

San Francisco Examiner
September 10, 1905

Brain Beaten by Brute Force

Dane's Perpetual Motion More Effective than Britt's Mental Superiority, Says Jack London

In the first round [Jimmy] Britt hit [Battling] Nelson half a dozen blows. At each blow Nelson was coming on. The blows did not stop him. He kept coming on.

Then Nelson hit Britt, and Britt was staggered by the blow. The whole story of the fight was told right there. Blows did not stop Nelson from coming on. Blows did stop Britt; also they staggered him.

Nelson is a fighting animal. Britt is an intelligent animal with fighting proclivities. This is another way of telling the story.

It was the abysmal brute against a more highly organized, intelligent nature. Now, do not misunderstand me. I do not wish to call Nelson a brute; but what I wish to say is that Nelson possesses to an unusual degree the brute that you and I and all of us possess in varying degrees.

Let me explain. By abysmal brute I mean the basic life that resides deeper than the brain and the intellect in living things. It is itself the very stuff of life—movement; and it is saturated with a blind and illimitable desire to exist. This desire it expresses by movement.

No matter what comes it will move. It came into the world first. It is lower down on the ladder of evolution than is intelligence. It comes first, before the intellect. The intellect rests upon it; and when the intellect goes it still remains—the abysmal brute.

Let me explain a step farther, if you are to understand this fight between Britt and Nelson as I saw it.

Here are you and I, average creatures, fairly normal and fairly rational. Our minds are clear. We reason. We conduct ourselves with the intelligent poise of mind. But a *sharp* word is spoken, a sneer is made, an insult is given. At once our poise of mind is gone. We are angry. The mind no longer dominates us. The abysmal brute rushes up in us, muddies our clear brain, takes charge of us.

This is a moment of anger. We are temporarily insane. Reason is gone. The brute has charge of us. The difference between us and the man in the insane asylum is that the brute always has charge of him.

It is this abysmal brute that we see in a man in a Berserker rage or in a jealous spell of anger. We see it in a horse, tied by too short a rope, frantic, dragging backward and hanging itself. We see it in the bull, bellowing and blindly charging a red shirtwaist; in the strange cat, restrained in our hands, curving its hindquarters in and with its hind legs scratching long, ripping slashes.

And now to return. Nelson is the lower type. Britt is the higher type. Nelson is more callous to pain and shock, has less sensibility. At the same time the abysmal brute in him gives him a tremendous capacity to move and to keep on moving. Britt is more delicately organized. He is more easily put out of gear. At the same time he possesses less capacity to move and to

keep on ceaselessly moving. Had he Nelson's capacity to move, plus his own intelligence, he would have whipped Nelson. But Britt did not have this power of movement; was too far removed from the brute, and was himself whipped. The best man won—according to the rules of the game.

All the preliminary fuss of the battle showed that bullheaded stubbornness and balkiness were on the Nelson side, and that intelligence was on the Britt side. "No Jeffries!" was the stubborn Nelson cry.

The Nelson side had balked like any fool horse, and was hurting itself all the time. The Britt side, being intelligent, gave in. It gave in intelligently, at the eleventh hour, spectacularly, throwing all the odium upon the Nelson side, winning all the sympathy for itself. Nelson was hooted; Britt was cheered. Intelligence won hands down, but it was only in the preliminary.

Britt stripped and showed himself deep chested and shouldered. His lines were soft and rounded. He was beautiful as a man goes and his condition was perfect, while his eyes were clear and bright.

When Nelson stripped he looked like a proletarian that had known lean and hungry years of childhood. His face was weazened, his eyes were small, his hair was colorless, his neck was thin, his naked body was not beautiful as Britt's was beautiful.

As they faced each other, one or the other seemed to belie his weight, for Britt looked much the larger. The contrast was striking. If Nelson looked the lean and hungry proletarian, Britt looked the well-fed and prosperous bourgeoisie. It was like a scrub mid underfed creature facing a thoroughbred. Nelson's eyes and face were vicious. Britt's face was inexpressive. His mind was in control. Whatever feelings stirred within him, they were well hidden.

The first round has been told. Nelson forced the fighting. He moved. He moved always. And he always moved forward. When Britt backed away, Nelson moved forward. When Britt hit him, he moved forward more swiftly. That was all.

It was the whole fight. From start to finish, for eighteen savage rounds, Nelson kept boring in. Britt could not keep him back. No matter how often and how hard Britt punched him, he bored in just the same. Always Britt backed away from him, smashing him cruel blows from a distance; and always he kept advancing after Britt.

And when Nelson got inside Britt's arms he went to work. Punch, punch, punch, right and left on stomach and kidney, and uppercuts to the face. It was here that the force of Nelson's blows was demonstrated. When he shot in an uppercut Britt was appreciably lifted by it.

In the clinches Nelson did practically all the punching, while Britt strove to protect himself. Nelson had little success in reaching Britt from a distance. It was at close quarters that he got in his work. He punched at the beginning of a clinch. He punched through the clinch. He punched in the breakaway. And the next moment he was moving forward again upon Britt in order to get at close quarters and deliver himself of some more punches.

On the other hand, Britt was not idle. He landed six blows to the Dane's one. Had Britt received the blows he gave Nelson Britt would have been out long before the eighteenth round. But Nelson scarcely seemed bothered by the punishment. One thing was strikingly noticeable. His blows, when they did land, jarred and often staggered Britt, while Britt's blows did not seem to jar nor stagger Nelson. He met these blows as he came on, and he kept on coming on just the same.

In the sixth round came the test of the two men. Nelson punched Britt groggy. This is another way of saying that Britt was dazed and weak.

His clear reason was reeling because his body was going back on him. It could not move, and move, and continue to move. He was too highly developed, too finely organized. There was not enough of the brute in him to save him. But the gong saved him. Another minute and he would have been out.

Britt recuperated wonderfully, but in the next round could do nothing with the Dane. A blow, two blows, a dozen—the Dane received them all, but they did not deter him from keeping right on and boring in. From the standpoint of blows landed, it was Britt's round. But from the standpoint of winning the fight by a knockout, it was no more Britt's round than was any other round of the fight. Victory was hopeless for him from the first round.

And so the battle went until the fourteenth. In this round Britt went groggy and for a while was all but out. Then it was that he made a terrific rally. He did not fight with his head. It was his own share of the abysmal brute that rose up and fought. He fought like a madman. Blows were exchanged frankly without attempts to protect. Boxing ceased. It was punch, punch, slug, exhausting all his [Britt's] reserve of strength.

In the fifteenth round Britt's mind resumed its sway. A minute of rest had brought it back. He was intent on resting his tired body. But the Dane never ceased from pursuing, from boring in and fighting at close quarters. The life that was in him moved, moved, ceaselessly moved.

When Nelson was hit on the nose or chin or jaw his head came forward in advance of his advancing body. No blow of Britt's seemed capable of sending that head back. But Nelson's blows when they landed sent Britt's head back with a snap.

The 15th, 16th and 17th rounds might be all called Britt's rounds. By appearance they seemed so. In reality they were the Dane's, for Nelson never ceased from boring in and forcing the fighting. He was wearing Britt out, punching him out; while Britt, even if he did give many more blows than he received, was not wearing the Dane out, nor was he punching the Dane out.

Nelson did not knock Britt out with a blow, nor with a series of blows, in the 18th round. Britt was knocked out by the whole light he had fought from the beginning of the first round. His multitude of punches on the Dane had not counted. The far smaller number of blows landed by the Dane had counted. It was the sum of the blows struck by the Dane, plus the exertions of Britt, that put Britt out. He had consumed all his strength, all his vitality.

Fighting with his intellect, and with his body as well, Britt was knocked out because his body was not strong enough to keep his mind poised in control and directing his body. When the body was weakened the mind was overthrown, and his cleverness and his intelligence counted for nothing.

Not so with the Dane. The abysmal brute in him fought on. It was the will of life itself, the fleshly life as a thing apart from the mind and the spirit, that moved on in him and that out moved the same kind of life that was in Britt. Britt is the finer human. Nelson is the finer fighting animal.

Nevertheless all hail to both of them! They play the clean game of life. And I, for one, would rather be either of them this day at Colma than a man who took no exercise with his body to-day but instead waxed physically gross in the course of gathering to himself a few dollars in the commercial game.