

EDITORIALS

The Striated Muscle Fetish

In the American colleges, at the moment, there is in progress a crusade against the commercialization of athletic sports, but it is not likely that it will yield any substantial reform. On the one hand, college authorities, and especially college presidents, are far too politic a class of men to take any really effective steps against an enterprise that brings in such large sums of money, and on the other hand they are far too conventional to challenge the common delusion that athletics, in themselves, are uplifting and hence laudable. The most one hears, even from the radicals among them, is that it is somehow immoral for college stadiums to cost five times as much as college libraries; no one ever argues that the stadiums ought to be abolished altogether. Yet it is plain that that position might be very plausibly maintained.

The popular belief in athletics is grounded upon the theory that violent exercise makes for bodily health, and that bodily health is necessary to mental vigor. Both halves of this theory are highly dubious. There is, in fact, no reason whatever for believing that such a game as, say, football improves the health of those who play it. On the contrary, there is every reason for believing that it is deleterious. The football player is not only exposed constantly to a risk of grave injury, often of an irremediable kind; he is also damaged in his normal physiological processes by the excessive strains of the

game, and the exposure that goes with playing it. If it were actually good for half-grown boys to wallow for several hours a day in a muddy field, with their heads bare and the bleak autumnal skies overhead, then it would also be good for them to be sprayed with a firehose before going to bed. And if it were good for their non-playing schoolmates to sit watching them on cold and windy bleachers then it would also be good for those schoolmates to hear their professors in the same place.

The truth is that athletes, as a class, are not above the normal in health, but below it. Despite all the attention that they get from dietitians, rubbers and the medical faculty, they are forever beset by malaises, and it is almost unheard of for one of them to pass through an ordinary season without a spell of illness. When a college goes in for any given sport in the grand manner it always has to prepare five or six times as many players as the rules demand, for most of its stars are bound to be disabled at some time or other. Not a few, after a game or two, drop out altogether, and are heard of no more. Some are crippled on the field, but more succumb to the mere wear and tear. In other words, the exercise they get does not really improve their vigor; it only develops and reveals their lack of vigor. The survivors are not better animals than they were; they were simply better animals than the general in the first place.

Nor is there any ponderable body of fact behind the common notion, so often

voiced by college presidents, that physical health is necessary to mental achievement. In itself, to be sure, health is a good thing, just as wealth is a good thing, but neither has anything to do with the operations of the mind. Some of the noblest thinking that history can show was done by invalids. In fact, certain kinds of thinking seem to be better done by invalids than by healthy men, and Nietzsche was not far wrong when he argued that the world owes a lot to the tubercle bacillus and the spirochæta pallida. My belief is that Nietzsche himself, if he had been a vigorous animal, would have wasted his nights in some Leipzig beer-cellar and so left his masterpieces unwritten. All the pull of his environment was in that direction. The pressure upon him to be respectable and normal, as such things were understood in his place and day, was very heavy. But illness drove him to the high Alps, and there he hatched the ideas which, if the majority of American historians are to be believed, caused the World War, and so, among other lovely things, produced Dr. Hoover and the American Legion. Ah, for more germs out of the same culture, and another Nietzsche!

The cult of health, of late, has been carried to extravagant lengths. It is whooped up, in large part, by medical men turned uplifters, *i.e.*, by men trained in medicine but with no talent for it, and an aversion to it. The public hygiene movement is mainly in the hands of such quacks, and they seem to have a powerful and baleful influence upon colleagues who should know better. This influence shows itself, *inter alia*, in the current craze to employ heliotherapy in a wholesale and irrational manner, without any consideration whatever for the comfort of the patient or the nature of his disease. My

prediction is that exposing sick people to glaring sunlight, or to any kind of artificial light that simulates it, will have gone as far out of fashion by January 1, 1940, as bleeding them has gone today. The fact is that, to the higher varieties of civilized man, sunlight is often very injurious, and their natural inclination to keep out of it is thus sound in instinct. If it were beneficial then farmers would be healthier than city men, which they are surely not. Man has apparently sought the shade since his earliest days on earth, and all of his anthropoid ancestors seem to have been forest dwellers. The same instinct is found in animals much lower down the scale, and even brook trout, on hot Summer days, seek the cool places under the rocks. Putting a civilized man into the broiling sunlight, especially with his clothes off, is a foul assault upon both his spiritual and civic dignity and his physical well-being. If he gets any incident benefit out of it, then that benefit is more than counterbalanced by the discomfort and damage.

Fresh air is another medicament that will be trusted less hereafter than it is today. Everyone can recall the time when poor consumptives were exposed to the wintry blasts on mountain-tops. Most of them, of course, died painful deaths, but the recovery of those who didn't was ascribed to the rarefied air. But now it begins to be understood that the only valuable part of this treatment was the rest, which the roaring of the winds obviously impeded rather than helped. At about the same time the pedagogues of the United States also succumbed to the fresh air craze, and the taxpayers were rooked into laying out millions for elaborate and costly ventilating systems for the public schools. But now it has been found that the air which comes in

around the edges of an ordinary window is all the pupils really need, and the pedagogues, abandoning their insane ventilating systems, begin to bellow for expensive quartz window-panes, to let in the ultra-violet rays. This lunacy will last a while, and then go out. Even pedagogues, it appears, have a certain capacity for learning.

But not much. In the matter of athletics they are hampered by bad training. Most of them, at least in the colleges, are themselves college graduates, and thus accept the campus scale of values. Inasmuch as the average boy of eighteen would far rather be heavy-weight champion of the world than Einstein, that scale is heavily loaded in favor of mere physical prowess. The poor 'gogues, subscribing to it, can never quite rid themselves of a sneaking admiration for football stars. Practically every one of them, when he dreams at night, dreams that he is Sandow. Thus they cannot be trusted to make any really vigorous onslaught upon the college athletic racket. If a reform ever comes, it will not come from college faculties, but from college trustees, most of whom are fortunately without college training. But these trustees, alas, have their dreams too: they dream that they are J. P. Morgans or Otto Kahns. Thus the only way to get rid of the combats of gorillas which now bring millions to the colleges will be to invent some imbecility which brings in even more millions. To that enterprise, I regret to have to report, I find myself unequal.



Treason in the Tabernacle

One of the cheering signs of the times is the appearance of an anti-clerical movement among Americans of dark complex-

ion. It was a long time coming, but here it is at last. Ever since the days of their earliest sojourn on these Christian shores the colored people have been under the hooves of ecclesiastical racketeers, most of them densely ignorant and many of them dishonest. These racketeers were turned loose by the slave-owners, and with malice prepense. It was considered to be prudent to purge the slaves of their savage theology, and to implant in them instead the gentler ideas of Christianity, especially its resignationism. But the planters of tidewater did not want to see mobs of blacks crowding into their own very tidy and charming Episcopal churches, so they hired Baptist and Methodist evangelists to operate in the quarters. Such evangelists were as plentiful in the balmy South in those days as they are in these, and as ready to work hard for their pork-chops. As a result of their wizardries practically all of the slaves were converted to some sort of Calvinism, and their descendants remain a generally pious and Hell-fearing people to this day. There are many American Negroes who seldom if ever go to church, but downright atheists are rare among them, and even the worst of them, coming to the gallows, commonly ask for spiritual consolation. I have seen many Negroes hanged, but I can't recall one who was not attended by a pastor, whether Methodist or Baptist.

Unfortunately, the theology of these black clerics has kept to a generally low level, and one sees in it little sign of that liberalization to which so many white theologians of the evangelical sects have begun to succumb, even in the South. Not long ago a colored Baptist pastor was boasting that there was not a single Modernist among his people—perhaps a somewhat over-wide boast, but nevertheless one with a certain plausibility in it.

The dark brethren have never staged any such combat between Modernists and Fundamentalists as that which lately shook the white Presbyterians. When they believe at all, they believe in the old Hell of the Bible, with sinners frying like chicken-wings in a pan. Their Christianity is thus vastly more honest than that of their white colleagues in the faith, and when they happen to be really soaked in it they show qualities that are almost apostolic. Nothing could be more naïve and charming than the confidence of a devout old colored woman that she will be snatched up to Heaven when she dies, converted into a rich, beautiful and excessively blonde angel, outfitted with a trousseau of pink and blue satin frocks, and put to live rent-free in an alabaster house with a solid gold cookstove in the kitchen.

But it is human experience that believing such things runs into money, and the dark brethren have not escaped the operation of that rule. Their piety costs them more than anything else they pay for in cash—probably more, even, than rent or taxes. Their churches represent an investment greater than their outlay on land; worse, their equity remains small, and so they stagger under a dreadful burden of debt. Even in Harlem there is scarcely a tabernacle without a mortgage, and some of them run to such huge amounts that paying them off will probably be forever impossible. What the upkeep of the pastors comes to I don't know, but it must be a staggering sum, for they are much more numerous, relatively speaking, than white agents of the Word, and on the whole they seem to be better kept. I am informed, indeed, by Aframerican statisticians that they make better incomes than any other class of colored professional men, and that not a few of them become

so adept at cadging money that they grow really rich. At worst, they are very well fed by the sistren, and it is uncommon to encounter one who is not fat and radiant. The cadaverous and choleric type of cleric, so numerous among the whites of the hookworm country, is rare among them.

So far, so good. No one could object reasonably to shepherds being well nourished. What the colored intellectuals complain of is the nature of the doctrine they preach. Theologically, it is simply cracker evangelism—the preposterous merchanted with whoops, snortings, and rollings of the eyes. And sociologically it is an abject and debilitating resignationism—highly satisfactory to the white crackers, North or South, but of dubious value to Americans of color. The typical black pastor, like the typical white labor leader, is only too willing to trade the dignity and security of his people for his own advantage. Whenever election day rolls 'round he is ready to be seen, and not infrequently his palm is crossed with something far more caressing than silver. This venality, of course, is also common among the lower orders of white evangelical clerics, but among the dark brethren it seems to extend to higher levels, and some of the most gaudy pastors (and even bishops) are very active politicians, and notoriously eager for political jobs. To satisfy that itch they have to deliver their customers on election day, and the safest and easiest way to deliver them is to keep them ignorant.

Against this enterprise the iconoclasts aforesaid now fling themselves—so far, it must be confessed, without much success, but nevertheless with a great deal of hope. They are helped by the intellectual ferment which shows itself among the colored people of the country, on low levels as well as on high. The old simple trust

in the eventual justice and benevolence of the whites is passing out, and in place of it there is arising a conviction that the American Negroes, if they are ever to be delivered from their burdens, must manage the deliverance themselves. One hears less and less talk about coöperation with white philanthropists and more and more about coöperation between black and black. It is a good sign, and as a sincere friend of the colored people I view it with great satisfaction. In many obvious ways they are superior to the whites against whom they are commonly pitted. They are not only enormously decenter; they are also considerably shrewder. Thus it

would be pleasant to discover that Jahveh had chosen them to lead that revolt against the hog-wallow theology which, in the long run, is bound to come in the South. The whites seem too timorous to make the break; they sweat under their prehensile pastors, but hesitate to do anything about it. I look for the day when Aframerican philosophers will circulate among the Nordic lint-heads and tenant-farmers, offering them blest assurance that their pastors are all wrong, and that there really ain't no Hell. It would be a generous and glorious requital for long years of stupid and barbaric injustice.

H. L. M.

ON BEING DEAF

BY WARREN M. SMALTZ

“How does it feel to be deaf?” new acquaintances often ask me. I have a reply ready.

“Oh, quite exhilarating,” I tell them.

They laugh feebly, supposing that I am trying to be funny. But though they can see only pathos in deafness, my reply is reasonably sincere; for I have discovered to my own satisfaction that silence is not a total calamity and that it tends, moreover, to lead into diverting situations.

I admit that the initial shock of my own deafness was terrible. Complete silence descended upon me with instantaneous finality, following an attack of cerebrospinal meningitis. But that was a long time ago, and meanwhile I have had opportunities for reflection. Also, I have gained considerable experience.

Of course, my deafness carries with it certain definite disadvantages. For one thing, my choice of possible occupations in a world of work is seriously circumscribed. My opportunities for preferment are fewer. I find it harder to strike up satisfying intimacies and friendships; and there is a profound sense of loss in being unable to hear any form of melody.

There are other disabilities, but in spite of them I laugh at silence. Or, more accurately, I find myself precipitated repeatedly into situations that compel my risibilities. My laughter is not wholly the result of a mere philosophical pose; rather, it is evoked by surprising and ever-new adventures.

To illustrate, I was a visitor in a mid-Western city some years ago, and a Sunday afternoon found me idly strolling the sidewalks, and wondering dismally how to pass a dull day. I was alone, and time was dragging interminably. Arrived at a street intersection, I was about to cross over when a tap on my shoulder made me turn about to confront a policeman. He said something or other, which as nearly as I could judge was a casual remark.

Now, I hadn't an inkling of what he really said, so I indulged in a little deception that is characteristic of the deaf: I nodded my head in friendly agreement with him and smiled pleasantly, exactly as if I had understood him. Then I started again to cross the street.

This time a more emphatic tap halted me. He spoke again, but still I failed to comprehend. However, I knew my little pantomime well: I nodded my head with even heartier approval, smiled even more engagingly than before, and essayed once more to cross the street. But I had blundered.

With disconcerting quickness I was firmly grasped and led, protesting, to a call box, then whisked in a patrol wagon to a police station. There I confronted a desk sergeant whose scowling stare belied his kind and understanding heart. A pencil and a few scraps of paper quickly did the rest.

It developed that I had obstinately persisted in an attempt to commit a traffic