Baseball and Football

A PHILOSOPHER who attended a game of the World Series without any elemental preference for either the Indians or the Robins, and also witnessed the Harvard-Yale game at New Haven with his blood unstirred by any partialities for Yale or Harvard whatsoever, and on both occasions devoted the right kind of reflection to the two sports, must easily have come to some conclusions as to why baseball is the true entertainment of the American masses, and football that of the colleges and universities.

At first glance these facts might seem strange to our philosopher, who could not help realizing how much the more beautiful of the two, on the whole, baseball is—more light, more swift, more plastic. The very season helps its beauty, the bright, hard sun and sky, the vivid heat, the dry, clear atmosphere of the American summer. Instead of going clad in harness and mail, as in football, and lumbering a little in their gaits, baseball players seem always on their toes, lithe and incomparably agile. The ball flashes across the field with a velocity no football can attain, and back and forth with the rush of meteors. Base-runners cover the ground as no half-back ever manages to do through the finest field, behind the most competent of interferences. Flying balls and flying runners weave over the diamond a brilliant net of interest, as if the stars should flash wildly about in the dark for an hour or so. Baseball has none of football's heavy piling up of hundredweights of humanity in masses from which some bystander must disentangle the members. In baseball all is in the open, every player is obviously an individual, every play stands sharply by itself. The game, once certain intricacies of rules and customs have been mastered, is as lucid as noon.

In football there is more to be watched. Individual playing amounts to less, or at least has less opportunity to attract attention. The punter means less to his team than the pitcher to his. The stupendous personal triumph won by a player who can take the ball on the kick-off and run with it to a touchdown is a sign how rare a deed he has accomplished. And even in his case the credit lies largely with his team. What essentially matters in football is the nice articulation of human beings into a corporation in which each plays his most strenuous part with the neatness and delicacy of wheel or cog or ratchet or piston. Only an expert can ever know how hard it is, or what painful repetition is necessary, to make a machine out of eleven men. Only a person considerably expert, moreover, can perceive the nicer points of generalship displayed by the player who conducts a football game. He is a driver with ten steeds who must set his own shoulder to the wheel as constantly as they; he is an organist who must touch many keys and pull many stops, his mind full of his repertoire of tricks and yet able at any moment to improvise new ones; he must spare his own men and yet send their weight against men in the opposing line who show signs of weakness; he must diagnose the play of his opponents no matter how much they may try to conceal all their symptoms. Nor does all this responsibility lie with the quarter-back, or whoever runs the game. The other players have more to do than follow instructions implicitly. Each of them, too, must diagnose the coming play; each of them must sway with the rhythm of the contest, original and yet always adaptable in a dozen directions, heated with the rush of the conflict and yet cool with the discipline of the rules.

We here speak, of course, of perfect conditions on perfect teams; but the matter is everywhere essentially the same, so far as the audience is concerned. From that point of view, baseball, for all the marvelous skill required to play it, and for all its technical brilliance and finish, is to football as vaudeville or melodrama to higher comedy. The baseball fan, like the onlooker at melodrama or vaudeville, watches what at the moment is before his eye, delighted or suited with that, and concerned only secondarily with the larger drift of the game, for the reason that there is less of it to consider. But the spectator at a football match has a different function. Like the players on the field he too sways with the rhythm of the organized cheering; like them, too, he fixes his attention not upon the brilliance of the individual moment or episode, but upon the coherence and solidarity of an entire undertaking. There has to be, therefore, a greater community of sentiment among the watchers at such a game than among the heterogeneous crowds who cheer the professional players of baseball. And such a community in America only the colleges and universities can furnish.

The Nation's Poetry Prize

THE NATION takes great pleasure in announcing an annual Poetry Prize of $100 for the best poem submitted by an American poet in a contest to be conducted by *The Nation* each year between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. The rules for the contest in 1920 are as follows:

1. Each manuscript submitted in the contest must reach the office of *The Nation,* 20 Vesey Street, New York City, not earlier than Friday, November 26, and not later than Saturday, January 1, plainly marked, on the outside of the envelope, "For *The Nation's* Poetry Prize."

2. Manuscripts must be typewritten and must have the name of the author in full on each page of the manuscript submitted.

3. As no manuscript submitted in this contest will under any circumstances be returned to the author, it is unnecessary to inclose return postage. An acknowledgment of the receipt of each manuscript, however, will be sent from this office.

4. No more than three poems from the same author will be admitted to the contest.

5. No restriction is placed upon the subject or form of poems submitted, which may be in any meter or in free verse. It will be impossible, however, to consider poems which are more than 200 lines in length, or which are translations, or which are in any language other than English. Poems arranged in a definite sequence may, if the author so desires, be counted as a single poem.

6. The winning poem will be published in the Midwinter Literary Supplement of *The Nation,* to appear February 9, 1921.

7. Besides the winning poem, *The Nation* reserves the right to purchase any other poem submitted in the contest at its usual rates.

The judges of the contest are William Rose Benét, Ludwig Lewisohn, and Carl Van Doren. Poems, however, should in no case be sent to them personally.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Perishing Ireland

IN a few weeks, so run the reports, Ireland will be reduced to the straits of Austria; famine will be at her doors. Her whole economic life is disrupted; her railroads are gradually ceasing to function; her motor trucks may not travel more than twenty miles from home; the transport of food becomes daily more difficult; factories and creameries are steadily being destroyed; death stalks abroad in the land; the grip of a deadly internecine war is upon it; and as yet the humane opinion of the world stirs but little. True, there are more and more brave voices being lifted in England itself. The English branch of the Women's International League has had a notable group of delegates in Ireland to see for themselves; the Labor Party has just voted to send another delegation to the suffering island, but Ireland begins literally to bleed to death, while Lloyd George insists that the policy of violent reprisal and repression is succeeding. From a prominent Englishwoman, Mrs. Cobden Unwin, the daughter of that Richard Cobden who never failed to lift his voice for suffering humanity, comes a note to us saying: "There are many English people who passionately desire to see Ireland a free country and who are filled with horror on hearing daily what is taking place there in the name of England." From a Protestant friend, Mrs. Unwin sends us the following:

In Mallow anyone can see, as I did, with their own eyes, the large handsome houses burned to the ground; there they are and it is useless for any Hamar Greenwood, or Carson, or Lloyd George, to deny it. There is a magnificent milk factory all in ruins, thousands of tins of preserved milk on rubbish heaps, all the newest, finest American inventions and machinery (many of them just installed) broken to bits, everything black, charred, and burnt to cinders; 500 people in Mallow thrown out of employment for the winter, most of them women and girls. I visited many of their homes and they are in blank despair, with starvation staring them in the face, no food to cook, and if they had, no fire to cook it with, and all this done by the forces of the Crown, the men who are sent here to keep order.

For the editor of the London *Nation* the death of MacSwiney—"fearless, generous, ardent," "a hero among heroes," he calls him—is the snapping point. "Certainly," he writes, "there is nothing in England so base as its Government and the average Englishman gets an occasional airing out of the hell in which it condemns him to live." For the Irishman, whatever his own guilt or innocence, there is no opportunity for an occasional airing out of the hell in which he lives. There is no escape for him, and there will be none unless after all the facts have been brought up, the public opinion of mankind is enabled to direct intelligently its power to move both the Irish and the English Government to find some settlement which shall at least end the agony and the bloodshed. The British Labor Party, in addition to sending a commission, is circulating petitions in support of the position taken by Viscount Grey that the first step shall be the removal of all British troops from Ireland that there may be placed upon Ireland herself the duty of keeping her people in order and of demonstrating to the world that she is capable of performing that function of self-government. Violence begets violence. As long as the troops are there, it seems plain, their presence will lead hotheads to attack them who cannot see that every deed of violence on an Irishman's part makes against his cause and gives an excuse for reprisals, which in Mallow, Balbriggan, and Thurles, and many other places liken these Irish villages to the towns in France so wickedly devastated by the Germans. It staggers the mind that such things are; that the noble Irish people and the noble English people should be brought to such a pass, should be literally at one another's throats.

In Washington in an effort to bring out the facts for the American people the American Commission on Ireland, called into being by *The Nation*, began its public sessions on Thursday, November 18, by the hearing of witnesses, and the following statement of the purpose of the Commission, read by Mr. Frederic C. Howe:

Conditions in Ireland have profoundly stirred millions of American citizens of Irish descent. They have created and are creating a widening rift in the friendly relations of English-speaking peoples, not only in America but all over the world. No person who shares our common blood and language can view unmoved the existence of civil war, the killing of human beings, and the substitution of martial rule for the civil state in any part of the English-speaking world. As a people we have been trained by centuries to a belief in orderly civic processes. Only in direct necessity can there be justification of a resort to arms for the adjustment of disputes which it has been our custom and our pride to adjust by reasoned and amicable means.

What the world most needs is peace. It needs an ending of hate. Discussion should resume its ascendancy and reason should displace the employment of force. The orgy of destruction which is now ravaging Ireland is sending its repercussions to every corner of the civilized world. It cannot fail to postpone indefinitely the return of ordered tranquility to civilization. In addition to all this, the political life of America as well as its orderly social processes are profoundly disturbed by the injection of an internecine war between peoples of our own flesh and blood. Feelings such as these gave birth to this Commission for investigating into conditions existent in Ireland. The Commission has set itself to the task of ascertaining the facts. It plans to learn as nearly as possible just what the conditions in Ireland are and what has brought them about. It will hear witnesses who present themselves representing English and Irish opinion.

The Commission plans to send a mission to England and Ireland to make an inquiry into conditions in the latter country. It will investigate the killings and disorders. Quite as important to the permanent adjustment of the dispute, it will investigate into the economic conditions in Ireland, the extent to which the Irish have developed a self-contained economic and cultural life, as well as the extent to which the Irish people have evolved their own agencies of self-government during the last few years. In making these investigations, the Commission has received assurances of cordial cooperation from liberal-minded groups in England, who are also deeply concerned over the state of civil war that exists in Ireland. It has received similar assurances from British labor groups and from British statesmen, as well as from organizations in Ireland. Judging by the expressions that have reached the Commission, the creation of this unofficial agency and the delegation of this unofficial mission to Ireland have awakened a genuine hope that through an impartial inquiry into the facts and a disinterested study of conditions some constructive measures may be formulated for ending the chaotic situation that now prevails.

A full report of the first two hearings of the Commission held in Washington on November 18 and 19 will be published for the first time as a supplement to an early issue of *The Nation.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED