

FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOR ATHLETES

Homo Flatulens and World's Records

A FEW weeks ago members of a Texas college football team came back to their dressing room at half-time thoroughly dejected. They had been completely outplayed. They waited anxiously for their coach and his tongue-lashing. The spell was almost finished when he entered the room. He looked slowly round each player and turned to the door. He paused, looked back, and said, "Well, girls, shall we go?"

They won the game. In this short story, which is true, there is the whole history of that sorry but amazing production of nature: the human race.

Something very similar happened a few thousand centuries ago. Man had been having a bad time. He had starved and frozen. Huskier animal forms threatened his extinction. Then someone said the local equivalent of "Well, girls, shall we go?" and Man lit fires, grew food, bent the strength of the animal kingdom to his own purpose, commandeered wood and iron, reached out for the wind and the rain and lightning, and made all these things work for him.

Vessels of Clay

But these are abstruse subjects. We are credibly informed that abstractions are not palatable to sportsmen. So we'll get down immediately to hard facts and hope that all the long words are not discouraging.

Sportsmen should know, first of all, that this poor thing of clay they drive so desperately around the track or about the field, is in very truth a vessel of clay—half baked and frequently cracked.

This revolutionary statement is not made without authority. We have always had our suspicions about the body which holds the human brain. It gets ricks and rheums, and it twists very easily out of plumb. It seldom survives the short span of life without ending up hunched, paunchy, toothless, ravaged by disease, reduced before its time to a state of hopeless immobility. A corn on the little toe of the right foot and a visit to the dentist were enough to confirm these suspicions, but even higher authority has been found in a physiologist who wrote a long article recently in "The Atlantic Monthly." He called it "The Wages of Biological Sin."

This physiologist first discusses the elementary principles of evolution, but all sportsmen have heard about the gooseberry bush, so we can skip that bit. The point is that he says, with good reason, that evolutionary immortality (i.e., survival) is more likely to be given to very simple organisms, since these breed in such vast numbers that the odds are always against total extinction. Moreover, the fewer the parts, the rarer the weak spots.

The Ants Know the Answer

Man, by this reckoning, has fewer chances of survival through the vale of weeping than the ant, or the rabbit.

Here, briefly and simply, are the reasons supporting the physiologist's statement that Man is in dire evolutionary peril. If you can run 100 in evens, cover a mile in under 4.20, jump six feet, or score from the twenty-five line, then read and be humble, for you're just a poor thing after all.

The human skeleton is a modification from that of the quadrepal animal. The arboreal, protohuman ape, has become the ground-walking human biped. The process has more or less been forced through variation (which means nature's inability to produce two organisms exactly alike), adaptation (which means involuntary change to suit changed circumstances in just as great a degree as organic initiative will permit), and selection (which means that some organisms will get past the higgledy-piggledy series of barbed wire entanglements which environment sets up in their way).

It has all been largely a matter of luck, and the result so far as Man is concerned, is shockingly inefficient.

Inspiration For Advertisements

His spine has had to lift his trunk out of the horizontal. From the bow-shaped structure which held the body as an inverted arch between the fore and hind-quarters, it has become a silly S-shaped thing balancing precariously on a socket joint which no self-respecting engineer would tolerate even at the base of so inanimate a thing as a wireless mast. The curves of this S are extremely liable to flexing out of true, as a result of faulty posture, or through such human tricks as the concentration on one side of the body for doing all the work. It is a hive of backaches, slipped joints, pinched nerves, inflammatory disease. It is the inspiration for "Every Picture Tells a Story."

The base of the spine is fitted very inefficiently into the pelvis. In the apes this joint is mortised, or interlocked. In Man it has become practically a bevel since he straightened himself up to reach for the stars. It slips, with all the weight pressing straight down to drive the base of the spine through the keystone of the arch formed by the pelvic bones. The less said about the results of this, in a family magazine, the better.

Man Climbs Down

Our physiologist suggests that the real Garden of Eden was up a tree, and the expulsion was a descent therefrom. For the human feet were never meant to carry alone all the responsibility they now have to bear. They are too small. The arches wobble, they are encumbered with vestigial and superfluous toes. "Man has been footsore ever since his forebears took to the ground."

Pound for pound we are weaker than the most minute insect. Our muscles have not adapted themselves to frequent shifts of their points of origin to mechanically disadvantageous positions, necessitated by the unnatural erect posture.

A survey of our digestive system prompts the writer to decide that *Homo Flatulens* would be a better name for the species than *Homo Sapiens*. Enough said.

Our blood stream has to work against gravity. It fails to supply the body above the heart with as much blood as it should (except, we suggest, when beer, whisky, and all the rest have induced blood pressure after not more than 40 years of over-indulgence). Below the heart, especially in the legs, it is forced into accumulations of lymph through over-thickening until few middle-aged men can stand still for more than 15 minutes.

And the radiator of a modern car has better thermostatic control.

Record Party

These shattering revelations arrived in the office just about the time we heard the news of the annual Record Party at Dartmouth, U.S.A. For the express purpose of breaking records, according to "Time," the season's fastest runners are annually invited to appear on a phenomenally fast track of spruce-boards, with six-and-two-thirds laps to the mile.

It was on this track, two years ago, that Glenn Cunningham ran his mile in 4mins. 04.4secs. Last year the Negro, John Borican, set the world's indoor records for the half-mile (1.49.8), and 800 metres (1.49.2). This year, at the third "record-smashing jamboree," not one, but eight world's records fell.

(We should point out here for the sake of correspondents who like to take us up on this sort of thing, that the word "Records" is used in its dictionary sense, and not in the legalistic sense they love to belabour.)

The times were:

John Youie Woodruff (nine-foot strides) broke the records Borican set last year. For the half-mile he turned in 1.47.7, and for the 800 metres 1.47.

Jim Herbert (another Negro) ran the fastest quarter mile (0.48.4), and 400 metres (0.47.9) ever recorded indoors. His time for the quarter at last beat the mark of 0.49.6 set by Tom Halpin in 1913.

Borican beat a 15-year-old record when he ran a three-quarter mile in 3.01.2.

In a mile relay a New York University team ran to 3.15, and set a new indoor record for 1,600 metres along the way.

In a half-mile relay, the same team beat the old indoor record by four seconds with 1.27.7.

This was almost enough for one season, but two days later Chuck Fenske, who has won seven mile races in a row this season, ran paced over three-quarters of a mile on an indoor dirt track at Chicago in 2.59.7, to beat all records indoors and out.

A Suggestion

In contrast to the gloom of the socially-minded physiologist, these figures

are encouraging. But sportsmen need not pride themselves. The physiologist says the last word, and we who can neither break records, nor see stories in streams or books in running brooks, must swallow it.

For those Texan footballers, for those Negro athletes, for you on the football field, and you streaming over the fences on a harrier's day in Winter, the brain has done something to overcome the deficiencies of the flesh and bone beneath it. But our physiologist looks at you with one eye, and wonders if brain is quite so important in your sport as brawn; and with the other eye he looks at the millions who have neither. "Whether the present biological depression is the beginning of a fatal evolutionary decline or merely a temporary lapse," he says, "it threatens to bring about the downfall of our present civilisation and the destruction of many or most of its human participants."

It all seems very difficult. We can only suggest that you come to work to-morrow on your hands and knees. You'll be amazed at the difference it makes to your business.

BOXING NOTES

IN beating Jack Jarvis, New Zealand light-weight champion, Young Gildo proved too wily and much too clever. He proved by his exhibition of scientific boxing that he is still far from being a spent force. The bout drew a large crowd, and showed once again that the "public will be there" when good men are matched.

Jarvis, characteristically, never gave up trying. Even over the last round, when he was well behind on points, he made a desperate bid to end the bout by a knock-out.

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Charlie Lindsay, once heavy-weight champion of Auckland, and later of New Zealand, came ashore at Wellington recently. The big fellow is with the Navy, and, he says, likes the sea breezes.

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A letter from overseas says that boxing is popular in old Cairo. Abbassia Gardens, scene of many hectic contests among soldiers 25 years ago, is once again in use. K. Wright, N. Jenkin, and Scott have fought there.

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Seen in Wellington recently was George Muir, of Invercargill. He was New Zealand light-heavy-weight champion of 1934. He has since taken to the bush, where he swings an axe. Muir says that his brother Tom, who also was a good boxer in his time, is overseas with the 1st Echelon, and has been boxing in Egypt.

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A short note from Tom Heeney says all is well with him and that he is still enjoying life in Miami. He does not mention returning to New Zealand for the visit he planned last year.