

# "IF ANY NAT EVER LICKED US, THE NAME ESCAPES ME" SAYS THE HOTEL CLERK

BY IRVIN S. COBB

"I'm mighty glad that little fuss with Castro blew over," said the Hotel Clerk.

"Who's Castro?" inquired that patient and long-suffering seeker after truth, the House Detective of the Hotel St. Reckless.

"He's one great little guy, is Castro," said the Hotel Clerk. "He's the president of our sister republic on the Monroe side of the family, the delightful little country of Venezuela. The principal products of Venezuela are yellow fever, the Asphalt Trust, informal 5 o'clock revolutions with or without frock coats, and Castro. But Castro's the most important. He's the boss of the works. He has a name like a new liver pill, and the lower slopes of his face are encumbered up as far as the frost line with stunted pine and dwarf furze, but he has a large displacement when he begins to rotate the propellers. He has a disposition like a two-inch length of blasting fuse."

"I know who you mean now," said the House Detective. "It's a case of touch and go with that lad, ain't it?"

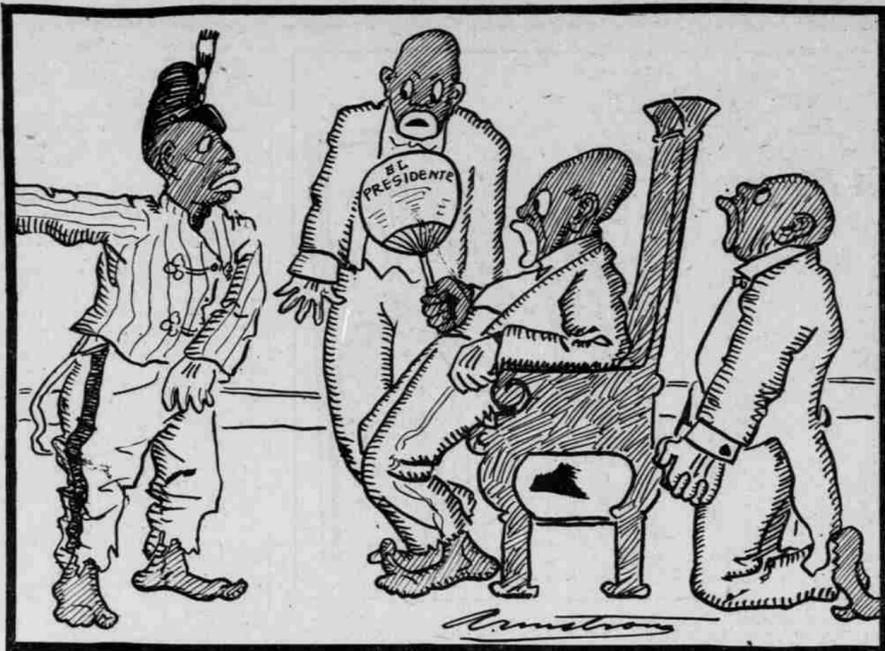
"It certainly is," said the Hotel Clerk. "But formerly when he touched somebody and tried to go, they'd halt him. Germany or England would send a competent fleet of those chunky European war vessels down to Caracas and make a demonstration."

"Wot's a demonstration?" asked the House Detective.

"Well, it's like this," said the Hotel Clerk. "If I should come to you, Larry, and rest the cold, forbidding nozzle of a large gun against the lobe of your ear while I frisked your raiment, that would be highway robbery. But if I was a big nation and you a small one, and I should do the same thing, then it would be a demonstration, and you'd have no cause for complaint. Our little friend Castro has taken the demonstration degree several times. And here the other day it looked as if we'd have to play collection agency again down his way. But the differences were adjusted without an open breach. It would've been a terrible thing if we'd angered Castro."

"Why so?" asked the House Detective.

"He might order out the squad of Postal Telegraph messengers that he calls his standing army, and invade us," said the Hotel Clerk. "I'm glad we didn't get him aroused. When I think of Castro and the Bock Panatella Guards marching from New Orleans to St. Louis, with flags and shirt-tails flying, and thence by rebates and drainage canal to Chicago, thence by the Erie and hired hacks to Buffalo, thence by New York Central wrecking trains to New York,



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"NOT A DREADNAUGHT IN THE WHOLE LOT"

thence by trolley to Coney, thence—"Are you gittin' altogether dippy in your head?" asked the House Detective. "Wot would the Army, and Navy and Teddy and Big Bill Taft and the Police force be doin' when them little smoked merchaum gysts tried to land?"

"There you go, Larry," lamented the Hotel Clerk. "You're like ninety-nine per cent of the populace of this ill-fated country. You will go on thinking we can lick any other nation on earth simply because we always have. Why don't you read the magazines? They're full of the perils—that and advertisements for rust-proof mattresses and non-refillable automobiles. Congress is full of it, too, and so is Senator Beveridge, and so is Secretary Loeb—he gets his ideas on the subject pre-digested, like a squab taking nourishment from its mama pigeon, but just the same, he gets them—and so is nearly everybody else, except the general public. Blind, deluded creatures that you are, you refuse to awake to the danger that menaces you. You go along concerning your minds with the small affairs of life, such as

notes coming due in the bank, and easy times that don't seem to be any different from hard times except that in some spots they're harder, when at this very moment we are all sleeping on a powder mine which is liable any minute to rise in a mighty tidal wave and engulf us in the quicksand of disaster, like rats in a trap, as Senator Beveridge remarked the other day in an impassioned speech which he delivered to the Vice-President, several pages and a soused party asleep in the press gallery.

"You don't seem to know what a condition our Army and Navy has got into. If you did, you'd know we'll have to be pretty careful hereafter about how we bandy hard words with Patsy Bolivians, or the Terry Delfnegos, or any of those chaps. Right now, if the Coreans, or the Peegees, or the Juhubes or some other outlying but well-armed nation should take a notion to attack New York, practically the only uniformed bodies we could muster for the defense of the wholesale clothing trade and the lesser industries of our great city would be the local letter carriers and the inmates of the Sailors' Snug

Harbor. Anyhow, that's how the magazines figure it out.

"There was a time once, when we could feel pretty cocky, and we did. If the Fruit Trust didn't like the way the cloudy republic of Hayti was playing the game, they'd pass the word to Washington, and the next day a gunboat would be on its way down to apply a little of the Monroe Doctrine with the reverse English. The President of Hayti, who greatly resembles the Hon. Joe Gans, only he has a complexion that looks more like rain, would be sitting in state with his cabinet about him in a semicircle, all in full dress and with palm leaf fans in their hands, discussing the situation, the whole presenting a spectacle something like Lew Dockstader's first part. A Lieutenant-General of the Haytian army would burst in, drawing on his uniform pants as he entered, and announce that the American fleet was without, and the executive council would adjourn to the nearest cellar. But now us Jack Daltons must have a care, or else some day a bunch of Williams & Walker cadets will be landing at Tampa, and unless they should be diverted by a chattering

supper or a crap game, ruin and ravage will assuredly await the watermelon orchard of Georgia, the fried chicken plantation of Kentucky, and the pork chop ranges of Sunny Illinois, while from the steps of the Capitol a conquered nation may yet hear ringing out the national hymn of the victorious foes, entitled, 'My Voodoo Lulu.'

"I have no doubt you are one of those who think our standing army is amply large, especially as no theater manager ever seems able to find a seat for a non-com. in uniform. You see trainload after trainload of gallant shipping-clerks and ribbon-salmsmen going to a camp laden with their mosquito nets, their mandolins, their bull terriers and other military supplies, and you think we have enough National Guardsmen to police every automobile course in this fair land, and still have a few left over for hop-nights at the Summer hotels. But you are wrong. And as for our Navy, the less said the better. If we but knew the truth, as a lot of the magazine editors know it, we would cease to be proud of those floating hospitals of decrepit rafts whose hospitable crews were

lately entertaining the thrifty citizens of open-hearted Los Angeles by paying them 75 cents a bottle for beer. If you still cherish the fond delusion that Bob Evans' flotilla of invalid soup tureens would have any chance against the Navy of Switzerland or Zambesland, you've only to read the remarks that were made recently by Congressman R. P. Hobson, the original soul-kisser, in demanding a larger fleet.

"The President has felt very strongly about the matter, too, ever since the fleet passed Oyster Bay in review last Summer, with their flags waving da-da, and the youngest male Roosevelt sat on the front porch clutching his pet grizzly cub in his young arms and cried aloud because there wasn't a Dreadnaught in the whole lot of them. The members of Congress representing the Pennsylvania localities that produce armor plate, are heartily with him in his endeavors to build up a fleet that will make Boston feel easy in its own mind, but apathy develops elsewhere. A bright young Congressman from the smelting regions, where the smelts come from, rises up to make an eloquent appeal for

more ships, but he is rudely interrupted by a member from Oklahoma, where the only foreign invaders they fear is the boll weevil or the white Republicans. The Oklahoma member is of the opinion that the Navy can wait. But how about that eighty thousand for a new cornice on the custom house at Kingfisher? And a member from Iowa would also like to know what about that measly half million for a survey of Skunk River? So they trim down the battleship appropriation until 'tis hardly visible to the naked eye. And there you are! It would be a terrible thing, if, in our defenseless state, we should arouse the ire of Great Britain. The only thing that consoles me is that nobody ever seems able to arouse the ire of Great Britain, unless it's a small, friendless bunch, such as Zulus or Boors."

"I ain't goin' to git skeered yet," said the House Detective. "There may have been somebody that's licked us from time to time, but if so, the name escapes me for the moment."

"Me, too," said the Hotel Clerk. "And sometimes it also seems to me that the modern battleships are a grand thing so long as you keep them on dry land. The action of salt water appears to have a bad effect on them. Wasn't it just the other day that one of those fragile grain-elevators that the British call a battleship bumped into a passenger vessel, and went down like a quinine pill? I hate to think of the loss of life that would ensue among His Majesty's sailors if their Dreadnaught ever got run into by one of our Staten Island ferry boats."

"No, Larry, unprotected and naked though we be, I have hopes that we'll struggle along for some time yet before we get licked by Roumania or Dutch Guiana. It actually looks to me our friends, the Japs, have taken in some few reefs since that ostensible fleet of ours began to edge over toward their side. In fact, I don't know of but one heavy reverse the American Nation has suffered lately."

"Wot was that?" asked the House Detective.

"Twas administered by William Waldorf Astor," said the Hotel Clerk. "You know Astor—he's the man who's sorry he was born in this country, but not as sorry as the country is. Well, by a great display of daring, he captured the battleship of the Chesapeake at an auction, and gave it to a British society."

"You wouldn't call that guy an American, would you?" asked the House Detective.

"No," said the Hotel Clerk, "but I'd gladly call him nearly anything else."

# Conversations with an Okla. Sport

IN WHICH HE DEALS OUT KNOCKS TO BOTH OPTIMIST AND PESSIMIST, AND COMPARES BASEBALL WITH OTHER BUSINESS INSTITUTIONS

"N O, KID," said the Old Sport, "it may be very soothing and comforting and all that to jolly yourself into thinking that you've got a strange hold on the great throbbing world, and that all you have to do is to tighten your grip and you can choke it till it's black and blue behind the gills, but I want to tell you that the guy who has the battle won as soon as he gets the grip is apt to be mighty surprised by the slippery proposition he is up against. You can take it from me that the optimistic slob who sees nothing but level roads ahead in the race of life is going to find himself all pumped out of wind when he hits the hills. I don't want you to be one of those guys who are so damned pessimistic that if you handed them a doughnut they couldn't see anything but the hole, but I don't want you to be so thundering optimistic that you would take it for fruit cake, either. You can take my tip that the guy who cops the results in this old dump of a world is the one who sorts out the bad eggs and then sets his hens without counting his chickens before they are hatched. The wise guy who sees both the roses and the thorns is the one who doesn't pick his fingers on the bum when he picks the roses."

"I know that the optimist has a thundering lot of fun in this world that doesn't cost a cent, but I want to hand you the tip that the guy who laughs at the pictures on the show bills is mighty apt to be disappointed when the real show hits in which he's taking part. The optimist by a long shot. He isn't the pessimist, either, but he is the guy who hits the happy medium, plugging along and working his block off to see the show and takes it for what it's worth without thinking about the two-headed orange-outing that they haven't got. There's nobody enjoys the circus like the kid who gets in by carrying water for the elephant."

"That's the dope, kid; plug along and don't for a minute imagine that the elevator to success is going to stop to take you on, because it is overworked already, and when the safety clutch gives way there's going to be an awful mess of human fragments down in the cellar."

"Besides, you're working on a floor at which the elevator to success never even hesitates. That's the great beauty about baseball. It is the one great American industry in which there is no such thing as 'pull' or favoritism. It is the only American institution that is absolutely governed by the masses, and in which the only route to success is by 'delivering the goods.' A guy might pack enough influence and prestige to

get him a job as chief pilot on the Ship of State at Washington, but just let him trot out on the ball lot and he's got to be there with the goods to hold down the job. No amount of influence or blue blood will boost him along if he can't eat up base hits and slam the ball. The wait of the city streets, who cuts his milk teeth on a cobblestone and was weaned on a fat-off cigar butte, can have the entire universe at his shrine if he is there with the goods, while the heir to a throne or the literal descendant of Democracy would be a dub if he fell down in the pinches. Your family tree and influential connections don't cut any lee with the fans, and they don't give ainker's damn whether your ancestors came over in the Mayflower or paddled across Bering Strait in a dugout. And that's why I maintain that baseball embodies more of the original principles and spirit of that little literary production which has lately been conferred upon the work of humor in politics, the Declaration of American Independence, than any institution in Uncle Sam's blamed turnip patch.

"And another thing, kid, you hear a lot of murr heads croaking about the unfairness of the reserve rule in baseball, but don't let that dope filter through the chinks in your garret for a minute. I'm hep to the fact that the head moguls hand you follows a contract that isn't worth the price of admission to a penny arcade when it bucks up against a court of law, and that when you put your fist to it you're caged for life as far as baseball is concerned, but you can take it from me that if this was the case with every other business, the whole thing wouldn't be any baseball job for you to get. Let them knock out the reserve clause and a lot of you guys would go popping around from one place to another like a beat dodging his board bill, and baseball won't be a more uncertain proposition than a bride's first biscuit. You'd knock the props out from under the whole blamed structure and put the game on the blink.

"I know that you guys get a hunch once in a while that you're getting the worst of it, but you can take my tip that baseball is the only fair and square business proposition that has ever been invented. And I've worked at everything from picking warts in a pickle factory to buying votes for the Mayor of New York. At that, baseball is the only institution that has ever been able to set up its own court and plug along contrary to all the dope handed down by a court of law and get away with it. And let me tell you that the only reason it can do this is because there is a blamed sight more justice in the decisions of the National Commission than has ever flowed its mug inside a law court. This is so because justice in



baseball is not bound hand and foot to the letter of the law, and they deal out the cards according to the situation. And I want to hand you the tip that if this situation existed in the Federal law you wouldn't see so blamed much distinction made between the burglar who carries a Jimmy and the one who wears a silk hat and has his office in Wall Street. There's nothing to it, kid, baseball law has Federal law chased clear under the table when it comes to dealing out justice, and no skinny shrimp of a lawyer can protect a crook by getting up on his hind legs and objecting to evidence because it is against the letter of the law and contrary to precedent. When they find a crook in baseball they chase him out of the game so blamed fast that his feet get hot hitting the grit. And it doesn't matter a brass mounted continental whether he is the guy who is putting up the cash to pay the salaries or only the dub who is getting \$100 a month for warming up the pitchers.

"And another thing I want to spike on the wall of your garret, kid, while we are on the subject. In any other business you butt into you'll always find a bunch of old women hanging around who ought to be at home spiking an axle patch

on the quarter-deck of a pair of trousers, but they hang onto their jobs because they put in their time licking the boss' boots every time he hits the joint. A kid will spend the halcyon days of his youth in a knowledge factory loading wads of dope into his coming tower, and then when he goes out to stab the world in the face with his roll of sheepskin he finds that the only way he can make a hit with the guy who gives him a job is to hit the brasses with his knee caps every time he shows his mug in the doorway. This crawling to the bosses is becoming so blamed prevalent that it's a wonder to me there isn't a universal epi-

demie of the housemaid's knee. But let me tell you right here that baseball is the only business institution that hasn't yet introduced this modern method of doing business. You stand a blamed poor show of holding your job in baseball by staying in the clubhouse licking the boss' boots, and the chances are that if you ever tried it you'd get the slam in the slats that was coming to you. The only way you can hang on in the baseball business is to get right out on the lot and pull liners out of the milky way and bang the paint off the whiskey ads with line drives. It's all right for a bunch of guys to get up on Fourth of July and hand out a bunch of rag about 'the spirit of '76,' but let me tell you that you can see more of the 'spirit of '76' splattered around a ball grounds in one afternoon than you could dig up in their business joints in a whole year.

"There's nothing to it, kid, you're in a more honorable business than you could rake out of the business directory with a fine-tooth comb. The gang up in 'rotters' row' may get up on their hind legs and call you a highway robber when you take a slice off first base or run the bluff that you've been cracked in the slats when the ball only grazes your shirt, but you can gamble that when they get back in their business joints the butcher is weighing his left hand with the steaks, the grocer who called you a thug at the ballgrounds is mixing white sand with the granulated sugar and hiding rotten apples at the bottom of the basket, and the banker who talked himself into vocal paralysis about your unfair tactics is getting cross-eyed looking for excuses to foreclose mortgages on widows and orphans.

"I want to hand you a tip, kid; don't hand yourself a free ticket to the Down-and-Out Club by getting it into your nut that you know better than your manager when to play to pull off to bring home the bacon. There's a lot of you guys who get in wrong by grabbing the dope that is dished out by the guys who sit up in the press box and make their guess after the play has been pulled off. Any dub can pick the winning horse after the race is over, and it's a cinch for these guys to hand out the raps to your manager after the game by saying that it was a managerial error to take a chance on the squeeze play which caught Jimmy at the plate when Mike subsequently slammed out a hit that would have scored the run. But these guys, and the players, too, seem to forget that the manager has to make his guess before the play has been pulled off. If Mike had hit it out and hit into a double play, take it from me the manager would have been treated just as hard for not trying the squeeze. It's