

GREAT LIMERICK ATHLETES.

No. 146—THOMAS S. LOWRY of Limerick City

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

CYCLING, one time one of the most popular items on a sports programme, is regaining much of its old time attractiveness—a welcome feature, for good cycling can add materially to the enjoyment of a sports meeting.

It all started a hundred and fifteen years ago, when a man named MacMillian put a pair of pedals on a Hobby Horse, and so brought into being what was really the first bicycle.

MacMillian lived in Scotland, at Penpont, but few took any notice of him when he appeared in the locality with his invention.

However, it aroused some interest elsewhere, and somebody tried it in France, with the pedals on the front wheel. The original pedals operated the rear wheel and this type drive eventually became the standard on which all future bicycles were operated.

Nearly a hundred years ago, a Coventry firm marketed what came to be known as the "Boneshaker." Then developed a machine with a big front wheel drive and a tiny one, popularly called the "Penny-farthing"—and to which some old riders were greatly attached.

It was not until 1878 that cycling really caught the popular fancy and half a dozen years later, when the G.A.A. was formed, the sport had many adherents.

Right from the early days of the Association, cycling formed an important part on all sports programmes.

THE PNEUMATIC TYRE.

It gained a further fillip with the invention of the chain drive, in 1885, followed by the introduction of the pneumatic tyre, three years later.

A Scotsman, resident in Belfast, J. B. Dunlop, successfully launched the pneumatic tyre, and it made its first appearance on the track at Queen's College Sports, Belfast, on May 18th, 1889.

Ridden by Billy Hume, of Belfast, the pneumatic tyred machine triumphed over all comers on the solid tyred cycles used up to then—including the three Du Cros brothers, sons of the then Chairman of the Irish Cyclists' Association.

Hume's success gave Dunlop the advertisement he needed, and Du Cros, senior, who was also a keen businessman, sensed the importance of the invention and financed the launching of the pneumatic tyre on the commercial market.

The battle of the tyres continued for sometime—cushion v. pneumatics—and towards the end of 1890, extended to England, when a number of Irish cyclists, including the Du Cros brothers and R. J. Macredy, the outstanding Irish cyclist of his generation, who emerged from retirement to demonstrate the value of the new invention, crossed the Irish Sea and swept all before them in events, from one to fifty miles, mounted on pneumatics.

LIMERICK COMPETITORS.

Thomas S. Lowry pre-dated the G.A.A., and we find first mention of him in a report of the Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Club Sports at the Markets Field in June, 1884, six months before the founding of the Association. We read: "The three miles cycle brought out T. J. Lowry first, J. J. Trehy second and M. J. O'Mahony (Cork) third. Trehy made the pace for the first mile, followed by O'Mahony, with Lowry in the rear. At the beginning of the second mile, Lowry overhauled O'Mahony and, after a spirited contest, challenged Trehy, who gamely responded. In a great finish Lowry was in front of the tape by 12 yards.

The report of the same meeting for 1885, one of the first held in Limerick following the establishment of the G.A.A., contained the following:

"The one mile bicycle brought out J. J. Trehy a good first, and T. J. Lowry second. The two mile bicycle race had a hearty welcome from a large field of spectators,

with T. Connell first; T. J. Lowry second and M. Trehy third, and the big event, three mile cycle, gave T. J. Lowry first place; J. J. Trehy a close second, and M. Trehy a good third. In this event the cheering for the three Limerick competitors was most enthusiastic."

CLEAN SWEEP OF CYCLE EVENTS.

Lowry made a clean sweep of the cycle events at the 1886 L.A.A. and B.C. meeting, the officials of which were:—President, Mr. A. W. Shaw; Vice-President, Mr. A. Murray; Treasurer, Mr. W. L. Stokes; Secretary, Mr. C. H. Gubbins. He won the one mile cycle (novices) in 3 mins. 49 secs., from the scratch mark; the one mile cycle open (3 mins. 24 secs.), three mile cycle (9 mins. 44 secs.) and two mile cycle (confined), in 7 mins. 31 2-5th secs.

At the County Kerry A. and C.C. sports held on June 22nd, 1886, he won the five miles cycling championship and was second (from scratch) in the one, two and three cycle events.

At the North Tipperary G.A.A. sports on August 9th, 1886, Lowry figured in a great race for the one mile cycle event with Stan. McAdam, a fellow Limerickman, who two years later won all-Ireland cycling honours over ten, twenty-five and fifty miles. McAdam won narrowly, both men starting from the scratch mark.

Three days later, Lowry won the one and three mile cycle events at Cork C.C. Sports, and was second the following day, at Tralee Bicycle Club Sports, over the same distances.

Newcastle West Sports on September 8th was notable for the fact that Dan Shanahan of Kilfinane covered 51 ft. 1 in. in the running, hop step and jump, a world's best for which, I think, sanction was never sought. At the same meeting T. Lowry won the 3 mile cycle event, with J. J. Trehy second; being himself second to Coleman O'Connell in the mile and J. J. Trehy in the two mile distances.

A THREE-DAY LIMERICK CARNIVAL.

The Limerick G.A.A. Carnival, which opened at the Markets Field, on September 19th, continued for three days, being divided into sections (a) athletics, (b) hurling, football and tug-o-war, (c) band contests. In the three mile cycle event Tom Lowry won from scratch, J. J. Trehy (330 yards)

being a close second. The winner's time was 9 mins. 34 4-5th secs.

The L.A.A. and B.C. were again first in the field in 1887 and at their sports held at the Markets Field on June 8th Lowry took honours in the two mile run, but was beaten by Stan. McAdam over the three mile course.

This is the last recorded performance of Tom Lowry, one of the leading figures during his all too brief spell. Munster at the time, and for many years after, was the home of grass track cycling and few succeeded in besting the popular Tom over the distance he liked best—the three mile circuit.

All his triumphs were, of course, secured under the old conditions, and riding the solid tyred bicycle.

THE NEW MACHINE.

The new machine made its appearance in the Markets Field before he finally retired, and it is on record that Blakeney Gubbins was the first cyclist to introduce the pneumatic tyre to the Limerick racing track.

Lowry, however, never took kindly to the new order of things, and I think the gradual disappearance of his favourite high wheeler induced him retire much earlier than he would have done under other circumstances.

Tom Lowry is dead this twenty years—he passed away on November 13th, 1935; his funeral two days later to Mount St. Lawrence Cemetery bringing out the few survivors for a final tribute to one who rode the old grass track with such distinction in days that will not come again.

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