BROAD SWORD AND SINGLE STICK

HEADLY, WOLLEY

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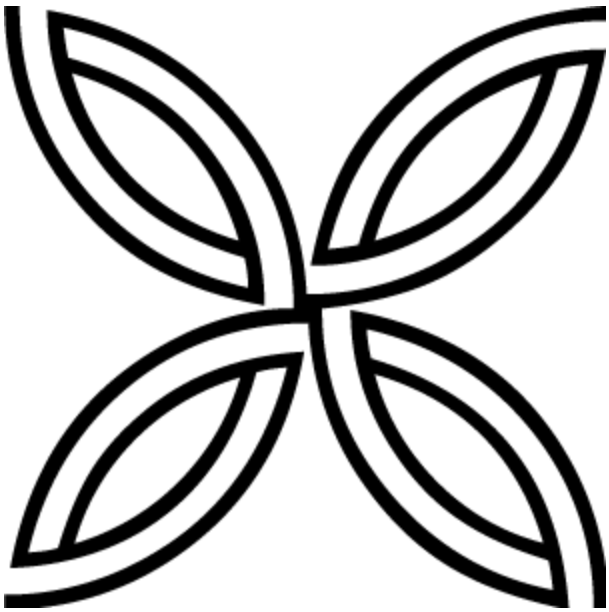
Headley, Phillipps Wolley



PREFACE.

The favour with which my little *brochure* on boxing has been received induces me to put together a few ideas on the subject of attack and defence with weapons other than those with which nature has endowed us.

A glance at the table of contents will suffice to show that the scope of the work has been somewhat extended, and that, though there is of course a vast deal more to be said on the wide subject of self-defence, an attempt has been made to give practical hints as to what may be effected by a proper and prompt use of those common accessories which we may find in our hands at almost any hour in the day.

Not having leisure to take in hand the whole of the work myself, I asked my friend Mr. C. Phillipps-Wolley to make himself responsible for that portion of the treatise which deals with single-stick play. This he kindly consented to do, and those of my readers who wish to make a special study of stick-play, I refer to p. 50 to p. 85 inclusive. The illustrations in this portion of the work are from photographs by the London Stereoscopic Company; all the other illustrations are from my own sketches.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Our neighbours on the other side of the English Channel have been accused of calling us a “nation of shopkeepers.” No doubt the definition is not bad; and, so long as the goods supplied bear the hall-mark of British integrity, there is nothing to be ashamed of in the appellation; still, with all due deference, I think we might more appropriately be called a nation of sportsmen.

There is not an English boy breathing at this moment who does not long to be at some sport or game, and who has not his pet idea of the channel into which he will guide his sporting proclivities when he is a man. There are not many grown Englishmen who don’t think they know something about a horse, would not like to attend a good assault-at-arms, or who are not pleased when they hear of their sons’ prowess with the oar, the bat, or the gloves.

I may be quite mistaken, but it always seems to me that the well-brought-up little foreign boy is too unwholesomely good and gentle to fight the battle of life. Still, such little boys *do* grow up brave and clever men, and they *do* , taken collectively, make splendid soldiers.

Then, as to sports, foreigners seem to put too much pomp and circumstance into their efforts in pursuit of game; the impedimenta and general accoutrements are overdone; but here again I may be wrong.

Of one thing we may be quite sure, and that is that the majority of Englishmen are devoted to sport of *some kind* . One of the prettiest little compliments you can pay a man is to call him “a good old sportsman.”

When, in addition to the advantages of a national sport or collection of national sports, such as boxing, sword exercises, wrestling, etc., you recognize the possibility that

the games you have been indulging in with your friends in playful contests may at almost any moment be utilized for defeating your enemies and possibly saving your life, you are forced to the conclusion that there are some sports at least which can be turned to practical account.

Unfortunately there are individuals, possibly in the small minority, who regard anything like fighting as brutal or ungentlemanly. In a sense—a very limited sense—they may be right, for, though our environment is such that we can never rest in perfect security, it does seem hard that we should have to be constantly on the alert to protect that which we think is ours by right, and ours alone.

However this may be, let us be men *first* , and aristocrats, gentlemen, or anything else you please, *afterwards* . If we are not men, in the larger and better sense of the word, let there be no talk of gentle blood or lengthy pedigree. The nation is what it is through the pluck and energy of individuals who have put their shoulders to the wheel in bygone days—men who have laid the foundation of a glorious empire by sturdy personal efforts—efforts, unaided by the state, emanating from those higher qualities of the character, relying on itself, and on itself alone, for success or failure.

From the earliest times, and in the most primitive forms of animal life, physical efforts to obtain the mastery have been incessant.

Whether it is in the brute creation or the human race, this struggle for existence has always required the exercise of offensive and defensive powers. The individual has striven to gain his living, and to protect that living when gained; nations have paid armies to increase their territories, and retain those territories when acquired.

The exact form of weapon which first came into use will always be doubtful, but one would think that stones, being hard and handy, as well as plentiful, might have presented irresistible attractions to, say, some antediluvian monster,

who wished to intimate to a mammoth or icthyosaurus, a few hundred yards distant, his readiness to engage in mortal combat.

Are there not stories, too, of clever little apes in tropical forests who have pelted unwary travellers with nuts, stones, and any missiles which came handy?

Then, coming nearer home, there is the lady at an Irish fair who hangs on the outskirts of a faction-fight, ready to do execution with a stone in her stocking—a terrible gog-magog sort of brain-scatterer.

When man was developed, no doubt one of his first ideas was to get hold of a really good serviceable stick—not a little modern masher's crutch—a strong weapon, capable of assisting him in jumping, protecting him from wild beasts, and knocking down his fellow-man.

To obtain such a stick the primitive man probably had to do a good deal of hacking at the bough of a hard oak or tough ash, with no better knife than a bit of sharp flint. Having secured his stick, the next thing was to keep it, and he doubtless had to defend himself against the assaults of envious fellow-creatures possessed of inferior sticks.

Thus we can imagine that the birth of quarter-staff play—not much *play* about it in those days—was a very simple affair; and we recognize in it the origin and foundation of all the sword exercises, and all the games in which single-stick, lance, and bayonet play a prominent part.

As the question of who picked up the first stone and threw it at his fellow-man, or when the first branch of a tree was brought down on the unsuspecting head of another fellow-man, are questions for learned men to decide, and are of no real importance, I shall not allow myself to go on with any vague speculations, but shall turn at once to an old English sport which, though sometimes practised at assaults-at-arms in the present day, takes us back to Friar Tuck, Robin Hood, and

" Maid Marian, fair as ivory bone,

Scarlet and Much and Little John.”

CHAPTER II.

THE QUARTER-STAFF.

According to Chambers's "Encyclopædia," the quarter-staff was "formerly a favourite weapon with the English for hand-to-hand encounters." It was "a stout pole of heavy wood, about six and a half feet long, shod with iron at both ends. It was grasped in the middle by one hand, and the attack was made by giving it a rapid circular motion, which brought the loaded ends on the adversary at unexpected points."

" Circular motion" and "shod with iron" give a nasty ring to this description, and one pictures to one's self half a barge-pole, twirled—"more Hibernico"—with giant fingers, bearing down on one.

Whether the fingers of our ancestors were ever strong enough to effect this single-handed twirling or not must remain a matter of doubt, but we may rest assured that in the quarter-staff we have, probably, the earliest form of offensive weapon next to the handy stone. If Darwin is correct, we can easily imagine one of our gorilla ancestors picking up a big branch of a tree with which to hit some near member of his family. This, to my mind, would be playing elementary quarter-staff, and the game would have advanced a step if the assaulted one—possibly the lady gorilla—had seized another branch and retaliated therewith.

The modern quarter-staff is supposed to be rather longer than the six and a half feet prescribed by the above-quoted authority, and I imagine it originally derived its name from being grasped with one hand at a quarter of its length from the middle, and with the other hand at the middle.

Thus, in the diagram (Fig. 1), if A E represents a quarter-staff eight feet long, divided into four equal two-foot

lengths at the points B, C, and D, the idea would be to grasp it with the right hand at D and with the left hand at C; or, if the player happened to be left-handed, to grasp it with the left hand at B and with the right hand at C.

Fig. 1.

This method of holding the quarter-staff may be well enough in certain cases, but it seems to me that, for rapid attack and defence, the hands should be about three feet apart: at D and m, half way between B and C; or at B and n, half way between C and D.
Of course a great deal depends upon the height and strength of the player, but, with the hands at a distance of three feet or so apart, it stands to reason you have a greater command over the ends of the staff than you have if they are only two feet apart, and that you can consequently come quicker into “hanging guard” positions, and more easily defend yourself from short upper strokes and from “points” than you can when you have less command over your weapon.