

THE MANILA COCK-PIT, IN BAMBOO TOWN.



IN our cosmopolitan community there are so many nationalities, and so many different customs are in vogue, that we might expect to see anything here. The Municipal bye-laws are assimilated to the police regulations in England; but in a community comprising nearly all the races on the face of the earth, the Police Act of England, or similar statutes of other countries, can only be adhered to in part. Chinese must be allowed to follow their own customs, so far as these do not interfere with the welfare of foreigners, but the western invention of licenses is enforced as a restraint upon some of their institutions, such as public opium smoking saloons; and their gambling houses are strictly prohibited, the same as lower-class gambling is hunted down at home, while in big clubs it is winked at. But other nationals who have settled here, bring with them their national pastimes, and under license from their Consul, and, apparently, beyond interference on the part of the Municipality, practise games which would not be tolerated under the Police Act of England. The particular case we have under notice is the game of cock-fighting, carried on by Spaniards from Manila. Cock-fighting is the chief sport or pastime of Manilamen, and they carry it on in full swing every Sunday afternoon, in the Cock-pit in "Bamboo Town," the north-western part of the American Settlement; and besides Manila-Spaniards, there are numbers of Portuguese, Chinese, and other nationals among the spectators. A short time ago we visited the Cock-pit, just to see what kind of a place it was. Bamboo Town is a quarter thickly covered with small houses, wretched hovels they are, chiefly constructed of bamboo, and this fact accounts for the name. The cock-pit can, we believe, be approached from Tien-dong Road, (the road to heaven!) through a long course of small and dirty streets; a less complicated route is by Chapoo Road until the west side of Bamboo Town is reached, then by a narrow path down between two rows of small houses; the next turn is into a narrow alley, where there is only room for walking in Indian file; this brings us to the back of one of the rows of houses, where there is a creek of stagnant water covered with green weeds; the creek is crossed by the most rickety erection in the way of bridges that could be found hereabout; the pillars are only bamboo poles, and four or five planks lie over them without any superfluous fixings; first a single plank, then two alongside, and another two; these constitute the bridge, and it is not fit to bear two persons at once. On the other side of the creek, on a long and narrow strip of ground, the Manilamen have their cock-fighting ground. The "pit," as it is called, is a bamboo erection,—a sort of matshed. The roof is supported by bamboo poles; the west side only is enclosed by a high fence and screen to keep out the strong rays of the afternoon sun; all the other sides are open. The arena is enclosed by a low fence, and between it and the high fence on the west side there is a small enclosure, presumably meant for a grand-stand, or private boxes; the spectators crowd all around, leaning over the fence of the arena; but at the east side there is a platform or stage erected on bamboo poles; the stage is five feet above ground, and reached by a ladder; spectators are standing on this slim erection, and others crouch below it

too. There is other and extensive accommodation for the sports; an open square is surrounded by seats constructed of bamboo poles fixed horizontally on short piles, and beyond this there is another space under a roofing of bamboo and mats. These spaces are where the cocks are kept, tethered to small stakes in the ground, and the men sit all around on the seats in the interval between one fight and the getting up of another match. The day we visited the place, the sport was said to be dull; there were only about eighteen fighting birds on the ground, and few of them could match; the birds were moulting, and hence the small turn-out. We were told that some days there might be nearly a hundred cocks brought to the pit, when numerous combats take place. The owners sit on the benches, talking loudly to each other, making challenges or bets; the talking goes on in Spanish chiefly, but a great deal of pidgin English is also used. The Manilamen are dressed in holiday suits, bright coloured, and checks of the "loudest" pattern; a conspicuous sportsman amongst them is dressed in quite a different garb; he is a Parsee, dressed in a long robe of dark grey checked tweeds, with his curiously-shaped *lopee* stuck on the back of his head; away in a corner is a quiet and apparently disinterested person, a Marwarée, in long white robe and white turban; beside him an old man with white beard, wearing a Turkish fez minus the tassel; but his blue cotton pants and jacket show he is only an old sailor, and he is more like an Irishman than a Turk; there are also several "packet-rats" and "beachcombers" of the English mercantile marine, who have been discharged at this port and have lounged about here for many weeks.

During the short time we were there three matches were got up, but only one came to anything. A challenge being given, the owners of the birds set them down beside each other in the open square, to see if they show a disposition to fight; then each owner takes up his bird and holds it out to the other; if the birds ruffle the feathers of their neck and show game for fighting, the match is agreed on, and the owners, others helping them, proceed to put on the horrible artificial spurs; for the fighting is not done in a natural way, but with a long steel blade fastened on the right leg of the cock. These spurs vary in length according to the size of the birds, the measure being from the foot to the joint of the leg. The average spur is two inches in length; it is just like the blade of a small knife, bill-shaped at the point, and as sharp as a lance. Some owners have a quiver of such spurs; they take the leather case from their pocket, select a spur, and then proceed to fix it on the leg of the bird. The blade is furnished with a double haft, which is placed against the leg and passes on either side of the natural spur; then great lengths of strong thread are wound round the leg till the blade is firmly secured, and the bird when placed on the ground cannot use the right foot on account of its being so much tied up; the blade meanwhile is covered with a leather sheath. When both combatants are ready, they are taken into the arena; the fence round it is lined with people on the outside, and about a dozen Manilamen are inside getting up bets on the contest. In one match we saw, the birds ran away from each other at the first trial inside the arena; in another, one caved in after the first round; the third fight lasted about ten minutes, which was a most unusual circumstance, as it is said the fights generally result in a kill or a capitulation in the first minute or two. But in this case there was a horrible fight. The backers had been calling for dollars for about five minutes, while the owners were in the middle of the arena with birds in hand; the stakes were about twelve dollars, besides outside betting; the final trial was made, the birds were presented to each other, and each pecked the neck of his opponent; if

they had not done that, it was still time for one owner to withdraw and save his stakes; but the birds are game fellows, and the backers shout with glee at the prospect of seeing a good fight, and at their chance of winning a few dollars. The arena is cleared of all but two or three men; the stakeholder has thrown down the Mexicans on the ground, and with one coin describes a rude circle round each pile of dollars. The sheaths are removed from the spurs of steel; each owner kisses his bird, and then puts it down on the ground, and there is great shouting and excitement amongst the spectators when the poor birds begin their terrible fight for life or death. One is a grey, the other a brown, and both are young Tientsin fowls. They duck down their heads, with their feathers standing on end around their necks like Elizabethan ruffs; then one leaps over the other and attempts to strike his opponent; they turn again and spring at each other; they jump about, till they have been nearly all over the arena; and their feathers are flying through the air; then the grey gets hold of the brown fowl by the neck and drags his head to the ground, but fails to get above him; the brown one rises and seizes the grey; now they have got hold of each other, the bill of one at the back of the neck of the other, and they keep a firm grip for a while, dancing round and round, each trying to gain the mastery. The grey one throws off the brown, and makes him back up against a fence; the grey then springs at the brown two or three times; and the breast of the latter is bare of feathers, covered with blood, and deeply cut. The two birds are getting pretty tired; they come out to the centre of the arena and take things quietly for a time; the grey has stuck his head under the wing of the brown; the brown pecks gently at the back of the grey, and thus they go on for half a minute; then the grey withdraws his head, flies at his opponent, and his opponent flies next; another halt put in by the strange procedure of the grey with his head under the brown's wing; and finally, after nearly ten minutes' hard fighting has taken place, the grey makes a wild spring at the brown, and in flying over him sends the long steel spur into his neck; the brown runs away; his owner picks him up and sets him down in front of the grey again, but the brown again runs off;—the grey is proclaimed victor, and his owner and backers win a few dollars over him. The brown cock was dreadfully cut, and seemed to be good for nothing but curry; the grey victor did not appear to have any serious wound at all. Such is a faithful description of the shocking cruelty practised in the game of cock-fighting, as regularly carried on by these Manila-Spaniards under the name of "sport!" The sight was so sickening that some European visitors turned away in disgust.

