

A BASE (BALL) CANARD

Throwing Some X Rays on the National Game

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"Yah, you champeen!"

gone game; nineteen decillion times the word *Base-head* was either chanted or moaned. So many peanuts were consumed that if piled together they would make a mountain range as high as the Himalayas and would completely fill thrice over the trunks of all the elephants in India. Fourteen thousand boxes of Old Whiff—generally—good cigars were given away to batsmen who swore at the ball for not going over the fence. Nineteen hundred men died of pneumonia from attending the game in the cold days of April to please the magnates. Eighty-five million doped roses were palmed off by get-rich-once florists in floral offerings for Opening Day. The nickels spent for carfare would, if laid side by side, go four times around the earth and eventually into the pockets of the Money Trust. Seven hundred and eight thousand, two hundred and ninety-six clerks, weighing an average of one hundred and ten pounds each, called eighty umpires, weighing two hundred pounds each the epithet *Robber* at least forty times each. Five hundred mayors and one President of the United States tossed the "first" ball. Seventy billion—

YOU know, all of this means something. It means that baseball is the great National Game. Figures can not lie. There are the figures. Baseball, as somebody has so well, so very well, said, is the National Pastime. It is the most popular game in the United States. Why?

Everybody knows why, but nobody likes to go on record as telling. All the sporting writers for the newspapers know why; all the psychologist-philosophers know why; all the fans know why. We all go and we all like to go, but we hate to tell on each other. The reason, briefly, and in two chunks, why baseball is the national game is, because this is the Land of Let George Do It and also the Land of Public Opinion. First and foremost, any discussion of the national game must, argal, include a discussion of the nation's prominent characteristics; and any successful business man, from the magnate down to Mickey, the office boy, will admit that this is a nation firmly entrenched in the belief, practice and triumph of Letting George Do It—George being anybody except yourself. This is what makes us the busiest nation on earth. It takes a lot of hustling to pass it on to Riley. Any man who has worked in a big American business office knows this. He knows how he has spent days and shoe leather and lungs, dictating memos to some other slave in the office asking him to "take this matter up"; and how that slave has passed the memo to still another, saying, "This seems to be in your line, George; you do it"; and so on, until lo, you, and behold, you, just as the original passer-on has forgotten such a matter ever existed, here comes the old original memo back to him with a full set of side-

burns and a crutch. Then that makes him mad; and he decides to complain to the boss about the lunk-headed laziness of the office force. Most of the work seems to be finally done by the office boy, any way.

Rambling thus along the rambling highway of philosophy, plucking here a lemon and there a quince, come we devoutly to the topic of baseball, and we see that even in our athletics and in the matter of our taking exercise, we let George do it. This is the great secret of the popularity of baseball in this country: that we can sit in the grandstand and watch the other fellow do the work. If the doctor tells the average American that what he needs is fresh air and exercise, the first thing the patient does is to buy a dollar's worth of cigars and a ticket to the baseball game. Filling his lungs alternately with tobacco smoke and advice to the home team, he watches eighteen hirelings use their wits and muscles, and comes away from his afternoon of fat content declaring himself greatly refreshed. Exercise by proxy. Just what the doctor ordered. I know this fact to be strangely true, because I have done it myself—and taken my doctor along with me.

The emperor Commodus, they say, used to put on the gladiatorial armor plate and climb down into the arena himself, there to take a back at some meek old giraffe, or puncture the neck of an ostrich with an arrow from his bow. Even at that he took a chance of the giraffe getting a foot in the imperial face or the ostrich suffocating him with its feathers. But in the modern Colosseum we take no such chances. There are parts of the stands where, to be sure, we might get a swift foul tip full in the feeding apparatus; but we are partly screened even from that possibility. No. Our part is simply the imperial part of sitting, with thumbs a-twiddle, while our hired gladiators and slaves (see pending bills in Congress ancient baseball peonage) refresh us with their skill—or lack of it, as the case may be. The best we can do to palliate our dulcet decline is to bark back to the olden days.

"**S**EE those fingers," says the adipose old fan next to you, "every one of 'em bunged up. I used to play third on my college nine. This game here takes me back to the halcyon When." Now he could n't catch a street car without the aid of a traffic cop. But he can give the boys advice.

Yes. He can give the players a tip or two on how to play the game. For one vice closely follows on another.

Along with the effort of getting George to do it has come the American habit of giving George advice on how to do it. We are the greatest little nation of advice-givers now occupying a red spot on the map. So far most of our advice has been intramural and has n't gotten us into much trouble with the rest



of the earth; but the future lies before us just as surely as Italy lies beyond the Alps. A good deal of our home-grown advice is called Public Opinion. It is a fine large phrase and covers everything from Anthony Comstock bloodhounding down Broadway

after a postal card to recalling the justices of the Supreme Court. All of this, as Rube Goldberg would say, comes under the head of Public Opinion. It is really and truly a vice, genuinely vicious, but it is so common we never think anything of it. We all do it, every one of us from Alpha Jones to Omega Smith. Preachers preach advice; Vice-Presidents and other indigenous fauna fill the land with advice; on all sides is a joyful, giddy tumult of advice. More than one well-meaning newspaper prints almost every day an editorial begging and pleading for less noise in the land. It might as well try to sweep back the stormy fields of restless tide. After we have got George to do our work for us, we are ready and willing to sit back and tell each other How Things Ought to Be Done.

Here is where baseball panders to our vicious taste. Edison himself could not have invented a better expedient for the high flute-like tooting or bellowing roar of good old vox populi. At a baseball game every last member of the audience gets a good chesty chance to tell 'em all How. None so lowly but he can shoot the waves of ether full of advice to Mathewson as to what the next ball should be.

The modest clerk men set their feet upon Turns demon, wildly rages, and anon Giving Ty Cobb an earful of advice. Remarks: "I told yah," when the game is gone.

A nervous little man sitting next to me at a recent game attracted my attention. Artie Shafer, a very fast man on the bases, was caught napping off of first. As Shafer dragged himself up out of the dirt of defeat and plodded toward the bench, my neighbor suddenly jumped



"See those fingers!"

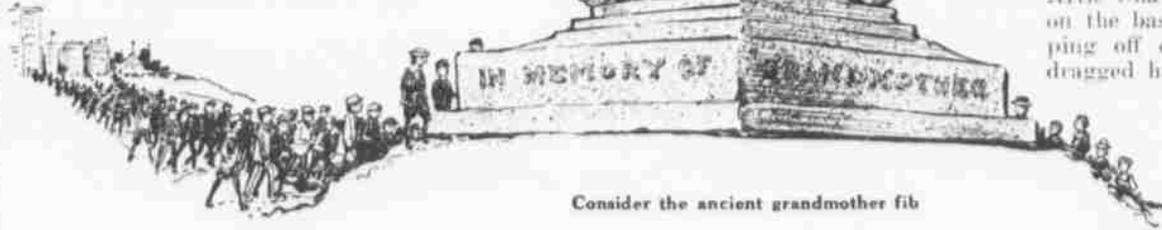


"You can be sent to jail!"

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(Continued on Page 11)



Consider the ancient grandmother fib