

LATIN AMERICA'S SPORTS (1895)¹

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COCK FIGHTING, RACING, GAMBLING, AND BULL BAITING.

Natives of Central America Who are Too Lazy to Hunt the Game and Fish with which the Woods and Rivers are Stocked—Gambling with Little Dies the Prevailing Passion—Sporting Resorts of the Cities—Some Queer Racing—A Trick of Native Betters—Bull Baiting and Cock Fighting and Their Brutality.

Any reference to the sports and sportsmen of Central America brings to mind at once the oft-told stories of the cocking mains² and bull fights for which people of Spanish blood have long been noted. Everyone has read of the lawyers who drop their briefs, the merchants who leave their customers, the workmen who abandon their tools, the padres who hasten through the mass in order to get away to the ring where cocks were fighting and dying and handfuls of gold and silver were changing hands on every main.

That these cock fights are interesting as an exhibit of the nature of the people who patronized them has been admitted by every writer on the subject, but that they afforded any element of sport likely to attract a spectator of Saxon blood after he had seen the first main has been invariably denied. And the same may be said of the current accounts of bull fights. It is a peculiarity, also, of about all the works on Central American travel, that when the cock fights and bull fights have been described the story of the sports of the region comes to an end. One does, indeed, find many references in a general way to the Spanish-American love of ambling, but the impression left on the mind of the reader of travels

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² Main — Match [cock-fighting]

in Central America is, so far as I can learn, that the sportsmen of the region confine their attention to the two kinds of contests here mentioned. That certainly was the impression I carried when I started on my journey; and I am bound to admit that I found in my earlier experiences, especially while journeying west from Panama through the Isthmus to Costa Rica, a plenty to confirm this impression. In Panama itself I found no end of game cocks, and one accommodating owner turned some of his stock loose that I might photograph them. The photograph came out somewhat hazy, for the reason that they were no sooner at liberty than they began to fight. Still, I got the birds in a natural position. And then in the long journey on muleback along the southern slope of the Cordilleras I rarely passed a home of any kind without seeing at least one lusty cock tied with a yard or so of string to a stake or house post, where he alternately plumed himself, pecked at stray insects, and shouted defiantly at all other blooded roosters within reach of his voice. Of bulls destined to fight I could neither see nor hear anything. The whole region was devoted to cattle raising, but the people said they had no bull fighters and no bull ring in all the country.

THEY PREFER SWINGING IN A HAMMOCK.

Then I asked about other kinds of sports—the kinds that are considered lawful and laudable in the States, mentioning in detail such of the athletic doings as might have place there—foot races, throwing and putting of weights, jumping, and so on. I had on such occasions an interpreter, so that my questions were put in the proper way, and yet those questioned rarely seemed to understand what I wanted to learn. That sane men should go out on the plain and get themselves heated up and out of breath and all tired out generally just to see which one could run the fastest or leap the highest or show the greatest strength of arm—that men should do this when there were hammocks a-plenty swinging in the shade of well-thatched roofs was something they could not well understand. Swinging in the hammock was good enough sport for them by day. At night, when the cool breeze sifted through the groves, and one was inclined to pick a guitar, they would dance. Yes, why not? But run a race! Caramba! Then I said very often during the journey:

"There is the river. Are any fish found in it?"

"Why not?"

"And do you catch any of them?"

A shrug of the shoulders. "We have no net."

"No fish hooks and lines, either?"

"No, sir."

"I have seen many skins of the deer and the jaguar in your stores. You have much pleasure killing them, eh?"

"The Indians kill them. There are many deer everywhere. It is no trouble. The Indian sits down by the pool where the deer come to drink and waits. It is stupid to wait so long. Sometimes a jaguar (tiger) comes. Then it is dangerous, but the Indians like it."

The whole south slope of the Isthmus, one may say, is a vast deer park. The river valleys afford deep, thick woods, where the deer may retire in the breeding season. The uplands are for the most part pastures, with clumps of trees scattered about, and here the deer come, especially in the mosquito and fly season, that the wind may deliver them from the winged pests. The gaucho of the Argentine Republic, with his notions of "the wild mirth of the desert," and the cowboy of the United States, would find there in a mad dash across the plain after the flying deer such a thrill of delight as would drive the hot blood to the uttermost limits of his body. But Don Juan of the Isthmus will have none of that.

I saw shotguns for sale in almost every store of the Isthmus. The barrels, as well as the stocks, were ornamented with a profusion of gilt and silver, and the price of the best double gun was \$5 in the depreciated silver of the country!

THE SOLDIERS' PASTIME.

Nowhere in the Isthmus west of Panama did I find anything ever called sport, except cock fighting. In San José, the capital of Costa Rica, I found different ideas. Time was in Costa Rica when the Congress would go from the legislative hall to the cock pit just as the British Parliament adjourns over Derby day to allow the legislators there to enjoy their favorite sport. Still it is not recorded that the Costa Rican Legislature ever adjourned especially to see a contest between

roosters as the British legislators have done to see a horse race. Moreover, the Costa Ricans have progressed in recent years. Cock fighting is still practiced, but it is no longer the universal sport that it once was. I observed immediately as I walked about the streets that blooded roosters were nowhere in sight until I came to the barracks and the police station. There I saw a plenty of them. And it seemed not a little singular, after the experience of the Isthmus, to be told that the roosters were kept for the entertainment of common soldiers and patrolmen. Officers did look on and wager good money at times, but it was no longer the proper thing for the quality to patronize the cock pits.

"Do you then have any other kind of sportsmen here?" said I when I learned this.

"Oh, yes," was replied in hearty fashion, "Cards and dice are the things. If you want a little game at any time you can be accommodated."

"Are there any gambling houses with roulette and faro, &c.?"

"No. The law prohibits those games and the law is enforced. Your American game of draw poker is very well understood, however, while the favorite game is with dice."

The dice game, as played in both Costa Rica and Nicaragua, astonishes the Yankee traveler. They use the smallest dice in the world, it is said, the cubes being never more than an eighth of an inch on a side. A man must have right good eyes to see the spots at all, not to mention counting them at a glance. I saw men playing with them everywhere. Barefooted peons, with half a handful of silver in the pot, shouted with exultation or cursed in disgust with every toss of the tiny ivories. Dons at the hotels, with a pile of bills in place of silver, showed no greater and no less interest in the game. Almost every one of them audibly invoked the aid of his patron saint when it came his turn to toss the dice, and about every one expressed anything but complimentary opinions of the old saints when the toss failed to win. The Central Americans who gamble thoroughly enjoy it. One has only to watch a game five minutes to learn that.

A BET OF \$2,000.

Professional gamblers are rare in Central America. In San José, they told me, all the gamblers had some other kind of business nominally. The leader of the sporting men was an American known as Spiller of New Orleans, they said. He came there as a railroad man, but he had what is known in the States as genuine sporting blood. They said he had been known to risk \$1,000 often on a toss of the dice, and sometimes as much as \$2,000, but it was not often that he could find anyone, even among the rich coffee planters, willing to play for so high stakes. When Spiller was asked about his experiences he said there wasn't anything in Costa Rica sport out of the usual run, except, perhaps, that it was worthwhile for a sportsman to keep a reputation for playing a square game. Spiller had that reputation, and so was a very popular fellow.

In San Juan (Greytown), Nicaragua, I found a keno outfit. It was laid out in a hotel barroom, and on Sunday afternoon was patronized by a shouting crowd. It cost ten cents to come in. The house took the usual rake-off, and it paid a license fee of ten per cent. of the profits to the Government. Of course, the place was running with wide open doors, and that is one thing to be said in favor of all such doings in Central America. This is not to say that all laws are strictly enforced, but, so far as I could learn, the sinful resorts that existed were not run behind a screen or under a cloak.

The boats on the San Juan River, Nicaragua, and on the lake as well, have in a modest way the reputation of the old Mississippi boats. Cards and dice were in sight all day long. On the boat which carried me was a native who was pointed out as a professional sporting man and smuggler. He had been down to San Juan, which is a free port, for goods, and they said he would manage to get the valuable part of them through the Custom House at Castillo free, even though known as a blackleg. He passed his waking hours the first day playing dice with the second-class passengers, with whom he was on the average very successful. Then he came to the upper deck at night, and invited a couple of drummers³ and a San Juan steamer Captain, who were Americans, and two native merchants, to have a little game of penny ante to pass the time. A penny there is but half a cent of American money, and so a game of penny ante seems to be particularly mild to the unsophisticated. But no mention of a limit was made, and therein was the rub.

³ Drummer — (perhaps) Conservative player [poker]

PENNY ANTE WITHOUT LIMIT.

The crowd sat down where the shade and the breeze were comforting and began with a dollar's worth of chips each and a fresh deck between them. It took the fellow a long time to get the players interested, but he was patient, and he succeeded at last. The Americans seemed to be the slowest in arriving where they would raise the bet more than 10 cents even on aces full on jacks or kings, but the time came when they did much better. One of the drummers who sat next to the steamer Captain was dealing, and a jack pot was developed. The Captain took the deal, but no one was able to open the pot. Then the next drummer dealt, and the gambler opened the pot with 25 cents. It was necessary for him to have a pair of kings or better to do this, of course, and I saw that he had just that. In the draw he called for two cards only, and that looked as if he proposed to bluff it out; but he got the other two kings nevertheless. I did not see what the rest drew. After the draw, one merchant and the steamer Captain remained in until the bets went around twice, the second round being on a raise of \$2 by the gambler. After that the merchant dropped out, looking sick, and the steamer Captain and the gambler seesawed to and fro until over \$200 Nicaraguan money was on the table. Then the gambler said: "I have no more in my pocket. I call."

He spread out his four kings with a smile that was pleasing to see. The steamer Captain raised his eyebrows and smiled faintly. Then he put down an eight spot of hearts, followed it with the nine, and so continued up to the queen—a straight flush.

"Caramba! Not in a lifetime could it happen so again," said the gambler as the Captain raked down the cash. And so it seemed to me, for a man's chance for a straight flush is said to be but one in sixty thousand or more. But afterward, when I was invited to take a cooling drink with the Yankees, I found that the chances could be changed by one skillful enough with the cards, and that the jack pot and the four kings and the straight flush had all been arranged by the steamer Captain and his friends, the drummers.

In San Juan there was a hotel that was run under the name of a club, but its proprietor and all of its patrons, so far as I saw, were foreigners. The play was higher there than I saw it elsewhere, but I did not hear of a loss greater than

\$200 in one night, even there. However, this was not a Central American gambling house, properly speaking. It is my opinion, based on what I have learned through enquiry, that high play of the kind one reads about in the days before the American civil war is now unknown in the Americas. No one can now be found who is foolish enough to stake good money by the thousands on a hand of cards. Spiller's bets were the highest of which I have ever had any knowledge.

A COSTA RICA SPORTING RESORT.

The nearest approach to a sporting house of the sort known to the mine camps of the United States which I found in Central America was at Limon. Its proprietor was a man noted in the annals of Cuban warfare for independence. Probably all of the Cuban readers of THE SUN, and not a few others as well, will remember the name of Eugenie Carlotta, commonly called Pichicá among his associates. He was a Cuban by birth, of Spanish, Indian, and negro blood by descent, and a citizen of the United States by adoption. In 1875, with a number of other Cubans, of whom Leonelo Prado was leader, he boarded the Spanish steamer *Montezuma* in Puerto Plata. When she had gone to sea, the Cubans captured the steamer, killing four men in all, including the Captain. The story in full will be told at another time. Pichicá said he was about the only one of the adventurers left alive. He was living temporarily in Limon, he said: he was there because it was a seaport convenient to Cuba, and where he could easily get away to join an expedition bound to fight the Spaniards. Meantime he ran a sporting resort.

His place was a wooden building that stood end on to the street, just as similar mining camp buildings do. From the street one stepped through doors that were always open into a small room with a bar on one side and two tables and some chairs on the other. The back wall of this room was merely a screen, say ten feet high. Through it a self-closing door led to a rear room about 12x20 feet large. Off one side of this room were four private rooms just large enough for a narrow table with two chairs on each side of it. Curtains served for doors to these rooms and they were lighted from overhead. By day the whole place had a strong smell of Georgia pine and stale beer, and the sales of the bar scarcely served to pay the salary of the barkeeper. By night the place was so different as to be scarcely recognizable. The large back room was filled with men and young women, who danced and talked and laughed and drank beer in a way that indicated a thorough enjoyment of life. The little rooms on one side were also full all the time, and here there was gambling as well as drinking. In the front room,

also, there was plenty of drinking and talk, but no dancing or gambling. Chief among the patrons of the place were members of the crews of the various steamers in port. Pichicá seemed to know them all by name, and was almost continually circulating about the place, although he occasionally took a spin on the floor with one of the girls or sat down to bet \$5 on a throw of the dice or a hand at a card game.

The music was furnished by a piano, a flute, a violin, and a brass instrument. These began to make the air and patrons quiver in harmony at 9 o'clock, on the night I visited the place. Only two girls were in the hall at the time, one a tall, slender woman, whose face showed long years of sinful experiences, while the other was a typical Spanish beauty, and apparently only 18 or so years of age. To an innocent spectator the young girl was far and away the more attractive, but at the first chord of the waltz the men made a rush for the other one, and to keep peace among them she danced with four different partners in the course of ten minutes. As she waltzed, the cause of her popularity became apparent, for in spite of the inroads of time and the devil she was as graceful as a Carmencita.

A SPANISH DANCE.

After the waltz came a dance that accompanied polka music, but was unlike any polka common to the United States. It was a dreamy tune, slow and sweet, but as it floated across the room the sailors abandoned the floor to the native sports. These took advantage of the opportunity with enthusiasm, especially the native young men who had seemed less attractive to the young women than the sailors. Each young man clasped a young woman close to his breast—very close—with his right arm far around her waist and her left hand and cheek on his right shoulder, while their other hands were clasped and extended pump-handle fashion. Standing thus they awaited the right impulse of the music, which came when the brass horn joined the other instruments. As it boomed they wriggled, revolved half around and wriggled again, revolved back and wriggled once more, and so they continued to revolve and wriggle, and wriggle and revolve, slowly, ecstatically, and to the infinite amusement of the unaccustomed spectators while the music lasted.

It must be said that a dance house is not, strictly speaking, a Central American sporting resort. Pichicá said he learned the business in New York. While Mr. Warner Miller's company was spending some four million dollars or more on

the Nicaraguan Canal there was a dance house at San Juan, but those two were the only ones I ever heard of in Central America.

Still, Guatemala City had a resort that was something like a dance house, and it was run and patronized by natives exclusively. The chief part of the patrons were bare-footed people from the country, and the favorite drink was native rum. There was a pavilion back of the barroom, where the wayfarers sat to eat their luncheons and drink, and music was provided during the day and the early evening. The young folks sometimes danced to the music under the pavilion, and the half Indian country girls were as graceful as fairies. But only those who believe that all dancing and all rum drinking are sinful would have called this an evil resort. To the patrons of the place the rum and the dancing were as innocent as the lemonade and the games are to the patrons of church picnics in the States.

Curiously enough, the swell place of resort of the Limon sportsman was also run by an American citizen, R. C. Childs, with J. F. S. Ross as cocktail artist. The saloon, known there as the Gem, was on the principal corner of the town. A sporting organization, sufficiently described by its name of "Whiskey Poker Club," had its private rooms here, and there was a very comfortable bower in the garden attached where the rich often met for a quiet game of draw. Upstairs there were cool, airy rooms where quiet little parties of both sexes gathered to test the skill of the drink mixer.

The compound in greatest favor among the sporting population was commonly known as "a cherry." It was made as follows: Three dashes of gum, two dashes of Angostura bitters, one of vanilla liquor, fill with whiskey, and add one cherry. This drink was sold at 50 cents per glass, and the proprietor said he had over fifty customers who came to the bar regularly every day for at least one cherry each. Naturally, he thought Limon was an excellent place for business, but, aside from this, it must be plain to every traveler that the people of all Central America are the ideal customers of a liquor dealer. The people drink often, they like all kinds of malt and spirituous liquors, and they so rarely get drunk that one may say that drunkenness is not a vice of even the sporting men of the region.

I had but few opportunities of observing the drinking habits of people at their homes, but on every occasion that I was invited to a private house, French cognac was served. And it was consumed by the host in much greater quantities

than any ordinary American traveler could possibly endure. I have seen men drink from seven to nine glasses of brandy at a sitting, while their wives and daughters drank from two to four glasses of the size of a whiskey glass on a New York bar. These amounts of liquor produced no greater effect on either men or women than the same number of glasses of beer would produce on our German fellow citizens when passing the evening in a summer garden.

A CENTRAL AMERICAN RACE TRACK.

In recent years the importation of blooded horses has become a fad among the rich Spanish Americans, and with the horses have come not only fine carriages, but trotting sulkies as well. Guatemala has taken the lead in this matter, although the Ezetas (Carlos and Antoine), who rule Salvador when I was there, were importing fine stock from Europe. I saw four magnificent roadsters on one steamer bound to the Ezeta estates. But the Ezetas were to be seen walking about the streets of San Salvador while in Guatemala City, President Barrios and his handsome wife, a New Orleans lady, drove everywhere in a carriage with their driver and footman in livery. And this was an example the rich people of the town had not been slow to follow. The journey which one makes from Tegucigalpa in Honduras to the capital of Guatemala is brief in the time occupied, but the distance between the two regions measured along the line of progress is best shown by placing the Honduras ox carts, with wheels cut from the end of a saw log, beside the open carriages drawn and cared for by servants in livery on the streets of Guatemala.

The relation which all this has with the sporting men of Central America becomes apparent when we learn that the growing interest in good horseflesh among the Guatemaltecos has resulted naturally in the opening of a race track at the capital city. I attended the races held there one Sunday afternoon. A meeting of unusual interest was promised by the newspapers, because there was to be a trot over a course of 3,000 varas (nearly 3,000 yards), between Ben, the favorite roadster of President Barros, and Colombia, a crack trotter owned by Charles Brown, an American livery stableman in business there. Both animals, it was said, had had frequent impromptu trials on the road with results so varying that a meet on the track had been arranged for small purses. The private bets were said to aggregate many thousands of dollars, but that the event showed to be untrue. To fill out the afternoon's sport the following program was arranged. It will be easily translated by horsemen if they keep in mind that

a *carrera* is a running race, and a *trote* is a trot, and that as to colors *colorado* is red; *azul*, blue; *bayo*, bay; *retinto*, very dark; *tordillo*, an iron gray, and *aplomado* lead colored;

HIPODROMO
DE
GUATEMALA.

PROGRAMA

de las carreras de caballos que se efectuarán el domingo 30 del corriente.

I.

Primera carrera - 1,000 varas—Premio \$25.

Romeo.—Bayo, de don Emilio Schuman.—Jockey Colorado.

Talisman.—Retinto, de don Adrián Romero.—Jockey Azul.

II.

Segunda carrera - 2,000 varas—Premio \$30

California.—Tordillo, de D. Emilio Schuman.—Jockey Colorado.

Gamo.—Retinto, de don Adrián Romero.—Jockey Azul.

III.

Trote en sulky - 3,000 varas—Premio \$30.

Ben.—Retinto, de don Emilio Schuman.—Jockey Aplomado.

Colombia.—Colorado, de don Carlos Brown.—Jockey Azul.

IV.

Tercera carrera - 2,000 varas—Premio \$10.

Luis Engran.—Retinto, de D. Emilio Schuman.—Jockey Colorado.

Exodo.—Tordillo, de don Adrián Romero.—Jockey Azul.

V.

Trote en sulky - 3,000 varas—Premio \$100.

Ben.—Retinto, de don Emilio Schuman.—Jockey Aplomado.

Colombia.—Colorado, de don Carlos Brown.—Jockey Azul.

VI.

Carrera general - 1,000 varas—Premio \$10.

GUATEMALA, ABRIL DE 1893.

With a good Yankee horseman who also knew the ways of the people, I went to the track and found it in no way peculiar, save that a special pavilion had been built near the wire for the use of the President and his guests. The general admission was 50 cents, and a grandstand seat cost \$1. There were no bookmakers' stands or other special places for betting, though plenty of men were ready to stake the cash when a race was called.

GETTING TIPS.

While waiting for the President to arrive, most of the spectators, of whom there were something over a thousand, generally passed their time in smoking and buying drinks at the bar under the grandstand. In company with the horseman, I took a look at the animals in their boxes. We first visited two of the racers, California, a beautiful, clean-limbed iron gray, and Gamo, his rival, a small, wiry, dark chestnut. The horseman at once said: "California is good. I'll back him."

This was said in English to me, with the idea that the jockey (a colored boy) did not understand that language. But the jockey at once said: "You are an American, ain't you, boss?"

"Yes."

That's what I thought. The gray's all right most generally, but he's off his feed today, boss."

We then went on to the stalls, side by side, where Ben and Colombia were to be seen. Mr. Brown was in charge of his own horse, and the President's coachman was working over Ben. Brown and the horseman had a talk about the two horses in English, but in a low voice, and then we went upon the grandstand, where the horseman took in all the money that was offered on Colombia. "Colombia could leave Ben out of sight," he said to me, confidentially, "but he won't."

The President and his wife drove through the gate at 1 o'clock. They were followed by a couple of carriages containing some generals and civilian officials while a bodyguard of soldiers came from a small building and took places near the President's pavilion. The president was dressed in a blue uniform, trimmed with red braid and wore a military cap of the shape used by German soldiers.

His wife was radiant in a creamy dress of fine wool, made in a fashion that was popular among people at the seaside in the States that year (1893).

Immediately after the officials were in place, the bell called out the horses for the first race and the two got away and finished in a style that aroused neither enthusiasm nor interest among the spectators. When the second race was called there was a stir on the grandstand. The jockeys led out the iron gray I had seen and a small roan that I had not seen, both ready for a race. The jockeys at once mounted and started, cantering along the track to warm up the animals; and then at least forty native shouting men came to the foreign or gringo group of spectators, who, because of their language, had gathered by themselves at one end of the stand. Each native had plenty of money in one hand and the program in the other, and everyone was pointing first to the second race on the program, and then to the two horses cantering along the track. Each time a native pointed at the program and the horses he held up a bill—usually \$10 and said, "*El chiquito*," meaning that he wanted to bet on "*el chiquito*," or the little one. The natives knew that most of the foreigners did not speak Spanish, and so they went through this formula to express their desire to bet on the little one.

QUEER BETTING.

The horseman looked at the program, that called for a race between a gray and a dark chestnut, and then at the track, where the long-legged gray and the small roan were alone in sight.

"That roan is not on the program," he said, "but if anybody wants to back her against the gray, I'll take him." Then, turning to the nearest native with money, a respectable-looking business man, he said, with emphasis on the last word and pointing to the roan:

"*Que quiere usted poner un dinero sobre el chiquito allá.*" That may not be classical Spanish, but he meant to say, "Do you wish to put your money on the little one there?"

"*Si, como no? El chiquito, el chiquito.*" (Yes, why not? The little one, the little one) said the native, but he held his index finger on the second event of the program and merely nodded his head toward the track. The horseman noticed this and

said aside to me: "They are trying to work us with a ringer."⁴ Then he said to the native, drawing \$20 from a roll as he did so: "*Si quiere poner dinero sobre el chiquito allá* (pointing to the horses) *aquí usted tiene veinte pesos.*" (If you wish to back the little one there, here you have \$20.)

"*Sí, sí, como no? como no?*" (yes, yes; why not? why not?) said the native, handing \$20 to the horseman. "*El segundo carrera? el chiquito,*" (The second race?—the little one.)

The fact that the money was left with the American seemed remarkable, and I mentioned it to several. Everyone said it was the custom there for a man who proposed to make a bet to place his money in the hands of the one with whom he made the wager.

After a few minutes devoted to exercising the two horses, the bell rang again, and then out came the dark chestnut to join the gray and the roan. A minute more and the three were off in a very pretty start, but the dark chestnut drew rapidly away from the others, and won easily by several lengths. The little roan was almost distanced. There was a roar from the sporting natives as the chestnut passed under the wire, and in a moment the man who had bet with my friend the horseman appeared with his hand out. The horseman grasped it and shook it cordially.

"Sorry for you, old fellow," he said in English, "but anyone should have known the roan wasn't in it." The native, much disgusted in appearance, drew his hand from the horseman's grasp as quickly as possible and held it out again, saying in Spanish: "The money — the money — mine — mine."

"You be blowed!" said the horseman in English. "Your roan there was almost out of sight," and he pointed the roan that was still on the track.

At this the native held up the program and pointed at the second event, and said in a most excited way that he had backed the little one of the program; that the roan was not on the program and was no part of the event, and a whole lot of other things that I could not catch. The horseman laughed and offered him a cigarette. Then the native threatened to call the police, and when the horseman laughed again he went away in a state of great excitement. When he had gone I

⁴ Ringer — Action made under false pretenses.

found at least a dozen other natives excited over the same matter. It was plain that the roan had been brought out to lead people to back the gray, on the supposition that the roan was the gray's opponent, while the real opponent was the chestnut. The gringos had in a lot of cases put up from \$5 to \$25 on the gray as against the roan and they said they had invariably pointed out the roan as the one they had bet against. While we were talking over the matter, the native who had bet with my friend came back bringing an inspector of police.

"This gentleman wants you arrested for robbing him," said the inspector in good English to the horseman.

"I did not rob him," said the horseman. "I bet \$20 on one horse against another, and my horse won, so I kept the money. But if you think I ought to be arrested I will go with you at once, of course."

At that the inspector asked for the details of the bet, first from the native and then from the horseman. Then he suggested that the matter be settled by returning the \$20 to the native. This the horseman refused to do, saying it was a clear attempt to swindle the foreigners, and he had won the money fairly from a deliberate swindler. Then the inspector told the native that no arrest would be made without a warrant from the Police Justice. The native said he would get one the next day, but he never did; at least, none was served.

This is a rather long story of a bet on a race, but it is given because it shows the conditions prevailing among sporting men there.

PULLED HIS HORSE TO LET THE PRESIDENT'S WIN.

As the trotting matches were called, considerable interest was shown in making bets, but long odds had to be given to get anyone to bet against the President's horse. Everyone seemed to know that Ben must win. And so he did, though it kept the driver of Colombia busy to do his part of the work. In the second match he pulled his horse off its feet three times and, even then, it settled down and, with the bit in its teeth, narrowly missed winning. My friend, the horseman, by giving odds of 5 to 1, stood to win \$5 but, in each bet, he gave the loser his money back.

"I knew the President's horse would win, but I did not think that he would do it in such a fashion," he said. "When I want to rob a man, I'll do it with a gun, and not in any such a way as this."

The people in the President's pavilion were wildly enthusiastic when Ben won. Even the wife of the President, who, as a former citizen of New Orleans, should have known the real condition of affairs, joined the rest in the applause.

When talking afterward with the United States minister (ex-Gov. R. Pacheco) on this event as an illustration of Central American sporting blood, the Minister apologized for the people there by comparing them with the "backwoods people in the States," but that will not do. The writer saw horse races in the backwoods of Ohio forty years ago. The people for ten miles round about used to gather at the distillery at Delphos and ran horses for a jug of whiskey that was hung on a pole over the finish line to spur on the riders. That was tolerably crude racing, but it was square. If a jockey had pulled a horse there he would have been ducked in the canal, while a man found willing to win by any foul doings—a man actually mean enough to take good whiskey by fraud—would have been tarred and feathered.

BULL BAITING.

Bull fighting, as it has been practiced in Spain for so many generations, may be said to be unknown in Central America. There have been real bull fights in Mexico to this day, and in Peru it is said that a special breed of vicious bulls is reared for slaughter in the ring, but in Central America they have bull baiting instead. There was a bull ring at Guatemala, and on a Sunday afternoon while I was there a bull fight was attempted, with a star bull killer from Mexico to do the final butcher act, but no very large crowd attended. The bull teasers were unable to excite any enthusiasm among the spectators; and when the butcher was at last called upon to make the fatal stab, he bungled the matter so badly that he was hissed from the ring and then arrested by the police for cruelty to animals. The fact that a law against cruelty to animals exists, and can be enforced with the approval of the sporting part of a Central American community, is enough to make even a pessimist have hope for the progress of the region.

Bull baiting or teasing is by no means so brutal as bull fighting, though bad enough. I saw a bull baited at San Jorge, Nicaragua, on the south shore of the big lake. The people of the village gathered about the plaza in holiday attire, the

occasion being a saint's day. When the crowds had congregated under the verandas, leaving the plaza clear, some mounted men drove a bull on the gallop right in the center of the plaza, where it was allowed to stop. Everybody shouted and applauded. Then a lot of men afoot and the horsemen gathered about the bull and threw darts at it. The darts had fine barbed steel points and wooden handles, something like a shoemaker's awl with a barb on the point. The handles had long bright-colored strips of calico attached for streamers, and a few had silky cotton ribbons. So many darts were stuck into the bull's hide that it was soon decorated. Blood flowed in some places, and it winced when a well-thrown dart struck it. The wincing made the people laugh.

NOVEL USE FOR RED TABLECLOTHS.

Then, as it merely stood still and bellowed instead of charging on its tormentors, a couple of men afoot ran out in front of the bull and waved a red cotton tablecloth before its face. The use of a red cotton tablecloth instead of a red silk velvet cloak to rouse the bull's temper would have made an old-time Spanish spectator groan, but the tablecloth served every purpose equally well. At least the cloth made the bull snort. Then down went its head, and up its tail, and away it went with blood in its eye after the tablecloth men. So, the men had to hump themselves to get out of the way, and one finally abandoned his cloth. This was a successful move, for the bull stopped to gore the cloth, whereat the advantage of using cotton in place of silk velvet was apparent.

The bull teasing began early in the afternoon. At 5 o'clock they were still at it, but two fresh bulls had been required to keep up the interest. The teasing simply tired out the beasts until they would not make a charge even on a red tablecloth. At first glance a spectator would say that this form of amusement had at least the element of danger in it. There were several hundred women and children around the edge of the open plaza where the bull was tormented, and the bull might charge the spectators instead of his agile tormentors. Nevertheless, the women and children fled within doors and through the open windows whenever the bull approached one side of the plaza, and there they were safe enough. And as for the men, they were active enough to dodge the well-fed bull so long as they did not slip and fall, an accident that did not happen and rarely does happen.

To a traveler from the United States, this torturing of a bull seems very brutal sport. At first thought, one is scarcely able to understand how any people can

find pleasure in witnessing the pain of any beast, but when one comes to consider the matter fully, one remembers that a good many people at home, in the State of New York, for instance, find pleasure in the exhibitions of pain in some animals. There is even a statute in New York that promotes the infliction of terrible suffering on one class of wild brutes. There is a statute that provides for paying a bounty to the woodsmen who kill these wild beasts, although the beasts are taken with traps, and the woodsmen enjoy their fierce struggles.

COCK FIGHTING.

Descriptions of cock fights may be had without number among the writings of travelers in the Spanish Main. Cock fighting is the national sport of every country there, and especially among the Central American republics. There is in every town of any consequence a yard that is especially fitted for mains of this kind. Sometimes one must pay 25 cents for permission to enter the enclosure. In other places, admittance is free, but some kind of return in the way of contributions to the pool is expected. In these cases, the backers of the birds put their money into a little rawhide box before the main begins. When it is over, the house gets a rake-down from the pool, the owner of the bird gets a percentage, and the balance is divided among the backers of the surviving bird, a list of the backers of each having been written out before the main. Where admission fees are charged, the owners make or lose by betting on their own birds, but it is a common thing for winners to make presents to the owners of birds that are victorious.

It is an expensive sport for the owners, because the defeated birds are almost invariably killed, and they are worth, on the average, \$10 each. This mortality is due, as every reader of travels knows, to the universal use of slender steel blades, say 2½ inches long, that are lashed to the legs of the fighters in place of the spurs that nature provided. So far as my reading has extended, the travelers have called the use of these steel gaffs particularly brutal, but after seeing mains in every nation north of Panama, and a couple in the Isthmus, where no gaffs were used, I am bound to say that if there be grades of brutality in cock fighting, then the use of steel gaffs makes the more humane grade. On the Isthmus without gaffs two fine birds fought for fifteen minutes desperately, and then the fight ended in a draw because both birds were so badly cut and bruised that neither could come to the scratch. Elsewhere I saw probably more than a score of fights where gaffs were used, and not one of them lasted two minutes. In

every case one bird was killed, and in almost every case the winner escaped without a scratch.

The owners carefully whetted the tiny scimitars to the keenest edge and point, and then lashed them in place. Then the cocks were irritated to a high pitch of anger. The owner would take a common rooster in his hands and dash it at the gamecock without releasing his hold on it. I saw one enthusiastic owner wave the rooster so near the gamecock that when the cock resented the insult its steel gaff cut a gash in the owner's thumb that laid bare the bone. The wounded thumb was quickly bandaged and then the irritating was continued.

At last, when both gamecocks were just aching for a fight, they were turned loose. In an instant they came together in the center of the ring. With wings and legs working they rose a foot above the ground. Then they dropped back and stuck out their long heads at each other for the briefest interval. But blood was spurting from under the wing of one of them, and just as it strove to make one more dash at its enemy its eyelids worked convulsively, and it toppled over and died almost without a struggle. The actual fight did not last more than seventeen seconds. There had been no cruelty to the victorious bird. It enjoyed the mill and crowed lustily when the other died. The defeated bird, on the other hand, had suffered very little; less, indeed, than roosters do in the States when they are killed for food. Considering the fact that the bird faced its enemy to the very last breath, it is doubtful whether it suffered at all.

PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST THE SPORT.

This is not to be construed as an apology for cockfighters, but merely to portray the contests as they actually are. That the effect of gazing on these fights is degrading to the human soul need not be said to an American, and the educated people of Central America have come to recognize the fact. One can indeed find people of wealth and intelligence gloating over the flowing blood and death struggles of the birds that rapidly follow each other into the cock pits, but the percentage is much less than that noted by travelers twenty and even ten years ago. I did not see a single priest—even a backwoods priest, so to speak—countenance the national sport, nor could I hear of one doing so. English speaking men living in the region when asked about the priests, would reply off hand: "Of course they attend cock fights," but when asked for specific instances, no one to whom I talked had ever seen a priest there. Neither do Presidents nor Cabinet officers nor other prominent officials frequent the pits.

On the whole, the view which a traveler gets of Central American sports is not pleasing. They have rivers and lakes and breezy bays, and the well-named Pacific Ocean, but neither boat nor yacht club. There are fields and trails and in places well-made roads, but neither cross-country nor cinder path nor bicycle club. They have waters that are alive with game fish and woods and prairies stocked like game parks, but none of native blood to care for either rod or gun, except the Indians, who hunt and fish for the pot only. There are sporting men of a sort in plenty, but few if any sportsmen. The one encouraging feature of it all is that the ranks of the sporting men no longer boast the presence of the leaders of the nation.

JOHN R. SPEARS

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