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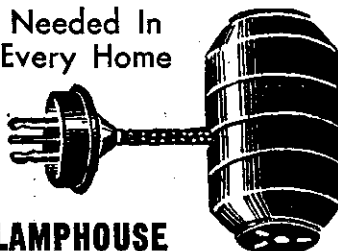
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Notes on Sport

"THE BRITISH ARE BAD BOXERS"

Bernard Shaw Points A Moral

Bernard Shaw as a sports commentator, whose abilities were illustrated by the article on the Beckett-Carpentier fight published last week, turns out to be the same person as Bernard Shaw the playwright. Not content with stating the facts, he must point the moral. One is that the British, according to him, are congenitally incapable of the art of boxing. We reproduce the second part of his article which originally appeared in "The Nation," on December 13, 1919:

NOW, continued Mr. Shaw, for the seamy side of the affair (the Beckett-Carpentier fight), the betting side. As I pushed my way through the crowd in Holborn, I could see by the way my news was received that every poor dupe of the sporting papers had put his shillings or pence or even his quid or two on Beckett. Never had a betting ramp been more thoroughly organised. When the war was over nobody knew whether military service had spoiled Carpentier for boxing purposes or left him as good as ever. If he were as good, or better, then clearly oceans of money could be made at a risk no greater than any gambler will take, by persuading the public that his sun had set and that the Carpentier who had knocked out Wells in seventy-three seconds was a back number. Accordingly, the situation was taken in hand in the usual fashion. A British pugilist of something less than commanding eminence was sent to France and pitted against Carpentier, who gave a poor display and obtained the decision with difficulty. Here was proof positive of his decadence. Then the press got to work. Beckett, progressing rapidly from victory to victory, was extolled as invulnerable and invincible. Carpentier's reputation was discounted until hardly a shred of it remained. His two youthful defeats were retold. The public was reminded that he had obtained a decision against Gunboat Smith only on an unintentional foul by that gentleman; and ring reporters solemnly declared their conviction that but for this accident Carpentier could not have lasted another round. I was informed on the strength of private information from "the French colony" (whatever that may be) that Carpentier had sold the fight and that it was arranged that Beckett should win. Then came a clump of boxing articles, each giving a dozen reasons to show that nothing but a miracle could prevent Beckett from wiping the floor with the exhausted and obsolete Frenchman. I do not know how high the odds were piled at last; but on the morning of the fight every ringstruck sportsman who knew nothing about boxing (and not one in a hundred of the people who read about boxing, or for that matter, who write about it, knows anything worth knowing) had his bet on Beckett. Most of these poor devils do not know even now how completely they were humbugged. They blame Beckett.

Not Beckett's Fault

Beckett is not to blame. What happened to him happened to Sayers sixty-six years ago when he was beaten for the first and only time by Nat. Langham. Langham taught Donnelly, who taught

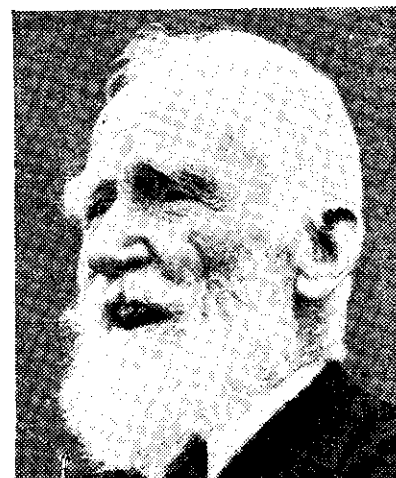
Mr. Angle's and my generation the long shot with the left and getaway of which Carpentier gave such a brilliant demonstration; and it beat even the invincible Sayers. Langham could not knock him out, because the knock-out, though effective for ten seconds, does not last thirty; and Langham had to keep hitting Sayers's eyes until they were closed and poor Tom, blinded, had to weep over his solitary defeat. But Sayers's most famous achievements came later; and there is no reason in the world why Beckett should not be as successful as ever in spite of his having shared Sayers's fate. When he described his defeat as a million-to-one chance, he exaggerated the odds against a knock-out; but the knock-out is always a matter of luck; and Beckett has probably taken dozens of clouts on the jaw as heavy, if not so artistic, as Carpentier's, without turning a hair.

Boxing Isn't Brutal

As to the brutality of the affair, Beckett was chatting to his friends over the rope without a mark on his face, and with £3,000 in his pocket, before they had stopped kissing Carpentier. There are many industrial pursuits more painful and much more dangerous than boxing. The knock-out is probably the most effective anaesthetic known to science; that is why it is so conclusive. Many women would let Carpentier knock them about for twenty rounds for a pension of £150 a year. The valid objection is the old Puritan objection: it is not the pain to the pugilist, but the pleasure to the spectator that matters. To the genuine connoisseur it is simply distressing to see a boxer hurt beyond the harmless point up to which every reasonably hardy sportsman is prepared to smart for the sake of the game. Mr. Angle's expression of concern as he contemplated Beckett on the boards was a study, though he knew that Beckett was fast asleep. But unquestionably many of the spectators believe that they are witnessing acts of cruelty, and pay for admission for their sake, not understanding boxing in the least.

Fascinates and Frightens

Also, the contests, like all contests, act as a propaganda of pugnacity and competition. Sometimes the demoralising effect is visible and immediate. I have seen men assault their neighbours after witnessing a rough and tumble fight for some time. But the effect of a highly skilled display such as Carpentier gave over-awes the spectators. It often reduces them to absolute silence. It fascinates the connoisseurs and frightens the novices and the riff-raff. The question of the suppression of prize-fighting is, therefore, not a simple one. The commercial ex-



BERNARD SHAW

"... Not for another 35 years"

ploitation of prize-fighting is bad, like the commercial exploitation of everything else; for in pugilism as in other things "honour sinks where commerce long prevails," and though such atrocities as the poisoning of Heenan and the rest of the blackguardism which compelled the authorities to make short work of the old prize-ring in the eighteen-sixties are now hardly possible, yet Mr. Cochran and other entrepreneurs of the ring must bear in mind that they can secure toleration only by being on their very best behaviour. The belief that pugnacity and the competitive spirit are the secret of England's greatness may give way at any moment to the equally plausible theory that they are the causes of her decline.

The world now waits breathless for the meeting between Carpentier and Mr. Dempsey. The general sentiment on the night of the fourth was undoubtedly "May I be there to see." I know nothing of Mr. Dempsey's quality as a boxer; but if he can play at lightning long shots with an instinctive command of the duck and counter, and on occasion side-step a boxer who, as the cinematograph proves, has a dangerous habit of leading off from his toes without stepping in, with the certainty of falling heavily on his nose if his adversary takes in the situation and gets out of the way in time, Charles XII. may find his Poltava yet.

"Happier at Home"

Such are the impression of one who has not for thirty-five years past dreamt of attending a boxing exhibition. If I be asked why I have abstained so long, I reply that any intelligent person who frequents such exhibitions will soon be convinced that the British are congenitally incapable of the art of boxing. When you have seen a hundred contests between two hundred Britons, and have concluded that every single one of the two hundred must be the very worst boxer in the world, and his admirers the most abject gulls that ever tipped their way, like Mr. Toots, into pugilistic society, you are driven to the conclusion that you would be happier at home, or even in a theatre or concert room. The truth is, of course, that boxing such as

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