

GETTING EVEN FOR WRONGS OF A YEAR

Writing in Harper's Magazine for April, Frederic Fenger tells of a strange West-Indian custom which he observed in the island of Granada.

"Inshore lay Sauters, typical of any British West-Indian coast town, with a cocoa-fringed beach before it, from which a government-built jetty spans the wicked surf that rolls in from the "trades." Guarding the windward (a word in these parts synonymous with east) end of the roadstead, the Morne de Sauteurs, or Hill of the Leapers, stands into the sea, its precipitous face rising beachless from rocks of its own calving, to a level plain above. The town, built partly on this hill, straggles down to the shops and huts which trail off along the coast road to the westward. As we unstepped our masts and stowed our rigs, we could see that something unusual was on foot. The roadway was crowded with people, and from the shore-end of the jetty came the shouts of excited Africans mingled with the sharp cracks of carters' whips. We tailed our whale-boats from the corner of the jetty, and headed inshore, where the whalers proved to their satisfaction and my small loss that there was still rum in Sauteurs. I left them in the cabaret, and, armed with my camera, found my way through the crowd to the cocoa-dealer, who was waiting for me at the door of his shop.

"'Afraid you might forget, so I sent my little helio,' he said in greeting. 'What do you think of this?'

"The roadway before us was filled with black masqueraders wearing queer, turban-like head-gear, and dressed for the most part like women. Instead of being fastened around the middle, their heavily flounced skirts, with arm-holes cut in them, were hung from the neck, evidently to give free action to legs unaccustomed to hampering female gear. Some wore long streamers from their turbans, with bells trailing at the ends, like cans tied to a dog's tail. Here and there pairs were engaged in strange combat with single-sticks, which they held with both hands wide apart. Advancing and retreating like gamecocks trying for an opening, they would suddenly let go with one hand and bring down the stick with terrific force on their opponents. Thick as these craniums are, the turbans were none too good a protection from the blows of the single-sticks, some of which were evidently the pets of their owners, like the Irishman's shillalah, and made of ironwood, the toughest and hardest of the tropics. As we stood there I watched a native bounce his stick from that of his opponent, who had guarded, and then, swinging on the rebound, deliver a terrific back-hand blow on the unguarded ribs of his less skilful adversary. Had the stick been a saber, the poor devil would have been dissevered like a cane-stock.

"'This is Shrove Tuesday, or Mardi Gras, as the natives still call it from the time of the French regime,' explained the cocoa-buyer. 'When the French took possession of the island,