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Ape and Tiger in U.S. Demand Fight, Says Jack London

Thrill of Combat a Passion of Race That Grew as Our Language Grew.

Must Accept it as Reality of Nature

Sport of Prize Fighting a Fair One and Marks Development of Humanity

Eventually Will Cease

Mr. London Says Personally He Wants to See Battle So Bad it Hurts

Here is the problem. At 1:30 o'clock on the afternoon of July 4 two men, a white and a black, are going to face each other in a squared ring, elevated in the centre of a large arena. They are not going to try to kill each other. They are to fight each other, true, but the fighting will be done with natural weapons, and according to very rigid and restricted rules. They are to strike each other with their hands, and their hands only. No other blow will be permitted. They cannot wrestle with each other or throw each other down. The very area on which they are allowed to land their blows is limited. It is the upper portion of the body. From the waist down all striking is tabooed. Nor may a blow be struck when a man is off his feet. The fists, which are their only fighting weapons, will be encased in padded gloves that weigh one-third of a pound. A naked knuckle can cut and injure, and it is a thing to be avoided. A third man will be in the ring with them to see that all the rules are observed. He is the referee. His word is law. Whatever he says must be obeyed. If a man strikes a foul blow, the referee will immediately disqualify him and award the victory to the other man. The referee will watch closely, circling about the two men, sometimes speaking to them in a low voice, sometimes touching one on the shoulder and sometimes the other.

And what are these two men, with the padded gloves, the rigid rules and the referee, in the ring for? What is their desire to achieve? Simply this: By means of blows with their gloved hands to see who can put the other down on the ground, and put him down so hard that he will stay down for 10 consecutive seconds. And why do they want to do this? For honor and fame and a prize for \$100,000.

It sounds silly on the face of it, doesn't it? But when it is considered that from 15,000 to 20,000 men, paying each from \$10 to \$50 for a seat, will be in the arena to watch the two men, that millions of dollars will be spent on this contest, that men will journey from the uttermost ends of the earth to witness it, that the ablest journalists and cartoonists of the country will be present, and that it has been and will be for a week to come the one overshadowing issue of the

whole United States, all to see which of the two men can put the other down for 10 consecutive seconds, why, it would seem to become a colossal silliness.

But is it such a silliness? Is it a silliness at all, when the pages of all the newspapers are daily filled with it, the only concession that a very large portion of the people of the country are interested in it? There is a reason for their interest, just as there is a reason for my interest, and why am I interested? In the next paragraph let me show you. But here let me stand up and announce that I am so keenly interested, so overwhelmingly desirous of witnessing this contest, that there are moments when sudden fears assail me, such as that the fight will not come off, that it may be prevented by some great earthquake or terrific cataclysm of Nature. Why, I want to see that fight so bad that it hurts.

This contest of men with padded gloves on their hands is a sport that belongs unequivocally to the English-speaking race, and that has taken centuries for the race to develop. It is no superficial thing, a fad of a moment or a generation. No genius or philosopher devised it and persuaded the race to adopt it as their radical sport of sports. It is as deep as our consciousness, and is woven into the fibers of our being. It grew as our very language grew. It is an instructive passion of race. And as men to-day thrill to short Saxon words, just so do they thrill to the thud of blows of a prize fight, to the onslaught and the repulse and to the exhibition of gameness and courage. This is the ape and tiger in us, granted. But like the man in jail, it is in us, isn't it? We can't get away from it. It is the fact, the irrefragable fact. We like fighting—it's our nature. We are realities in a real world, and we must accept the reality of our nature and all its thrillableness if we are to live in accord with the real world, and those who try to get away from these realities, who by ukase will deny their existence, succeed only in living in a world of illusion and misunderstanding. These are the people who compose theatre panics, fire panics and wreck panics. They are so far out of accord with the real world that they can make no adjustment with it when the supreme moment comes.

It goes without discussion, so patent is it, that an audience composed wholly of prize fighters would never engage in a theatre panic. They would be too close to the real, too wide-seeing and clear-seeing and cool to stampede like a herd of brute cattle. The chance is that they would stay and put out the fire.

Another thing which merits pointing out is that our sport of prize fighting is a fair sport. It gives play to our ethical natures. No one can disbelieve this who has ever heard a fighter, guilty of a foul blow, hooted by an indignant and outraged audience.

Our sport of prize fighting is hedged with ethical restrictions. It is synonymous with fair play. It is different from the fighting of the jungle, of which it is a development. There is absolutely no fair play in the jungle fighting. So has man improved. By that much is he less red of fang and claw. By that much has he climbed up the ladder of life. Don't rush his development too hard. He will climb higher.