"THE LATE AESOP WAS A SAD AFFAIR," SAYS THE HOTEL CLERK

BY IRVIN S. COBB

IT WAS quite evident, even to the casual eye, as she floated through the Red Room of the St. Reckless, with a swish of silk and a jingle of gold armlets, that she was one who sewed not, neither did she spin, or at least, not to excess. The gentleman who trailed behind, carrying her wraps, was a man about as tall as a wine agent and correspondingly stout. The Hotel Clerk contemplated the vision musingly.

"Sometimes," he said, "sometimes it seems to me that Aesop was a dub."

"Less see," said the House Detective, "the name sounds familiar. This here E. Sopps can't be the same party that was nominated for President by the Labor and Socialists, can he?"

"No," said the Hotel Clerk. "I've forgotten the name of the trusting stranger you're thinking of, because I only heard it once and I probably never will hear it again until the day after election when he'll be grouped in the general results under the head of 'Scattering.' Aesop wasn't in politics. He wrote fables. He took an unfair advantage of a lot of poor dumb animals that'd never done him any harm by letting on that they didn't know any more than human beings. Away back in the days before Syracuse and Troy and Utica and all those towns moved from the old country to Central New York, Aesop was one of the 10 best sellers. The ancient Greek was pretty strong for literature in those days. He hadn't discovered up until that time that his proper vocation in life was running a candy store with ice cream soda and crackerjack popcorn on the side. He went around, holding the pass of Thermopelae until Thermops could prove he hadn't bought it from a scalper or whatever the circumstances of the case were, and swimming the Hellespont River when it was full of shore ice, and worshipping at the shrine of a Central Office a god who from all accounts must have been something like Elbert Hubbard, only bushier, and making offerings to a goddess named Juno who was a blamed good-looker and held her years well, but didn't have anything on our own Lillian Russell at that, and otherwise carrying on. Well along about that year or a little later, or maybe a little earlier, because I always did have a rotten bad memory for dates, Aesop was doing space work on the Athens Evening Slab and the other leading dailies and turning out a lot of nature-faking stories that would have got him into trouble if the Roosevelt of the period, the Hon. Zeus J. Jupiter had been properly on his job of running the universe."

"What was the matter with this party's writin's?" asked the House Detective. "Didn't his stuff go all right at the time?"

"Yes, I guess it must've gone all right then," said the Hotel Clerk. "What I'm complaining about is that people keep on pulling Aesop's fables when if they'd look around them they'd see easy enough that they don't fit any more. We've outgrown them the same as we have the state's rights doctrine and the habit of teaching college graduates how to spell correctly."

"As for instance how?" asked the House Detective.

"Well," said the Hotel Clerk, "take the classic about the grasshopper and the ant. That was one of Aesop's best bets, if not his one best. According to the original version the grasshopper had a perfectly lovely time all that Summer going around the country, in a minstrel suit and tan pants, singing tenor with the Locust City Quartet, and frittering away his substance on those long cool ones with a straw in the glass, while the ant never missed a day from the works and put something gratifying in the savings bank every Saturday night that came. And then one day during the following Winter, a brakeman shoved an unknown tramp off a freight train, in the middle of the worst snow storm since the blizzard of '84, hard by the modest cot of the hard-working ant. It was the grasshopper and at his modest knock the ant came out and gave him the morgue slab eye and told him they didn't need anybody to shovel off the snow and then went inside and shut the door in the grasshopper's abashed face. And the next morning, according to the local papers, a milkman making his early rounds found a stranger, believed from papers in his pockets to be named Percy J. Katydid, a frozen stiff in a deep drift back of the round house. And the moral was that a grasshopper has a better time than an ant but don't last as long."

"Well, wot's the matter with that one?" inquired the House Detective.

"Nothing, only it doesn't turn out that way in a great modern city," said the Hotel Clerk. "I know Larry, because I came from the same town that Gyondolin Gwendolyn Grasshopper and Ann Eliza Ant came from. They both came on about the same time to carve out their futures in the metropolis. So they had a similar ambition, but they weren't constructed alike. Ann Eliza was one of those life-is-real-life-is-earnest girlies who's got a straight tip from somwhere that the grave is not the goal. She had a facial expression that reminded you of a flat note on a parlor organ and a straight up and down figure. When she put on white she looked something like a bandaged thumb. But usually she wore a strictly hygienic shirtwaist fastened up the front with a plain pin and a health food walking shirt. She knew whole chapters of Bayard Taylor off by heart and she dearly loved to go to the public library and get one of the standard works of E. P. Roe and just sit down and devour it.

"But Gwendolyn was different. Any time she had two ideas at once there was a crowded feeling in her head. But she had upwards of nine pounds of sun-skinned hair that was all her own and the eye of a startled doe, and one of those figures that went right in and then seemed to come out again. When she put on the full marching regalia of the unl-from rank of the Lady Man Eaters and passed through a crowd there would be a low involuntary whistling sound followed by a hush of tense silence.

"Well, Ann Eliza and Gwendolyn did not meet for months. But one evening as Ann Eliza was walking home from the office to save carfare she saw Gwendolyn just climbing into a touring car slightly larger than one of those owl lunch wagons. The latter was attired in such a manner as to create the impression that she had just been hatched out of an Easter egg. For a hat she wore probably the rarest thing that had been seen in feathers since the Greek Auk went extinct. She also wore one of the new style of hunting case frocks that had the appearance of having been fitted to the form by an expert paperhanger and then sealed hermetically. One might have said that she was putting all her money on her back, but at the same time one must acknowledge that the back was certainly getting a good run for its money. The person with her was the very image of an only son and there was something about the fit of his coat suggesting the idea that his folks must have money.

"'Have a care,' warned the Ant. 'It's all right in the summer time, but when winter comes and I have my steady job and my cozy hall-bedroom, where will you be? Have a care, oh, sister.'

"'Never fear,' answered the Grasshopper with a careless laugh, 'we carry cash bail, although chauffeur nearly always prefers running down the policeman to stopping for him.'

"And the gentleman with her closed the door and they vanished afar with a loud roaring sound of machinery.

"Winter came just as the Ant said it would and one bitter, bitter day, when she was copying off about two hundred letters on her typewriter, the door opened and in blew her old childhood chum shivering with cold, to announce that she was out of work.

"'Begone,' said the Ant. 'You would not heed my warning. It takes every cent of my nine a week to keep the gas stove going. The only Christmas present I made myself was having a tooth pulled. At this time I am saving up to buy a pair of overshoes. I cannot help you now.'

"'Peace, be still, poor, sad-eyed, stenographic insect,' said Gwendolyn Grasshopper, pushing eight or nine large gold bracelets up her arm. 'What care I for these futile babblings of gas stoves and goloshes? I've been starred all season in one of those Broadway musical shows where they write the music over night some night and allow twenty minutes for a new book if the old libretto doesn't seem to satisfy. I had a grand part, with nine complete changes of costume, and seven lines. The critics united in saying that my decollete black jet gown in the last scene was one of the grandest pieces of acting that's been seen on the metropolitan stage in years, and I had a drag with the manager that caused the leading lady to sob aloud at frequent intervals. I've quit just to get married. He has nothing but, and we're going to take a bridal trip on a three-story and English basement private yacht, with a hip-roof and tradesman's entrance and a full male chorus of Swede sailors in white pants to bring us ashore from time to time in one of those cute little steam launches that sounds like a trombone. After one year of that I will return here and enter society.'

"'Will the groom be the same gentleman that I saw you with last Summer?' asked the abashed Ant.

"'Either him or his father,' said the Grasshopper. 'I have applications from both on file.' And then she arose and went away, and as she passed out with all those costly baubles rattling like somebody unpacking a crate of tableware, Ann Eliza just sat there, counting up on her fingers in a dazed way.

"Some day, Larry, I'm likewise going to give you the modern versions of some more of Uncle Aesop's fables. I'm going to show you that in New York anyhow, the Spider is frequently stung by the Fly and the slow but sure Tortoise gets a job, at the end of the race, sweeping out the bank, where the spectacular and dashing Hare has just been elected president at a salary conservatively estimated to be thirty thousand a year.

"So that's what makes me say what I do about the late Aesop. Measured by modern standards I regard him as a sad affair."

A Bunch of Mixed Metaphors

SPEAKERS who are given to frequent public utterance have need of a ready wit to guard against that enemy of the improvisator, the mixed metaphor. Some excuse may be found for lapses of this nature, says a writer in the Christian World (London), especially when a man's ideas must be uttered without time for formulation, but what will be thought of the writer who states in the biography of Mrs. Isabella Bishop this fact: "Japan has leaped from rung to rung of the ladder of national greatness, and promises to be as leaven to the whole East, rousing, vitalizing, developing what has lain in the valley of dry bones for many centuries?" It could not be expected, says the writer, that the discussion of so contentious a measure as the education bill now agitating the British government would proceed very far without provoking our more picturesque rhetoricians to the exercise of their gift for mixed metaphor. He goes on to give some examples:

"A few days ago, if we may believe the Manchester Guardian, Bishop Knox explained at a meeting at Halesowen "that Mr. McKenna's sword was an overloaded pistol which, being hung up in a tight corner lest it should burst, pretended to be dead until it got up and trotted home on the friendly back of the bishop of St. Asaph.' Perhaps the reporter has somewhat condensed the bishop's oratory, but in any case, as the Guardian remarks, the grimness of political strife is relieved by such pleasant pictures as this, which 'combine in one canvas all that is best in the study of still life, or the subtety of the animal world, and the beauty of human helpfulness.' . . .

"But it is in political debate, especially in the House of Commons, that the mixed metaphor flourishes most luxuriantly. 'The flood gates of irreligion and intemperance are stalking arm in arm throughout the land.' 'This bill effects such a change that the last leap in the dark was a mere flea bite.' 'I cannot endorse the phantom that the honorable member has evoked.' 'That is the marrow of the education act, and it will not be taken out by Dr. Clifford or anybody else. It is founded on a granite foundation, and speaks in a voice not to be drowned in a sectarian clamor.' For all these charming combinations of ideas we have to thank members of the Lower House. Even politicians of cabinet rank have made valuable additions to the collection. Thus, the late Mr. Ritchie, when chancellor of the exchequer, once asserted that 'the question of moisture in tobacco is a thorny subject and has long been a bone of contention.' His immediate successor in office, Austen Chamberlain, remarked at the Liberal Union Club's dinner last year that the harvest which the present government had sown was already coming home to roost. Sir William Hart-Dyke has two conspicuous 'howlers' to his credit—the description of James Lowther as having gone to the very top of the tree and landed a big fish, and the comforting assurance that his government had got rid of the barbed wire entanglements and was now in smooth water. Among other political examples of mixed metaphor are the prediction ascribed to a labor leader that if we give the House of Lords rope enough they will soon fill up the cup of their iniquity; an Irish member's complaint that a certain government department is iron-bound in red tape, and the confident assertion at a recent Liberal meeting that 'though the Tories keep dragging the home rule red herring across our path, it misses fire every time.'"

Another instance is given from a parliamentary descriptive report. Thus:

"The debate in th House of Lords has, I think, finally cleared the air. We know at last whither the country is being steered. There is the figure-head with his hand on the rudder; there is the man that moves the figure-head. The figure-head is Mr. Balfour; the man is Mr. Chamberlain.' Truly the picture of Mr. Balfour as a figure-head with his hand on the rudder is one that even 'F. C. G.' might find it difficult to draw with pen or pencil. Not, however, in the gallery, but in an editorial sanctum was committed to paper the desire that some of the seed sown by a prominent economist might not fall on deaf ears."

Adam's Library.

John Kendrick Bangs, in the Century.

In Adam's library no books were found
In manuscript or printed, sheets or bound.
No magazine had he, or daily print,
With all the latest information in't.
There were no "six best sellers" in his day,
And ne'er a footsore agent came his way
To sell his cyclopedias and tomes
That lie on center-tables in our homes.

And yet what letters had he in his time!
The hills and dales gave him his meed of rhyme
The rivers, rushing onward to the sea,
Provided him with hints of mystery.
What sweet romance, his leisure to beguile,
He found in gentle Eve's resplendent smile!
If history he wished, he sought no shelf,
But buckled down and made it all himself.
His humor, that was fresh; his jokes were new,
E'en with a spreading chestnut tree in view.
No time on "nature fakes" was wastrel spent;
For he was it, and what he stated went.

Dear Father of the Human Kind, I think
You fared right well, for all your lack of ink;
And, while I'd greatly miss my treasured store
Of modern books and ancient printed lore,
For you, I vow, 'twas ordered well indeed,
Especially as you ne'er learned to read.

Conversations with an Old Sport

IN WHICH HE TALKS AT LENGTH ON BASEBALL PESTS

BY JIM NASIUM.

"ON the level," said the Old Sport, as he came in sweltering from the ball game, "I hate to put a crimp in the box office receipts out at the ball grounds, but take it from me there's going to be a few familiar faces missing from their accustomed places in the stand out there."

"What's up now?" asked the hotel clerk.

"My temper's up," replied the Old Sport, "and some of these days it's going to jump the governor belt and I'll sail into a lot of these ball ground pests and splatter them around the scenery so thoroughly that the Coroner will have to gather them up with a blotting paper. Now, understand, I'm not kicking against enthusiasm at ball games, but when a lot of muttheads go to a game for the express purpose of smashing in all the hats they can reach every time a home player gets to first, then bust your eardrums with a whisky-trimmed voice and kick you in the shoulder blades when a run comes in, it's about time they were legislated out of business with a pick handle."

"Them's my sentiments," spoke up a fat man, who was leaning against the counter, "and when the massacre comes off I'd like to get in on the killing. I'll gamble that only about ten per cent of the crowds who go to the ball grounds go there to see the game. The other 90 per cent go to tell the surrounding multitude how much they know about the game and make life miserable for the ten per cent who really understand what is going on out on the field."

"Well," said the Old Sport, "I'm going to make a bunch of that 90 per cent wish that they had died of membraneous croup when they were young and innocent. It's a howling shame when a guy can't go to see a ball game without having some factory hand pour about sixteen gallons of bibulous voice into your ear, flavored with stale beer and the fragrant aroma of a royal cabbage-leaf cigar, while he fills in the time between innings by telling you all about 'Pop' Anson and Methuselah and some of the other old players of his time.

"Then there's the pop kid, who walks all over your corns and then turns around and walks back again and varies the performance by kicking you in the kneecap to prevent monotony, and when some guy in front of you invests in a bottle of soda he opens the bottle in your face and treats you to a shower bath.

"Some day when the ground-keeper sweeps out the grandstand he will find a suspender and a lock of red hair and a handful of freckles, and he'll wonder what it all means. It will be what I leave of that blamed pest of a pop-kid for the Coroner to operate on.

"And right in my immediate vicinity there is always perched that cheerful idiot, who seems to think that the great throbbing world of sport is standing with bated breath quivering with anxiety to know his opinion of every play in the game. When things are not moving to his liking, he opens up a gap in his mug that looks like an explosion in the subway, and, leaning on the anatomy of the surrounding multitude, he pours out his fund of knowledge in a voice that no person this side of the Island of Sulu can escape.

"Some day this guy is going to catch me in just the right mood, and I will rise in my wrath and what other clothes these trampling hordes have overlooked and neglected to tear from my frame, and I will jam his gambrel joint into his vest pocket so blamed tight that the Coroner will have to dig it out with an ice-pick.

"There's no use talking," continued the Old Sport, "it's high time we instituted a reform. Between these 'Merry Widow' hats that the women are wearing now and the excitable plug who has to do a highland fling every time the batter slams out a hit, the guy who coughs up the ante for a seat in the grandstand is lucky to get a glimpse of the bat boy let alone see the game."

"Well, how are you going to prevent it?" asked the hotel clerk.

"The most effective way is to create a vacancy in that particular spot," replied the Old Sport. "The law prevents us from assassinating him, but the same result may be attained by flattening him out so completely that his miserable little wart of a head won't stick above the chair backs.

"I think it a sad piece of negligence, anyway, that the game laws don't provide for an open season on pests, with an unlimited bag, and if they did you can take it from me that it would be the most popular form of gunning. life is so short and transitory, anyway, and if a guy has to waste half of it waiting for some dub to get off his toes and shut off the fund of information he is pouring into his face, he is mighty apt to die with his ambitions unfruitioned. And if we have to give our undivided attention to a lot of howling dervishes in the grandstand when we cough up the ante to see a ball game, we will have to grope along in utter ignorance of what occurred on the field until we get the morning paper.

"I suppose," continued the Old Sport, "that if you met any of these guys who insist on making howling idiots of themselves at a ball game at any other time, they'd hand you the old dope that they never done anything they were ashamed of. Which only goes to prove my contention that when a guy makes this statement, nine times out of ten it is only a confession that he has no sense of shame.

"Take it from me, the gang at a ball game is a thundering lot like narrow-necked judge; the less they have in them the more noise they make in pouring it out. Now, I don't object to a guy displaying his ignorance in the highways and byways all he has a mind to, but when he shoves his bazoo into my ear so blamed far that his wagging tongue wraps around my eardrums and fouls the snares, then I'd like to lure him to some out-of-the-way place where I could seize some murderous instrument and lose it so effectually in his vital organs that they'd have to probe for it with a mining drill.

"To me the most remarkable feature about baseball is its ability to draw out what is in a man. You may meet a guy in the business world and his apparent good judgment and sound common sense will command your respect and admiration. You may accompany him to the theater or any other form of entertainment and his deportment and dignified bearing will meet with your approval. But before you pass final judgment on him, take my tip and lug him out to a ball game. There you will see the mask thrown aside, and his soul will be laid bare before your eyes, as easy to read as a school chart in the primer class. If there are any germs of the double-distilled fool lurking in his system they will break out like the measles, and if you leave the park retaining your former admiration of him he is either as wise a man as you thought he was or you are as big a fool as he is.

"I'm not saying that baseball crowds are a blamed bit worse than the crowds that hit the trail to prayer meeting every Wednesday night, not on your life. But at the ball grounds you see them with the paint and exterior decoration scraped off, and you get next to what lies beneath the surface. When you see a guy at a ball game after meeting him elsewhere it's something like waiting at the stage entrance for the chorus girl you admired on the stage; you're mighty apt to be floored at the view when the grease paint comes off.

"It's mighty apt to throw a jolt into your confidence in your ability to read characters when you pick a guy out for a hodcarrier at the ball game, and later see the same guy dealing out justice from the judge's bench. And it's mighty apt to put a crimp in your confidence in human nature when you float in to transact some business with the president of a bank and find yourself talking to the guy who danced a mazurka on your lap at the ball game the day before. But that's the way of the world. Some wise guy has handed out the dope that 'a little nonsense now and then is relished by the best of men,' and I've got a good-sized hunch that most of 'em go to the ball grounds to pull off their nonsense stunt.

"If a lot of these guys would only keep their supply of nonsense for exhibition in the privacy of their own homes it might be harder on the members of their immediate family and they would probably lose the respect of their children, but they wouldn't be such a thundering nuisance to the public at large, and it would be a blamed sight better for their reputation in public life and cause less confusion in regard to their calling.

"Now, I'm not a chronic kicker, but here's a suit of clothes that I'll gamble has absorbed every brand of chewing tobacco on the market and soaked up a sample of every kind of liquid refreshment known to chemistry. It's got now that, in order that I won't miss anything and feel lonesome and neglected while watching a ball game, when these pests are compelled to take a rest from shattering my ear-drums and kicking me in the knee-caps, they fill in the interval by spitting tobacco juice and pouring the dregs from a pop bottle down my back, and to make sure that I don't lose any of it by absorption, they rub it into my clothes with their feet.

"I've always been a law-abiding citizen, and I have a wholesome respect for the specter of the law. But take it from me, one of these days when the red sun is sinking behind the western horizon and the groundkeeper is sweeping the peanut shells out of the grandstand he is going to stumble over a pile of stiff forms with about six inches of scantling extending from their medulla oblongata out into the gathering gloom. Then I suppose the majesty of the law will lay its iron hand on my shoulder blades and I will ascend the Golden Stairs at the end of a hemp rope, but I will go with a song on my lips, knowing that my life has not been lived in vain, and don't you forget it."

Test of Parcel Tube.

A novel experiment to demonstrate the practicability of a pneumatic parcel carrier was recently tried in Chicago. The "parcel" shot through a short length of sample tube was a 13-year-old boy. He traveled at the rate of 16 miles an hour and was in no way the worse for the journey. J. M. Masten, superintendent of the railway mail service, and Postmaster Campbell, of Chicago, witnessed the experiment, as representatives of the Postoffice Department, which is looking into the device. The inventor declares that with a tube between New York and Chicago mail can be shot from one city to the other in seven hours.

Summer Remorse.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

He voted for water one desolate day
When Winter was taking its leave,
When the heavens spat snow in a drivelina way,
And ice rattled down from the eave.
The children were out with their banners and songs,
And rub-de-dub-dub went the drummer.
The women marched by beating cymbals and gongs,
Exhorting the voters and crying their wrongs—
And he plum forgot all about Summer.

The wind whistled out of the lowering sky
Tempestuous, stinging, and blunt,
And the pots of hot coffee went scurrying by
To hearten the men at the front.
The church bells were tolling their prayers, ding-dong,
And rub-de-dub-dub went the drummer,
And the women just seized him and pushed him along
With a "Glory to God!" and a snatch of a song—
And he plum forgot all about Summer.

He never once thought of the time when the heat
Would burn his internals to char,
And if given their head his intelligent feet
Would take him around to the bar.
He was carried away by the children's parade,
And the rub-de-dub-dub of the drummer,
And he voted for water and pink lemonade,
But now he repents (95 in the shade)—
For he plum forgot all about Summer.