

A Base Ball Canard

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up, pulled off his eyeglasses, threw his stogie into the grounds and shrieked thus:

"Yah, you big hick. You poor simp. You bone, you. Whadda you know about baserunning? Huh? Who told you you was a champeen? Doncha know you can't get but just so far off'n foist? An' doncha know that when you're that far off if you lean your body just the least bit toward second, he's got yuh? Why, you dope, you, what's yer vaudyville act—the Sleepin' Beauty? Who put morphine in yer coffee? Why doncha get a sofa if yuh wanta take a nap? Yah, you champeen!" And so on. He kept it up until the next play was started and then sank back into his seat, quivering and almost exhausted. I tapped him on the shoulder.

Just as a matter of psycho-sociology, I inquired, "What business are you in?"

He glared at me defiantly and said: "I am a jeweler."

The next man got a base on balls. The next man made a short hit. Then the side went out in two-three order.

The irate diamond man almost had a fit. "Yah," he yelled so that half the grandstand could hear him, "if Shafer had only stood still on that bag just as I told him to, we'd have scored a run and won the game." Which was true, as it turned out afterward. "If he'd only stuck his spike in the bag; if he'd only got a pot of glue; if he'd set down on the dern sack and chewed his gum—anything, anything," Shafer happening to trot by at this moment, the whole thing began over again. "Yah, you. Call yourself a baserunner. You couldn't beat a blind cripple with the wind behind your back. Why, a turtle is a Hans Colemine compared to you. Run? You could n't run an ad in a noospaper. Yah, you champeen!"

THIS, as the reader knows, is one of the joys, the national joys, of attending the national game. While George was tinkering the watches (or else had let them go hang and was sitting somewhere else in the audience) this little wedding-ring merchant was giving expert advice to his hirelings of the afternoon. And on all sides of him sat we others, gormandizing the ozone and breathing it forth full of inside information for Manager McGraw.

Besides this vocal hullabaloo while the game is going on, there is another branch to the passion. I refer to the national pastime of dropping the local manager a post card, thus:

"Why don't you can that shrimp that hides behind second every time a ball comes his way? Are you a baseball manager or are you a charitable organization for the support of imbeciles and cripples?" This sort is always signed, "A Fan."

Or thus:
"Keep your eye on Poke Swank, now playing first for Little Rock. This feller is Big Lig material. He can play better ball right now than that half-witted behemoth you got holding down the sack." Signed, "Rooter."

To return to the little jeweler for a moment.

His tirade against Shafer brought out another typically American trait—the use of a sort of sarcastic exaggerated humor, what Kipling called our "acrid Asiatic mirth." We have developed a purely American brand of wit as exemplified by the word-smiths who report the game.

For instance:
"Merkle pulled one of his usual bones. He hoisted his marble think-tank into the parabola of one of Old Left Soupbone's slippery elm spray sprigs and was promptly beaned on his pseudo-cerebellum. But it is almost impossible to fracture Fred in the spot where Silas put the hay."

To all good Americans this is simple and full of fun. To any one else

it is about as intelligible as a paragraph from Henry James read loud by a lady with a Southern accent, a cold, and a tendency to pause and gasp after each comma.

Another point, also in passing, which any self-respecting chronicler should set down for the perusal of, at least, future generations if not this one, is that baseball is a terrible demoralizer. We need only consider the awful lies which are told by fans, either to their business associates or to their wives, in order to attend a game. Think of the young lives which are started wrong; consider the ancient grandmother fib. As the twig is bent, so the future business man is inclined. Nowadays young America is committing perjury by the bucketful. Worse than that. They are becoming adepts at burglary, invasion and trespass. At a recent game I saw a ten year old lad being led out of the grounds by a special policeman. The lad was being held by the ear while the special cop poured words of wisdom and advice into said orifice. He said:

"You are over sixteen years old,"—which the culprit was not—"and you can be indicted for the offense you have committed. You can be sent to JAIL." (Tears.) "Think of your poor father and mother dragged into court because of this." (More tears from the ten year old.) "Think of the heavy fine they would have to pay. Now this is the last time I will let you go; the next time I catch you I will see to it that the full penalty of the law is visited upon you." (Prolonged sobbing.)

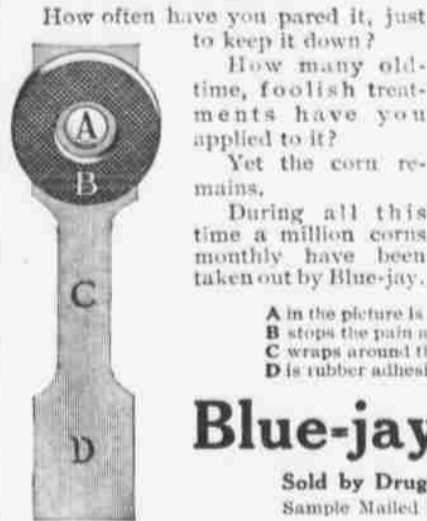
After the boy had left, I learned that he and twenty odd others had taken a two-by-four and pried off some iron bars set in concrete in a basement window of the grandstand. Damage, about ninety dollars. Incidentally I am pained to relate that all the other boys got good seats in the stand and the policeman was unable to find these base malefactors. Could infant infamy go further? Answer, no. I remember in my younger days another young man who leaned a board against a fence in Kansas City and climbed up it on his hands and knees to see the old K. C. Blues wallop Boston. This was in the days when Jimmie Manning never considered it a good afternoon's work unless he stole home. This vicious lad not only wore out his stockings in the attempt but, there being a barbed wire strip around the top of the fence, he utterly collandered a fine new pair of pants for which his poor and yet honest parents had paid three dollars. All to steal his way into a game which he could have rightfully attended by paying the small sum of twenty-five cents.

IN conclusion I would like to say that I know an American citizen, forty-five years old, who has been a newspaper man, a magazine editor and a successful man of affairs in general. He seems to be of sound mind and quite normal. Yet he has never seen a baseball game in his life—and he boasts of it.

It is almost impossible to believe that there is such a poor benighted simpleton on earth. Yet I know him and he lives. Just think of him—not a man, but a crustacean. Not a live palpitant American, but a lobster. A dull drone who knows not the wild joy of whooping loudly over a fellow man's skilful accomplishment. A business sot, a routine runt, a bleak, obtuse thing with a granite nose to a sandstone grindstone. Not for him the clear, snappy air of a clear day at the ball park. Not for him the eye-relieving green of the well-kept sod. Not for him the new stir of nerve and the quickening of his heart's blood. A groping thing of papers and decimal points beneath an electric bulb; a mere thick hunk of unagitated clay.

I leave the reader to strike the happy medium.

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