

## The Parson at the Hockey Match

by W.M. MacKeracher

It's very disagreeable to sit here in the cold,  
And a sinful waste of time—ah, well, it's too late now to scold;  
I'll think about my sermon and my prayers for Sunday next,  
And the young folks may be happy—let me see—what was my text?  
But what a throng of people—an immortal soul in each:  
With such an audience this would be a splendid place to preach.  
I'd have the pulpit half-way down—what ice! without a smirch!  
Here are the men—I wonder if they ever go to church.  
"The teams?" Ah, yes, "the forwards, point, and cover-point and goal";  
Thank you, my dear, I understand—is that a lump of coal?  
"Rubber?" Ah, yes, "The puck?" just so! One's holding it, I see—  
That fellow with his clothes all on—ah, that's the referee.  
What was he whistling for—his dog? Why, they've begun to play;  
Well, well, that's rough; I really think we're doing wrong to stay.  
It's sickening, deafening; dear! I wish this uproar could be stilled.  
I do sincerely trust there'll not be anybody killed.

It's a wondrous exhibition of alertness, speed, and strength.  
I suppose there's not much danger—there's a fellow at full length.  
He's up again; that's plucky. Well, the little lad has pluck—  
And now he's master of the ice, possessor of the puck.  
He dodges two opponents, but collides with one at last,  
A Philistine Goliath—David baffles him and fast  
Darts onward o'er the whitening sheet, while from each crowded row  
The crazed spectators cheer him on—Look!—has he lost it? No!  
He's clear again. Played, played, my boy. I'd like to see him score:—  
(I'll have no voice for Sunday if I shout like this much more)—  
But there his ruthless enemies o'erwhelm him in a shoal—  
Well played, you hero, safely passed. Now for a shot on goal.  
Shoot, shoot, you duffer; shoot, you goose, you ass, you great galoot,  
You addle-pated idiot, you nincompoop, you—shoot!  
You've lost it! Never mind—well tried—that other dash was grand.  
Why do they stop? "Off side," you say? I don't quite understand.  
That's puzzling. I suppose it's right. I wish they'd not delay.  
This is a most provoking interruption to the play.

"Cold?" Nothing of the sort. I was—I'm heated with the game.  
I'm really enjoying it; indeed, I'm glad I came.  
I'd like to see both ends at once; I can't from where we sit.  
They've scored one yonder—What's the row? A player has been hit?  
Such things are bound to happen in a rapid game like this;  
They'll soon resume the play, my dear; there's nothing much amiss,—  
Some trifling accident received in a rough body check,  
A shoulder dislocated or a fracture of the neck.

Oh, no, it's nothing serious—the game begins again.  
They're here, a writhing, struggling mass of half a dozen men  
Battling and groaning with the strife, and breathing hard and fast,  
Swayed back and forth and stooping low like elms before the blast,  
Changing their places like a fleet of vessels tempest-driven  
That blindly meet within the waves and part with timbers riven,  
Waving their sticks with frantic zeal—But isn't this a sight?  
My goodness! I could sit and watch a game like this all night.  
There, dirty trousers, there's your chance. Muffed it! Why weren't  
    you quick?  
This is a sight to make the sad rejoice, to heal the sick,  
To rouse the drones and give them life to last them half a year—  
Hit him again!—I wish I had my congregation here.

My stars! and this is hockey. Hockey's the king of sports.  
This is the thing to come to when you're feeling out of sorts.  
This is the greatest holiday I've had for many weeks.  
This helps one to appreciate the feeling of the Greeks.  
I understand my Homer now—O Hercules, behold  
Yon Trojan giant, he that's cast in an Olympian mould,  
Ye gods, he more than doubled up that other stalwart cove—  
Here comes swift-footed Mercury, the messenger of Jove.  
Adown the blue, outstripping all, he speeds. Oh, what a spurt!  
His shoulders have no wings, but see, he has them on his shirt.  
He's broken through the forward line, baffled the cover-point,  
Thrown down the other man and knocked their game all out of joint.  
And now he rushes on the goal—this makes the senses reel—  
Goal! goal! hurrah! hurrah! well done, men of the winged wheel!

At last—how soon!—the game is done; I've scarcely drawn a breath.  
This getting out is difficult; I'm almost crushed to death.  
The cars are packed; how we'll get home I'm sure I do not know.  
Here's room for you; get up, my dears; I'll walk; away you go.

My sermon's gone, but as I walk I cannot help but think  
That, after all, perhaps I've found a sermon in the rink.

This world is an arena with a slippery sheet of ice,  
And all have skates and hockey sticks and enter without price.  
And seats are round for those who rest—the idle and the old;  
But those who are not in the game are apt to find it cold.  
Some play defence, some forward, with terrific speed and stress.  
The puck keeps flying 'twixt the goals of failure and success,

Now up, now down, across and back, here, there, and everywhere.  
The grit of skates, the crack of sticks, the shouting, fill the air.  
Some slip and fall a thousand times and spring up in a trice;  
Some go to pieces on their feet and have to leave the ice;  
Some play offside, kick, tackle, trip, try every kind of foul;

Some players are forever cheered, some only get a howl.  
We seldom hear the whistle of the watchful Referee,  
Who mostly lets the game go on as if He didn't see.  
No gong rings out half-time to let the players get their breath—  
To most full time comes only with the solemn stroke of death.  
The winners are not always those who make the biggest score:  
The vanquished oft are victors when the stubborn game is o'er;  
For many things are added to make up the grand amount,  
And everything is taken at the last into account—  
The sort of sticks we played with, and the way our feet were shod,  
For the trophy is Salvation and the Referee is God.

God prosper our Canadian sports and keep them clean and pure,  
Whole-hearted, manly, generous, and let them long endure!  
Long live each honest winter sport, each good Canadian game,  
To train the youth in lusty health and iron strength of frame,  
To make them noble, vigorous, straightforward, ardent, bold,  
Nearer a perfect standard than the grandest knights of old.

Keep in the path of rectitude the young throughout the land,  
And guide them ever on their way by thine unerring hand,  
Along the slippery path of life in safety toward the goal,  
And keep their bodies holy as the temples of the soul:  
For the river of the future from the present's fountain runs,  
And a nation's hope is founded on the virtue of her sons.

The glory of a man is strength, Thy wisdom hath declared:  
Let strength increase, and strength of frame with strength of will  
    be paired,  
And let these twain go hand in hand with strength of heart and mind,  
And strength of character present all forms of strength combined.  
Oh, make out strength the strength of men to perfect stature grown,  
And use it for thine ends and turn man's glory to thine own.

Source:

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