

I FOUGHT A BULL BAREHANDED IN THE RING

EXTRAORDINARY EXHIBITION OF COURAGE AND FOOLHARDINESS BY AN AMERICAN NEGRO IN THE CITY OF MEXICO AS WITNESSED BY A PORTLANDER.

BY EDWIN C. JOHNSON.

THIS is the story of a fight, the like of which was probably never witnessed in a gladiatorial arena since the days of ancient Rome. That its counterpart will ever be seen again is doubtful. It was a bloody struggle between a bare-handed negro cowboy and one of those fierce Mexican bulls, reared and bred especially for the bull-ring. These are the circumstances that led to the strange contest:

In the City of Mexico, where I chanced to be a visitor a short time ago, there was an American Wild West show, with its customary coterie of cowboys, Cosacs, Indians, etc. Their performance—the usual stunts, so familiar to us all—made small impression on the Mexicans. Especially was there one performance which met with more or less criticism, not to say derision. This was where a Texas steer is brought into the ring and one of the cowboys tackles him and throws him down. It is done by catching hold of his horns and twisting the neck to a point where he has to give in and topple over. Should he prove too stiff-necked to be handled by the horns alone, effective aid is introduced by the cowboy fastening his teeth in the nose of the steer and pulling it in the desired direction. It seems to be an accepted fact among cowboys that this hand-and-mouth-combination hold is something that no steer or bull can successfully resist, the nose of the animal being extremely sensitive.

However, as all performing animals become in time more or less pliant and tractable, the steer in question proving no exception, the stunt fell flat on a people who could not help comparing it with one of their own bloody bullfights. What claim to sport, for instance, could there be in the act of a plainly-dressed cowboy tugging and twisting at the neck of a half-trained steer whose very motions while in the act of falling, were quite as suggestive of the force of habit as of any other agency? What sport in that when compared with one in which took part a brave and beautifully bedecked Mexican matador, matched against a fierce and renowned bull of the same nativity? From the Mexican's point of view there was, of course, no answer to this question.

Battered the Darkey.

The cowboys held different views. They had their own opinions, not only of the bravery of bullfighters in general, but also of the alleged danger of their vocation, and did not hesitate to express them in terms as terse as they were pointed. As these banterings became more and more bitter, William Pickett, a negro cowboy, in order to settle the disputes, offered, with no weapons save his bare hands, to enter a ring with one of their famous bulls and wrestle with him or fight him for a space of 15 minutes, unless he could throw the animal in less time. The proposition was so ridiculous that it was looked upon as an idiotic bluff. The darkey, however, was in dead earnest, and soon, in startling headlines, papers and posters bore announcement of the date of the unprecedented battle.

Some of the more cool-headed of his companions tried to persuade him out of engaging in a contest so unequal; a combat which, barring a miracle, could have but one result—death or horrible mutilation. All arguments were wasted on the darkey, who was game to the core.

Besides, as he reasoned, why shouldn't he take the chance? According to the law of accidents, applicable to the life he had led, he should have been killed several times in the last dozen years. Consequently, having lived now on 12 years of "chance," why couldn't he afford to risk a life held that length of time by courtesy only, so to speak?

Expected to Win.

Still, there can be no question that he actually expected to win out; that because of lifelong familiarity with cattle he believed himself able to do exactly what he had proposed to.

Even though he had been able to foresee what would happen him in the ring, it is doubtful whether he would have been deterred. For what if the beer bottle, hurled at him by one of the howling hoodlums, did hit him the side as he helplessly hung on the bull's horns, and opened up a newly healed wound, from which the blood started to flow freely? It might have hit him in the head and knocked him senseless. While the drain of blood was serious, loss of his senses just then would have been fatal. What if one of the horns did tear through his cheek, grubbing out a few teeth as it went? Did it not furnish him an extra vent for his rage, and at the same time equip him with an additional opening through which, by preference, he was unable to stick out his tongue in contemptuous derision at his tormentors? That act alone had in it sufficient satisfaction to compensate for the pain.

The scheduled day is at hand, and by 2 P. M. the seating capacity of the colossal arena is taxed to its limit. In anticipation of a possible riot, two companies of rurales, besides numerous policemen, are at hand on the inside, and a squadron of cavalry on the outside of the ring.

Beginning the Attack.

Promptly half a dozen cowboys, on their ponies, enter the arena, Pickett being one of them. Their arms consist simply of quirts and pistols, blank cartridges only being used. Immediately a side gate is thrown open and out from a dark stall, into the light and ring, darts a bull; head held high, and eyes red with rage. He has evidently undergone a preparatory goading in order to make the fight more interesting for the darkey. Suddenly stopping, he stands for a moment, bewildered at the strange scene before him. Soon his fighting instinct blots out his wonderment, for, selecting his nearest foe, he lowers his head and makes a charge. He almost carries home; but, by a dextrous movement, made in perfect unison between man and horse, he is felled; his horns barely graze the horse's flank. Selecting another opponent, he makes a



second attack, and this time draws blood; though a quick rap across the nose disconcerts him, and apparently has something to do with the warding off of a more serious injury to the horse. Charge after charge is made, but between quick-blows, blank cartridges and, above all, marvelous horsemanship, they are barren of serious results, though gore is gradually gathering on the horns of the bull.

Maneuvering for Position.

During all this time the darkey is constantly maneuvering for a position favorable to his mode of attack—the object of the others' presence in the ring being to assist him in this, and, presumably, to render aid in his final rescue, should there be time. His plan is to come up alongside of the bull from behind, jump off his horse, grab

the horns and sink his teeth in the bull's nose at the same time; then, by a combined effort of hands and mouth, give such a twist to the neck of the bull that he must go over. This had been a comparatively easy matter when practiced on a tractable Texas steer, with his slim, weak legs, thin neck, horns yard-long and as far apart as the tips. But here was a different proposition—those sturdy, sturdy legs; that awful neck; those murderous, close-set horns, denying leverage and

slippery with gore. What could the man be thinking of, trying to match his flimsy 160-pound structure against this grizzly-framed, 2000-pound ogre, tipped with horns, hoofs and—hate?

Knocked Down and Trampled On.

His plan, as stated, was to come up from behind; but with the great advantage of interior lines in his favor, the bull found it easy to foil all such attempts. He was always front to, and the cowboys, in order to save their ponies, found it advisable to keep at a respectful distance. Chagrined to find himself balked at every point of approach, the darkey, by sudden impulse, threw to the winds the centennial of Charles Darwin, consummator of the liberty of the human mind. Few people in Oregon would have even thought of Dr.

The behavior of the crowd, ugly and unreasonable from the very first, now became positively alarming. Insulting remarks were made concerning all gringos, especially Americans, and the demonstrations grew so violent that quite a number of the spectators left the arena. Had it not been for the overbearing presence of soldiers and police, a riot would undoubtedly have been the next order on the program.

Swiftness and Audacity.

All of a sudden, however, there is a lull in the roar, and the darkey is seen to re-enter the ring. He had simply gone to obtain permission of the owner of the horse to sacrifice the animal, if necessary. Until then he had been handicapped trying to fight the bull and save his pony at the same time. Having gained the owner's consent, the daredevil of a darkey lost no time in bringing things to a crisis. Sinking low in flank, he sent his horse full tilt against the side of the bull. The swiftness of this charge—and the audacity—took the bull by surprise, though not so much but that he managed partly to parry it and rip open the left thigh of the horse from hamstring to hip, leaving a deep, ragged-edged rent, running full with gore.

The position of the horse was now one of extreme danger, as it left him with his side fully exposed and the bull within a few feet of him, ready to charge. With leveled horns he hurled himself at the horse's side, as if shot from a catapult, but in the very same breath the negro made a demi-volt to the left and took it in the shoulder instead—a brilliant feat of horsemanship that saved the pony's life.

Fighting in Earnest.

The fight was now on in earnest, though it is doubtful if the darkey had any clear idea of what he could or should do. The red gods ran riot in

In order to rid himself of this incubus, he would back and shake his head furiously, at which the darkey's legs would gyrate fantastically, and with such forceful jerks that it would seem his hold around the neck must be broken.

During the eight long minutes that the darkey hung onto the horns, the audience, especially the lower rabble, behaved outrageously. Being very close to their side of the ring, they threw at him every portable thing that they could lay hands on—from canvas-covered cushions to beer bottles—keeping up at the same time a constant storm of hisses and hoots. One of these bottles hit Pickett in the side and opened up a newly-healed wound. Loss of blood served to weaken his fast-clinging strength. To be able to show his contempt for their cowardly behavior, by sticking out his tongue at them through his torn and bleeding cheek, was a satisfaction that had its limitation—he could have run it out further through his mouth.

After hanging on for what to him must have seemed an eternity, with no chance for action, discouraged by hisses and taunts; weakened by wounds, and having his life threatened from every point of the compass, he finally relaxed his hold and sank limp and exhausted at the feet of the bull, who immediately began to search him out with his horns. At this supreme moment, a startling cry was raised by someone and at the same instant a gate was flung open and into the ring, on a dead run, were driven a half dozen Texas steers. The sight of these had a magical effect on the infuriated bull, for he immediately left his fallen foe and joined them; they were then all driven out together.

It is a well-known fact that the presence of cattle in the arena will instantly quiet the maddest bull, and for that reason they are always at hand during bullfights. For in case the audience should take a fancy to some particularly brave bull and demand that his life be spared, cattle are led into the ring. The bull immediately mingles with them and all are readily driven out.

In view of the unparalleled bravery displayed by the darkey in this desperate encounter, a natural wonder is why such shameful treatment was accorded him by the crowd. It is easily accounted for. Here was an unkempt, off-colored gringo, trying to prove by actual demonstration that it wasn't at all necessary to kill a bull in order to beat him; that what he quired fully a dozen specially trained and well-armed Mexicans to do, one unarmed American cowboy could do equally well, if not better.

Success of the darkey would have dimmed the glory of all the bull-fighting heroes of the past and have made it difficult to attend future fights with the same degree of respect as of old for the professional performers. In fact, the beloved national pastime was in imminent danger of being laughed out of existence; and between the bull and themselves, the audience expected to keep it alive, even if in so doing the negro had to be killed.

It is only fair to state, that after their passion had cooled off, and the daring deed of Pickett had sunk into their minds, the majority were willing to admit that, as an exhibition of unparalleled nerve, it had never been surpassed in that or any other arena.

AUTOGRAPH LETTER FROM DARWIN

Courteous but Forceful Reply to a Student Who Thought He Had Made a Discovery.

A FEW weeks ago there was celebrated the hundredth anniversary of Abraham Lincoln, hero President of the United States of America. The same day was the centennial of Charles Darwin, consummator of the liberty of the human mind. Few people in Oregon would have even thought of Dr.

Darwin at that time if it had not been for the articles published in The Oregonian.

In the Fall of 1880, I was a young man holding down a prairie homestead in the new Canadian Province of Manitoba, and enjoying in a first crop of three or four hundred bushels of wheat. In that coun-

try the period between harvest and winter is brief, and prudent people prepare for the long period of extreme cold. I patched up my outbuildings, and among other things, placed a water barrel in my poultry house, which I filled with wheat for the convenience of feeding. For entertainment for myself during the long winter nights, I procured a number of scientific works, being weary of fiction.

When spring came I needed the water barrel in the poultry house for another purpose. I emptied out the wheat and placed the barrel in the sun-warmed air outside. The unfrozen water had left a circle of dust around the bottom and the bung-hole of the barrel, to which many grains of wheat clung, and after a few days in the sun sprouted and threw out green blades about two inches long. At this stage I had need to fill the barrel with water, and a week or two later was astonished to find the wheat kernels navigating the water, with the green blades turned into whitish tails and the little rootlets changed to the legs of insects, while there developed in each grain two distinct eyes.

I was greatly interested in this apparent phenomenon, and watched the life in the barrel closely for several weeks, confirmed in the belief that I had chanced upon an astounding fact in Nature. In my reading of Darwin's "Origin of Species" I understood him to teach that life commenced with a very low type of vegetable, which in the course of ages developed to a stage having characteristics of animal life. In short, that there was a jump from vegetable life to animal life, and that is exactly what I believed I had witnessed in the barrel. But Darwin asserts that nature does not go by jumps, though his own story of the short-legged Anson ram suddenly developed in a flock of long-legged sheep seemed to dispute him. Then, too, Huxley, Darwin's greatest disciple, took the position that the dictum that Nature does not go by jumps was a serious weakness of Darwin's theory.

Anyhow, after elaborately considering the manifestations in the barrel, I decided that I had facts worth communicating to the great Naturalist, and accordingly I wrote a letter to Dr. Darwin, reciting my observations in minute detail. In due course I received the accompanying reply.

With the positiveness of youth, I was by no means satisfied to accept the decision of Mr. Darwin. I imagined that possibly I had not made the case clear, but there was no higher court to appeal to, and I was obliged to hold my peace. Ten years later, in British Columbia, I witnessed precisely the same alleged phenomena under entirely different circumstances, and then I was satisfied to surrender. I realized that a great evolution in life could not occur in the same form at brief intervals. I wrote to Darwin's statement that "There was plenty of time and means for the indefinite multiplication of innumerable kinds of insects in the cask."

J. F. GALBRAITH.
Grants Pass, March 20.

Resembling certain fossil quadrupeds more than any other living animal, a few specimens of the salamander, an insectivorous animal, have been seen on the island of Santo Domingo for the first time in several years. It had been supposed that the animal was extinct.

GRAND OPERA STAR HAS PLENTY OF BABIES.



Mlle. LOUISE HOMER AND HER TWINS.

NEW YORK, March 22.—(Special.)—Mlle. Louise Homer is now the leading contralto of the Metropolitan Opera Company. Unlike many of her sister singers, she does not live at a hotel during the opera season, but has her own home—for Mlle. Homer is an American, and New York is her home. She is rearing a large family and a visit to her home recently marveled at the long line of baby carriages, the latest additions to the Homer family. The twins, by the way, is not a stage name. Mlle. Homer is the wife of Sidney Homer. They live in the German opera. Her "Brangäne" in "Tristan und Isolde" is regarded by the critics as both vocally and dramatically of the highest order. In the opera of the Ring she is equally at home as Fricka, one of the Rhine maidens, or a Valkyrie. Her Aucuna, in "Trovatore," is considered one of the finest on the operatic stage, and her Amneris in "Aida" has been highly praised.