

Safe or Out?

BY JIM EGAN

Illustrated by R. L. Lambdin

IF anything in this world makes me sorer than a sunburnt neck, it's to hear people call Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, and them guys "heroes of the diamond." Take it from me, the real hero of any baseball battle is the bird who risks his neck out there to call 'em when they're over and when they ain't.

Why, compared to what an umpire has to stand for, them Hun-hunters in the front-line pits had it *soft*! Everybody is out to rope the goat of the indicator man. When he isn't busy ducking a barrage of bottles from the bleachers, he is choking from gas attacks from the grand stand. You're as bad as a trolley-car during the rush hours—they all want to ride you.

It's tough enough in the big brush, but out in the sage it's the pure arsenic. A group of regular small-town bugs are sure the Willie Wildeyes of the national game, especially if they have a couple o' ice-cream cones hung up on the combat. Pull a bum decision on them, and somebody starts to chip out your history on a nice marble block. It's immediate friends and no flowers for you.

During the ten years I have been robbing the players of base-hits, and giving rotten decisions, and doing all those other things that umpires usually do, I tried to steer clear of the sticks. That's why I turned the deaf and unheeding ear when my old friend Mickey Reilly attempted to get me to referee a conflict in one of them rutabaga centers.

"There's a hundred dollars for you," he says.

"A fine funeral I could get for a hundred bucks!" I says. "Why not make it enough to bury me decent, anyhow?"

"Aw, lay off that noise! I ain't asking you to come out to any hick village. Sterling is a real town—a manufacturing town—an industrial center. This is the big game

of the season; every fan for miles will be there, and—"

"And the umpire will be just as popular as the Kaiser at the peace conference!" I says. "I know all about that local-talent stuff. I went out to wave them back to the bench in a jay series one year, and I happened to call a guy out because he didn't swing at the third strike. The only reason I escaped with my life was because they had to stop to buy a new rope. Never again! It's the bunk, take it from me!"

But Mickey argued with me a long time, and I finally gave in. Anyway, he and I were old friends; we had muffed flies together on the Cincy Reds and cheated the same bushers out o' their back teeth at poker. Besides, a hundred bucks is a hundred bucks, after all.

It seemed that the Thorpe Mills team—which Mickey managed—had cleaned up everything in Raven County but the Verrill Cannery outfit. Both teams were good, Mickey said, and they were gonna play it off in Sterling, the county-seat.

"Well, I'll accept," I says, "but I'm taking more chances than the hero of a movie serial."

"Aw, forget it!" says Mickey. "You're going to a civilized burg."

"It don't take much to make civilized people savage at a ball-game," I tells him. "But I never had any brains, anyhow. I'll go. What kind o' club have you got, Mickey?"

"Good!" he says. "I have a professional battery, but all the other boys work in the mills except my field captain, Joe Kenny. Remember Joe?"

"Foxy Joe?" I says. "Well, I guess! That bird is trickier than one of them openers on a sardine-can. I know him—old Foxy Joe!"

"Always on his toes," chuckles Mickey. "Gotta keep your eyes open, or he'll get

you. The old scoundrel has been a big help to me."

"Who handles the cannery gang?" I next asks. "Are they any good?"

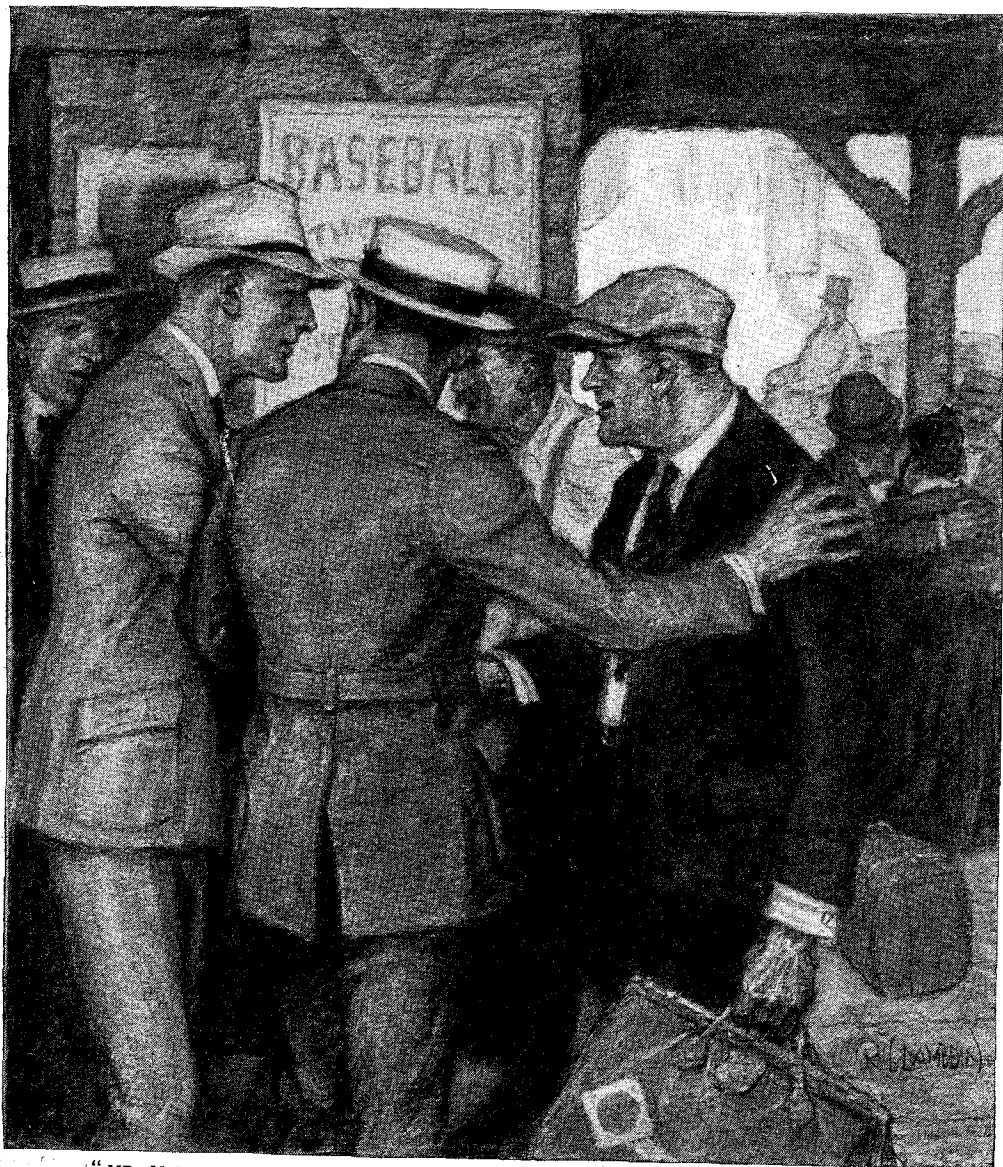
"Nice ball club," Reilly admits. "Several college ginks in the line-up, and the rah-rah boys are snappy. Got a pitcher who's a bear. Their captain is a pleasant young fellow from the University of Oregon. Kind o' sweet on old Verrill's kid. He's sure anxious to beat us, too!"

I absorbed a lot more local color from Mickey, and then held him up for some

expense money. The game was to be played Saturday afternoon. I would leave for Sterling Thursday morning and arrive there Friday afternoon.

I got there all right, tired and dirty. It was a day-coach ride all the way, and enough to make any goof forget his early Christian training.

When I ambled off the jerkwater at Sterling, which appeared to be populated around the ten-thousand mark, Mickey Reilly and a good-looking youth were there to hand me greetings and salutations.



"MR. McLAUGHLIN, MEET MR. HASKELL, CAPTAIN OF THE VERRILL CANNERY CLUB," SAYS MICKEY, DOING THE ETIQUETTE STUFF

"Mr. McLaughlin, meet Mr. Haskell, captain of the Verrill Cannery Club," says Mickey, doing the etiquette stuff.

"Glad to know you, McLaughlin," says Haskell, giving me the lunch-hook squeeze. "I feel that we are fortunate in getting a man of your ability to umpire our little battle."

"Well, I'm just like this Nathan Hale guy," I says. "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country."

"Oh, it won't be as bad as that!" laughs the cannery captain. "The fans will have their war-paint on to-morrow, but I guess an old campaigner like yourself will get by. And now I know Mr. Reilly wants to take you over to the hotel. But, after you've washed up a bit, I have been requested to invite you up to the Verrill place for dinner. I can't be there, but Mr. Verrill and his daughter will entertain you in good style."

I looked at Mickey Reilly.

"Hop to it," he says. "Only tell old Verrill not to try to bribe this bird, Haskell. He's high-priced and hard-boiled."

So I went over to the Central Hotel—I coulda guessed the name before I hit the town—and dolled up a bit. About six bells I blew out to the cannery magnate's domicil, and found it to be something of a shack.

Old Verrill seemed to be a pretty harmless guy, and as for his daughter Millicent—well, I'll say that if I had been single and a few years younger I'd been hanging around her house like ivy. She sure was a cute little bundle of sugar. If this Haskell guy had staked a claim to her, he was the luckiest stiff in the world, I thought.

They threw me a line of home-cooked eats that were knock-'em-dead, and I went after 'em like a starving Belgian. Of course, most of the chatter was about baseball, and I learned that Miss Millicent was no dub when it come to spilling that stuff.

The old man was all heated about the coming game. I saw that it didn't mean any more to him than his right eye. It seemed that he and Mr. Thorpe, the mill man, loved each other like a Bolshevik loves water, and the winning of that game certainly meant something to the Verrill household. The way the old boy raved, I pitied young Haskell if the canners lost.

After the banquet this Millicent lady asked me if I didn't want to take a stroll about the hacienda and give their gardens the east and west.

The Verrills had some plantation, and I slipped the girl a few kind words about it. She took the remarks a bit careless.

"Oh, Mr. McLaughlin," she says sudden like, "do you think the cannery will win to-morrow?"

"Search me!" I says. "I never seen either team play. I haven't any idea."

"I do hope the cannery wins! It means so much to Perry—to Mr. Haskell. And to me!"

"Why?" I asks, stupid.

"Because—because Perry and I want to be married, and I am afraid if the cannery loses papa will be so mad he—he won't let us. He is just crazy over the old game."

"Why give me this earful?" I says, suspicious.

"Oh, I don't know—only you are the umpire, and I thought—I mean, you wouldn't want to see our happiness spoiled, would you, Mr. McLaughlin? And maybe you could help our side just a little tiny bit, if we needed it."

All in white, she looked up at me, her eyes blue and shining, sweetly begging me. She was such a pretty little thing!

"Did Haskell tell you to do this?" I says.

"No!" she shakes her head. "He would be awful angry if he knew, I guess."

"My dear girl," I tells her, soft and gentle, "if you was a man, and made them cracks to me, I—well, I better not tell you what I'd do. I realize you are probably a lot in love with Mr. Haskell, and a guy's got to excuse a woman in love for a lot o' things. But I umpire games only one way, girly. I call 'em as I see 'em. If I give a bad decision, it's accidental, not on purpose. I ain't winning games for nobody. That ain't my business. And you wouldn't want to see the cannery win by cheating. I know Haskell wouldn't. Don't you see that's right?"

She looked at me, and her little mouth began to quiver. Next thing I knew she was crying like sixty.

"Please—please forgive me!" she sobs. "I didn't mean to do wrong. It's just because I love Perry. Oh dear!"

Well, it was a nervy trick for me to do, but I took her in my arms like a little kid for a minute or two, and somehow I calmed her down.

"It's all right, little lady," I says. "Probably the cannery won't have no trouble winning, anyhow."

And with a few more such consoling remarks I beat it. Not that I figured the cannery would have the easy work I pretended; I had played ball too long with Mickey Reilly.

II

It was Mickey who dug me out of the hay Saturday morning.

"Got another bid for you," he says. "Mr. Cranford Thorpe, the guy who pays our bills and runs the mills, wants you to lunch with him."

"Gee!" I says, sarcastic. "I'm a riot in this burg, ain't I? Just as popular as a new almanac. What's the idea of all this social honor? This is the first time I ever heard of anybody getting friendly with an umpire. Maybe they are like the cannibals—fattening me up before the big feast."

"Gonna accept or not?" asks Mickey.

"Why not?" I says. "A meal is a meal any time. Gonna be with us, I suppose?"

"No. Thorpe says he wants to eat with you alone. He's very anxious for you to come. I'll take you over for the knockdown."

It was a swell day for baseball—clear and bright, and yet not too warm. It was the kind of weather that brings the bugs out in bunches like bananas.

Cranford Thorpe, the mill man, was a big, burly guy who looked like what a heavy-



"MY DEAR GIRL," I TELLS HER, SOFT AND GENTLE, "IF YOU WAS A MAN AND MADE THEM CRACKS TO ME, I—WELL, I BETTER NOT TELL YOU WHAT I'D DO"

weight champ ought to look like. He stowed me into his buzz-wagon and whizzed away out to his country home.

A nice little lunch had been set up for us, and I began to crowd the plate like a high-school hitter.

"Understand Verrill had you out to dinner last night?" Thorpe finally says.

"Yeh," I answers, careless.

"How much did he offer you?" comes next.

"How much what?" I demands, fumbling the grilled lamb.

"Dough—coin! I know the old geezer is crazy to win this game, and I figured the first thing he would try to do would be to buy off the umpire. But I'll raise his figure, whatever it is."

I shoved myself away from the lunch.

"You may be leading the league when it comes to the mill business, Thorpe," I says; "but when it comes to umpires you are running wild on the sacks. Mr. Verrill did not offer me anything last night. I don't get my jack that way. Nobody is buying my services during this ball-game, you can take it from me!"

"Everybody has a price," sneers Thorpe.

I began to get torrid under the collar.

"Another squawk like that," I tells him, "and I'll bust you one! You ain't gonna buy me, nor nobody else! That goes! Now, how can I get back to Sterling?"

Thorpe grinned at me.

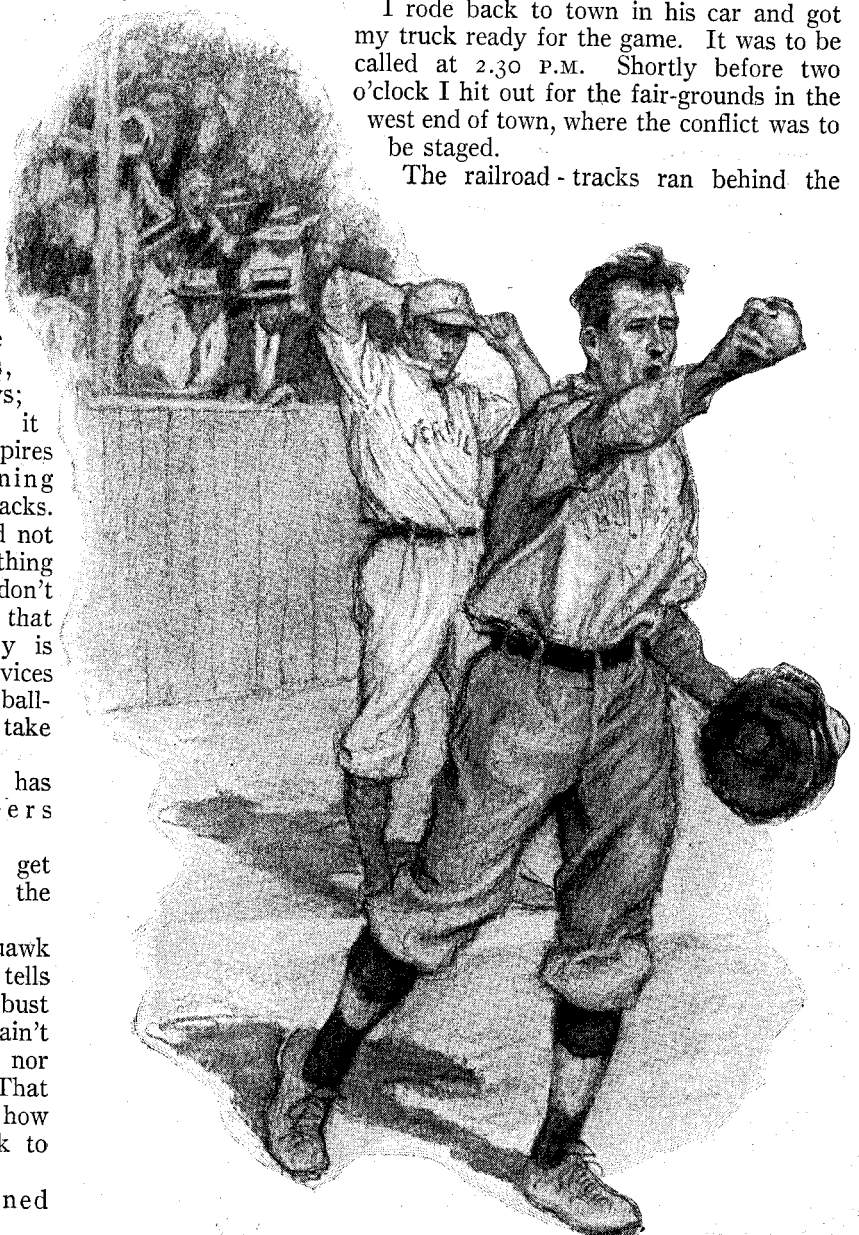
"Sit down and finish your lunch," he says. "I'll take you back to town. I'll apologize for all I said. I just wanted to make sure of you. I want to see my team get a square deal, of course—that's all."

"They'll get it as square as a German general's bean," I says, "and there's nothing so square as that."

I was pretty sore for a time, but finally cooled. I saw Thorpe had been trying to test me, and in a way I couldn't blame him. Safety first!

I rode back to town in his car and got my truck ready for the game. It was to be called at 2.30 P.M. Shortly before two o'clock I hit out for the fair-grounds in the west end of town, where the conflict was to be staged.

The railroad-tracks ran behind the



grand stand, which was a big one. The diamond was in pretty good shape, although the grass in the outfield was tall and rank, and the fence in the back old and rotting.

I gave the crowd the once-over, and it

seemed to me the whole county must be on hand. The fans were just pouring in. The box-office was swamped.

Cute little Miss Verrill and her father were already on hand, as was the husky Mr. Thorpe. Mickey Reilly's players had the field, and as soon as the old war-dog spied me he called me over for a little guff about the grounds with young Haskell of the cannery.

"I suppose you were counting on standing behind the catcher and calling 'em," says Mickey; "but as you are the only umps, maybe it would be better for you to stand back of the pitcher. The crowd is used to getting their umping that way."

"Jake with me!" I says. "I should worry where I stand."

Young Haskell was very pleasant. While he was chattering away, a hard-boiled old vet butted in on the group. Right away I recognized Foxy Joe Kenny.

"Hello, Joe!" I salutes him. "What you got up your sleeve to-day?"

"'Lo, Mac!" he answers, a bit sourly. "I guess we got enough up our sleeves to trim this cannery crowd, all right!"

"Tell us after the ninth inning," advises Haskell, giving him a nice smile.

We finally settled upon the rules and regulations, and all that remained was to wait for the time of game to roll around.

Both nines were a peppy bunch and went through their practise with lots of zip. The way they snapped at each other showed me it was gonna be a tough old struggle.

I called the combat on the dot. As I yodled out the batteries in regular big-brush style, I saw that the mob

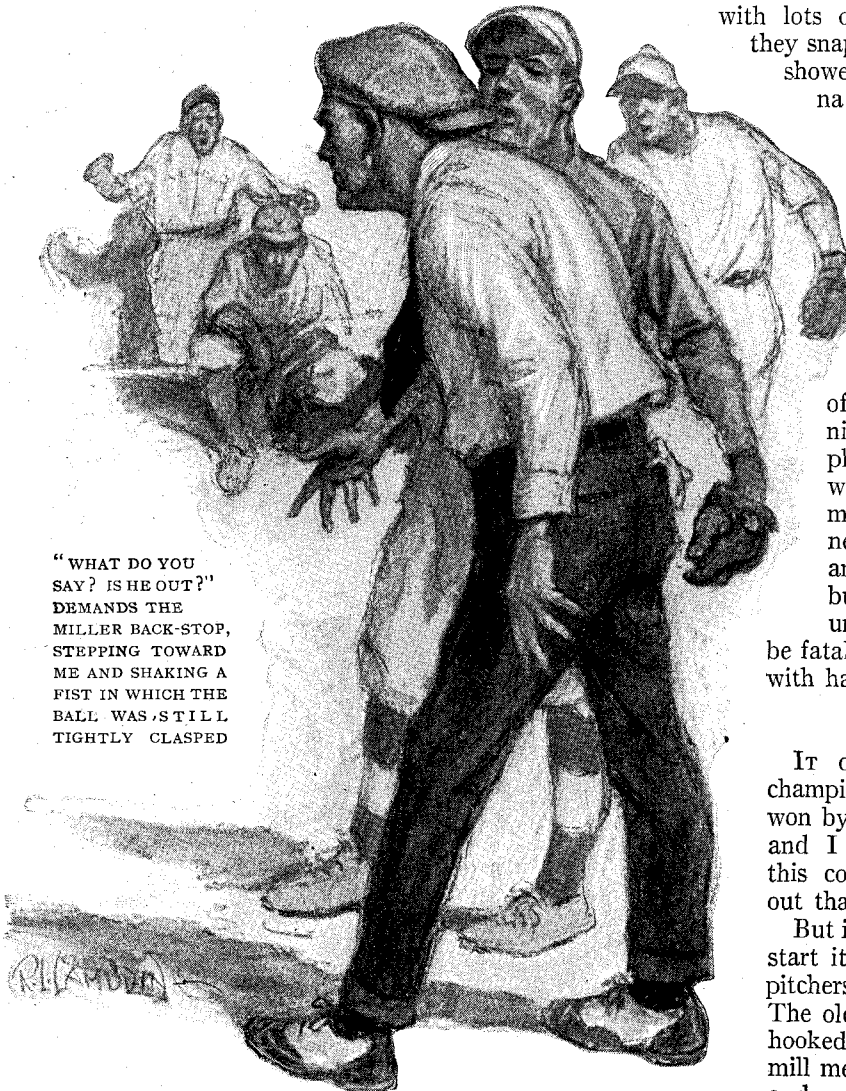
of fans were beginning to overflow the place. All of them were either for the millers or the canners. No neutrals among them! Any bum guessing by the umpire would sure be fatal—I could see that with half an eye.

III

It often proves that championship games are won by a lop-sided score, and I was hoping that this contest might work out that way.

But it didn't. From the start it was one of those pitchers'-battle things. The old professional who hooked 'em over for the mill men was a southpaw and a crafty bird. His

"WHAT DO YOU SAY? IS HE OUT?" DEMANDS THE MILLER BACK-STOP, STEPPING TOWARD ME AND SHAKING A FIST IN WHICH THE BALL WAS STILL TIGHTLY CLASPED



catcher was an old head, and the pair worked well together.

The young right-hander who worked for the cannery took my eye, though. He had oodles of stuff, and he carried a lot o' reserve behind his eyebrows. If he got the breaks, things looked bright for the cannery boys. Haskell was back-stopping for him, and held up his end in good shape, too.

I got along well with the crowd until the third inning, when I called out a crabby miller on a third strike that he looked at. He made a bellow, but I had no further time for him. It set the crowd onto me, however.

"Rotten! Rotten!"

"Oh, you cheese!"

"So this is the league umpire!"

"Gonna rob the bank before you go back?"

"Why don't you get a pair of glasses?"

"Give the poor man a cane and a cup—help the blind!"

They ragged me for keeps, but as long as they confined their disapproval to noise I didn't worry. I was sort o' accustomed to that.

Luckily, I had no real close decisions to pull. Inning after inning the game rolled on. There were a few clean blows, fine bits of fielding, and fast double-plays that brought the crowd to its feet. Both hurlers were tighter than an Edinburgh banker in the pinches.

When the ninth stanza commenced, each team had eight goose-eggs on the board. The millers went out in order in their half, two of them breezing. The canners took their turn. Two guys popped out, and young Haskell came to bat.

The cannery captain was a dangerous hitter—he swung a mean club, and Mickey Reilly's boxman knew it.

"Come on, Slat—whiff 'em!" I heard my old pal holler from the bench. "He's your meat—chew him up!"

Slat tried hard, and Haskell fouled three of his fork-handed flings out o' the lot. I didn't have a pill left to hand the mills pitcher. Just then the first ball fouled, which had gone over the grand stand, came in. I grabbed it on the bounce, noticing as I did so a streak of black grease across it—doubtless from hitting against the railroad-track. I placed it in my pocket, as Mickey tossed out a new ball at this moment.

Haskell also fouled this one over the grand stand, and I had to give the pitcher

the reserve ball in my pocket. The old southpaw burned it over fast. Haskell took a savage cut and clicked the agate right on the nose. His hit was a drive that bounded out into the deep grass near the left wall and disappeared from sight.

The cannery captain tore around first base, then second. As he legged it into third, I saw that the left-fielder—old Joe Kenny—had the ball and was going to whip it in. Haskell did not pause, however, but kept right on for the plate. Kenny had thrown to the short-stop, who relayed it in to the Thorpe Mills catcher. The pill arrived at the plate just as Haskell slid in, stirring up a fine, large cloud of dust. The crowd was roaring and raving.

"Safe! Safe!" shrieks the cannery bugs.

"He's out! He's out!" thunders the mills rooters.

"What is it, umpire? What is it?" yells the players.

"He got him, Mac; he got him!" I hear Mickey Reilly cry.

I didn't say a word. I couldn't. The decision was very, very close—so close that I was tongue-tied. Whether the catcher had received the ball in time to tag the runner or not had been hidden from my eyes by the dust, even though I was close to the plate. Haskell might be safe—or he might be out. *I didn't know!*

Never in all my experience had anything like this happened to me. Any one can see the fix I was in. The game hung on my decision, and this game meant a lot to these people. I'll admit I was afraid of what some of the wild-eyed ones might do.

"Well, what do you say? Is he out?" demands the miller back-stop, stepping toward me and shaking a fist in which the ball was still tightly clasped.

A sudden something flashed into my head as I lamped that ball he held. I wrenched it from his grasp. It was almost new, and had no mark of any kind upon it. The ball I had given the pitcher had been streaked with grease.

This was not the pellet that Haskell had swatted!

Foxy Joe Kenny was now in the group around me, crabbing loudly.

"What are you stalling for?" he wants to know.

"Where is the ball that Haskell hit?" I demands.

"In your hand, of course," he says, flashing me a funny look.

"Cut it!" I says, getting sore. "You can't bluff me, Foxy Joe. The ball he hit was streaked with grease, and this is not marked. It isn't the same pill. You know it, Kenny!"

"By golly, I believe—" begins the south-paw heaver of the millers, when Foxy Joe cuts in:

"How do you get that way? Whatta you trying to hand us? The guy is out!"

"Sure he's out!" gargles the catcher. "I had him a mile. I put the ball on him, and he knows it!"

"This is not the ball Haskell hit, I tell you!" I says. "That ball was marked with grease, and this—"

"Aw, bring back your brain from the Berkshires!" jeers Foxy Joe. "It's on a vacation. Not the same ball? Say, do you think I'm this bird Houdini? I can't make baseballs out of nothing!"

By this time the bugs were howling blue, yellow, and green murder, and were beginning to swarm down on the field. It looked like somebody would soon have an unrivaled opportunity of collecting my life insurance, but I wasn't going to let Foxy Joe Kenny get by with his stuff.

"We'll give that outfield the once-over," I says, "and see how many balls are hidden away in that long grass."

"Oh, that's it, eh?" remarks young Mr. Haskell, shaking loose from some dust.

Through the mob comes Mickey Reilly, his Irish up and batting three hundred.

"What did you call that?" he barks.

"Haskell is safe!" I says. "That gives the game to the cannery. It's all over. Clear the diamond! Kenny, you might as well come through."

"I guess he's got you!" says Mickey, who was always pretty much of a square shooter.

So I had. Foxy Joe had tried an old gag which the long grass of the outer gardens made possible. He had salted several

balls there for emergency use. Haskell's long drive had rolled out of the lot through one of the holes in the rotten fence. Kenny had thereupon pegged in one of his hidden agates, but the bit of grease had spilled the beans.

Maybe you think that wasn't a wild mob. The canners raised the roof with glee, while the millers came near tearing up the grand stand. They used to tell me in Sunday-school that right was might, but believe me, no matter how right I was, I felt I was hardly a popular guy in Sterling.

Among the champing herd I saw old Cranford Thorpe and the veteran Verrill. Thorpe didn't seem to know whether he was peeved or paralyzed. Verrill looked like he might want to shake hands, but didn't have the nerve.

"Oh, Mr. McLaughlin!" comes a voice, and I saw Milly Verrill breaking through, followed by Mr. Hero Haskell; but I wasn't inclined to be social, and bright, girlish eyes held no charms for me at that moment. Somewhere in the distance I could hear a train whistling.

I managed to grab Mickey Reilly on the run, and says to him:

"Mickey, for the sake of old times and the love you once bore me, get me my jack so I can hop that old rattler!"

"Beating it, huh?" he says. "Well, I don't blame you. That was some decision you pulled. If it hadn't been for that grease spot there wouldn't have been a grease spot left of you!"

The whistle tooted again. The train was closer to Sterling. I grabbed a roll of green Mickey pulled from his shirt.

"Good-by!" I squawks. "I'm leaving town now, pronto and immediate."

And, old as I am, the merry gazels had nothing on me as I loped for that railroad station. The next time I umpire a ball-game it's gonna be in Russia or some other peaceful place. Safety first for me!

THE KISS SHE DID NOT GIVE

THE kiss she did not give—it should not harm him,
Since from his selfish ways she could not charm him.
So near, so dear—her kiss, it would alarm him
Did he but know!

The kiss he did not give—it comes to haunt her,
Out of the wilderness and waste to taunt her
With scorching thoughts that say he did not want her
Who loved him so!

L. W. Ingalls

Brokers in Adventure^{*}

A ROMANCE OF LIGHTEST FIFTH AVENUE AND DARKEST AFRICA

By George Agnew Chamberlain

Author of "Home," "Taxi," "White Man," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY LEE CONREY

CHARLES HARLOW, an ex-athlete who has grown fat and flabby in the pursuit of mammon, is visited one day by an old college chum, Flange Rordon, who, thanks to an outdoor life in the wild places of the earth, is still athletic and vigorous, despite his thirty odd years. Rordon reproaches Harlow for becoming a sordid money-grubber, and by way of emphasizing his statement that Harlow is no longer a real man, but only a soft ball of putty, proceeds to "wipe up the floor" with him.

Having demonstrated to Harlow that he needs conditioning more than he needs money, Rordon collects a coterie of old friends, and that night they have a reunion at the Aspic roof-garden.

In the midst of their frolic an aristocratic, wealthy, and extremely good-looking cousin of Harlow's, Miss Helen Pelter Hume, is attracted by Rordon's good spirits and cave-mannish appearance, and asks to be permitted to join the party. Harlow tells her the party is a stag one, but Rordon says: "Aw, let the kid sit down, Charlie!" and the girl joins the celebrators.

The party becoming more and more unconventional, a free fight finally results, from which Rordon, after decimating the ranks of the flunky cohorts, escapes with Harlow and Miss Hume in a taxi. Having overheard the men discussing a projected trip to Africa in search of big game, the girl vows she will go with them, and refuses to alight at her home. Rordon and Harlow acquiesce for the time being and engage a suite for her at their hotel, but succeed, next morning, in slipping away from America without her.

In London they learn, however, that they are shadowed, and that Miss Hume, in her spoiled, self-willed way, is still resolved to accompany them to Africa. After outfitting themselves for the pursuit of big game, they board a German steamer for the east coast of Africa, and are congratulating themselves upon their escape when Miss Hume astonishes them by appearing on deck.

The men land at Beira, get their outfit through the custom-house, bribe various officials to delay the clearing of Miss Hume's baggage, and lie low to see what happens to her. In despair because she cannot get anything done, Miss Hume throws herself on the beach and weeps, her indomitable spirit broken at last. Rordon, relenting, takes her in his arms and agrees to let her accompany the expedition, provided she will "cut out the love stuff." He ruthlessly scales down her outfit, orders her to dress in a suitable way, and, with a full retinue of native attendants, the expedition begins its march into the interior of Africa.

Miss Hume finds that big-game-hunting is indeed no pink tea-party, but she sticks despite her numerous woes, and the caravan progresses some distance with varying luck.

Charlie Harlow, who is now in splendid physical condition, resolves one day to have revenge upon Rordon for the beating inflicted upon him in his New York office, and challenges the latter to combat. They have agreed that Queensberry rules shall govern, and are preparing for the encounter when Miss Hume inquires:

"Here! What are you silly men doing?"

Rordon issues a command in dialect, two grinning natives pinion the girl, and then, forgetting her and her protests, the white men, having chosen their fighting-ground, advance upon each other as cautiously as cats.

XI

A LONG, tense second of pause ensued; then came the whirlwind. There are moments when men in the pink of condition fight because they love it, when they feel that nothing, not even the thunderbolt of Jove himself, sent by express, can fell them. Such moments give birth to

the lust of battle in its highest and loveliest form. Such a moment had befallen Messrs. Harlow and Rordon.

Before thirty seconds had passed, Mr. Rordon's right eye was giving a horribly comical imitation of a puff-adder, while Mr. Harlow's nose, turned into a gushing fountain of incredibly red blood, was threatening to eclipse his entire countenance. Over

^{*} Copyright, 1919, by George Agnew Chamberlain—This story began in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE