

OXFORD AND KANSAS

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

FOR a number of years Harvard and Yale have arranged matches between picked teams of their track and field athletes and picked teams of the track and field athletes of Oxford and Cambridge. Six meetings have taken place (including two in which Yale alone played Oxford or Cambridge), Harvard and Yale winning three and Oxford and Cambridge winning three. In only one meeting did the visitors (the Harvard and Yale men, as it happened) win on their opponents' home ground. In the meeting that has just taken place in England Oxford and Cambridge won by five events

against four, the deciding event being won for Oxford and Cambridge by an American, a Rhodes Scholar from Kansas. There has been a slight disposition shown to protest against the fact that the Oxford and Cambridge team should have contained this American who won the deciding event in the contest (as well as another American, also a Rhodes Scholar, who ran in the quarter-mile). There is no justification whatever in such a complaint. The Rhodes Scholars are a special and very interesting class of Oxford undergraduates, drawn, not only from the United States, but from Australia and Canada. They are received on a footing of

¹"The Winter's Tale."

equality in Oxford, and there is no more reason why they should not play for Oxford than there is why a Canadian who enters Harvard should not play for Harvard. If a Kansas man went to Harvard and Harvard played the University of Kansas, he would of course play for Harvard; and if he goes to Oxford, he ought to play for Oxford.

Apparently the confusion of thought in the matter arises from the tendency to regard the meet between Harvard and Yale and Oxford and Cambridge as an international championship meet. It was nothing of the kind. The victory of Oxford and Cambridge over Yale and Harvard has no more to do with any question of international intercollegiate championship in track and field athletics than the previous track and field victory of Yale over Harvard had to do with the question of the American intercollegiate National championship, in which a number of other American colleges stood ahead of both of them. If the international championship had been at stake, then Harvard and Yale would have been greatly to blame for sending over their team to represent America, for it happens that this year there are several other American college teams any two of which could have produced a team which could have easily beaten either Harvard and Yale combined or Oxford and Cambridge combined, and there was one American university—Cornell—which, although it has repeatedly been beaten by Harvard and Yale in the past, would this year have probably been able to beat Yale and Harvard and Oxford and Cambridge all taken together. Oxford and Cambridge occupy a position of pre-eminence in the British collegiate world of athletics which is not occupied in any way by any two American universities, neither by Harvard and Yale nor by any others. It is an excellent and sportsmanlike thing for Harvard and Yale to compete in various branches of athletics with Oxford and Cambridge, and they are to be congratulated, because, on the whole, they have done so well; but it would be an absurdity to regard the event as of international value, and therefore to complain against an American who is at Oxford because he plays on the Oxford team.

Occasional international contests—such as the polo championship contests—do good if entered into by just the right men and carried on in just the right kind of sporting spirit. But they are good only as occasional, not as normal, incidents of athletic life. Sport should be kept as sport, as a pastime, and not made a business. International, and even national, championship contests create such an amount of strained interest and excitement as tends to make them objectionable save under exceptional circumstances. Normally, it is far more healthy to limit the field of competition. It is a good thing that Leland Stanford and the University of California should have their annual football game as the great football event for both universities; that Harvard and Yale should treat their private contests as those that are most important for both of them; that Cornell, Columbia, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Syracuse should look forward to the great annual regatta on the Hudson as the chief event of their athletic year; that scores of colleges should be in similar contests. A friendly contest between any one of these universities, or any two of them, with Oxford or Cambridge or with both of them, or with some Australian or Canadian team, is an admirable thing, but such a contest should be regarded, not as an international contest for international championship—any more than the contest between Harvard and Yale is a contest for the National championship—but as an inter-university game between universities which have for one another that friendly admiration and regard that ought always to obtain between contesting teams or individuals in amateur athletics; where each man should play his hardest and do his very best to win, neither sparing himself nor his opponent, and yet should keep a spirit of good will to that opponent.

Incidentally there is one point emphasized by these intercollegiate contests which not only the average citizen and the average sporting writer but even the average serious student of each country tends wholly to forget, namely, the extreme caution which should be shown in dogmatizing as to national traits and aptitudes, physical or moral, from insufficient data. For many years Americans

paid much less attention, for instance, to distance running than to sprinting. In consequence, Americans often beat Englishmen in sprinting races, but rarely in distance races; whereupon any number of solemn wiseacres in both countries announced that this was because Americans had a nervous temperament which fitted them for spasms of exertion in the way of speed and agility, but rendered them unable to compete in contests where strength and endurance decided. Then Americans took up hammer-throwing and shot-putting (both of them, in the eyes of the present writer, exceedingly dull sports) as English university men did not; and, accordingly, Americans always won these events in intercollegiate sports. Thereupon the wiseacres altered their previous conviction, and announced that Americans possessed great strength as well as great speed, but lacked stamina and endurance. Of course, in reality the differences had nothing of any sort whatever to do with national aptitudes, but arose purely from the kinds of training the individuals had been put through and the kinds of sport to which they were accustomed. Nowadays there are American colleges in which distance running is practiced, and, accordingly, the difference in distance running between American and English college athletes has vanished, just as the difference in hammer-throwing would vanish if the English seriously took up that sport. The Cornell mile and two-mile runners showed up much better against the Harvard men than did the Oxford and Cambridge champions, in spite of the fact that the latter enjoyed the advantage of running on their home ground—an advantage which the experience of the past in these intercollegiate games has shown to be of real importance. In the last Olympic contest in London the English beat the Americans in the five and ten mile contests, although they lost the mile run; and immediately this was taken as a text by various worthy writers, who harped on the old string of the American superiority in speed and the English superiority in stamina. But when the Marathon race of over twenty miles came, three Americans finished far ahead of any of the Eng-

lish competitors. This did not mean that Englishmen had a special national quality which enabled them to win races five and ten miles long, and Americans a curious physical capacity to win only when the races were over twenty miles or less than two miles in length. It meant partly that at the moment each country had happened to produce certain exceptional men fitted to run certain distances, and partly that at the moment in each country the popular attention had been directed along certain particular lines to a degree not equaled in the other country. *

Think of the profound speculations and dogmatic generalizations in which the type of wiseacre I have mentioned would have indulged anent the contests of the last forty years between Cornell and Harvard if those two universities had happened to belong to different nationalities! During the past forty years—since Cornell came to the front in the old intercollegiate races at Saratoga—Cornell and Harvard have rowed a number of races, and during that time Harvard has won exactly *one* race. But during the same length of time Harvard and Cornell have repeatedly played football together, and in no single instance has Cornell been able to avoid defeat at Harvard's hands. In baseball the record has been more even; and after a period of defeat in track athletics, Cornell has now come to the front. Even between Cornell and Harvard efforts have occasionally been made to explain Cornell's victories on the water by dogmatizing about the difference in the *personnel* of the students of the two universities, the conclusions being drawn with delightful indifference to the fact that they were directly contradicted by the results of the football contests during the same years. What learned nonsense would have been written on the subject if either Cornell or Harvard had been an English university! An investigation into the causes of the phenomena would be of interest now; but even without such an investigation the mere bald recital of the phenomena ought to warn us to be exceedingly cautious in generalizing as to supposed national differences from the results of even a large number of international contests.