Richard Francis Burton

The Sentiment of the Sword

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Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066461386

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LIFE, as we know it, had scarcely crowned the travail of creation and produced a man when man rose up and slew his brother. That first killing must have been some uncfcanly business, wiili a boulder clenched in an angry fist. It must have taken very little time to discover that other men were better slain with some more elongated instrument. At first the flint that flaked so easily into a fatal shape was bound with deers' sinews to a wooden shaft. Then Earth gave up her secrets at the call of Death, and with bronze and iron the forge of Tubal Cain's descendants set to work at weapons. Leaves, or talL fronds of water plants, were instant models for the prehistoric sword. The falchion that Achilles wielded flashes its primeval origin. The strong blade of the Roman legionary warred down the world with trenchant edge and thirsting point until the hordes out of the ancient East swept over Europe better armed. Against the scimitar of the Moslems, the long, straight Norman sword hewed out its path to Palestine and reigned, in turn, as Death's best sceptre from Scandinavian fiords to the Sicilian seas. By war man smote his way to freedom,

Stripped aiul adust in a stubble of empire. Scything and binding the full sheaves of sovranty.

By the sword he held hi-* blood-stained fief until the age of chivalry was overpast, until the mailed knight vanished at the first whiff of Friar Bacon's villainous saltpetre, and gun-powder, which choked Don Quixote's dream, produced the art of fence. The days had passed when, in a clear air, hand to hand, the lines of warriors met and grappled; when every wound showed gaping red, and every hand that dealt it

reddened; when armoured cohorts, irresistiblle, charged by sheer weight through legions of the lesser sort, and trampled, hacked, and hewed them iuto lifeleseness. Now missiles came from far through murky tracts of smoke-stained mist, belched from some iron artifice, like blasts of Tophet, and in their path was death that no cuirass, no carapace of armour could withstand. So the one excuse for a complete protection of the body vanished, and from the crowd of ancient armour-cracking weapons, mace, hammer, flail, and such like, the sword rose paramount. More lightly clad, the horseman could ride swifter, move his limbs with greater freedom. The joints in his harness expanded into gaps. One by one his metal shields dropped off, and, as he thus gradually used his armour less and less, so did he become more vulnerable to the skilled swordsman, and so did the point begin -triumphant to assert its superiority over the edge.

One result was an immediate outpouring of volumes on the new science of fence from Perpignan, from Spain, from Italy, from Germany. Tho whole continent was agog with geometrical and mathematical theories, with complicated and encyclopaedic treatises, which overlaid the subject with so many extraneous trivialities that all sight was lost of the one deadly principle that simplicity is best, when killing is your game, and when the killer Ls a man of human passions, human errors, human short- comings. A fatal stroke is rarely made by one whose nerves are absolutely calm; it is never made, save in the foulest ways of murder, without the necessity for self-defence at the same moment. It is, therefore, best made as the easiest of simple and

instinctive movements. But this was the last thing fencing masters realised. The discovery of the point had fairly dazzled them. Though for many years it did not involve anything like complete abandonment of the edge, yet that discovery alone gave the rest of Europe a temporary and marked superiority over England in the art of duelling, for your downright Englishman would at first have nothing to say to the new- fangled "foining" from across the Channel. A good heart and a strong blade was all he wanted. But time after time the ruffian who had learned to lunge in France was found to be more effective than the Briton who trusted to the edge alone. Slowly and cautiously the foreign fencing master was admitted; for these islanders, who " were strong, but had no cunning," found themselves obliged to learn. At Westminster, upon a July 20, in the thirty-second year of his reign, Henry VIII. granted a definite commission to certain "Masters of the Science of Defence," and for this reason the Tudor rose is to-day the badge of English fencing teams in international tournaments, under the rules of the Amateur Fencing Association, whose patron was King Edward VII. and is now King George V. Under Elizabeth the " scholar " obtained his diploma of efficiency after a kind of examination calted "Playing his Prize," which consisted of bouts at certain weapons, supervised by the masters, and these were, no doubt, the origin of the " Prize Fights," which Pepys observed in the days of Charles II.; but develop- ment moved very slowly still. Only by tedious degrees did the deadly form of fence which Agrippa invented for the weapons of his day spread throughout Europe, and become general, as swords- manship and fencing spread among all

classes. Tlio rapier play perfected at the end of the sixteenth century kept a great deal of cutting with its use of the point, as the famous duel between Jarnac and Chataigncraic sufficiently shows; it also kept a great deal of use of the left hand, cither with ;i dagger or with a cloak and sometimes unarmed, for many an Elizabethan duellist " with one hand held cold death aside, and with the other sent it back to Tybalt." The reason of this was that the rapier was a long and heavy weapon; its real size may be gathered from the old rule that " with the point at your toe the cross should reach as high as your hip bone." This meant that a weapon which nearly always resulted in severe wounds when used in attack was not handy enough alone to provide an efficient defence, and the left hand, with or without a dagger, had to be brought into play to protect the swordsman. This at once involved the disadvantage that adversaries, doubly weaponed, must perforce stand very square to one another, and would risk many chances of grappling and "in-fighting," at which the better fencer might be worsted by a muscular opponent; science, in fact, made far less difference than it does at present. A more accurate and more complete system became a necessity. So the point by degrees superseded the edge entirely. One weapon was found sufficient both for attack and for defence; for the point kept men at their distance, and the fencer, using one hand for balance, did all that was possible, by standing sideways, to efface the surface of his body open to attack.

It is, perhaps, significant that the era which produced the perfection of fencing, the crowning masterpiece of the riposte, was also the age when duelling with the sword went

out of fashion in those countries where the national skill had not rendered it practically innocuous. The history of firearms pro- vides an example of a similar series of causations. When Gentlemen of the Guard fired first, and the officer's cane pressed down their musket barrels on a mark some fifty paces distant, the slaughter of the volley would have made modern humanitarians turn pale. But in these days of the- repeating rifle and the Mauser magazine, one army has hardly time to see the manly countenances of its foes throughout a whole campaign, and, relatively, very Kittle bad blood has been spilt when all is over. It has remained for the days of "scientific hygiene" to count more victims killed by disease than fell in action. So the sword was in danger of becoming a mere symbol, though always a brilliant symbol, for the martial poet,

Clanging imperious
Forth from Time's battlements
His ancient and triumphing song.

Perhaps this is why, both in France and England, the military authorities have shown a creditable anxiety to remove it from the vulgar sphere of practical utility, and the six-shooter has entirely replaced it in the United States, and meanwhile the subtle perfection of foil play steadily came more and more into favour. Emancipated from the bonds of too strenuous utilitarians, freed from the fetters of an encyclopaedic scholasticism, yet glowing, still, with the romance of all its glorious past, the sublimated spirit of good swordsmanship throughout the ages seemed to float over the fencing-rooms of the last decade of the nineteenth century; for here, even in England, the discovery of the

French duelling sword '(or epee de combat) had given renewed zest to practice with its elder sister, the foil. Even the exquisite art and laudable enthusiasm of a Camille Prevost could not, however, recommend to the average militant male a pursuit which he regarded as a mere academic elegance, with very little reference to the serious issues of personal combat and no pretence to the employment of a serviceable weapon. Englishmen asked for something more practical, and in epee play they have found it. The late W. H. C. Staveley, whose recent and untimely loss all English fencers have so sincerely mourned, was first-rate with the foil before his epee and sabre play had reached international form, and he was as eager to preserve the qualities of the foil as he was to fight the foremost with the sword. Capt. Hutton, too, who died within a few days of his younger comrade, was a president of the Amateur Fencing Association whose place will be difficult to fill, for he guided modern developments with an experience of the past that was well-nigh unequalled, and the swordsmanship of the last thirty years owes much to his presence and example.

But though our amateur fencing championships, with foil, epee, and sabre, are now regularly carried out each year, it may be feared that the art of swordsmanship remains a mystery tp the larger part of the inhabitants of these isles, and that few of the great sporting public know the meaning of the little Tudor rose (commemorating Bluff King Hal, as aforesaid) which hangs at the watch-chain of those who have represented England in an International Tournament. Yet there was a time when Englishmen, sword in hand, could

face the rest of Europe without fear, either in the fencing-room or on "the field of honour." They had at first been a long time learning Ibat the Continent had really got something to teach them; having at last learnt it, they proceeded to outdo their masters. But they gave up the game as soon as they dropped wearing swords. Practical danger appealed to them; artistic recrea- tion left them cold. They had laughed duelling out of fashion, both with steel and pistol; they forthwith gave up going to the fencing-room. Angelo's work seemed likely to be wholly forgotten within scarce two generations of his prime. A few men only Burton, Chapman, Hutton, Egerton Castle, the two Pollocks, perhaps a short half-dozen mnrp savod foil play from complete oblivion in Ixmdon. during Ihe long years of ccli}> < The following dialogue, of which the first publication began in the pages of the Field, is from the hand of Sir Richard Burton, that curious blend of the mystic and the athlete, of the explorer and the linguist, of the antiquary and the scholar. A man who felt as strongly as it has been ever felt the passion he calls "the wild and fiery joy which accompanies actual discovery," Burton equally delighted in the subtler expression of intellectual, tem- peramental, even psychical emotions; and was therefore very peculiarly qualified to describe "the Sentiment of the Sword." His sketch of " Shughtie," one of the characters in his con-versation, is probably intended as a portrait of the writer (or one side of him) by himself. Hie dialogue, which throws several curious sidelights on Mid-Victorian society (in velvet smoking caps and whiskers), is valuable not merely for its sound doctrines of swordsmanship, but for its revelations of

his own character and personality. It has been edited by Mr Forbes Sieveking, a skilled upholder of the foil, to whom London owed, some dozen years ago, an exhibition of first-rate foil play in the Portman Rooms that was not surpassed either in excellence or in interest until the famous evening when the King saw Pini and his Italian champions vanquished in the Empress Rooms by Kirchhoffer, Merignac, and the flower of France. That was a typical encounter, for which those who had seen Camille Prevost's elegant classicalism on the former occasion were more than half prepared. The passing of the sceptre from Italy to France had been foreshadowed already. It may now be taken as an accomplished fact.

First-rate foil play has invariably been too delicate in its essence,, too ideal in its aim, too unpractical in its courteous fragility for the majority of Englishmen. It is the foundation of the knowledge of all weapon play, and your true foil player need never be at a loss in a scrimmage, even if he bears but that unromantic symbol of civic respectability the silk umbrella. But in itself the foil has always appealed to a very small minority of our countrymen. The scoring was compli- cated, restricted, and liable to much misconception, save by the rare and tyrannous expert. The somewhat artificial ceremonies attending it had too Continental a flavour for your insular athlete, who liked to know both when he hit his foe and when he had been hit himself. And so the whirligig of time has brought yet other changes. Fencing has experienced a miraculous Renaissance in this country owing to the introduc- tion of the pool system and the epee dc combat, the triangularly fluted rapier of the

French duellist, with its semicircular cup hilt, its light, blade, and foil handle, its grim simplicity of method, its virtual reproduction of the conditions of the duel, its strictly businesslike and obvious scoring. The first pool ever held here in public with this weapon was in the Steinway Hall in 1900. By 1903 the first English fencing team that ever crossed the Channel competed in Paris in the International Tourna- ment. Much to the surprise of their compatriots they were not last, for a victory over the Belgians served as an anticipatory atonement for lost Grand Challenge Cups at later Henleys.

In 1906, only three years afterwards, the English team fought France to a dead heat in the final at Athens for the first time in any open international event. It is not too much to hope for even greater honours in the future. The popularity of the new sport for new it is, in its first decade etill would have fairly astonished Richard Burton, and, we may safely add, have thoroughly delighted him, for he knew all about the possibilities of the epee, ae did a few other Englishmen in the latter half of the nineteenth century; but it never became really popular till after 1900, and now we hear so great an authority as J. Joseph- Renaud, across the Channel, saying that " foil play is dead." We do not believe that the foil will ever die while swordsman- ship remains alive; but it is a fact that the epee has given an impulse to English fencing of which the foil has never in its whole history been capable. Non cuivis contingit adire Corinthum; not all may wear the Tudor rose of English swords- manship, but scores more than ever cared to perfect themselves with a foil may now learn, something of the joys of swordsman-

ship, may feel the fine thrill of that sentiment du fer when your blade seems like a nerve outstretched from the eager point of it to your own heart and brain, when your opponent's steel bewrays him as it palpitates with the tremor of his struggling will and adverse energy. In any weather, indoors or out of doors, at any hour, at any age, this game of games is at your service. To begin it without foil play as an introduction were as futile as learning slides before fixed seats in rowing, but once the preliminaries are mastered an epee pool becomes the true combat of personalities, the keen revealer of temperaments, the merciless arbitrament of skill. It changes with every pair who stand ujp man to man. It can be twenty minutes of the hardest bodily exercise ever known, and it may be either a series of single matches or a combined team fight in sets of four or six. The days of Angelo have come back again, with a difference: the tragic comedians of the duel have silently vanished into limbo, and one of the best sports in modern Europe sounds in the ring of glittering steel.

THEODORE ANDREA COOK.
January, 1911.

THE MANUSCRIPT of the following Dialogue was entrusted to me by the late Lady Burton some time after Sir Richard Burton's death in 1890, together with the notes ajid memoranda he left for the continuation of his Book of the Sword. It will, I hope, be of interest as the work of one of the greatest travellers, finest sportsmen, and strongest personali- ties of the Victorian era; but it will appeal more especially to lovers of the sword and foil, who have increased so vastly in numbers since Burton wrote. For it contains the matured opinions upon the art and methods of offence and defence in England and on the Continent of one who was throughout his life an ardent student of the theory, and an acknowledged master of the practice, of the art of swordsmanship.

We have Burton's own statement (Life, Vol. I., p. 134) that he began his long practice with the sword seriously at the age of twelve, sometimes taking three lessons a day, and he never missed an opportunity of studying the fencing or fighting methods of whatever country he was in, savage or civilised. In 1850, at the age of twenty-eight, he was devoting himself to fencing at Boulogne. " To this day," writes his widow, " the Burton une-deux, and notably the manchette (the upward slash disabling the sword arm and saving life in affairs of honour), are remembered; they earned him his brevet de pointe for the excellence of his swordsmanship, and he became a maitre d'armes." This diploma he placed after his name upon the title page of his Book of the Sword. In 1853 he published A Complete System of Bayonet Exercise, which, at first pigeonholed at tho War Office, was subsequently adopted in the army.

Burton's original title for his work was " The Secrets of the Sword," suggested by the Baron de Bazancourt's volume Les Secrets de VEpee, published in Paris in 1862, from which he quotes freely in the following pages, and so well known in England by Mr C. Felix Clay's fine translation (illustrated by Mr F. H. Townsend), which has forestalled this title here. The one chosen in its place, " The Sentiment of the Sword," perhaps suggests even better to non-fencers Burton's intimate sympathy with and affection for the weapon and its correspondence with his own nature, while to swordsmen and fencers it brings home le sentiment flu fer invented by our "sweet enemy France" for that inner feeling of the foil, that magnetism of the blade, that sense of touch or " tact " which no other expression in any language so happily conveys.

I have ventured to omit a few passages from Burton's work which time has rendered of less lively interest, and have allowed myself the liberty of a few notes where the text seemed to require it, or the title of an early fencing work has been given in full

A. FOEBES SIEVEKING

12, Seymour Street, W., December, 1910.

THE FIRST EVENING

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Ne, che poco io vi dia da imputar sono,
Che quanto io passo dur, tutto vi dono. ARIOSTO.

I. Introduction

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IN the long world journey of the traveller, who is something of an explorer, there are two lights. The greater is that wild and fiery joy which accompanies actual discovery; the lesser light is the mild and tranquil enjoyment snatched from rude life and spent amid the radiance and fragrance of civilisation.

II. Point and Edge amongst Ancients and Primitive Peoples

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One evening, many strangers being in the smoking-room, our talk happened to touch upon the sword. Seaton was certain that the English would never be a fencing nation, that the Pointe wae the invention of modern Continental Europe, that the French school is the only system worth learning, and so forth the usual commonplaces of swordsmen.

I differed with him upon sundry details. It is hard to say what a nation cannot do; two centuries ago England could teach mueic to that all-claiming German race why should she not teach it again? The Greeks and Romans used the point, although their weapons were rather knives than " long knives," and the Turkish yataghan, the Malay kris, the Afghan "charay"[1] the Kabyle flissa[2], and the Algerian dagger, from which the Due D'Aumale borrowed the French sword-bayonet, are made for " thrust " as well as for "cut." We must not go beyond the assertion that only the exclusively pointed weapon, a revival of the old " stocco," that with which General Lamoriciere proposed to arm the French cavalry, is the invention of comparatively modern times. As regards the Italian schools, the old and the new, I supported their prowess in the field, and the aristocracy of the family from which they claim descent.

The discussion became animated enough to impress the general ear, despite the protestations of the schoolman and the objections of the cosmopolite. The many present who had never touched a foil were impressed with the halo of feelings which I threw round my favourite pursuit. They began to understand that mind or brain force enters, as well as muscle, into the use of the sword; that character displays itself even more than in the " bumps " of the phrenologists, or the lines of the physiognomist; and that every assault between experts, who despise the mere struggle of amour-propre, is a trial of skill and temper; of energy and judgment, of nerve, and especially of what is known as " coup d'oeil " and the " tact of the sword." Regarding nerve, I asserted that the same quality which makes an

exceptionally good rider, marksman, or skater, a cricketer, tennis, or billiard player, to name no others, is required for the finished swordsman. Lastly, I proved, to my own satisfaction at least, that, although the man who would be a perfect master of fence must begin in boyhood, simple offence is easily, and defence is even more easily, taught. I fear, in fact, that my form of conversation became somewhat tectural, professorial, and dogmatic.

III. History and Development of Sword

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"Do you know," said the Chatelaine, " that you are revealing to us the Secrets of the Sword? "

I accept the epigram, was my reply, and certainly nothing can better describe my intention. Amongst all weapons the rapier alone has its inner meaning, its arcana, its mysteries. See how it interprets man's ideas and obeys every turn of his thoughts! At once the blade that threatens and the shield that guards, it is now agile, supple, and intelligent; then slow, sturdy, and persevering; here light and airy, prudent and subtle; there, blind and unreflecting, angry and vindictive; I am almost tempted to call it, after sailor fashion, " she."

Unhappily its secrets are generally neglected, and even those who give what are called " fencing lessons," like those who take them, mostly fail to pass beyond the physical view.

Our great-grandfathers wore swords by their sides, and all gentlemen learned to use them. Presently the pistol came into fashion an ugly change of dull lead for polished

steel, and the "art of arms " fell so low that many a wealthy city in England had a "fencing master" who combined the noble functions of dancing master sometimes of dentist. The effect of the "muscular movement" has made the foil rise again in the market of popularity, but it is too often used as a mere single-stick might be the single-stick, like the quarter-staff, a weapon for Gurths and Wambas.

" Please don't abuse the single-stick," Shughtie interrupted; " it once saved my life."

Nothing newer than to hear him speak of his adventures, as he was that rarity, a lion who seldom roared. The smoking- room at once seized the occasion for insisting that the whole tale be told. The words had fallen from him inadvertently; he could not withdraw them, and so with a resigned air he began:

" Once upon a time, as the story books say, I was travelling amongst the Galla (3), who at first held me in high honour; few had ever seen the ' hot-mouthed weapon,' and those who had knew only ball, so when I made a flying shot they cried ' Wak, wak, the man from the sea brings down the birds from heaven! ' Presently the marvel waxed stale, and my savage friends, in this matter very like the civilised, began to treat me as one of themselves which means I was going very fast down a deep slope, with a deep drop at the end. My ' long knife,' as they called my broad sword, also sank in public esteem with its owner. One day a certain ruffler, a fellow of the bully type, showed his entourage how easy it was to beat me with spear and targe; I laughed in his face, and he pre- pared a trial. My Abyssinian servants were sorely frightened ' if you fail, we're all down among the dead

men.' I chose a stout, solid stick, and made my boaster take one the length of his assegai, not wishing to trust him with the spear-head. We stood opposite each other; I cut ostentatiously at his face: he guarded with his shield, and my stick was broken, with a resounding thud across his well, his flank, low down. A roar of laughter sent him flying in a fury to snatch up his weapon; I cocked my gun, and the bystanders interfered. But my name was made for ever and a day. So I don't abuse single-stick, nor do I ever shoot the ' katta,' the sandgrouee, which saved us during the same journey from a torturing death by show- ing a spring of water."[3]

I ventured to assert it was exceptionally rare to find, as in this smoking-room, two out of ten who have made the sword's principles their study.

(3) The Galla is a, fierce pastoral nomad tribe of Eastern inter-tropical Africa. &>e Life of Burton, I., page 260. The same story is told in Burton's Diary on page 203 of Vol. I.

Such assertions could hardly be disputed, but the auditory, especially those who did not fence or intend to fence, were loud, and I thought invidiously loud, in their praise of " wet bobs and dry bobs," of out-of-door exercises and sports, athletics, boating, rowing, from cricket to foxhunting.

I should be the last man in the room to decry them; but do not let us be Pharisees, who can see no good beyond a certain pale. Athletics are the great prerogative of the North as are gymnastics of the South, and this ie one of the main reasons why the North always beats the South has always beaten it, from the days of Bellovesus and Brennus, to those

of " Kaiser Weissbart." and allow me to predict always will beat it.

" Unless," cried Seaton. " some avatar, some incarnation of Mare like Alexander or Hannibal, Caesar, or Napoleon Buona- parte, throw in his sword to turn the scale. But, happily, it would take half a millennium to breed such men."

Out-of-door exercises give bodily strength, weight, and stature, endurance, nerve, and pluck; tell me how many foot pounds two racers can raise, and I will point out the winner in the long run.

But the use of the sword is something more: look at the fine health and the longevity of the maitre d'arms I doubt if the poet or the mathematician exceed him in this matter of great individual importance.

Our study also is the means adapted to an end. He who can handle a rapier well can learn the use of any other weapon in a few days. It teaches him flexibility of muscle, quickness of eye, judgment of distance, and the consensus of touch with sight, one of the principal secrets of the sword. If he practise consecutively, as much with the left as with the right side, it obviates that serious defect of training only one-half of the body to the detriment of the other. Do you know why men who lose their way in the Arabian desert, on the prairies and pampas of America, on the Russian steppes, or in the Australian bush walk round and round, describing irregular circles and broken ovals, till they droop and drop and die of fatigue, perhaps within a mile of the hidden camp? Simply because when the brain is morbidly fixed upon one object muscle asserts itself, and the stronger right runs away with tho weaker left.

"I'm not quite sure," Shughtie objected, "that men do not sometimes wander ' widdershins ' or 'against the sun.'"

Moreover, I continued, without noticing the remark of the "objector general," these are the days when the "silver streak," our oft-quoted " inviolate sea," must not be expected to ditch and moat us, especially as we seem likely to burrow under it in a measure which I greatly fear will turn out

"Yes," cried Seaton, "with peace-at-any-price policy, someday we may have a hundred thousand men hold the tete-de-pont before our unreadiness has time to move a corps. Nothing proves so well the greatness of Englishmen, nationally and individually, as their wonderful success, despite their various governments.

And now, when "la force prime le droit," when Europe stands up like Minerva in her panoply ready for the trial by what sciolists call " brute strength," I would see the old nation, England, take a lesson from her fair and gallant daughter, Canada. It is really refreshing to read of four millions being able to arm nearly 700,000 hands. We are fast returning to those fine old days, still preserved in Asia and Africa, where every free-born man was a born man-at-arms, when every citizen was a soldier, and our falling back on the " wisdom of antiquity " in this, as in other matters, is not one of the least curious features of the age. I would make Pro- fessor Sergeant part and parcel of every school. This has been tried partially and has failed, because the boys take little interest in learning the dull course of " sitting up" and " squad work," which the artless tutor proposes as

the art of arms; but when the parents shall set the example, the sons will follow them.

" Ou le pere a passe, passera bien 1'enfant," but the sooner drill is introduced perforce into our public schools, the better.

" The worst of fencing," said Charlie, the Oxonian, " is that one must begin from one's childhood, like riding; one must work for years to be a tolerable hand; if one does not keep it up, it becomes as rusty as running or swimming."

Parenthetically, I knew that my fresh-cheeked and stout-framed Oxonian had been an inveterate sportsman from his greenest years, and that even now many an hour during vacation was given to otter hunting. He could also whip a stream and throw a quoit admirably in fact, he had spent upon these and other recreations time and toil enough to make a complete swordsman. But he was leading up to my point, so I told him bluntly enough he was wrong.

" Pardon me, I've turned over a treatise or two in the library, and they made me feel small; really, it is like reading up geometry or alchemy, or any other secret science."

IV. Early Fencing Treatises and Technicalities Simplification Italian School and Names of Parries

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Now we come to the gist of the matter. You are quite right about the treatises. They are produced mostly by or for men far more used to the company of Captain Sword[4] than that of Captain Pen. Though some masters in the olden day

were highly educated men, and, later still, others have written comedies, the pretensions of the modern school are less to literature than to moral dignity. For instance:

" Le maitre d'armes doit avoir une conduite irreprochable, une humeur egale, de la bonte, de 1'indulgence sans faiblesse, il doit surtout etre juste et impartial, c'est le moyen pour lui d'obtenir 1'estime publique et la confiance de scs elevcs.

" Le professorat est un sacerdoce, et le maitre d'armes ne doit jamais 1'oublier.

" Le maitre d'armes devrait etre non seulement un modele de l^nu, de dignite, do maintien, de politesse et de courtoisie, mais encore un modele d'honneur."

This does not much help one with a foil. Again, the art of arms is a subject which, like chemistry, cannot bo learned from books; even illustrations give only the detached stanzas of the poem (6). Chief of all, these are the words of the professional men who take a pride in making and multiplying difficulties; as masters they must know everything, and as authors they must show what they know. With them the noble art becomes an abstruse science, a veritable mystery of which they are the Magi, the priests. It is well, indeed, when each one does not modify the principles of all others and propound his own system. Without such show of erudition they would expect to bo called " ignorants."

Lastly, like the Lemons d'Armes (Paris, 1862) of the good Cordelois, the book too often becomes a mere puff.

A few in England and elsewhere have tried to simplify these treatises, with the effect of a skeleton drill book.

These also have unduly neglected principles, or, rather, principes, and the result has been a mere tax upon the memory, resembling those abstracts and manuals of history, all names and dates, which no brain at least, no average brain beyond its teens can remember.

The voice of Seaton now made itself heard.

" I agree with you here. It is my opinion that the affected names and the endless hair-splittings of the fencing books make up a mere jargon. Why talk of the hand in ' pronation ' or in ' supination? Can't you say ' nails down ' or ' nails up '? We had trouble enough at school to learn the difference between pronus and supinus, I'm sure. Why must we be taught such technicalities as Avoir de la main, des doigts, des jambes, df la tete, de Vcpaule. chasser les mouches, passer en arriere. caver, faire capot, le cliquetis, eperonner (7), and scores of the same kind? They remind me of my crabbed Madras major,

(6) One of the rarest books on fencing happens to be the poem La Xiphonomie (1821), by Lhoma.ndie, a pupil of Texier de la Boissiere, the- "British Museum having no copy.

(7) Many of those terms are still current in the Salle d'Armes. Tlip definitions may IK- found in M. La Boossiere's Traitc de l'Arf r?e. Armes (pp. 18-24).

who knew some three hundred native names for horse furniture, and could turn them upon any hapless sub. he wanted to ' spin,' or ' pluck,' as you call it here."

" But every art and every science must have its own vocabulary its own slang, if you like. And why not fencing? I, for one, am sure that many of the hard words are of use in