



Another



Uncle Al Hits The High Spots

Baseball was Uncle Al Drake's hobby. He built Drake Park and was the largest individual contributor to its maintenance. He would sit in the grandstand, back of the home plate, mopping his florid brow with a red bandana, and when a Westfield player struck out with the bases loaded, he would tell him where to go to improve his batting average. In 1892, after four straight defeats, Manager Charlie Coddling so far forgot himself as to remind Uncle Al that he looked like Santa Claus. For once, the old fellow was speechless. His great round belly shook, but not with laughter, and the perspiration poured from his bald, red head on to his bristling, golden beard. He choked, he stuttered and finally gasped, "See me Christmas," then turned on his heels and walked away. A few days later, Manager Coddling received a note advising him that "some people want the earth but are not willing to pay for a grain of sand." Pinned to the page was a check for \$100.00.

Uncle Al had an excellent stable of riding and driving horses, and many handsome turn-outs, in charge of Oswald Young. His favorite, on summer mornings, was a light buckboard from the high seat of which he surveyed the landscape, under cover of a large, green cotton parasol. One morning, while passing under the Westfield Avenue railroad bridge, the horses took fright at a freight train thundering overhead, dashed wildly across the street, into the gutter, up-

set the buckboard and deposited its occupants upon the green sward in front of Lawyer Peckham's tenement houses, opposite the M. E. Church. Uncle Al's treasured parasol was rent in twain and, though well upholstered, his terminal facilities were rudely shaken and bruised. He gathered himself together and struggled to his feet. His equipage had disappeared, so had his coachman, probably in pursuit. Then burst a plutonic blast against coal trains, bridges, road overseers, gutters, and lawmakers of all denominations. It continued until Uncle Al ran out of breath and vocabulary. Puffing and blowing, he walked to town, the cynosure of astounded pedestrians to whom he bowed politely. Soon afterwards, he entered Decker's Livery Stable. "I just told George Van Emburg," he said, "that if he didn't put in a good stock of green umbrellas, I'd stop trading at his — — store. Take me home!"

When the Westfield Club house was being built, he urged "storekeepers and professional men to become shareholders to help increase public interest in solid improvements." He opposed the "outward habiliments of woe," stood for "sound money, sound government and common sense in education." He advocated a public park system for Westfield (May 21, 1892), was one of the organizers of the Westfield Fire Department, and gave the Bucket and Engine Company its famous red buckets. He thought