, he went where and when he wanted; now he found himself on a strict schedule, which included cycling at least forty or fifty miles a day. Once with a tail wind he rode eighty-five miles and gave three lectures in one day. He rode from Blackpool to Lancaster for pleasure, covering sixty-eight miles in seven hours, with only one stop. When he pedaled across Dartmoor in a thick fog on his forty-seventh birthday he did not consider himself old as he "looked forward with such pleasure to a couple of thousand miles on a bicycle."[36]

Like Newman, despite its age, the bicycle remained young and vigorous. Despite the rise of the automobile and statistical evidence to the contrary, bicycles continued to attract a significant ridership. Of equal importance, the public maintained its interest in these adventurers, reading their books, which encouraged others to ride and to write. When the American baby boomers reached maturity, they continued this particular form of travel literature.

Endnotes

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