

June 30, 1952

### **Bull and Bear Fights**

Innumerable stories have been told about grizzlies, some of which became traditional in the old Spanish families of California. In those days some of the bravest of the young men would go out alone to kill grizzlies. When they had lassoed one they would drag him to a tree, and the well-trained horse would hold the bear against it while the hunter slipped out of the saddle, ran up and killed the grizzly with one stroke of his broad-bladed machete, or Mexican hunting knife.

The governor of California would appoint expert bear hunters in different parts of the country, who spent their time in destroying them – just as lion hunters receive pay for the hides of those animals today. Don Rafael Soto, one of the most famous of these hunters, would conceal himself in a pit covered with heavy logs and leaves with a quarter of freshly killed beef above. When the grizzly bear walked on the logs he was shot from beneath. When a feast day arrived the hunters would go into the hills and bring out several live bears to turn into the bull-fighting pen.

The principal bull-fights, Guadalupe Vallejo records, were held at Easter and on the day of the patron saint of the mission. Bull and bear fights continued in California until as late as 1855. The Indians, it is said were the most ardent supporters of the cruel sport.

The days of the rodeos, when cattle were driven in from the surrounding pastures and the herds of the different ranches were separated were notable episodes. The ranch owners elected three or five “juezes del campo” to govern the proceedings and decide disputes. After the rodeo there was a feast. The great feast-days, however, were December 12, (The Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe), Christmas, Easter, and St. Joseph's Day, or the day of the patron saint.

In these days of trade, bustle, and confusion, when many thousands of people live in the California valleys, which formerly were occupied by only a few Spanish families, the quiet and happy domestic life of the past seems like a dream. Those who loved it have written of those days and especially of the duties of the large Spanish households, when so many dependents were to be cared for, and everything was done in a simple and primitive way.

Guadalupe Vallejo writes in his “Ranch and Mission Days in California” of a group of warm springs a few miles distant from the old adobe house in which the family lived. It made the children happy to be waked up before the sunrise to prepare for the “washday expedition” to the “Agua Caliente.” The night before the Indians had soaped the clumsy carreta's great wheels. Lunch was carried in baskets, and the gentle oxen were yoked to the pole. All those to go on the expedition climbed in under the green cloth of an old Mexican flag, which was used for an awning, and the white haired Indian who had driven the carreta since his boyhood, plodded alongside, with his long ox-goad. The great piles of soiled linen were fastened on the backs of horses, led by other servants, while the girls and the women who were to do the washing trooped along by the side of the carreta. All in all it made an imposing cavalcade, though the progress was slow, and it was generally sunrise before the spring was reached.

The women unloaded the linen and carried it to an upper spring where the water was best. Then they loosened the horses, and let them pasture on the wild oats, while the women put home-made soap on the clothes, dipped them in the spring, and rubbed them on the smooth rocks until they were as white as snow. Then they spread them out to dry on the tops of the low bushes growing on the warm, windless, southern slopes of the mountain.

There was also a great deal of linen to be washed, for it was the pride of every Spanish family to own much linen, and the mother and daughters almost always wore white. Vallejo wrote in 1890 that he had often heard strangers speak of the wonderful way in which Spanish ladies of the upper classes in California always appeared in snow-white dresses.

In the rainy season the soiled linen accumulated for weeks before the weather permitted the house mistress to have a washday. Then when at last it came, it seemed that half the village, with dozens of babies and youngsters, wanted to go along and have a spring picnic.