

'Sports and Pastimes,' Chicago Record, September 9, 1899.

One morning when the American missionary returned from a stroll with Eulalie (they were in search of a certain gorgeous yellow flower which blooms within a few weeks after the close of the rainy season), he turned the corner of the Kakyak house and came upon a scene which aroused him to extreme indignation.

Francisco and Patricio, the two sons of Bulolo Kakyak, were squatted down facing each other, and each held a struggling gamecock. The lean and sinewy birds fought to free themselves. They stabbed the air in quick strokes with their pointed beaks, and the snappy little eyes glowed like beads of fire, so fierce was their hatred and so eager was the desire for battle.

Patricio, the smaller boy, had difficulty in restraining his bird, which squirmed and flung itself within the boy's chubby grasp.

On the ground were four copper coins. Washington Conner saw at a glance that the two sons were tantalizing and exciting the two gamecocks, preliminary to a death battle, and that the money on the ground represented a wager on the result.

To say that Washington Conner was indignantly horrified would be putting it very mildly. Before coming to the Philippines he had read that the Tagalos were given to the brutal pastime of cockfighting, but this was the first time he had happened upon the inhuman sport.

"Stop!" he commanded. "Don't you dare to set those birds to fighting: Release them at once."

"If we release them they will fight," said little Patricia, with a bad boy's grin. "We have to keep them tied up all the time or else they kill one another."

"Well, then, tie them up again. Whatever you do, don't let them fight. It seems to me that I arrived just in time to prevent a very degrading exhibition. How can you boys, who claim to possess some of the attributes of a civilized people, sit here and see two birds tear each other to pieces?"

Francisco, the elder son, had tucked his fighting bird back under his arm, and he regarded the missionary with sullen hatred, apparently inclined to disobey.

"The birds want to fight," said he. "They can't do anything else, and I don't see why we shouldn't have the fun of seeing them fight."

"Fun!" exclaimed Conner. "You call that fun? Why, in America we cannot find language strong enough to express our disapproval of such cruel and bloody enjoyments."

"That's strange," remarked Francisco. "One of our neighbors who has been down to Manila to sell his produce says that the American soldiers crowd into the cockpits every day in order to see the birds fight."

"Doubtless they go there to study the sports of a half-civilized people and prepare themselves for reformatory work," said Conner. "Their presence at a cockfight need not indicate that they approve of such shocking exhibitions.

"But they bet on the result, too, or at least our neighbor says so. He says he never saw such betting."

"If any of our soldiers have been attending cockfights and betting on the results they have done so without the consent or the approval of the national administration," said the missionary, "The government at Washington is determined to abolish these barbarous sports and pastimes in the colonies--bull-fighting in Cuba, cock-fighting in the Philippines. We are a humane people and a people much given to the reformation of others, and it will be a great reward to our national conscience if we can induce you lowly tribes to give up gambling and the torture of dumb animals.

"I take it that in your country you do not gamble or torture dumb animals," said Francisco, in a manner which was almost sneering. It was evident that the information he had received of American doings in Manila had made him skeptical.

"There may be a little gambling in America, but as regards the torture of dumb creatures I can say, with pride, that our enlightened civilization has undertaken to protect domestic animals, and that any man who maltreats or tortures one of them is subject to prosecution in a court of law. Cock-fighting, for instance, is strictly forbidden. The only cockfights we have are conducted in secluded and out-of-the-way places.

"But you do have cockfights occasionally," asked Francisco, who seemed to find some comfort in the missionary's confession.

"Only at rare intervals," replied Conner. "Most of our sports and pastimes are rational and harmless."

"What are some of your sports?" asked Francisco. "If you are going to prevent cock-fighting I suppose we shall have to take up with some sort of amusement that is approved by your government."

"Oh, we have many games and sports at home," said Conner. "We have baseball, tennis, golf, croquet and so on. Also we have horse-racing. There is some gambling at our racetracks, I am sorry to say, but we do not approve of it. In fact, it is in direct violation of law, so we feel that we are not responsible for it."

"These are quiet sports, I suppose," said Francisco. "That is, I dare say that those who play them are in no danger of being hurt."

"Not in the games I have mentioned," replied Conner. "Tennis, golf and croquet are especially safe. I don't believe ever heard of any one being hurt while playing croquet. We have other games that are quite rough; football, for instance. A great many of the young men who play that game are either killed or injured."

"I suppose it is very unpopular on that account," suggested Francisco.

"Well, I can't say that it is," replied Conner.

"At any rate it cannot be as that other game you mentioned the one that was particularly free from brutality and the element of danger--croquet, I think you called it."

Conner had to laugh.

"I'll not try to deceive you," said the missionary. "In New York city I have seen 40,000 spectators at a football game. I doubt if more than eight spectators ever sat through a game of croquet. You must remember that we men of the north are better adapted for personal encounter and have more endurance than you little people of the warm climes. We are fond of sports which to you would seem rough and bearish. In fact, I am afraid that we have a decided preference for smashing and bruising games such as football and pugilism."

"What is pugilism?" asked Francisco.

"Pugilism is another name for prize-fighting; that is, fighting with the fists to win a certain prize, usually a sum of money. Two men face each other in a square which is inclosed by ropes, and at a given signal they begin striking at each other. Their hands are padded so as to protect the fists and permit the contestants to strike harder blows. They keep at it until one or the other is too exhausted to continue or receives a blow which disables him so that he cannot rise from the ground within ten seconds after he falls."

"I should think some one would be killed," said the smaller boy.

"Some one is killed now and then," replied the missionary.

"I must admit that it is rough sport. Nearly every one in America is opposed to it, as a matter of public record. At the same time all of us seem more or less interested when there is to be an important contest. The newspapers have column after column about the fighters and their condition and the predictions made by their friends. The people read every line of it and want more. And you ought to see the crowds that assemble to hear the bulletins read on the night of a championship battle."

"But how can you induce men to stand up and take their chances of being pounded to pieces?" asked Francisco.

"The rewards are very large," replied the missionary. "As much as \$30,000 has been offered in one prize. If a fighter becomes a champion he commands an immense salary as a stage attraction. You can have no idea of the popularity of a successful pugilist."

"Yet you say we are savage and only half-civilized because we permit chickens to fight," suggested Francisco.

"We are a rugged people and we enjoy rugged sport," said the missionary. "Furthermore, a man is a reasoning creature and when he goes into a fight he goes in of his own volition. It is better that a man should be bruised and pounded than that a dumb animal such as a bull or a gamecock should be killed to gratify a lust for pain and slaughter."

"I don't think so," said Francisco.

"Then we differ in our opinions. Mind you, I am not attempting to defend prize-fighting. A prizefight is a brutal and degrading spectacle. Everybody says so. It is forbidden by law in nearly every state in our union, and yet, somehow or other, we continue to have prizefights and the people continue to be feverishly interested in them, notwithstanding that we are the most humane and cultured people on earth. Now, that seems contradictory, doesn't it? The fact is, we do a great many things that people living far away in another climate and a different environment, and having peculiar hereditary traits, cannot rightly understand."

"That's what we think," replied Francisco. "We think the Americans cannot rightly understand the Tagalos."

"We understand everything," replied Conner. "Wait until I read you a few speeches from the Congressional Record."

