

**T**HE Boston bench was in an uproar. It was a close ball game and the umpire had just flagged a Red Socker out at home plate. The Bostons set up an angry clamor from their cave. But the umpire gave no indication that he heard the insults as he looked about for his little whisk broom to sweep away the dust that had been scattered over the plate by the Red Socker.

Suddenly, from the depths of the dugout, there boomed a stream of syllables. The umpire straightened as if shot. He flung his mask to the ground and stormed over fiercely to the dugout.

"Berg," he roared, "one more crack like that and out you go! You can't say that to me. Shut up, or get out!"

As the irate arbiter stalked back to the plate, Moe Berg grinned.

"What the devil did you say?" asked one of his teammates.

"I just told him where his whisk broom was," said Moe. "I just said, 'It's right in back of you, Bill.' I guess I shouldn't have said it in French."

Morris ("Moe") Berg, linguist, lawyer, scholar, gourmet and big-league catcher, can say lots of things in lots of languages, but the truth is, Moe's too much of a gentleman and a scholar to misuse his talented tonsils; it must be reported here that he has never cast any aspersions on an umpire's ancestry or integrity, even in good plain homespun American. Several times the umpires have been suspicious of him, but his ability to talk fast and in five different languages (he has a working knowledge of a dozen more) has preserved his record of never having been thrown out of a ball game.

This ability stood Berg in good stead in Moscow during one of his several around-the-world jaunts between baseball seasons. A camera enthusiast of the first water, Moe was arrested by two OGPU agents for taking pictures in "Red Square." He had used up half of the roll of film when the agents politely but firmly suggested that he come to headquarters for a bit of a chat.

And the bit of a chat, if you please, was conducted in Russian at Berg's own request.

The agents, it seemed, wanted his film. Berg argued angrily against giving it up. They were persistent, though, and Moe did not relish the idea of being waived into the Siberian League, so he surrendered. But not without a flourish.

"All right, all right," he barked in Russian, snatching the camera from the agent. "If you feel that way about it you can have the film. But I'm going to see the American consul and I'm going to . . ." And as he talked the ingenious Moe deftly ripped out the *unused* film and handed it to the satisfied agents. Then he stormed out of OGPU headquarters with the pictures he had snapped. He will show them to you if you drop over to his Newark home during the off-season.

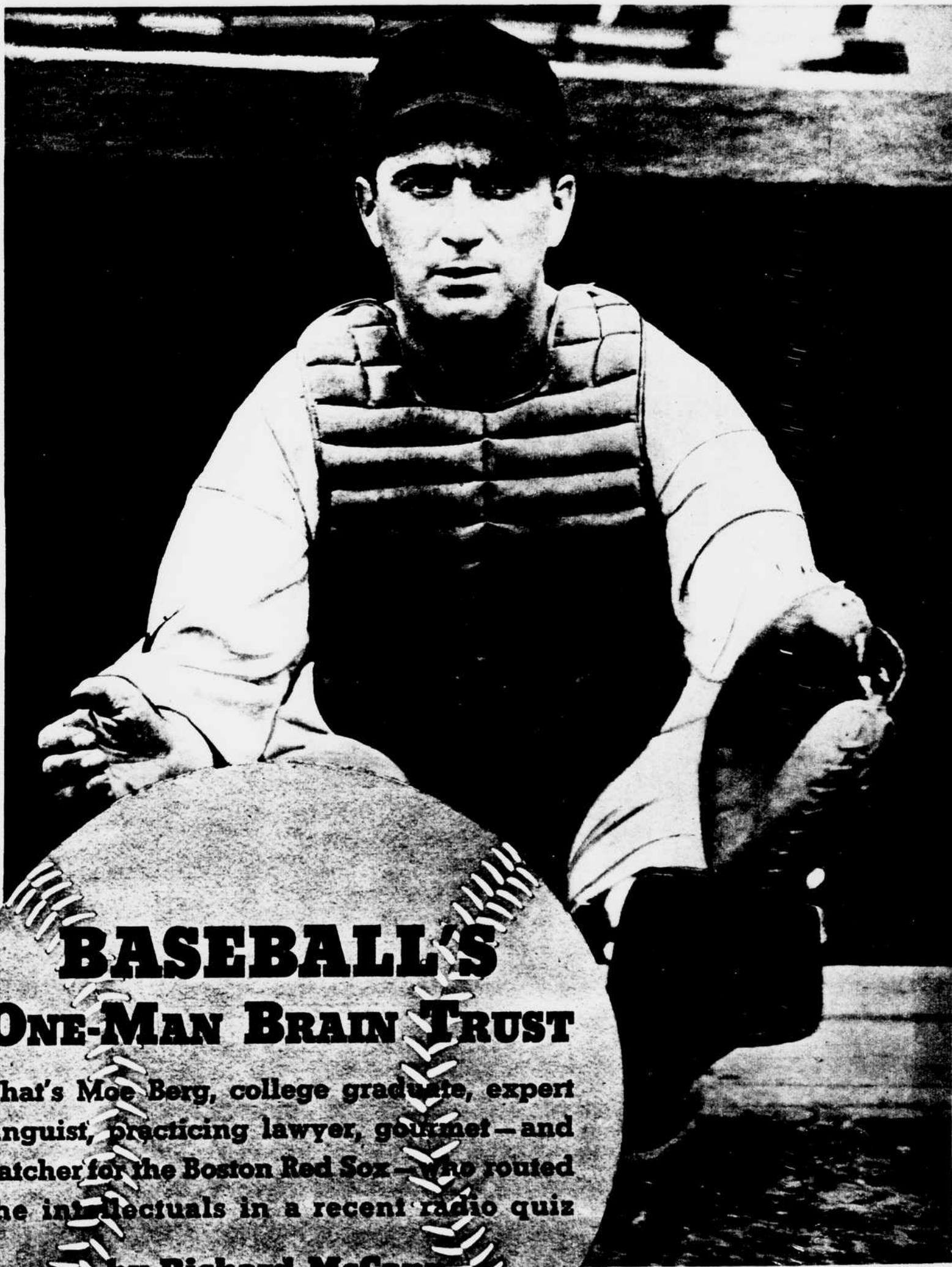
For seventeen summers now sports writers in Brooklyn, Reading, Minneapolis, Chicago, Washington, and Boston, where the likable Moe Berg has displayed his baseball ability, have been trying to tell the fans how learned and clever the tall, handsome catcher really is, but it has remained for Berg himself to convince the public.

Invited recently to appear as a guest star on the popular radio program, "Information, Please," which features such wise wits as Clifton Fadiman, John Kieran, and Franklin P. Adams, the baseball player stole the show. If Ring Lardner had been alive to hear him the great humorist would have felt pretty dubious about his many dumb-ballplayer yarns.

During the course of the evening's quizzing, thirty-two brain-stumping questions were put to the three experts and Mr. Berg; and the ballplayer emerged with a .343 batting average when he provided eleven of the answers.

If you don't think that is evidence of an acute acumen, tell us, in about ten seconds, the meaning of *poi*, *soy*, *loy*, and *oy*! And do you know what the *Bordereau* letter was? The Willie-Nicky correspondence? And what is the brightest comet, the brightest planet, the brightest satellite, and the brightest star our generation has seen?

Well, the ballplayer answered all of these brain teasers, answered them quickly and correctly. With the same easy assurance



# BASEBALL'S ONE-MAN BRAIN TRUST

That's Moe Berg, college graduate, expert linguist, practicing lawyer, gourmet — and catcher for the Boston Red Sox — who routed the intellectuals in a recent radio quiz

by Richard McCann



that he would assume when ordering the pitcher to keep 'em low and inside, Berg told his astonished fellow broadcasters that the Willie-Nicky correspondence was the pre-War telegrams between the Kaiser and the Czar, and that the *Bordereau* letter was the one that convicted Alfred Dreyfus of espionage. He knew that *poi* is the Hawaiian substitute for bread, that *soy* is a bean from which we have derived the word *suey*, and that *loy* is the ancient French spelling for law. Venus, he said, is the brightest planet we see; Halley's Comet of 1910 was the brightest comet; the moon is the brightest

satellite; and the sun is the brightest star.

Speaking of bright stars, few other guest stars have shone as brightly as did Berg that night — and, you know, among the program's guests have been such brilliant and nimble minds as Heywood Broun, Dorothy Thompson, Kathleen Norris and Howard Brubaker.

When Berg had pegged his last puzzler out before it could get to first base, Clifton Fadiman, director of the program, quipped: "Mr. Berg, are you very popular with your teammates?"

That was one question Moe didn't answer.

The answer is simple. It is: yes, very popular.

He is popular because he won't like the compliments in this story. He doesn't flaunt his knowledge around the clubhouse and dugout. He doesn't want to be identified as a linguist or a lawyer or a gourmet or a lover of fine music. He wants to be known as Moe Berg, catcher.

He knows the restaurants that offer the finest cuisine in each of the cities on the big-league trail, but he'll sit on a stool and hack away at hamburgers with a homesick rookie outfielder. He knows the scores of several operas and is devoted to the drama, but he'll go off happily to a "hoss" opera with the mental giant who just came up from the backwoods.

He is father confessor to teammates in trouble, and Big Brother to bewildered rookies. He took the blame for a midnight escapade one training season to save one player's scalp, and acted as bodyguard and shield for another buddy when an irate gentleman was seeking to wreak considerable damage on the lad.

He is thirty-seven now; time and knee surgery have slowed him so that he doesn't catch many games through a season, but he is still one of the most useful men in baseball.

"He's one of our most valuable," says Joe Cronin, manager of the Boston Red Sox, who was also Berg's boss at Washington. "He's just as necessary to our team as if he

(Continued on page 22)

Wide World