

Rev. W. Benson, Headmaster of Wellington College.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

Contributions will be received at the *Advertiser* Office, or at Mr. Pepperday's, under cover to the "Editor of the *Meteor*."

RUGBY FOOTBALL.

To the Editor of the Meteor.

DEAR SIR,—Having known football at Rugby now for some years, I venture to send you a few remarks on my impressions of the present state of the game.

In the first place I remark two very great improvements in the game of late years, one is the suppression of vicious hacking and the other the absence of "mauls." But I do not think that these two improvements, excellent as they are in themselves, have been conducive to unmixed good to the game. In idea the object both of the hacking and the mauls was to get the ball on. Often a good strong fellow carried the ball clear through a scrumage, by dint of hard hacking, and also a little dodgy fellow would somehow wriggle out of a maul and get away for a clear drop: so it happened that the ball was seldom stationary for long together; but now the "squashes" which follow a fellow being caught with the ball, and made to put it down, may last an indefinite time, for the ball lies quietly on the ground, while the players shove each other in the ribs with their elbows; and even if the ball has the luck to show itself outside the scrumage, it is instantly shoved, rather than kicked, back among the forest of motionless legs. Now my notion is that it is a most desirable thing to get the ball out of a scrumage, and that as soon as it appears outside it should be kicked at once *sideways*, or only slightly forward, so as to give the half-backs a chance of a clear run, and drop. My impression is that the present practice, which keeps the game so tame, has arisen from a wrong idea about funking, namely, that a fellow must be a funk unless he sticks always quite close to the ball. This is a mistake, for much more pluck is wanted to make a good run at the ball, when it is *loose*,

than to shove, with the whole side to back you; and the consequence of the idea is that there are never any open scrummages, in which the ball is carried on with the feet,—more as in Eton football—instead of the hands. With our strict rule of "off-side" there is not much fear of "sneaking;" and the game is much livelier and more exciting if the sides spread more, so that the players can help each other. I suppose the object of each side is to get the ball on, and I maintain that the best means are not taken to do so. I believe this is clear if you think what the result of a game would be in which one side kept close upon the ball, according to the present fashion, and the other spread itself out, and observed the rules that backs and half-backs should always get their drops, and forward players seldom or ever take up the ball at all, unless with the fair chance of a "run in." It used in my time to be a rule that back players of both kinds should make sure of their drops, and by the side spreading out it was ensured that if a back player made a "skew" drop, some other fellow far out would follow it up for him and prevent a long-back on the other side having, as he has now, a calm run away from the game. There has been an idea abroad that a back player funks unless he runs till he is caught; no doubt some times this leads to a brilliant run in, such we saw in the VI. match, but generally I think it only tends to choke the game. My two suggestions are that backs and half-backs should drop more and try to run less; and that the forward players should spread more, and in the case of a tight scrumage should aim at getting the ball out, forwards, sideways, or backwards, according as it gives the best chance of a neat run and drop. It is obvious that I speak from a back-player's point of view, and so no doubt my opinion is open to suspicion, but at any rate it is founded on a good deal of experience, and offered from a sincere desire that all should get as much fun as possible out of the jolly old game, which we always so doggedly maintain *must* be the best game in the world.

I remain, dear Sir,

Your obedient servant,
F. H. FISHER.

To the Editor of the Meteor.

School House, Nov. 2, 1867.

SIR,—Will you allow me to remind your correspondents "Trio," that the jurisdiction of the Football Committee only extends to

matters connected with House matches. As was passed at the Big-Side Levée last Term their decision as to which are the two cock houses is final, and from it there is no appeal to Big-Side; but with Big-Side Matches, and Football in general, they have no concern. I do not deny that some measure is needed to ensure the attendance of Caps at Big-Sides; I merely wish to remind "Trio" that it does not lie with the Football Committee to frame it.

Yours very truly,
J. S. M.

To the Editor of the Meteor.

DEAR SIR,—Pardon me for addressing you on a subject which seems to be at present under discussion. In looking over your last number I was somewhat startled at some remarks in the second article, relative to the slender attendances of Caps at Big-Sides. Now, Sir, I would ask,—Is the attendance voluntary or compulsory? I was always under the impression that on the first absence, without leave, a Cap would either get lines or a severe reprimand from the head of his side, and on the second it would be two chances to one that he got his cap taken away. I judge from your remarks that it is now almost a matter of his own choice whether a Cap plays or not. By all means let the old system of notes be revived in all its strictness. A few words to the heads of House Twenties and heads of sides from the Captain of the Committee, would, I am sure, do more to better the attendance than any amount of fines.

While on the subject of Football, let me refer to one other point. I gather from some remarks in your last that the new rule proposed last February is entirely disregarded. Now, whether it is a good rule or not is a matter of very even dispute, if one is to judge by the variety of opinions; but that it should be put aside merely from prejudice, or, at all events, without a formal repeal, is, I think, very unfair, and unlike what Rugby management ought to be. You will perceive from my letter that I am an O. R.; if I have been meddling, by all means annihilate me in your next number, but at present permit me to remain

Yours truly,
PRINCIPLE.

To the Editor of the Meteor.

DEAR SIR,—I wish to point out what has always appeared to me a great deficiency in

our Football at Rugby. I have been often asked here at Oxford, "Were you in your School Twenty?" and I was obliged to answer, "there was no such thing in existence." Now it seems to me that this defect might be remedied, and I am sure the result would be beneficial. Why should there not be a School twenty? The one great argument, I know, is,—What are they to do? Who are they to play? And I can only reply, in the first place, they could play the rest of the Caps, which would equal in cricket the eleven playing the twenty-two. Secondly, it would be a means of getting twentys down from Oxford or Cambridge, which would not interfere with the Old Rugbeian, and which would tend immeasurably to foster good play in the School. Thirdly, in the end it might bring about a match with some other School, such as Marlborough. Against this I know there is the old objection that School feeling would be sure to run high, and the match might end in something like a fight. If this is true, it seems to me to be a most degrading confession; but I do not believe it would be the case. So much for the argument against the formation of a School Twenty. Let me briefly state a few of the arguments in its behalf.

1. It would improve the play on Big-Side. At present, when a fellow gets his cap, there is simply nothing more for him to try after, and he may take football tolerably easy for the rest of his time. Of course he will always play his best for his house, but I believe that the competition aroused by the fact of there being some further dignity to attain, would increase the good play of the School in general, and especially on ordinary Big-Side Matches, which of course would constitute the greatest test for admission into the School Twenty.

2. If by this means something like School matches could be brought about, we should have done something towards liberalising Football. Football is a strongly Conservative game, hedged round with all sorts of prejudices, and that is the reason why it has not flourished as it ought. Cricket on the other hand is very Liberal, it has spread all over England, opening its ranks to all classes; and the result is that it has flourished beyond all other games, and the chief danger it has now to fear is of becoming Radical.

Such appear to me to be the chief arguments in favour of my proposition, and if during this term and the two which follow this subject can be discussed, and more

arguments brought for it, as I have no doubt there may, and more against it, as there may be also, this letter will quite have fulfilled the intention of yours most truly,

O. R. AT OXFORD.

To the Editor of the Meteor.

SIR,—Seeing that the *Meteor* has already carried into effect the proposals of several correspondents, I venture to hope that the same success may attend these. In the first place could not the part of the path immediately by the White Gate on the Barby Road, be made “in touch?” If this could be done, many unnecessarily *hard-tumbles* would be avoided. My second proposal, which, I fear, your readers will consider very radical and revolutionary, is that a fellow be allowed to have his cap if he be thought *throroughly* worth it, without reference to the time he may have been in the School. In anticipation, I hear cries of, “What humbug,” &c., but I shall hold to my opinion that it would answer well, until thoroughly convinced that it would not. In answer to one objection which would probably be made, that a “new fellow” would not know the rules, I say that it would be very easy for him to learn them, and certainly, after reading the rules over three or four times, and playing as many Little Sides or below caps, he would know quite as well as some, not a few, who already wear the “velvet cap” on Big Side; which brings me to my last question or proposal. Could not *all* be obliged to pass an examination in the rules before being allowed to have a cap?

Yours truly,

FOOTBALL.

H A T S .

To the Editor of the Meteor.

SIR,—I have been greatly amused, not to say astonished, at the stolidity and rashness evinced by “An Utter Fool,” in daring to think that a stand could possibly be made against such evidently *magni tumores* as “Cosmopolitan” and “A. H. St. V.,” both of whom, I should think, must feel the greatest pity, though not unmixed with indignation, for one who is so purblind as not to be convinced, nay, overawed, by their wisdom.

I have two reasons, principally, for trespassing on your valuable space for this worn dispute; 1st, that I have a “practical suggestion” to make; and, 2nd, to answer “Cosmopolitan’s” letter in your last. He says:—“Briefly, this is our case. Hats are annoying to the new boys. Mere annoyance does no good to them, and certainly no good to others; *therefore*,” he concludes, “*hats* do no good to them, and certainly no good to others.” Now this would be a most convincing syllogism, and would at once end this dispute, if it *were* a syllogism; but the middle term is incorrect; for if we take it as it stands, “mere annoyance” is not synonymous with “annoyance,” and therefore the argument falls; and if we erase the “mere,” the middle term of the syllogism becomes intrinsically untrue, for this annoyance *is* good for new boys, because of the beneficial effects it brings with it. One might just as well say, medicine is an annoyance to a child; *mere* annoyance does the child no good, nor anyone else, therefore medicine does no good. True, *mere* annoyance does no good to the child; but the annoyance with its accompaniments, does. So with new fellows. The annoyance brings with it salutary effects. It teaches new boys (i) that they are not yet thoroughly conversant with the rules of the School, and must therefore submit to be taught them by those who are; (ii) that, as new members of an important society, they must first make good their claim to offer their opinions freely before they exercise that privilege. Now a *distinguishing badge* does this more effectually than anything else. It teaches them that although they may deceive *THEMSELVES*, *others* they *cannot* deceive into the delusion that they are either thoroughly conversant with the rules of the School, or that they have showed by their general actions in what rank their opinions are to be placed.

Now lately, since the hats have been discontinued to a great extent, the ‘upstart feeling’ has been growing bigger and bigger. This may be exemplified by the following *trifle*. Whereas, three or four years ago, new fellows used, when asked their names within a year from the time they entered, to give a civil answer; now, if an old boy asks a *very new* one his name (if he has been at Rugby a week), instead of answering, he turns round and stares, as much as to say, with Hood, “Pray, are you anybody in particular, or am I merely to regard this as idle curiosity?”

I have gone thus far only to show that the hat is not a "mere annoyance," and that assumed superiority is not always such a crushing argument as "A. H. St. V." and "Cosmopolitan" seem to me to think. For I do think that *another* badge may be accorded to new fellows, which will be, perhaps, nearly as efficient in its good qualities as the hat, of the bad qualities of which it will possess none. This is a *black straw with the house-colours on*. This will answer nearly every purpose. Not only will it distinguish *new* boys from *old*, but *new* boys from *new*; which is a great advantage.

My letter has become already much longer than I expected, and I will therefore close; but let me say one more word to "Cosmopolitan" and "A. H. St. V." In consulting for the good of new fellows, let us not merely attempt what seems at first sight a good, but also try to do them the greatest good *we can* do in this line, that of gaining for them the greater facility for more quickly obtaining the good esteem and liking of their school-fellows; and this not to be done by making them over-bearing and precocious.

Again apologising for taking up so much of your space, which I should not have presumed to do had I not had a "practical suggestion" to offer,

I remain, &c.,

MARCELLUS (O.R.).

FIVES COURTS.

To the Editor of the Meteor.

SIR,—I perfectly agree with "Hillmorton" in his praise of Rugbeian fairness in most matters, but I do not think he has discovered a real exception. Do these "important times for fives courts" really "belong to one house?" I think not.

The fastest runners in Arnold's house take the courts, but they generally run for members of other houses. I know it was not

so for the first year, but that was, I believe, only because they were not so often asked to run, and so they left the courts to the small fellows of the house, who were always glad enough to get them.

Look at the proofs of skill in hand-fives playing. This is, if I remember right, the first year an Arnoldite has had a chance of the single.

Diver's books may show a larger "tick" at Arnold's, but is it due to these particular hours? or is it only that as Blake's have the highest average in the Sixth for their numbers, and Wilson's are most addicted to the Natural Science, (especially chemistry!) so Arnold's are the most addicted to voluntary games. Compulsory foot-ball depends of course only on the Sixth of the House. I think they play more puntabout and more ends than other houses.

I think, too, that unless the present plan is unjust, it is a real convenience to the School, as there is no house except Arnold's which can take courts at that time without ruining half their dinner time. And now, a fast runner in Arnold's is certain to take the court, whereas it would be difficult to tell who would be the most likely to get a court if all the school raced from Dr. Temple's garden wall, as running in a crowd is uncertain, and the result would be constant disappointments. Did not the existing practice of taking the batfives-court appear to "Hillmorton" "utterly contrary to the spirit of fairness?" I do not see that it is better for a court to belong to the Sixth fellows than to the fast runners in a house.

Yours,

AN O.R. WHO WAS IN THE SIXTH.

P.S.—Hillmorton must be rather farther from Rugby than I remembered, if "Hillmorton" left Rugby before the courts were opened, wrote within five years of that time, and yet his letter has but just reached you now.