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The Bull-Fight

By H. E. Bates

THE art of the bull-fight has proved so unattractive to the English that until the publication of *Death in the Afternoon*, closely followed by Mr. Roy Campbell's book, a much shorter work, dealing with the bull-fight as fought in Provence, where in Mr. Hemingway's eyes it is not bull-fighting at all, there had been no single published work on the subject in English at all.

The principal reasons for that lack of interest not only by the English, but by all non-Latin races, seem to be a loathing and fear of bulls in general; an unwillingness to witness a so-called sport in which the aggressor, the man, is in as great, if not greater danger than the victim, which may be a fox or a pheasant or even an elephant, the killing of which entails only a negligible danger to the killer himself; and lastly a horror of all suffering in animals, in horses above all others.

Allied to the fear and loathing of bulls is a paradoxical pity for them as soon as they are confined to a ring to be faced, fatigued, outwitted, and finally destroyed by man. On the other hand, although the bull is more powerful, just as well armed, and almost as intelligent as his opponent, the gored, dying, or dead bull-fighter, so far from receiving pity, gets nothing but an emotionless "Serve him right, that's what he asked for," and by his pains or death only increases the philistine's disgust of his art.

Both Mr. Hemingway and Mr. Campbell discuss these things at length, paying special attention to the question of the cruelty to horses. "In the tragedy of the bull-fight," says Mr. Hemingway, "the horse is the comic character. This may be shocking, but it is true."

Books Reviewed Here

DEATH IN THE AFTERNOON. By Ernest Hemingway (Cape. 15/-)

TAURINE PROVENCE. By Roy Campbell (Desmond Harmsworth. 6/-)

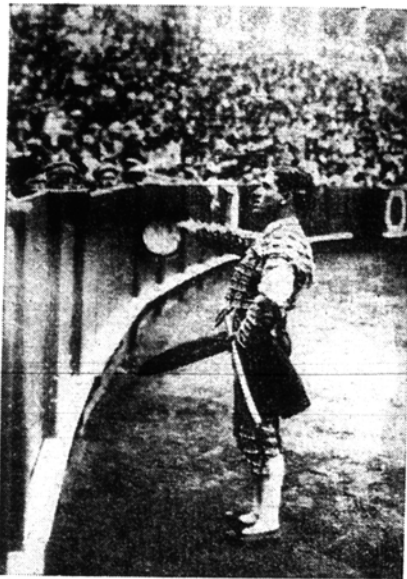
Mr. Campbell, as befits a satirical poet, is less cool about it. He declaims savagely—and rightly—against that nauseating cult of "kindness to dumb animals" which so often countenances cruelty to and neglect of human beings.

"I have never witnessed," he says, "more malignant patience than evinced by officials of animal-loving societies to detect, punish, or destroy human beings; for the sake of a dog who has a tin-can tied to his tail, a starved cat or a beaten mope they will punish a man worse than for thrashing his wife or for starving his children."

In support of his argument he quotes Caesar: "When men make such a great fuss of animals, God help human beings."

It is an old cry, uttered here with a fresh and more savage indignation, but it is a true one. Like Mr. Hemingway, Mr. Campbell can see nothing ennobling in an affection for animals which not only involves so often pain and poverty for human beings, but which in its narrowness and inconsistency is extended only to a favoured species or two and is therefore hypocritical. If the dog, why not the fox? If the horse, why not the otter? If the cat, why not the tiger?

If it is cruel and disgusting to outwit and tire and kill a bull in a bull-ring, why is it sport to stalk and shoot with a rifle—"an invincible weapon against any animal"—any tiger or lion, and glory in its death to the extent of being



Belmonte, the greatest matador who ever lived.

photographed with the foot on the carcass, and of having the head stuffed and preserved as a memento of a glorious achievement?

To the question of the horse in the bull-ring there are many sides, and, realising this, Mr. Hemingway has introduced into his book the character of an old lady, who at the end of each chapter discusses with him, by means of many questions, this and the other complex problems of the bull-fight.

She becomes finally so depraved and tiresome that he dismisses her from the book, but one may learn much from their conversations, for the old lady is the general public, and her questions are the questions which ninety-nine readers out of every hundred will be asking themselves.

Of the two books, Mr. Hemingway's is by far the more important; it gives a comprehensive account of every phase of bull-fighting in the ring and out of it, of the breeding of the bulls, of the lives of the bull-fighters themselves; it deals at length with the bull-fight as an emotional spectacle, a drama with an inevitable tragic end, its obscure and involved technicalities, its relation to Spanish life as a social event and a business, and its appeal as an art—admittedly a minor art, "a decadent art in every way, reaching its fullest flower at its rottenest point, which is the present."

To the bull-fight itself there are three acts, as in a play. In the first act, the *suerte de varas*, the bull charges the picadors, who retaliate with lances: this the beginning of the slowing-up of the bull and the act in which the horses may be gored. The second act is that of the *bandilleras*, yard-long sticks, like harpoons, which are driven into the big humped muscle at the top of the bull's neck as he charges: the second process of slowing up the bull.

This to most people is the most picturesque part of the whole fight. The third act, the final in many senses, is the act of the matador himself, the act of death. It is final in the sense that either the bull or the matador may be killed, and in that the matador may be

wounded and retire, or may prove himself so crude and incompetent that the bull must be driven back alive to the corrals; and for the bull the act is final in every sense, since in Spain a bull is never allowed to return a second time to the ring. His intelligence is such that he learns in one visit so much about the cape and its tricks in the hands of the matador that it would be fatal to allow him a second visit, and without the cape and all the varied, skilled and graceful uses to which the bull-fighter puts it, bull-fighting ceases to be an art and becomes merely a cheap and quick way of death for the matador.

The life of the bull-fighter is, at best, a precarious one. Apart from the dangers of the ring itself, every bull-fighter is likely to suffer from one or both of two diseases—tuberculosis and syphilis.

Even a great bull-fighter who by his art triumphs in the ring and escapes its dangers may, like a great boxer, succumb miserably to either of these afflictions. Bull-fighters rarely retire; if they are great they persist in displaying their art for both the glory and money it brings until some accident, such as the blowing of the cape by the wind, puts them fatally at the mercy of the bull; if they are poor both as fighters and men they persist in fighting, because it is better to die by the horn than by starvation; and rich and poor alike contract the diseases common to all professions in which the body is glorified.

Alone among modern bull-fighters Belmonte, in Mr. Hemingway's estimation perhaps the greatest matador who ever lived, survived the ring and disease, and made an honourable retirement.

Both these books are profoundly interesting. By their very subject they are provocative, and by their style and thought they are salutary. They are vividly written, with intelligence and virility, colour and irony. And though both are concerned primarily with the art of bull-fighting, they are fascinating not only because of that, but because they are concerned with human nature also, with passion and conflict and life and death.

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