

Aesop's Baseball Fables

THE FABLE OF THE (ALMOST) HITLESS GAME

PITCHING in the Big League, and doing Very Fairly through the Years, there was a certain Flinger, who entertained the one Great Ambition that obsesses every Twirler—to pitch a No-Hit Game. Now, while this Gazimbat had a nice Break to the Curve, and a sweet Hop on the fast Ones, he couldn't Keep them off the plate Entirely, and they always Soaked him More Or Less. Usually, it was Less—say Five to Seven hits Per Battle—and thus he Managed to win around .600 per cent. of Games, and keep drawing a fine Fat Salary. Nevertheless he Pined and Sighed. He wanted to Pitch that no-hit Game, and he simply could not get away with it. The years Went By, and he had a rattling good Reputation plus Loads of Currency. He had It where it couldn't Get away from him, and he had an excellent Standing in his Home Community. It might be imagined, with everything Going Smoothly like This, that he would be Well Satisfied, but where was there ever Yet a Contented Person? He yearned to pitch that No-Hit game, and nothing else would Suit or Soothe him.

Finally the years Weighed upon him; he had all the Kale he Needed, and he Knew Blamed Well he could never get Past the Present Season. The Bright Summer Approached its Finish; only a Day at last Remained, and, with a Heavy Sigh, the old Warhorse Shambled out, amid Terrific Cheers, for his final Stand upon the hill. Only one More Game to Pitch, and the old Arm nearly gone—what chance to realize his Lovely Dream?

But, so it Chanced, on this Last Day the Luck seemed supernatural. When they hit them on a Line, they Smacked into the Mitten of a Fielder. When they Bumped them on the Ground, the Basemen and the Shortstop gathered well and threw Like Shots. Inning after Inning Oozed along, and not a Hit was Registered. The Old Boy lifted up his Head, and pitched with every Ounce he had Remaining.

Ninth Inning, and not a hit—so far—also the weak end of the Hostile Order. The first man popped a Gentle Fly, and the first Baseman took it with a Cruel Leer. The second batter bounced feebly to the Aged Pitcher, who did not Miss the Peg to First. The Third Geezer swung like a Gate and missed two by a Mile. Then the good Old Pitcher sent one over wild and High. The Batsman, in some agitation, Ducked and Dodged. And the Fool Ball struck right on the tip of the Bat as it stuck up over his shoulder, and Bounded into Right Field for a single!

MORAL: Aw, what's the use of hoping?

THE FABLE OF THE HERO'S HOMECOMING

DOWN in the Brushwood there Flourished a Young Slugger who Hailed from a Town of 50,000 People, and was Playing Giddy Old Ball in a Burg of 19,000 Population. He Throve Heartily during the Season of the Sticks, and his Averages were so Tall that he was drafted, when the Autumn rolled Along, by a Major Aggregation. Naturally, the Young Gazooper was as Elated as a Pig in a Drawing room, and the Folks up Home were elated Correspondingly.

But when the Spring Tryout came, it was soon Evident, Alas, that the young Athlete, who had been playing Ball in a Town of 19,000 Denizens, was just about that Pace, and if he had been Taken on in a Town of 37,000 Souls, he would Have Flivvered Utterly. He Hung on until the Beginning of the Regular Season, but, in even the Exhibition Games against Southern Leaguers and Semi-Pros, he hit .047, and was so Staggered with Trepidation that he Couldn't Catch the Measles. But the Management retained Him, for just one purpose: the big Club had an Exhi-

bition Game Slated with the Club of the Home Town, the town of 50,000 People, whence the Youngster came, and held him for a Drawing Card on This One Occasion.

Now, knowing Full Well his Utter Inabilities, and Realizing that he was Further Handicapped by Stage Fright, the youngster Begged the Manager to Use him in Practice only, so that the Home Folks would not Totally Despise him, but the Manager ordered him to "Get in there and do his Rottenest." And he Surely Did. Coming to Bat Four Times, he Struck out Four times in Rapid Suction without even Tipping a Foul. Offered Five Chances in the Field, he Duffed them All, then added Four Wild throws to the Collection. And, Inning after Inning, while he expected to be Joshed to Death for his Misdemeanors, he Heard a Steady uproar of Genuine Applause, mixed with loud but not Derisive Laughter. His Club, being big Stars, all but Him, won out 17 to 5, and he Personally gave the Home Folks all Five of the Runs.

Next Morning, as the Hollow-eyed Youngster, who had Hidden at the Parental Home to escape Obloquy, was Starting for the Railroad Station, 900 Citizens halted him to shake hands and slap him on the back. And the Morning Paper, thrust into his astounded Clutches, had a story like the Following:

"Rich and Royal Comedy! Our Jovial Fellow-citizen, Tommy Yapp, Takes Pity on his Townsman! Rather than Show up old Friends too Completely, the Goodnatured Star Purposely Strikes Out and Deliberately drops Five Flies in Center! Thanks, Tommy, for your Courtesy and friendly spirit!"

MORAL: That stuff about a Prophet being without Honor in his Own Land doesn't go in Baseball.

THE FABLE OF THE OLD CATCHER

PLAYING blamed good Baseball, season after season, there was a Burly old Hippo who knew the Game, and, through that Knowledge, hung on to the Payroll long after he should have been Retired for Weight and Age. When the Pitchers shook and wobbled, and the Game was evidently going to the Demnition Bow-wows, the Agile young Backstops would doff the Mask and Pad, and this Huge Relic of the Mesozoic Age would sally Forth to take up the Burden.

But as the Years went by, the Elephant grew weary of the Tumult and the Shouting. He had plenty of the Coin, and Some left over. So he retired to the seclusion of a Quiet Farm, and Raised Asparagus, and Bragged about the Rutabagas that filled the Southwest corner of his East Eighty, and Forgot Baseball Totally and entirely.

One Night he had rounded up the Cows, wound up the Cat, and Put out the Clock, when there came a Telegram from his Old Manager, informing him that the old Club needed him, and to please take the first Train to the big City. Mostly from force of Ancient Habit, he hopped the Rattler, hurried to the Burg, and was met by the Old Manager with a Frantic Plea to again Assume the mask and Mitten. "Nothing Doing," was the Rigid answer of the Portly Veteran.

"But your old Ballclub needs You," pleaded the Manager.

"I have retired, and I wouldn't play ball again for Twice the Money," negated the Ancient Catcher.

"Now, listen," Quoth the Manager, with Emphasis and Feeling. "If you'll play ball this Summer, it will release a strong young man who can go to War and help his Country!"

"Why in Hell didn't you say So in the First Place?" roared the Bulky Catcher. "Where is the Mask and who stole my Old Glove, anyhow?"