

Fencing

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If by fencing the art of fence, i.e. of defence or of fence were meant generally the dexterous use of the sword, the subject would be wide indeed; as wide, in fact, as the history of the sword itself. But, in its modern acceptation, the meaning of the word has become considerably restricted. The scope of investigation must therefore be confined to one kind of swordsmanship only: to that which depends on the, regulated, artificial conditions of single combat. It is indeed this play, hemmed in by many restrictions, which we have come to mean more specially by fencing. It differs, of course, in many respects, from what maybe called the art of fighting in the light of nature. But as its restrictions are among the very elements which work to the perfection of the play, it is undoubtedly in the history of swordsmanship as applied to duelling that we shall trace the higher development of the art.

It may be said that the history of fencing, therefore, would be tantamount to the history of private duelling. Now, this is an ethical subject; one, again, which would carry the investigation too far; and it need not be taken up farther back than the middle of the 16th century, when, on the disuse of the medieval wager of battle, the practice of private duelling began to take an assured footing in a warlike society. It is curious to mark that the first cultivation of refined cunning in fence dates from that period, which corresponds chronologically with the general disuse of armour, both in battle and in more private encounters. It is still more curious to note that, in order to fit himself to meet what was an illegal but aristocratic obligation, the gallant of those days had to appeal to a class of men hitherto little considered: to those plebeian adepts, in fact, who for generations had cultivated skill in the use of

hand weapons, on foot and without armour. Thus it came to pass that the earliest masters of fence in all countries, namely, the masters of the art of conducting skilfully what was essentially considered as an honourable encounter, were almost invariably to be found among a somewhat dishonoured gentry gladiators, free companions, professional champions, more or less openly recognized, or bravoes of the most uncompromising character.

In Germany, which may be considered the cradle of systematic swordsmanship, these teachers of the sword had, as early as the 15th century, formed themselves into guilds; among which the best known were the Marxbrüder, or the Associates of St Marcus of Lowenberg, who had their headquarters at Frankfurt, and branches in all the more important towns. Similarly, in Spain and in northern Italy, professional swordsmen were at various times allowed to form themselves into recognized or at least tolerated associations.

In England swordsmen had been looked upon with especial disfavour by the powers that were, until Henry VIII., who was a great lover of all manly exercises, found it likewise advisable to turn their obnoxious existence to a disciplined and profitable channel by regularizing their position. The most redoubtable masters were allowed to form themselves into a company, with powers to increase their numbers with suitable and duly tried men, in imitation of the world-famed German Marxbrüder or Marcusbrüder. Under these conditions they were granted the lucrative monopoly of teaching the art of fight in England. The enormous privileges that the king, in course of time, conferred on his Corporation of Masters of Defence very soon enabled it to put down or absorb all the more ferocious of independent swashbucklers, and thereby to impart to the profession a moderate degree of respectability

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under the coat of arms granted by the royal heralds: gules a sword pendant argent.

It was in the midst of such corporations and in the fighting dens of independent swordsmen, therefore, that sprouted the first buds of systematic swordsmanship. Among the professional fencers, curiously and happily for the historian, there seem to have been a few with a literary turn of mind.

The oldest manuscripts of fence belong to Italy and Germany. They deal with the methods of carrying out single combats on foot, with any of the most generally accepted weapons long sword and short sword, dagger and every kind of knives, mace, long and short staff, axes, &c., and with the tricks of wrestling recommendable therefore. Among the most comprehensive in their scope may be mentioned *Il Fior di Battaglia di Maestro Fiore dei Liberi da Premariacco*; a work which, although illustrated with truly Italian taste and grace, shows, as far as its fighting style is concerned, unmistakable marks of German influence. The text of the MS bears the date 1410, but the writer was known to be flourishing as a master offence as early as 1383. A reprint of this invaluable codex has been published, under the care of Francesco Donati, by the Istituto Italiano D'Arti Grafiche. Another is the better known *Thalhofers Fecht Buch, Gerichtliche und andere Zweikämpfe darstellend* (1467), a reprint of which, with its 268 plates in facsimile, was brought out by Gustav Hergsell in Prague. The oldest printed book is likewise German: *Ergründung der ritterlichen kunst des fechtens, von Andre Pauernfeindt, Freyfechter czu Vienn* (1516). This work, which is exceedingly rare, is a very complete exponent of the ways of wielding long and short blades to the utmost of their lethal capacity. It was reproduced (under various titles, very confusing to the bibliographer) in Frankfurt, Augsburg, Strassburg, and finally done into French under the name of *La Noble science des joueurs d'epee*, published in Paris and Antwerp, 1535.

Following the Germans, the oldest printed books of fence are Italian. The first French book on the sword is known to be a translation from the German. Curiously enough, the second, and one of the most notable, *Le Trait de l'epee seule; mere de toutes armes*, of the *Sieur de St Didier*, published in Paris in 1573, can be shown to be a transparent adaptation of two Italian treatises, the *Trattato di Scienza d'Armes*' of Camillo Agrippa, and Grassi's

Ragione di adoprare sicuramente l'arme, &c.

It is about this time, namely, the latter half of the 16th century, that swordsmanship pure and simple may be said to find its origin; for then a great change is perceptible in the nature and tendency of fence books: they dissociate themselves from indecorous wrestling tricks, and approximate more and more to the consideration of what we understand by swordsmanship. The older works expounded the art of fighting generally; taught the reader a number of valuable, if not gentlemanlike, dodges for overcoming an adversary at all manner of weapons: now the lucubrations of fence-masters deal almost exclusively with the walking sword, that is, the duelling weapon with the rapier in fact, both with and without its lieutenant, the dagger.

It must be remembered that at this period private duelling and cavalier quarrelsomeness amounted to a perfect mania. The fencing master was no longer merely a teacher of efficacious, if rascally, tricks; he was becoming a model of gallant deportment; in many cases he was even a recognized arbiter on matters of honour. He was often a gentleman himself: at all events he posed as such.

Although the Germans were always redoubtable adepts at the rougher games of swordsmanship, it is in Italy that is to be found development of that nimbler, more regulated, more cunning, better controlled, kind of play which we have learned to associate with the term fencing. It was from Italy that the art of fence first spread over Europe: not from Spain, as it has been asserted by many writers. The Italians if we take their early books as evidence, and the fact that their phraseology was adopted by all Europe were the first to perceive (as soon as the problem of armour-breaking ceased to be the most important one in fight) the superior efficiency of the point. They accordingly reduced the breadth of their sword, modified the hilt portion thereof to admit of readier thrust action, and relegated the cut to quite a secondary position in their system. With this lighter weapon they devised in course of time that brilliant cunning play known as rapier fence.

The rapier was ultimately adopted everywhere by men of courtly habit; but, in England at least, it was not accepted without murmur and vituperation from the older fighting class of swordsmen, especially from the members and admirers of the English Corporation of Defence Masters. As a body

Englishmen were as conservative then as they are now. They knew the value of what they had as their own, and distrusted innovations; especially from foreign quarters. The old sword and the buckler were reckoned as your true English weapons: they always went together in fact sword and buckler play in the 16th century was evidently held to be as national a game as boxing came to be in a later age. Many are the allusions in contemporary dramatic literature to this characteristic national distrust of continental innovations. There is the well-known passage in *Porters play*; *The Two Angry Women of Abingdon*, for instance: Sword and buckler fight, says a sturdy Briton (in much the same tone of disgust as a British lover of fisticuffs might now assume when talking of a French Monsieur's foil play), begins to grow out of use. I am sorry for it. I shall never see good manhood again. If it be once gone, this poking fight with rapier and dagger will come up. Then the tall man (that is, a courageous man and a good sword-and-buckler man) will be spitted like a cat or a rabbit! The long-sword, that is, the two-hander, was also an essentially national weapon. It was a right-down pleasing and sturdy implement, recalling in good steel the vernacular quarterstaff of old. It required thews and sinews, and, incidentally, much beef and ale. The long-sword man looked perhaps with even greater disfavour than the smaller swashbuckler upon the new-fangled bird-spit. Tut, man, says Justice Shallow, typical idolater of the good bygone days, on hearing of the ridiculous Frenchmans skill with his rapier, I could have told you more. In these times you stand on distance, your passes, stoccadoes, and I know not what; 'tis the heart, Master Page; 'tis here, 'tis here. I have seen the time, with my long-sword, I would have made you four tall fellows skip like rats.

Now, sword-and-buckler and long-sword play was no doubt a manly pursuit and a useful. But, as an every-day companion, the long-sword was incongruous to a fastidious cavalier; and, again, the buckler, indispensable adjunct to the broad swashing blade of home production, was hardly more suitable. In Elizabethan days it soon became obvious that the buckler was inadmissible as an item of gentlemanly attire. It was accordingly left to the body attendant; and the gallant took kindly to the fine rapier of Milanese or Toledan make. On the other hand, it is not difficult to understand the

rapid popularity gained among the gentry by this nimble rapier, so much reviled by the older fighting men. The rapier, in fact, came in with the taste for cavaliero style, and may be looked upon as its fit outward symbol already in the days of Queen Mary. In Elizabeths reign it was firmly established as your only gentlemanlike weapon.

The rapier was decidedly a foreigner; yet it suited the Elizabethan age, for it was decorative as well as practical. Its play was picturesque, fantastic almost euphuistic, one might say in comparison with the matter-of-fact hanger of older days. Its phraseology had a quaint, rich, southern smack, which connoted outlandish experience and gave those conversant with its intricate distinctions that marvellous character, at once precious and ruffling, which was so highly appreciated by the cavalier youth of the time. The rapier in its heyday was an admirable weapon to look at, a delicious one to wield. And, besides, in proper hands, it was undoubtedly one that was most conclusive. It was, in short, as elegant and deadly as its predecessors were sturdy and brutal.

By the time that the most perfect, namely, the Italian, rapier fence came to be generally taught in England that is, during the last third of Elizabeths reign the theory of swordsmanship, as applied to a single combat, after having passed through many phases of imperfection, was already tolerably simple and practical. (The exact story of its evolution. may be found in a work now included in *Bohns Libraries, Schools and Masters of Fence*.) What may be considered as one of the cardinal actions of regulated sword-play on foot, namely, the lunge, had already been discovered. Although a great many movements which, according to modern notions, would be considered not only unnecessary but actually pernicious, still formed part of the system, it may be doubted whether, considering the character of the weapon, anything very much better could be devised, even in our present state of knowledge.

For it must be remembered that the evolution of the forms of the sword and of the theories concerning its most efficient use are closely connected. It is in fact, sometimes difficult to decide whether the change in the shape of the weapon was the result of a development of a theory; or whether new theories were elaborated to fit alterations in these shapes due to fashion or any other reason.

When systematic fence came over to England it

was already much simplified (it should be noted that improvement in the art, from its earliest days down to the present time, seems always to have been in the direction of simplification); yet, for more than a century from the appearance of the first real treatise, simplification never reached that point which would render impossible a belief in the undoubted efficacy of those secret thrusts, of that universal parry, of those ineluctable passes, which every master professed to teach. These precious secrets remain long, among a certain shady class of swordsmen, an object of untiring study, carried on with much the same faith and zest as the quest of the alchemist for his powder of projection, or of the Merchant Adventurer for El Dorado. There can, of course, be no such thing as an insuperable pass, a secret thrust or parry; every attack can be parried, every parry can be deceived by suitable movements. Yet there was some justification for the belief in the existence of secrets of swordsmanship in days when, as a rule, lessons of fence were given in jealous privacy; constant practice at one particular pass, especially with the long rapier, which required a great deal of muscular strength, might render any peculiarly fierce, sudden and audacious stroke excessively dangerous to one who did not happen to have opposed that stroke before. Undoubtedly there was little in Elizabethan fencing schools of what we understand in modern days by loose-play between the pupils; practice was almost invariably conducted between scholar and teacher in private; and thus the opportunities for watching or testing any particular fencers play were few. Such an opportunity would, as a rule, only occur on occasions of an earnest fight; and the possessor of a specially bandy thrust (if it came off at all) would of course take good care that his opponent should not live to ponder over the secret. The secret, such as it was, remained. In this guise it was inevitable that an almost superstitious belief in secret foynes, in the *botte secreta* of certain practised duellists, should arise.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that towards the end of the 16th century there were many free-lances in the field of arms who professed to teach, in exchange for much gold, strokes that were not to be parried. From one truculent personage, whom Brantôme mentions, Tappa the Milanese, you could learn how to cut (if it so took your fancy) both eyes out of your adversarys face with a *rinverso tondo*, or

circular reverse of the point. From Caizo, another Italian teacher, at one time much favoured by the French court, lessons were to be had in the special art of ham-stringing. Caizos *botte secreta* seems to have been nothing more nor less than a *falso manco*, that is, a left-handed drawing cut, at the inside of the knee. But, as practised and taught by him, it was infallible. This stroke has come down to us as *le coup de Jarnac* a stroke, be it said, which, notwithstanding its bad name, was quite as fair as any in rapier fence. One *Le Flamand*, a French master in Paris, was reputed the inventor of a jerky time-thrust at the adversarys brows, which was a certainty. This special *foyne*, which was merely an *imbrocata* at the head, has become legendary in the fencing world as *la botte de Nevers*. English fencers have their own legends about the very butcher of a silk button, and this brings us to the first writer on the rapier in England, Vincenzo Saviolo, the great expounder of that Italianated fence which was so obnoxious to the old masters, withal so much admired of Elizabethan courtiers; the man, in short, who there seems to be much internal evidence to show it was Shakespeares fencing master.

Vincenzo was not the only foreign master of note established in London during the latter part of Elizabeths reign. One, Signor Rocco, had, we hear, a very gorgeously appointed academy in Warwick Lane, near St Pauls, where he coined money rapidly at the expense of gulls and gallants alike. But this man came to grief ultimately in an encounter with the longsword with an old-fashioned English master of defence. Another popular teacher was a certain Jeronimo; but he also met with a melancholy and premature end by the hands of one Cheese, a tall man in his fight and natural English, says George Silver, the champion of the Corporation of Masters of Defence. Saviolo, however, seems to have remained unconquered. In his work (*Vincenzio Saviolo, his practise, in two bookes, the first intreating of the use of the Rapier and Dagger, the second of Honor and honorable quarrels*. London. Printed by John Wolfe, 1595) are expounded in a most typical manner the principles of rapier play.

The fencing phraseology of Elizabethan times is highly picturesque, but with difficulty intelligible in the absence of practical demonstration. Without going into technical details it may be pointed out that the long Elizabethan rapier, however admirably balanced it might otherwise be, was still

too heavy to admit of quick parries with the blade itself. Thrusts, as a rule, had to be avoided by body movements, by ducking, or by a vault aside (*incartata*), or beaten away with the left hand, the hand being protected with a gauntlet or armed with a dagger. In fact, one may say that the chief characteristic of Elizabethan sword-play was the concerted action of the left hand parrying while the right delivered the attack. Benvolio's description of Tybalt's fight is graphic: With piercing steel he tilts at bold Mercutio's breast, Who, all as hot, turns deadly point to point, And with a martial scorn, with one hand beats Cold death aside, and with the other Sends it back to Tybalt, whose dexterity Retorts it.

Of these body movements, in Saviolo's days, the most approved were: the *incartata*, just mentioned; the *pass* (the *passado*, in the ruffling Anglo-Italian jargon), that is, passing of one foot in front of the other whilst delivering the attack; the *botta lunga*, or lunge; and the *caricado*, which was a far-reaching combination of the two. Of systematic sword movements there were six: *stocata*, a thrust delivered with nails upwards; *imbrocata*, with nails down; *punta-reversa*, any thrust delivered from the left side of the body; *mandritto*, a cut from the right; *verso*, one from the left; *stramazone*, a right-down blow with the point of the sword.

The new art of fence, as systematized by the principles of rapier play, was on the whole already accepted in England during the last decade of the 16th century, and was, as we know, destined to endure. Nevertheless, there were still many partisans of the older school: lovers of the national short-sword and the buckler. Their tenets are to be found embodied, in very strenuous language, by the George Silver mentioned above, a member, it would seem, of the now dwindling company of Masters of Defence, in his small work: *Paradoxes of Defence*, wherein is proved the true ground of fight to be in the short ancient weapons, etc. Printed in London, 1599. (The work has been reprinted by Messrs George Bell & Sons.)

The Italians were undoubtedly the leaders in sword-play; but, towards the beginning of the 17th century, the Spaniards developed a peculiar school of their own, which for a short while was all the mode in England as well as in France. The last trace, be it stated, of that school is now extinct. Yet the Spaniard of cavalier days was undoubtedly

a formidable duellist; that was no doubt owing to the quality of the man, not of his art. The Italian fence was artistic; the Spaniards' dexterity was essentially scientific. In Spain were to be found typically those Captains of Complements, who not only understood in their most intricate mazes the proper dependencies for the cartel, but also the mathematical certainties for the reason demonstrative. These Spanish books are marvellously pedantic; one may as well say it, frankly ridiculous. Spanish masters instructed their scholars on mathematical lines, with the help of diagrams drawn on the floor within a circle, the radius of which bore certain cryptic proportions to length of human arms and Spanish swords. The circle was inscribed in squares and intersected by sundry chords bearing occult but, it was held, incontrovertible relations to probabilities of strokes and parries. The scholar was to step from certain intersections to certain others. If this stepping was correctly done the result was a foregone victory. A villain, exclaims Mercutio, indignantly, who fights by the book of arithmetic. Elizabethan comedies bring us many an echo of its great expounder of mathematical swordsmanship, the magnificent Carranza, the primer inventor of *la Ciencia de las Armas*, the writer of treatises so abstruse on the first and second cause, in questions of honour and swording, that they have never been quite understood to this day.

Perhaps the most curious matter in connection with the Spanish fence is that the most splendid treatise of the sword published in the French language is in reality purely Spanish (we have seen that the first was German, and the second an adaptation of Italian treatises). This third work, *Académie de l'épée de Girard Thibault, d'Anvers, etc.*, is indeed a monument; one of the biggest books ever printed, and beyond compare the biggest book of fence. It was issued in 1628 by the Leiden Elzevirs, and took fifteen years to complete. Nine reigning princes and a vast number of private gentlemen subscribed to meet its stupendous expenses.

This work was spoken of as a monument. It may, in some respects, be looked upon as the funeral monument of the old rapier fence; for soon after that period rose an entirely new school, one adapted to the use of a less portentous weapon, the small-sword of French pattern; a school destined to endure, and to lead to the perfection of our modern *escrime*.

The evolution of this new school is an instance of the influence of fashion upon the shape of the sword, and hence upon theories concerning its use. The French school of fencing may be said to owe its origin to the adoption, under Louis XIV., of the short court-sword in place of the over-long wide-hilted rapier of the older style. With a weapon of such reduced dimensions, of such reduced weight, the advantage of the dagger as a fencing adjunct at once ceased to be felt. The dagger, last Gothic remnant, disappeared accordingly; and there arose rapidly a new system of play, in which most of the defensive actions were performed by the blade alone; in which, at the same time (the reduction in the size and weight of the weapon rendering the efficiency of the edge almost nugatory in comparison with that of the point), all cutting action was ultimately discarded.

It is from that date, namely, from the last third of the 17th century, that the sword, as a fighting implement, becomes differentiated into two very different directions. The military weapon becomes the back-sword or sabre; the walking companion and duelling weapon becomes what we now understand by the small-sword. Two utterly different kinds of fence are practised: one, that of the back-sword; the other, what we would now call foil-play.

The magnificent old cut and thrust rapier still flourished, it is true, in parts of Italy and Spain; but by the end of the 17th century it had already become an object of ridicule in the eyes of all persons addicted to *bon ton* and it must be remembered that *bon ton*, on the Continent everywhere and even in England, at that time, was French *ton*. The walking sword, fit for a gentlemen's side, was therefore the small-sword of Versailles pattern. Its use had to be learnt from French masters of deportment; the old magniloquent Italo-Spanish rapier jargon was forgotten; French terms, barbarized into *carte*, *tierce*, *sagoon*, *fianquonade*, and so forth, were alone understood. In fact, French fencing became as indispensable an accomplishment to the Georgian gentlemen as the fine Italianated foyning had been to the Elizabethan.

The new French sword-play was, it must be owned, very neat, quiet, precise, and, if anything, even more deadly than the old fence. It was perfect as a decorous mode of fight, and as well suited to the lace ruffles, to the high perruque and the red heels of the beau as the long cup-hilted

rapier had been to the booted and spurred cavalier. The essence of its play was nimbleness of wrist; it required quickness of spirit rather than muscular vigour. It is to be noted, however, that the same sort of popular opposition met the invasion of French fencing, in post-Restoration days, that had been offered to the new-fangled Italian rapier a century earlier. During the Parliamentary period the rapier and its attendant dagger had practically disappeared; they were not true warlike weapons, their chief virtue was for duelling or sudden encounters. But the stout English back-sword survived; and with it a very definite school of back-sword play. Under Charles II., the amusement of stage or prize-fighting with swords had become a *la mode*. Courteous assaults at many weapons, of course rebated, had been frequent functions under the auspices of the Corporation of Masters of Defence during the second half of the 16th century; it is (be it remarked) in such sword-matches on the scaffold that we find the origin of our modern prize-fights at fisticuffs. The first instance known of a challenge at sharps on the fighting stage is seen in a cartel sent by George Silver and Toby his son, as champions of the Corporation of Masters of Defence, to the obnoxious Signors Saviolo and Jeronimo. As a matter of fact, the latter, having apparently no wish to improve their excellent social position or to risk forfeiting it, declined this invitation to a public trial of skill. But the idea was right martial and pleasing to the English mind, and the fashion of prize-fighting took the firm hold it retained on English minds till stringent legislation, not so very long ago, was brought to bear upon it. Be it as it may, this prize-fighting with swords endured until middle Georgian days; when, under the impetus given to fistic displays then by the renowned Figg (who was at one and the same time the most formidable of English fencers and the first on the long list of English pugilistic champions), back-swording became relegated to the provinces, and ultimately dwindled into our bastard single-stick.

Fencing, in its restricted sense of purely thrusting play, was always an academic art in England. The first great advocate and exponent of the new small-sword fence, as taught by the new French school, was Sir William Hope of Balcomy, at one time deputy governor of Edinburgh Castle, who wrote a great number of quaint treatises of great interest to the operative as well as to the specula-

tive fencer. Yet, oddly enough, Sir William Hope was instrumental in endeavouring to push through parliament a bill for the establishment of a court of honour, the office of which was to have been the deciding of honourable quarrels, whenever possible, without appeal to fencing skill. The House, however, being at the time excited and busy on the question of the union of Scotland and England, the bill never became act.

To resume: since it began to be practised as a regulated art one may say broadly that sword play has already passed through four main phases. The first belongs to the early Tudor days of sword and buckler encounters, whereof, if the best theoretical treatises appeared in Italy, the sturdiest practical exponents were most probably found in the British Isles. Then came the age of the rapier; coeval with the general disuse of the buckler. There may be discerned the dawn of fencing proper, which will fully arise when, in Caroline times, the outrageous length of the blade will at last be sufficiently reduced no longer to require the dagger as a help-mate. The third was the age of the smallsword. With its light, elegant and deadly practice we enter a new atmosphere, so to speak, on fencing ground. Suppleness of wrist and precision of fingering replace the ramping and traversing, the heavy forcing play, of the Elizabethan. If the rapier age was well exemplified by Vincentio Saviolo, this one was typified, albeit perhaps at a time when it was already somewhat on the wane, by the admirable Angelo Tremamondo Malevolti.

In the early days of the small-sword age men still fenced in play as they fought in earnest. But presently there appeared on the scene (during the last years of the 18th century) an implement destined to revolutionize the art and hopelessly to divide the practice of the school from that of the field: that was the fencing mask. Before this invention, small-sword play in the masters room was perforce comparatively cautious, correct, sure and above all deliberate. The long, excited, argumentative phrases of modern assaults were unknown; and so was the almost inevitably consequent scrimmage. But under the protection of the fencing mask a new school of foil-play was evolved, one in which swiftness and inveteracy of attack and parry, of riposte, remise, counter-riposte and reprise, assumed an all-important character. With the new style began to assert itself that utter recklessness of chance

hits which in our days so markedly differentiates foil-practice from actual duelling. And this brings us to the fourth phase, the fencing art, to what may be called the age of the foil.

If anything were required to demonstrate that foil-play has nowadays passed into the state of what may be called fine art in athleticism, it would be found in the rise of the method which French masters particularize as *le jeu du terrain*, as duelling play in fact; a play which differs as completely from academic foil fencing as cross-country riding in an unknown district from the *haute école* of horsemanship in the *mange*. By fencing, nowadays, that is by foil-play, we have come to mean not simply fighting for hits, but a strictly regulated game which, being quite conventional, does not take accidental hits into consideration at all. This game requires for its perfect display a combination of artificial circumstances, such as even floors, featherweight weapons, and an unconditional acceptance of a number of traditional conventions. Now, for the more utilitarian purposes of duelling, the major part of the foil fencers special achievement and brilliancy has to be uncompromisingly sacrificed in. the presence of the brutal fact that thrusts in the face, or below the waist, do count, insomuch as they may kill; that accidental hits in the arm or the leg cannot be disregarded, for they may, and generally do, put a premature stop to the bout. The rub on the green must be accepted, perforce, and indeed often plays as important a part in the issue of the game as the players skill. The fact, however, that in earnest encounters all conventionalities which determine the value of a hit vanish, does not in any way justify the notion, prevalent among many, that a successful hit justifies any method of planting the same; and that the mere discarding of all convention in practical sword-play is sufficient to convert a bad fencer into a dangerous duellist.

It is the recognition of this fact (which, oddly enough, only came to be generally admitted, and not without reluctance, by the masters of the art during the last quarter of the 19th century) which has led to the elaboration of the modified system of small-sword fence now known as *epee* play. The new system, after passing through various rather extravagant phases of its own, gradually returned to the main principle of sound foil-play, but shorn of all futile conventions as to the relative values of hits. In *epee* play a hit is a hit, whether correctly

delivered or reckless, whether intentional or the result of mere chance, and must, at the cost of much caution and patience, be guarded against.

Per contra the elaboration by the devotees of the epee of a really practical system of fence, that is, one applicable to trials in earnest, has reacted upon the teaching of foil-play by the best masters of the present day a teaching which, without ceasing to be academical up to a certain point, takes now cognisance of the necessity of defending every part of the body as sedulously as the target of the breast, and, moreover, of warding the many possibilities of chance hits in *contretemps*.

In both plays in the highly refined, complicated and brilliant fence of the first-class foil, as well as in the simpler and more cautious operations of the practised duellist the one golden rule remains, that one so quaintly expressed by M. Jourdain's *maitre d'armes* in Moliere's comedy: *Tout le secret des armes ne consiste qu'en deux choses, à donner et à ne point recevoir.*

The point most usually lost sight of by sanguine and self-reliant scornors of conventionalities is that, although with the sword it may be comparatively easy at any time to give, it is by no means easy to make sure of giving without receiving. The mutual simultaneous hit, the *coup-double* is, in fact, the dread pitfall of all sword-play. For this reason, in courteous bouts, a hit has no real value, not only when it is actually cancelled by a counter, but when it is delivered in such a way as to admit of a counter. In short, the experience of ages and the careful consideration of probabilities have given birth to the various make-believes and restrictions that go to make sound foil-play. These restrictions are destined to act in the same direction as the warning presence of a sharp point instead of a button; and thus, as far as possible, to prevent those mutual hits the *contretemps* of the old masters which mar the greater number of assaults. The proper observance of those conventions, other things being equal, distinguishes the good from the indifferent swordsman, the man who uses his head from him who rushes blindly where angels fear to tread. So much for foil-play.

In modern sword-play, on the other hand, is seen the usual tendency of arts which have reached their climax of complication to return to comparative simplicity. With reference to actual duelling, it is a recognized thing that it would be the height

of folly to attempt, sword in hand, the complex attacks, the full-length lunges, the neat but somewhat weak parries of the foil; so much so, that many have been led to assert that, for its ultimate practical purpose (which logically is that of duelling), the refined art of the foil, requiring so many years of assiduous and methodical work, is next to useless. It is alleged, as a proof, that many successful duellists have happened to be indifferent performers on the fencing floor. Some even maintain that a few weeks special work in that restricted very restricted play, which alone can be considered safe on the field of honour, will produce as good a practical swordsman, as any who have walked the schools for years. Nothing can be further from the truth: were it but on the ground that the greater includes the less; that the foil-fencer of standing who can perform with ease and accuracy all the intricate movements of the assault, who has trained his hand and eye to the lightning speed of the well handled foil, must logically prove more than a match for the more purely practical but less trained devotees of the *epee de combat*. The only difference for him in the two plays is that the latter is incomparably slower in action, simpler; that it demands above all things patience and caution; and especially that, instead of protecting his breast only, the *epee* fencer must beware of the wily attack, or the chance hit, at every part of his body, especially at his sword-hand.

The difference which still exists between the French and Italian schools of small-sword fence by no means so wide, in point of theory, as popularly supposed is mainly due to the dissimilarity of the weapons favoured by the two countries.

The *quillons*, which are retained to this day in the Italian *fioretto* and *spada*, conduce to a freer use of wrist-play and a straight arm. The French, on the other hand, having long ago adopted the plain grip both for *fleuret* and *epee*, have come to rely more upon finger-play and a semi-bent arm. Both schools have long laid claims to an overwhelming superiority, on theoretical ground, over their rivals' claims which were unwarrantable. Indeed, of later days, especially since the evolution of a special duelling play, the two schools show a decided tendency, notwithstanding the difference in the grip of the weapons, towards a mutual assimilation of principles.

As a duelling weapon as one, that is to say, the

practice of which under the restrictive influence of conventions could become elaborated into an art the sabre returned to favour in some countries at the close of the Napoleonic wars. Considered from the historical point of view, the modern sabre, albeit now a very distant cousin of the small-sword, is as direct a descendant as the latter itself of the old cut-and-thrust rapier. It is curious, therefore, to note that, just as the practice of the small or thrusting sword gave rise to two rival schools, the French and the Italian, that of the sabre or cutting sword (it can hardly be called the broadsword, the blade, for the purposes of duelling play, having been reduced to slenderest proportions) became split up into two main systems, Italian and German. And further it is remarkable that the leading characteristics of the latter should still be, in a manner, severity and steadfastness; and that the former, the Italian, should rely, as of yore, specially upon agility and insidious cunning.

Concerning the latter-day evolution of that special and still more conventional system of fence, the Schlager or Hau rapier play favored by the German student, from that of the ancestral rapier, the curious will find a critical account in an article entitled *Schlagerei* which appeared in the *Saturday Review*, 5th of December 1885.

Authorities.

The bibliography of fencing is a copious subject; but it has been very completely dealt with in the following works:

Bibliotheca dimicatoria, in the *Fencing, Boxing and Wrestling* volume of the *Badminton library* (Longmans); *A Bibliography of Fencing and Duelling*, by Carl A. Thimm (John Lane).

For French works more especially: *La Bibliographie de l'escrime*, by Vigeant (Paris, Motteroz); and *Ma Collection descrime*, by the same (Paris, Quantin).

For Italian books: *Bibliografia generale della scherma*, by Gelli (Firenze, Niccolai).

For Spain and Portugal: *Libros de esgrima espaholes y portuguesas*, by Leguina (Madrid, Los Hurfanos). Both M. Vigeants and Cay. Gellis works deal with the subject generally; but their entries are overly critical, or even tolerably accurate, in the case of books belonging to their own countries-

Concerning the history of the art, Egerton Castles *Schools and Masters of Fence* (George Bell); Huttons *The Sword and the Centuries* (Grant Richards); and Le Tainturier-Fradins *Les Joueurs d'epee a travers les ages* (Paris, Flammarion) cover the ground, technically and ethically. As typical exponents of the French and Italian schools respectively may be mentioned here: *La Théorie de l'escrime*, by Prévost (Paris, de Brunhof) (this is the work which was adopted in the *Badminton volume on Fencing*), and *Trattato teorico-pratico della scherma*, by Parise (Rome, Voghera). (E. CA.)