

So far as the Federal offices are concerned, the merit system is firmly and successfully entrenched in that part of the service now under its operation. Successive administrations of different parties have upheld and extended it; and the Civil Service Commission has recently borne emphatic witness to the fact of the faithful observance of the laws, and of their spirit, as applied to the offices now covered. Meantime, the President has greatly strengthened the *personnel* of the Commission, and thus made it a better

instrument for the prosecution of its labors, and several of the Secretaries are moving in the direction of reform. Postmaster-General Bissell has made emphatic declarations which will win friends for the merit system wherever its efficacy may have been doubted.

We are not unmindful of the danger of precipitate reform, but public opinion will heartily welcome any extension of the merit system by well considered executive and legislative action.

OPEN LETTERS.

The Current Criticism of Foot-ball.

FIFTEEN years ago, when some of the American colleges were endeavoring against great odds to establish the sport of foot-ball, I undertook the then extremely unpleasant task of begging for space in daily papers, weekly periodicals, and magazines in which to exploit the advantages of the sport. It was hard and thankless work, for the real devotees of the game were few in number, and gibes were many. It took the most zealous efforts of those of us who really cared for the sport to persuade editors occasionally to allow a game to be written up by an actual player. In a few years the parents and the general public learned that the game was not barbarous, brutal, or demoralizing. Then for a time it enjoyed comparative immunity from such criticism. During the last two or three years it has become over-popular with the public, and this craze has led it to assume an importance and prominence wholly unsought, and has afforded a pretext for a new arraignment.

My own personal experience leads me to believe that the injuries which are the principal basis of these exaggerated criticisms occur in teams that are neither regular school nor college organizations, and in many cases are attributable to the entirely unfit condition of the contestants. An untrained person could not, without injury, merely run once around the track outside the field at the pace which, after careful and systematic training, these youngsters maintain throughout the game.

Foot-ball necessarily involves personal contact. To play it successfully a man must be above all things cool, and this requires severe training. Victory depends upon the effectiveness with which each individual of the team, at a given signal, performs during its own attack a certain small but necessary portion of the work, and, during the period when the opponents have the ball, divines their play and frustrates their attack. No man can lose his temper and keep his place on the team, and the training necessary for self-control in this personal contact is the best of discipline for any youth. During the last six years four of the Yale foot-ball captains have been prominent members of the Young Men's Christian Association. A sport which can strongly attract such an element in university life needs no defense against charges of brutality. In order to become a foot-ball captain a man must have made a practical study of the game in all its aspects; otherwise his fellows would never select him for the position. But, unfortunately for the status of the sport among those who

read the newspapers, a foot-ball critic need have made no study either of the theory or of the practice. Unless his strictures are based upon some knowledge of the sport, reasonable people can afford to take them with the usual grain of salt. The Boston "Medical and Surgical Journal," which has recently been engaged in an investigation of the sport, after reviewing every injury received at Cambridge during the last four years, concludes with the statement, "We do not hesitate to say that there is a better physical condition among college students with foot-ball than without it, with out-door games than if their place were taken by compulsory calisthenics and gymnastics." A similar investigation, covering colleges in many parts of the country, which was undertaken by Caspar W. Whitney, the results of which were printed in the Christmas number of "Harper's Weekly," strongly confirms these conclusions.

One point may be conceded to the critics. Doubtless, of late, in the opinion of the best coaches, certain features of the sport have become over-developed; viz., those involving the principle of bringing a rapidly moving mass of men in contact with one or two standing still. Although injuries from this source have not been many, it is probable that the play will be barred out or modified before another season. Such legislation will add to the attraction of the sport, for the Princeton-Yale game on last Thanksgiving day gave evidence both of the rather slow character of mass-playing as well as of the brilliant and exciting features of a more open game. All that is necessary to bring back the old days of no off-side interference is to drop out a few words in one of the rules. If this seems too severe, a rule can be enacted against players changing position, in order to interfere, until the ball is in play. A third way would be to insist upon a kick or a long pass every third down. In fact, almost any legislation rendering the possession of the ball less valuable would accomplish the desired end. At the same time the game should be shortened to two half-hours of actual play.

As to the amount of time taken by a foot-ball player from his studies: in the first place, the early practice of some three weeks is taken not from his studies, but from his summer vacation. October and November are the only months wherein he is both playing foot-ball and studying. During the first of these his practice usually consists of two half-hours in the afternoon. In November he may be required, in addition to this, to go through signals for a half-hour in the morning, and,

toward the end, in the evening also. It is easy to see that the actual time occupied is, therefore, far from excessive. But during the last fortnight before the great game the foot-ball man will become more or less wrapped up in his fancies of victory or defeat. Up to this time the player, in distinction from the captain, has had few worries. He has been coached, but has not been required to study out problems of attack and defense, tricks and strategies, plays for emergencies, and plans of operation. This has become the duty of the coaches and the captain. The coach is usually a graduate who has sacrificed a vacation at some other period of the year to assist in the fall work. Thus the coaches answer an excellent purpose in taking from the shoulders of the players the too fascinating and engrossing study of tactics. There is no doubt that when team play really begins in earnest, as it does at the end of October, the captain thinks of foot-ball more than of lessons; but that very man has usually been selected on account of his mental ability, and I have never known a foot-ball captain at Yale who did not keep up with his class and pass satisfactory examinations. The "bummer" gets dropped, the exceedingly bright but dissipated collegian falls by the wayside, sometimes even the plodding but stupid worker has to give it up, but a man whose mental attributes and moral qualities win him the captaincy of a foot-ball team is sure to pull through in spite of the demands made upon his time.

The reason that college authorities are so little moved by the clamor against athletics is that they know from the results of their previous and continuing investigations that the good far overbalances the evil, and that no better example could be placed before the college of the value of sustained self-control. Professor Richards, from an exhaustive study of the facts, and with tabulated statistics to prove his statements, concludes as follows:

The system is conducive to the good order of the college. Before the days of athletics these men of superabundant animal life supplied the class bullies in fights between town and gown, were busy at night gate-stealing, and other pranks now gone out of fashion. Such now find occupation for all their activity in regular training. Any instructor who has kept track of the ways of college during the past fifteen years cannot fail to be struck by the decreasing number of the really great disorders, by the mildness of those which remain, and by the increasing regard for college authority, college property, and for the rights of fellow-students.

His accompanying statistics show that although in three years in the sixties the record of dismissals for these disorders was eleven, twenty-one, and thirteen, that for the next decade after the sports became prominent, it was less than an average of three a year. Nor can I forbear quoting his reply to the complaint that there is more talk of foot-ball than of Greek.

Does any one suppose that if there were no athletics, members of the college who meet one another on the campus would fall into conversation on the absorbing questions of science and knowledge? The college world is like the world in general in that its inhabitants when off duty find their recreation in talking of other subjects than those of regular business. Their manly contests supply these, and prevent many a man from looking to dissipation and disorder as reliefs from the daily drudgery of the study and the class-room.

The question of a game in New York and upon Thanksgiving day is one upon which I must confess

there is room for a wide difference of opinion. Against such a game is the fact, among others, that at present, while it is a fashionable fad, the increased importance of the game itself and of the players tends to exaggerated ideas of all kinds, while it may be urged in its favor that it gathers together as does no other event, not even commencement, the old and young graduates, and affords a particularly favorable opportunity for reunions. I have seen in the hotels the most pleasant meetings of the parents with the son's chums and companions, the old graduates with the young players and supporters—meetings improbable, almost impossible, under other conditions. A dozen years ago it was commonly remarked to the college foot-ball managers by their friends, the public, "Why do you have the game on Thanksgiving day, when everybody is engaged with family dinners or family reunions? If you must have it on Thanksgiving day, at any rate have it in the morning, and then you'll have a crowd; but you will never get New Yorkers to give up their Thanksgiving dinner for a foot-ball game." To this the college managers replied that they did not care for a crowd, and they would not be induced to change the day or hour of this match, because, they said, "Our own fellows have this holiday, and can come to the game." To-day the very same advisers are crying out against Thanksgiving day, accusing the college managers of selecting that day in order to make more money. The fact is that the colleges alone have been consistent. They began by selecting Thanksgiving day because it was a holiday, and their men could therefore see the contest. They selected New York or its vicinity as the place *par excellence* for a neutral ground and a fair field. The public have come to regard the game as one of the important "sporting events" of the year, and have attached to it many attributes in themselves undesirable. Such attributes come not from the collegian, and it is rather unjust to hold him responsible when one knows that his position is the same that it was twelve years ago, and realizes also that the present future will exhaust itself, and leave him that for which he selected the spot—a fair and accessible neutral field. But the collegian will not rebel against altering this date if his own people desire it upon religious grounds. Would it not be rather hard to say that because all London turns out to the Oxford-Cambridge race the contest should be given up or taken away from the Thames? Why is it that college contests are so attractive? Because—and here is as high a compliment as the collegian is likely to receive at any point in his later career—because the spectator knows that every man will do his best to win, that there will be no sold contests, no cheating, and no cowardice.

The gate receipts amount to a large sum. Are they too large? That must depend entirely upon the object to which they are devoted. Of course not one cent goes to the players. They are neither richer nor poorer for their connection with the team. The money goes to pay for improvements in the gymnasiums or the athletic fields, or for the erection of suitable houses upon these fields. In other words, the popularity of the moment is being made to provide for a more permanent establishment of college sports and athletics.

Walter Camp.