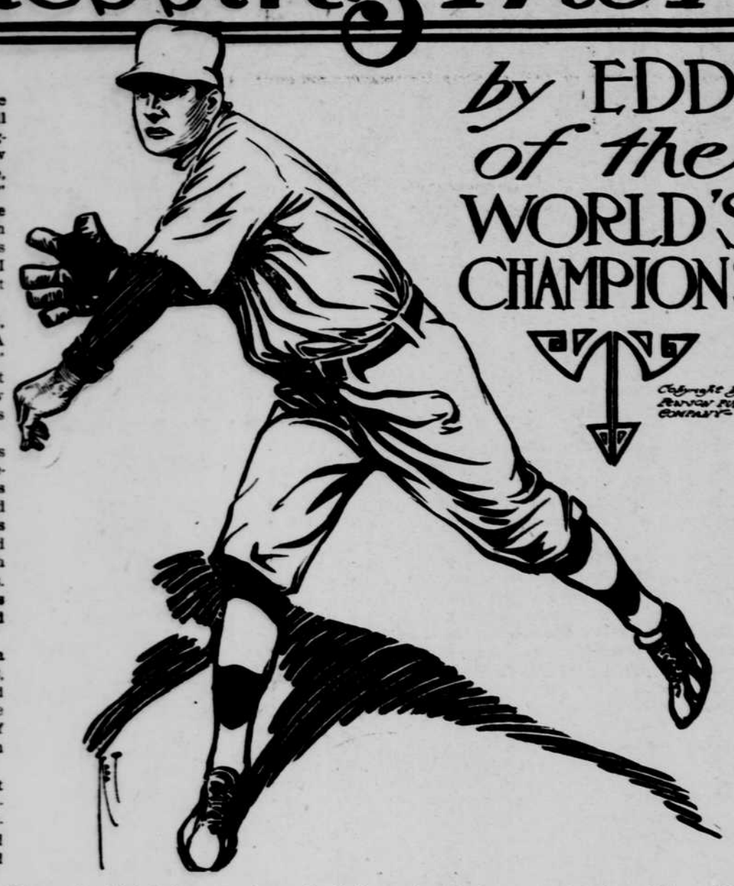
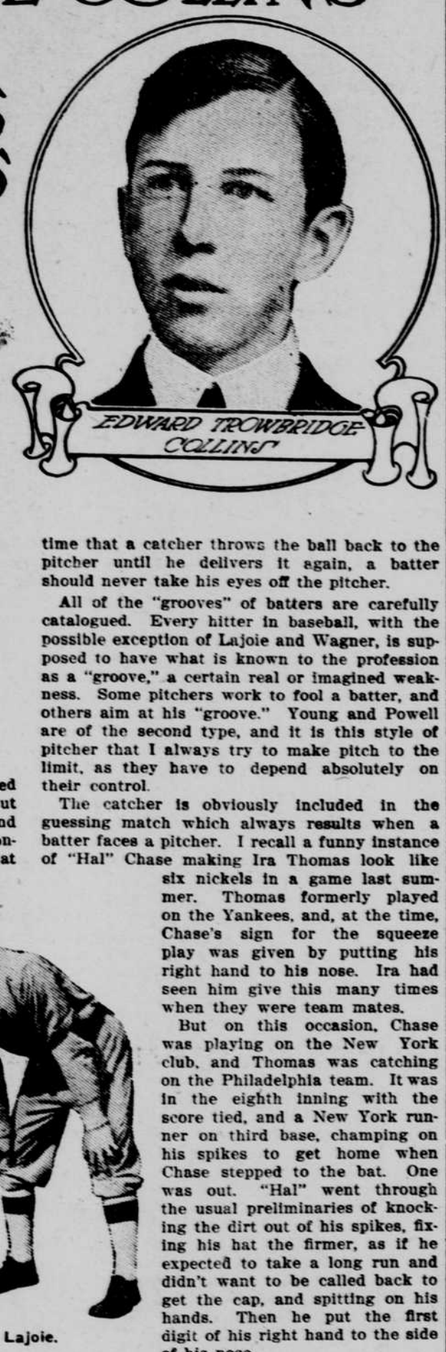
Outguessing The Pitcher

by EDDIE COLLINS of the WORLD'S CHAMPIONS





RUMORS had been circulated by the "underground" routes of baseball during the season of 1909 that signals were being tipped off in New York and Detroit. About this time, I noticed Ira Thomas and "Eddie" Plank working together in a game against the substitutes one day in morning practice. Thomas's signals were so ridiculously plain that I yelled to him from my position at second base.

"For heaven's sake, Ira," I called, "what are you trying to do? A blind man in center field could get these signals."

"All right, Eddie," he answered. "That's what they're for. It's a stall. We open a series in New York Monday, and they may be tipping signals there."

Instead of covering up his signs with his legs as any good catcher will, when he crouches behind the batter, Thomas was displaying his signals so that coachers at both first and third base could see them. I learned in due time that the pitchers were giving the real signs, and that Thomas had devised this scheme to throw any observers with spy glasses or other artificial aids off their guards. I might add that, as a result, in the following series four of the New York batters were hit with pitched balls and badly hurt.

All this means that, every time a batter faces a pitcher in a game of baseball in the big leagues, there is a duel of wits. In fact, the batter is pitted against both the pitcher and the catcher, as the incident related above will show. The acuteness of the duel depends on the amount of wits enlisted on each side. Some are not very keen.

But, although in the vernacular of baseball, it is called "outguessing the pitcher," it is really outwitting the catcher, for the receivers almost universally decide what kind of a diet shall be served to the batter. Occasionally a pitcher disagrees and shakes his head. Successful men behind the bat in the big leagues have made a careful study of batters, their "grooves" and mannerisms, and it is on this knowledge that a pitcher depends. Therefore, in the majority of cases, it is the batter outguessing the catcher. In only a few instances does the pitcher give the signals.

So much faith have some pitchers in certain catchers that they pitch altogether a different brand of baseball to other men. This is particularly true of Krause, the Philadelphia left hander, who pitched such sensational ball in the season of 1909, and of Ford, of the New York American league club, who was the thrill of the league last season with his double breaking spitball. Krause had no confidence in any catcher except Ira Thomas, and Ford could not work harmoniously without "Ed" Sweeney. These catchers did all the thinking for the two great twirlers, and their work in the box was purely mechanical.

Cobb.

Krause ranged ten straight victories in a row before he fell, in a ten-inning game with the St. Louis team, then, as usual, in last place. The secret is this. Thomas was catching him for the ten he put on the shelf. Lapp was behind the bat for the eleventh, and it fell off and smashed. Krause pitched without confidence in his catcher's judgment to outguess the batters, and he lost.

The same thing was true of Ford in the post-season series with the Giants. In the early innings of the first game, Sweeney had his hand split open with one of Ford's eccentric spitters. The Highlander was never the same again. He did not pitch the wonderful ball he is capable of in that series. He had no confidence in the lumbering Mitchell to handle his "spitters," to think fast; in short, to outguess the batters.

Plank.

Some catchers have a very busy habit of talking all the time to annoy a batter in an effort to distract his attention from his work. John Kling, of the Chicago Cubs, known in baseball as a bad man with a batter, "chewed" incessantly during the world's series in which we won the championship from the Cubs. He seemed to want to distract attention from the pitcher. A favorite line of his was:

"Now, let's try him on a fast one."

It is sort of an unwritten law of baseball to let the first one go by to get a look at the style. Kling would say:

"He liked the looks of that. Let's try him on another." Then up would come a curve.

A favorite trick of his is to get the batter into an argument, and have his pitcher shoot over a fast one. He tried this on me in the first world's series.

"So they say that you are the best base runner in the American league," was his opening line. "Well, you are not up against American league catchers now, young fellow. Let's see you steal a base if you get down."

I paid no attention to him, although he evidently hoped that I would turn around and reply, so that I would be caught off my guard. And not in conceit, but, as a historian, I relate the sequel. I did get down to first base, and by pretending I was going to steal, made him signal to Overall to waste two balls. Then, when he had to put a strike over, I went down.

Ford.

Sometimes a catcher will overplay his part in this respect, and a remark dropped by him will give a batter the key to the situation which will enable him to outguess the pitcher. A thing of this sort happened to me in Chicago one day last season, with Walsh pitching and Payne catching.

Payne dropped a remark, which set my mind working and which led me to forecast what was coming. This cue and the resultant conclusion I drew, based on the hasty hypothesis of Payne's remark, resulted in a timely base hit. The conditions and circumstances of the hit are not likely to occur often in a game with Walsh pitching. He is a spit ball pitcher entirely. He uses his "spitter" and a fast ball with no curves. On this occasion, Payne signalled for either a spit ball or a fast one, I don't know which. Walsh shook his head in reply, and Payne gave him another signal to which he again shook his head.

"You don't want this one?" Payne mumbled in his mask, but loudly enough for me to hear as he gave another signal. Walsh nodded assent.

Now here is what passed through my mind, after listening to the hint carelessly dropped by Payne. Two were out at the time, a man was on third base, who, if he scored, would put us ahead, and the count on me was two strikes and no balls. My flash of thought must have been instantaneous. I try never to pay any attention to the monologue of a catcher, but Payne is naturally a reticent man, and his remark surprised me.

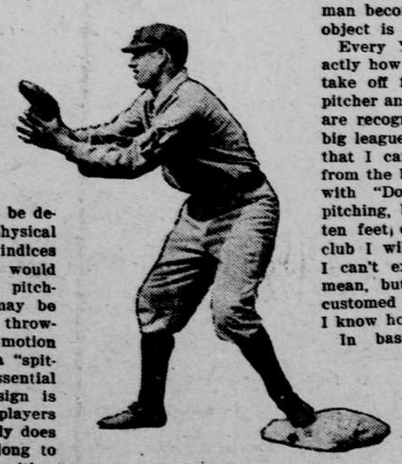
Walsh had refused to pitch until he had received a certain sign. This made me think that it was not going to be a "spitter" or a fast one, evidently the first two signals given by Payne. He can't intend to waste a ball, I reasoned, because the man is on third, and he doesn't think he is going to try to steal. Then it struck me.

"Can it be a curve?" I asked myself surprised. "But he never throws one," I argued in my mind.

Then I remembered the surprise betrayed in Payne's "You don't want this one." The remark, mumbled in his mask, had supplied the key. I took a chance. It was a curve, and I called the turn. It was the first and last one Walsh ever threw me, and probably he would have slipped it over, had it not been for Payne's poorly suppressed surprise. That cost Walsh the game. It must be remembered by the reader that all this giving of signals and reasoning took place in about a minute's time. A ball player must think fast.

Old "Cy" Young, one of the Solons of baseball, crossed me once in almost the same way with reverse English on it. It was a case of him outguessing me. The veteran Cleveland pitcher is as different from Walsh, in his style, as white is from black. "Cy" relies on a curve and a fast ball, never using a "spitter." Young had two strikes and one ball on me in a game in Cleveland. He walked out of the box and part way to the catcher to receive the ball. Easterly, catching, signed for an offering that did not coincide with "Cy's" idea of the exigencies of the situation. The old fellow shook his head twice, which immediately forced me to conclude that it would be neither a curve nor a fast one.

Oldring was on first base at the time, and I guessed that "Cy" must want to waste one, thinking he was going to try to steal. When the ball came to me about chin high, I at once concluded that my diagnosis was the correct one, and I let it go. But, when about two feet in front of me, it broke across my letters, a beautiful strike, and I had not even taken my bat off my shoulder. "Cy" had dished up a spitter from somewhere in his assortment, and I didn't even know that he could throw one. He simply outguessed me and caught me in the arms of Morpheus. He had wet the ball, while walking away from the plate with his back to me, after getting it from Easterly, thus giving no hint that he was going to throw a "spitter."



Chase.

Young invented this trick and applies it occasionally to great advantage, I have learned since, catching a batter off his guard. But he depends for the most part on a curve and a high, fast ball, relying on his wonderful control to put the ball where he wants it. That "whisker" trimmer of his, which is a high, fast one in the vicinity of the neck, is a villainous ball. A pitcher of Young's type would just as soon tell the batter where he is going to try to throw the ball, because it is generally known that he is pitching at a batter's weakness.

Lajoie.

So batting in the big leagues is largely a game of thought. The man who outguesses the pitchers accumulates the most hits and the largest batting average. Lajoie is the only exception to this that I can recall. Of course, self-confidence is an absolute necessity to any successful hitter, but the Cleveland second baseman is more chock full of reliance in his own batting ability than any other player I know. It is not conceit, just faith in his eye. He shuffles out to the plate, almost carelessly, and bangs his bat down two or three times as if to say to the pitcher:

"Toss one up here and hurry up about it. I'm not particular."

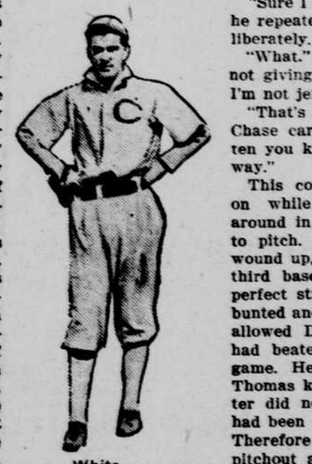
He seldom lets the first one go past him. He gets his poise, takes a couple of short steps, wades into the ball, and bang!

"You can't get one by me," his manner appears to challenge. He is simply bulging with confidence. He is the one hitter and the only successful one I ever saw who apparently doesn't try to guess what the pitcher is going to throw and really doesn't care. Pitchers have never been able to discover any "groove" that he is concealing. He simply wades in and hits at any kind of a ball. He is one batter in a thousand.

Tyrus Cobb, the Detroit star, is the exactly opposite type of hitter. He is thinking all the time he is at the bat, figuring, planning, to outguess the pitcher and the fielders, in baseball parlance "to cross" his opponents, a legitimate procedure. If he thinks that the third baseman expects a bunt, he will hit it out. He never chases a bad ball, and he makes a pitcher work to the last notch. He worries many of the men in the box by his restlessness, and because he is constantly guessing right. He has almost clairvoyant ability to outguess a pitcher.

In some games, I have been able to guess right almost every time that the pitcher has thrown the ball to me and yet have not been able to get a hit.

There is a great difference in pitchers. Some are easy to outguess, and others are as bad as a jig-saw puzzle, and I never worked out one of those in my life. I know some men who have mannerisms in the box which betray definitely the sort of a ball to be delivered. These little physical eccentricities are true indices and often cost men, who would otherwise be successful pitchers, many games. It may be the twist of the wrist in throwing a curve ball, or some motion of the foot peculiar to a "spitter" that divulges the essential secret. This tell-tale sign is fatal to a pitcher, when players get on to it, and it usually does not take his opponents long to discover and associate it with a certain kind of ball.



White.

Working in combination to outguess the batters, a catcher will often help a pitcher out by talking incessantly, hoping in this way to distract a hitter's attention from his business. Street of the Washington club is one of the worst talkers in the business, and is called in some strata of baseball "Gabby." From the time that a catcher throws the ball back to the pitcher until he delivers it again, a batter should never take his eyes off the pitcher.

All of the "grooves" of batters are carefully catalogued. Every hitter in baseball, with the possible exception of Lajoie and Wagner, is supposed to have what is known to the profession as a "groove," a certain real or imagined weakness. Some pitchers work to fool a batter, and others aim at his "groove." Young and Powell are of the second type, and it is this style of pitcher that I always try to make pitch to the limit, as they have to depend absolutely on their control.

The catcher is obviously included in the guessing match which always results when a batter faces a pitcher. I recall a funny instance of "Hal" Chase making Ira Thomas look like six nickels in a game last summer. Thomas formerly played on the Yankees, and, at the time, Chase's sign for the squeeze play was given by putting his right hand to his nose. Ira had seen him give this many times when they were team mates.

But on this occasion, Chase was playing on the New York club, and Thomas was catching on the Philadelphia team. It was in the eighth inning with the score tied, and a New York runner on third base, champing on his spikes to get home when Chase stepped to the bat. One was out. "Hal" went through the usual preliminaries of knocking the dirt out of his spikes, fixing his hat the firmer, as if he expected to take a long run and didn't want to be called back to get the cap, and spitting on his hands. Then he put the first digit of his right hand to the side of his nose.

"What are you going to do, Hal," asked Ira, "frame up something here?"

Thomas did not expect to find out anything by the question, but wanted to drag Chase into conversation to get his mind off his work.

"Sure I am," replied Chase, and he repeated the old sign very deliberately.

"What," exclaimed Ira, "you're not giving me that sign, thinking I'm not jerry to it?"

"That's right, Ira," answered Chase carelessly. "I had forgotten you knew, but it goes anyway."

This conversation was carried on while Plank was pawing around in the box and preparing to pitch. As the tall southpaw wound up, Daniel started in from third base. Plank delivered a perfect strike, and Chase half bunted and half hit the ball, which allowed Daniels to score. "Hal" had beaten Thomas at his own game. He had given a sign that Thomas knew, and which the latter did not for a moment think had been passed out seriously. Therefore Ira did not signal for a pitchout as he would have done if he had guessed the play was coming. Thus Chase double-crossed Ira. A ball player is trying to outguess the pitcher from the time he leaves the bench until he sits down again. He doesn't terminate his engagement at the plate. As soon as a batsman becomes a base runner, his object is advancement.

Every ball player knows exactly how much of a lead he can take off first base on a certain pitcher and not get caught. There are recognized standards in the big leagues. For instance, I know that I can go fifteen feet away from the bag and get safely back with "Doc" White of Chicago pitching, but if I go a step over ten feet on Walsh of the same club I will probably get nipped. I can't exactly explain what I mean, but when I once get accustomed to a pitcher's delivery, I know how far to venture.

In base running, I believe that the secret of success is the start, absolutely. Speed is a great asset, but the start is everything.

Outguessing the pitcher and catcher is a sort of instinct which some players have and others never attain. A man seems to do it by intuition and often cannot tell just what concrete hypothesis leads him to reach a certain conclusion. But believe me, it is a great art for a ball player to have, a great art, and one to be cultivated.

PARTNERS

By ANNIE HINRICHSEN

"Our partnership must end." The girl spoke decisively.

"I don't see the reason," objected the man.

"We have been writing together very successfully for several weeks," she explained. "But we have reached a point in our work where each one can do better alone. If we stay together our influence on each other will be a real detriment to success. My work will take on the quality of yours; yours will become like mine. Our talents will develop if we work separately."

In spite of the hurt in his eyes Graham Ford's lips twitched.

"Perhaps I seem ungrateful," Norma Atwood went on. "I am really your protege rather than your partner. I came to the city with the intention of devoting my life to newspaper and magazine work. All my articles and stories were refused. When I met you I was utterly discouraged. I told you my difficulties. You read my stuff, showed me how to alter it into salable matter and introduced me to editors. Success came immediately. I am selling everything I write. We have been working together. You write your things and I write mine. Every morning you come here to my flat and we go over the stories and give each other advice and suggestions. We have called ourselves literary partners.

"Yesterday the Arcade asked me to furnish them a daily story. These stories and my work will take all my time and these morning hours together must be given up."

Ford's brows drew together. "I understand," he said briefly. "You offer two good reasons; you are so successful that you haven't time for me, and we can do better work without the assistance of each other."

Two weeks later Norma Atwood went to the office of the Arcade.

"Mr. Mills," she said to the managing editor, "you promised to publish a story of mine every day for an indefinite period. This morning you sent back to me a bundle of my stories accompanied by a letter telling me to write better ones if I

"I Can Be a Partner—"

wished the Arcade to use them. I've come to ask you what is the matter with them."

The editor was a direct man and a frank one. "They lack snap and point. Your earlier stories were clever; these are flat. Write as well as you did a few weeks ago and no story will be returned to you."

I few days later another bundle of stories was returned to her.

One evening Graham Ford came to the little flat. It was his first visit since the dissolution of the partnership.

"How are you getting along?" he asked abruptly.

"I am very busy," she began bravely.

"Are you selling much?"

"Every writer has periods of failure."

"What is the Arcade doing with your stuff?"

"Sending it back to me." After a moment she added, "So is every other editor."

"Brutes," he anathematised. "Let me see your stories."

He went through them, cutting, transposing and adding whole paragraphs. "These are good stories," he commended. "Try them on those editors again. They will buy. You write well."

She shook her head.

"Norma, let's go back to our partnership. Will you? I'm lonesome and unhappy. I can't write alone."

"Every big magazine in the country is buying your work. You don't need me. You never needed me. But I—"

"I'm lonesome and miserable. I do need you. I want a literary partner and I want the other kind of partner, too. I want a wife, Norma. I love you, dear, and I can't go on without you."

"You will have to. I shall neither marry you nor resume our literary partnership."

The next day she took the revised stories to the editor of the Arcade.

He glanced over them. "Good stuff," he announced. "You've touched up these stories and put the real substance into them. I'll publish these and all others as good."

She gathered them up. "They are not for publication. I wanted to know something about them, and you have told me what I wished to know."

Three months later, in response to a charmingly worded note, Graham Ford came to Norma's flat for dinner.

The living-room had been refurnished and was a harmony of dull woods and soft colors. Before the grate fire was a small table set for two. Norma wore over her pretty, light gown a white apron.

It was a well cooked dinner which the white-aproned hostess served. Graham Ford ate steadily and appreciately through the course. When the meal was finished they carried the table into the tiny kitchen. Graham looked about for the cook, but saw no one.

Norma pushed an easy chair before the fire. He dropped into it and lighted a cigar. Norma, still wearing her apron, sat on a small chair drawn close to his.

"Graham," she said in a low voice, "how do you like it—my little flat and my dinner?"

"It is a domestic paradise," he sighed. "Would you like to have it all the time? You can if you want to," she went on as he stared bewildered. "I refused you a literary wife. Will you take a domestic one? Sit still while I tell you about it. I was so spoiled by my literary success that I thought I had real talent. I ended our partnership. After that I could not sell a story. The only merit my stories possessed was the revision you gave them. With it they sold; without it they were worthless.

"After we separated I realized that—that I loved you. When you asked me to marry you I wanted to—I wanted to with all my heart. But I could not do it. I had nothing to give you in return for all you were ready to give me. I refused you and—and—I went to school to learn to be a good home-maker. I learned to cook, to arrange rooms, to shop economically. I've practiced here in my little flat, trying to become proficient enough to—to make your home comfortable and happy. I'm a literary failure, but I am a good cook and now I can be a real partner—a useful one—if you—"

But the rest of the sentence was left unfinished as the girl and the big white apron were drawn into the easy chair.

Small Republics.

Klein-Alp is a diminutive republic tucked away between Switzerland and France. Only in summer is the republic inhabited, and then by miners and cowgirls. There is one hotel, closed during the winter. Another little republic is in Tyrol, between Austria and Italy, and in long gone years was under the jurisdiction of first a king and then an emperor. But in the adjustment of frontier lines the state of Val di Ventino was in some way overlooked, and it promptly organized itself into a Lilliputian republic. It has now about 2,000 inhabitants, living in six villages. Neither Val di Ventino or Klein-Alp have any taxes. There are no officials or compulsory military service. The only industry of Val di Ventino, aside from the farming of small fields, is charcoal burning.

Just Baby's Size.

In a car filled with ladies, a 90-pound dude sat wedged in tightly. At a street corner a fat woman, handsomely dressed and with a baby in her arms, got in. The little dude struggled to his feet and touched his hat politely, remarking facetiously:

"Madam, will you take this seat?"

The fat lady looked at the crevice he had left and thanked him pleasantly.

"You are very kind, sir," she said. "I think it will just fit the baby."

And it did.—New York Evening Mail.

Marvel Explained.

Mrs. A.—Your boy is different from the others I know. He always keeps his face clean.

Mrs. B—Yes; he hates so to have it washed.

BRAVERY OF STOKE-HOLE MEN

Many Deeds of Heroism Reported Among Firemen on Board War Vessels and Merchant Ships.

The president has presented medals to the six members of the engineer's crew of the battleship North Dakota, who, when an explosion of oil fuel occurred, rescued injured comrades amid steam and deadly fumes and saved the ship from destruction.

It is one of the curious anomalies known to the merchant service of the salt water that stoke-hole men, recruited from human riffraff and scarce recognizing the mere existence of discipline, have risen to the noblest heroism. They have stayed by vessels deserted by deck officers and men. They have made repairs when every breath drew in scalding steam and worked at furnace doors when the water was so high upon the plates it splashed into the ash pit doors. It is their lot to be held partly in contempt and partly in fear. Their labor saps the life of strong men. That of firemen has been placed as low as six years. They are always in danger from shifting coal, breaking pipes and tumbling slice bars. The beat of the waves may throw them against white-hot furnaces or the waves themselves, coming over the rails, may tumble through gratings and drown them like rats in a barrel.

It is surely a great thing that beings of ill reputation and hard, cruel lives, should yet appear on the records and in the tales never recorded as the bravest men in the hour of trial. The six men of the North Dakota, because they are of the navy, gain something of reward. They are, however, but brothers of a world-wide family.

The Leader.

A Kansas City hotel boasts of having five brides as guests in one day. In Houston, where about 150 passenger trains arrive every day, the brides enter the corridors in such a stream that it is not uncommon for the sweepers to gather up a bushel and a half of rice at a single sweep.—Houston Post.

Man a Dependant Creature

Those Who Are Independent of Every Government Are Properly Called Pirates.

Man is essentially a dependent creature. He is like certain sea beings, such as the patecrinis caput medusae, which cannot live, though they be animals, without attaching themselves to some rock or shell.

When you examine any human greatness, you will always find it consists in a human spirit finding some cause or principle or person and giving himself up to it. There is no heroism that is not self-surrender.

The good mother is one who is tied to her children. A man's passions never become noble until they are chained to the one woman he has chosen. It is this sense of servitude, of bondage, of obedience to another in our innermost will and feeling, that lends honor and stature to our commonest human relations. Jesus was never taller than when he called himself "Servant of All." And it was said of him. "It behooves the captain of our salvation to learn obedience."

Freedom is only a superficial and a relative term; it can only mean renouncing a low master for a higher one. Our fathers declared their independence of King George only that they might serve the people.

Those who are independent of every government are properly called pirates and bandits, and are hunted down by all nations as enemies of mankind.

Those who seek to be entirely independent, to do as they please, to be their own master, become speedily slaves to the worst of masters, their own appetites.

The beauty of a worthy master is that he sets us free. Only as we find that to which we can look up and reverence, and as we find that which is reverencing, do we escape from the irritating slavery itself. "If the son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."—Dr. Frank Crane.

Had Been Cautioned.

"Where you been to so late, young man?"

"I've been calling on Sally Simpkins, father, and she's promised to marry me at last!"

"Serves you right! I told you that you'd get into trouble if you didn't keep away from that girl."—Harper's Bazar.