



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.





600049775







NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

ON

THE ART OF FENCING.

A SEQUEL TO 'FOIL PRACTICE.'

BY GEORGE CHAPMAN,

CAPT. LATE OF H. M. MILITIA.

PART I. NO. 1.

London:
CLOWES, CHARING CROSS.
1864.

Presented gratis with "Foil Practice," or separately, price 1s.

75.268 d 1.



NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS
ON
THE ART OF FENCING.

A TASTE for practising the Art of Fencing has Introduction. been for some years slowly, but steadily, increasing. Endeavours have recently been even made to introduce the use of the Foil as one of our military exercises, and many of our volunteer regiments have established Schools of Arms at their Head-quarters. Proficients in Fencing may, therefore, at the present moment, reasonably offer the fruits of their experience towards the furtherance of the art. In so doing, and in continuance of former endeavours, the author of the following observations proposes to explain the principles of Fencing, according to the theories of eminent Masters, and to expose the errors which have been promoted, or are tolerated by incompetent instructors;—so that the novice may be cautioned against common faults which, when contracted in the early lessons of Fencing, are ever after difficult of correction.

In the practice of all bodily exercises a correct application of the physical powers should be the primary consideration, and in the adoption of postures, necessary towards the accomplishments of every physical art, those actions which are the most grace-

ful or pleasing to the eye may be generally taken as the best rules by which to be guided. Now, graceful and just positions of the human frame are in no exercise whatsoever of more consequence than in that of Fencing, for upon them chiefly, the success of the Fencer depends.

The present number is devoted to the consideration of the positions of Attack and Defence. A few remarks upon the formation of the Small-sword, and its substitute the Foil, with an explanation of the manner of grasping the handle, are almost necessarily preliminary to subsequent observation.

Fencing.

All sword-play may be properly designated as Fencing, but the term is usually applied to the management of the Small-sword, and to the use of the point in thrusting only.

The Small-sword
and Rapier.

The SMALL-SWORD is constructed with three blunt edges upon which the parries are effected, and is hollowed between each edge for the purpose of rendering the blade stiff and light at the same time. By persons who have not given much attention to the construction of sword-blades, or who have not studied the subject of swordsmanship and its progress from past to present times, the Small-sword is often confounded with the RAPIER; and, indeed, in modern English dictionaries the word denotes a sword for thrusting with only.* This disregard of

Difference between
the weapons.

* In the vocabularies of other countries the distinction is frequently observed. The German Schläger, or cutting blade, for instance, is termed a Rapier. The Small-sword, and modern Fencing Foil, were introduced during the last century, before which the lesson in Fencing was practised with the "Tuck," a Rapier blade, narrowed, somewhat increased in solidity, and when blunted designated as a "Foile."

distinction is unimportant to most people, but, as the Art of Fencing may be considered a foundation for swordsmanship generally, all Fencers should understand the relative difference between the Rapier and Small-sword. For while the Small-sword is of triangular formation, and shaped only for thrusting, the Rapier, properly speaking, is a flat blade intended for both thrusting and cutting. In the course of instruction the Fencing-master should make it his duty to explain the difference between the triangular and double-edged weapons, so that his pupils may readily apply their abilities in Fencing to the management of either kind of blade, as it may casually come to hand. When the Parries with their varied application come to be treated of, the advantage to the Fencer in carefully distinguishing the difference alluded to, will be fully explained. Among the various actions which may be conveniently executed with the triangular or duelling sword there are many which cannot be so easily managed with a flat blade, or with the usual weapon of modern warfare, however light in weight that weapon may happen to be. Fencers among military men should be therefore cautioned against *indiscriminately* attempting with the Sword the performances usually taught in lessons with the Foil.

The FOIL is a truly quadrangular blade, so The Foil. formed that, from its pliancy, it may be better adapted for practice than the actual Sword. It should measure thirty-four inches from point to hilt. A shorter blade should not be used in practising the lesson. The best form of shell or guard is the ordinary double-ringed open iron one, but both sides of it should be bent upwards to protect the Guard thumb and fingers from injury.—[Careless teachers

Grip.

frequently neglect this precaution.]—The grip or handle should be in length at least seven inches,* almost square, slightly curved, and of nearly uniform size throughout; the convex and concave sides, in a trifling degree, wider than those on the right and left. It should be always (as it usually is), covered with twisted twine of two sizes, and should measure around from 2 to 3 inches according to choice, or the size of the player's hand. The pommel should weigh about 3 ozs. and should be barrel-shaped or oblong, rather than globular.†

Pommel.

Manner of holding the Foil.

The grasp with the fingers, or hold on the grip, should be firm but not strained, the thumb should be laid along the upper or convex side in a line with the point and almost touching the shell. The fingers should be closely pressed against each other upon the left side of the handle. The index should not be separated from the middle finger. A space or hollow should be left in the palm of the hand, between the little finger and the grip. The fingers should not be bent over the upper side of the grip; because, in so doing the play of the Foil cannot be managed as it should be by an action of the fingers (principally the thumb, index, and middle finger), but must proceed, as it should not, from the shoulder. A correct mani-

* Including the pommel.

† It has not been thought necessary to explain in these pages the manner of mounting the Foil, or fixing the pommel, handle, and guard to the blade. A full description thereof may be found in the Author's Treatise, 'Foil Practice,' published (Clowes) 1861, and recommended to the consideration of the Army, by General the Honourable Sir James Yorke Scarlett, Adjutant-General of the Forces, with the sanction of H.R.H. the Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief.

pulation of the handle of the Foil is a difficult attainment, in which even many strong Fencers never succeed. Far greater delicacy of grasp is necessary in the use of the Small-sword than in the use of a flat blade, or of a heavier weapon. But this is a subject to which indifferent teachers seldom pay attention: indeed they seldom understand it.

Of the POSITIONS IN FENCING, strictly speaking, there are but two, That of the DEFENCE and that of the ATTACK. As a preliminary position, previous to falling into the position of Defence, or, as it is termed, "On Guard," the Fencer should place himself in an upright position, the right heel in the hollow of the left ancle, the feet at right angles, the head turned sideways towards the adversary, and the left side of the breast slightly brought round to the front. The shoulders drooping, the arms lowered at the sides, the hilt held in front, and over the right knee. Bending the knees until the left be on a line with and directly over the toes, the right foot should be advanced (the heel on a line from the left ancle) to a distance of at least twice the length of the Fencer's foot, or, for a man of middle height, about twenty inches, so that the right knee may not overhang the instep. The stride should never be less, and when the Fencer is not vigorous of frame even more. In the position of Defence the utmost steadiness must be preserved, to insure which the left hip should be pressed inwards, and the frame supported in a perfectly upright line equally on both legs; attention should also be paid to the position of the right knee, so that it should not bend inwards. As the right foot is advanced the arms should at the

Positions.

Preliminary.

'On Guard.'

Length of stride
between the feet.

same time be raised, the elbows slightly bent, [the left forearm rather more than the right,] the palm of the left hand turned towards the left cheek, the point of the Foil presented directly at the adversary's face; the pommel on a line with and opposite the right nipple. From this position the Foil may be inclined either to the right or left, according to the line chosen for Attack or Defence.* In these movements, which should be combined, as it were, into one, care should be taken not to lift the shoulders, for the awkward effect of lifting the shoulders deprives a Fencer of all lightness of action in Attack, and renders his movements forced and clumsy in Defence. This ugly fault is also one of the many which careless teachers seldom notice.

The shoulders not to be lifted.

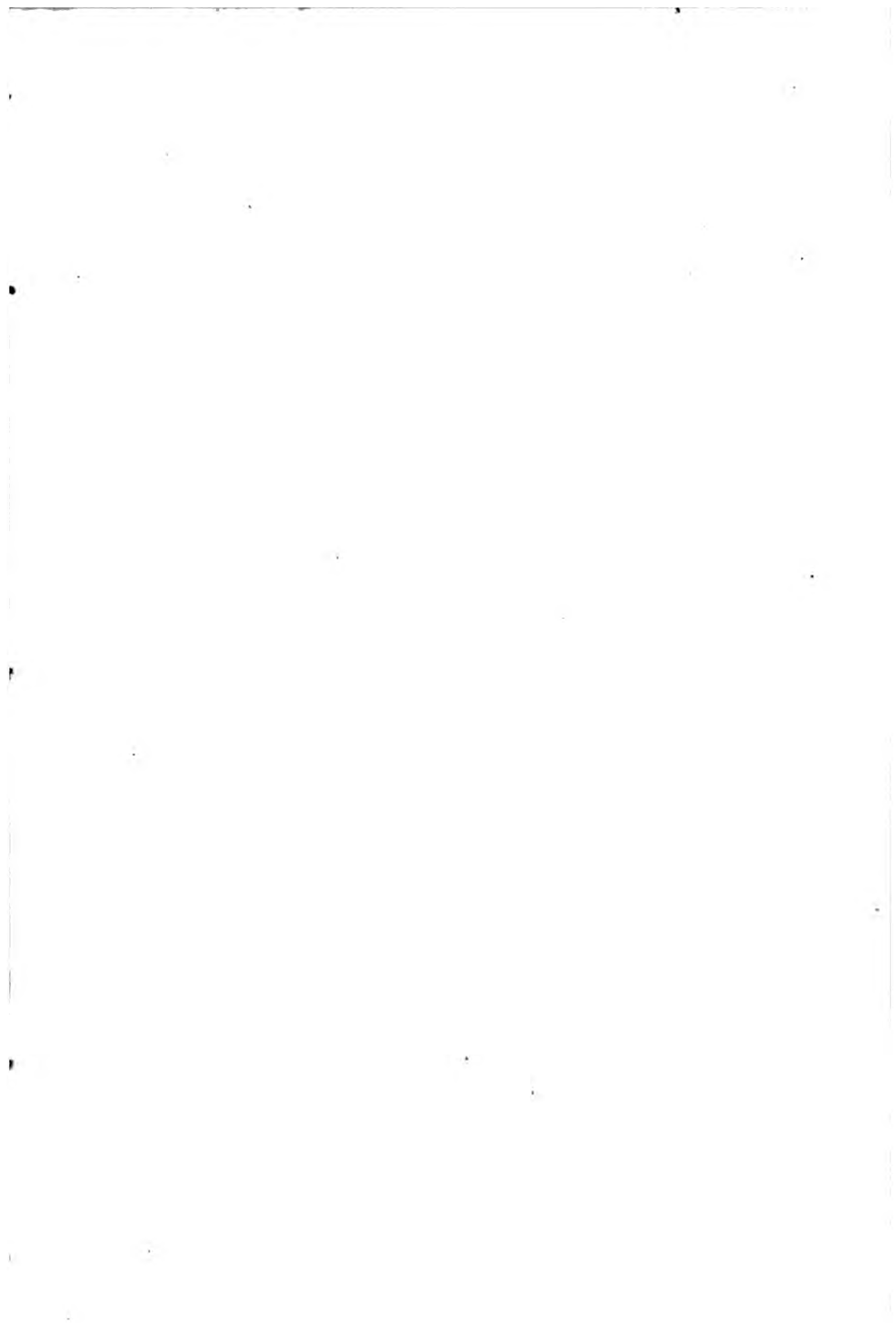
Correct position of Defence.

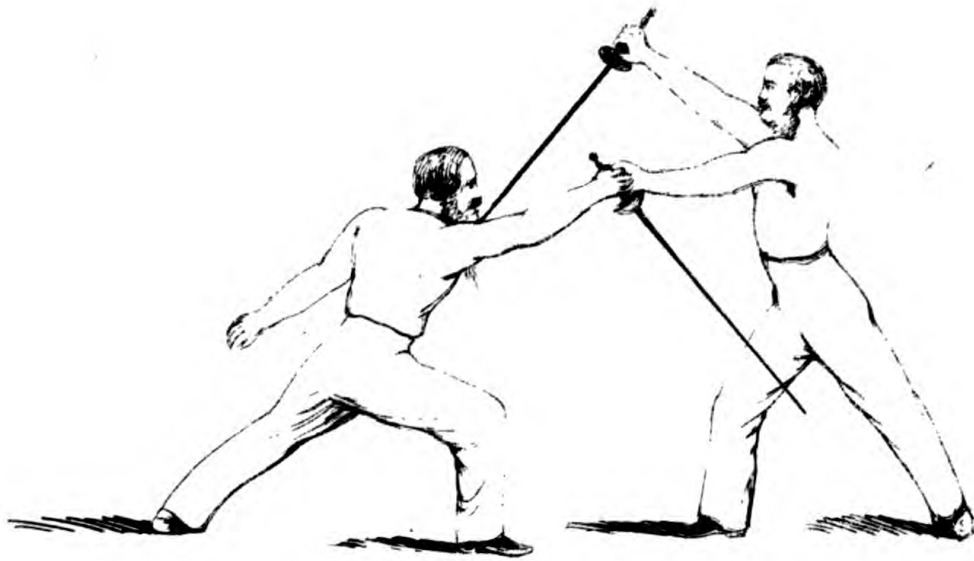
Design No. 1 illustrates the position in which the Fencer should place himself when 'On Guard,' when parrying, when advancing, and when retiring, nor, as a rule, should the head or body be swerved backwards, forwards, on the right or left, but should be retained in an erect position; so that the eye, though principally fixed upon the adversary's hilt, may not lose sight of his general actions.

The Advance and Retreat.

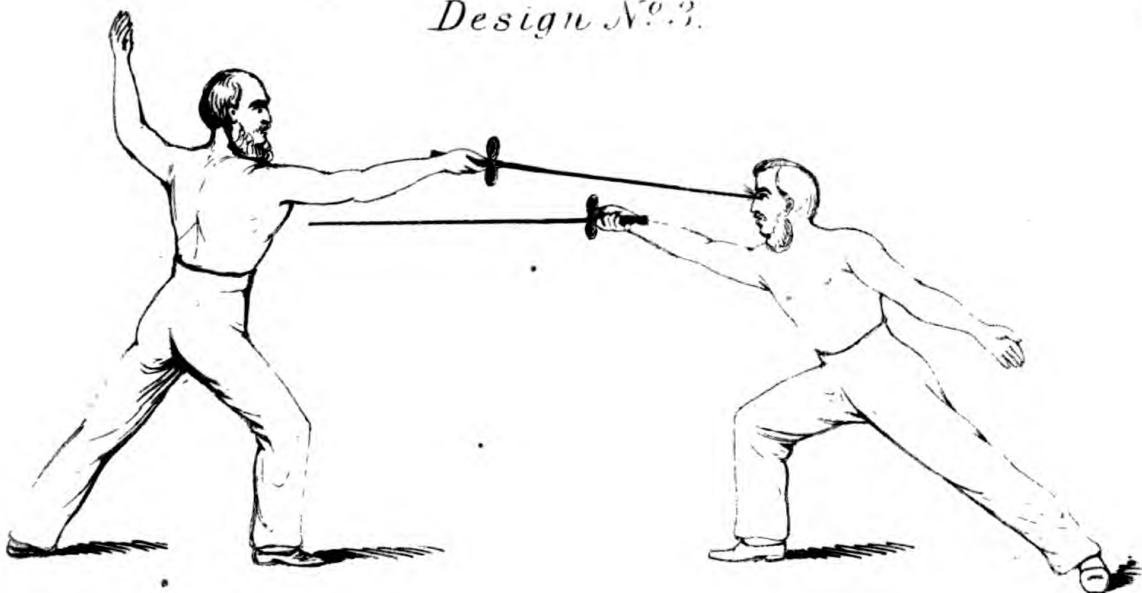
Thus placed the Fencer may easily and gracefully effect the ADVANCE, by first moving the right foot forward and then bringing up the left; or the

* Similar instructions, with a slight variation in the wording, may be seen in the Author's Treatise, 'Foil Practice' (1861), viz., from the preliminary and upright position. 1. Pass the sword hand across the body and grasp the hilt. 2. Raise both hands above the head, retaining their hold upon the grip and hilt. 3. Bend the elbows and knees. 4. Bring the sword's point to the front, withdrawing the left arm, and advancing the right foot.





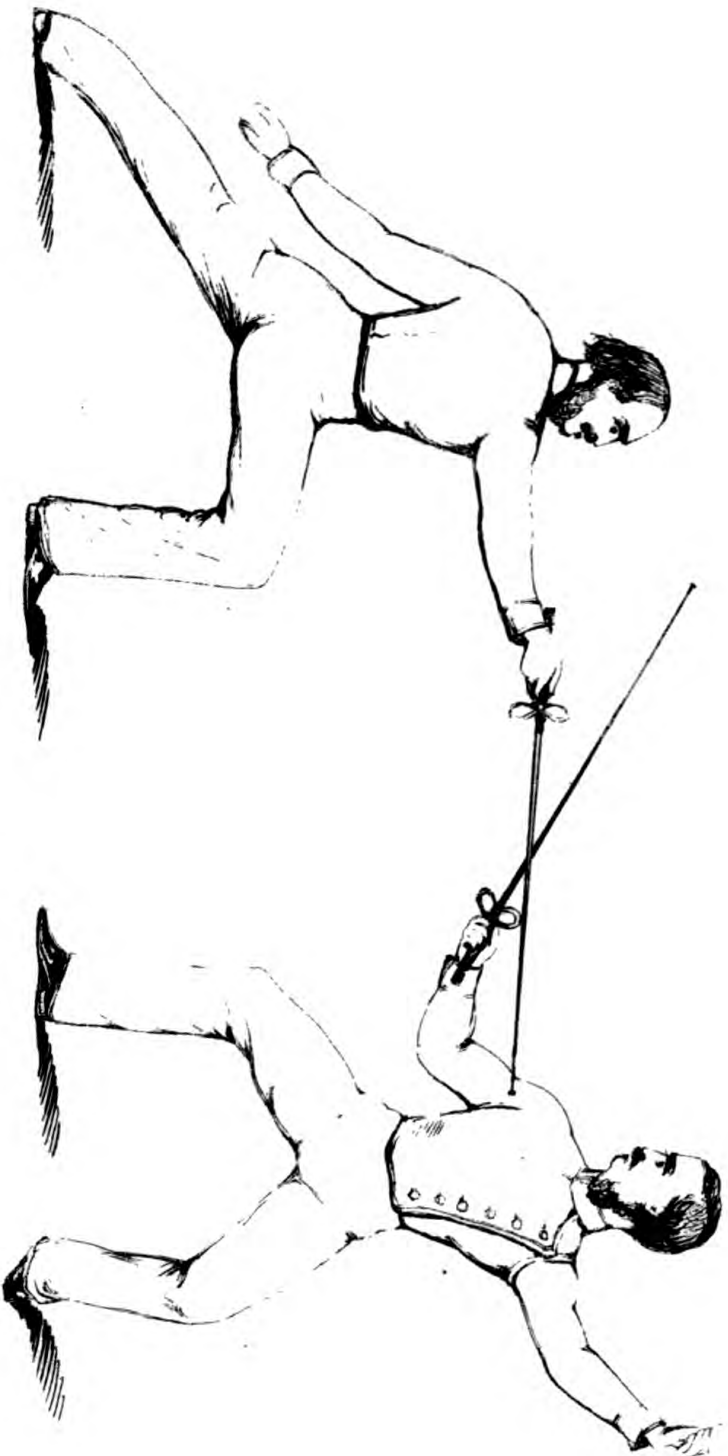
Design N^o 2.



Design N^o 3.

*Danger incurred in throwing the head and
shoulders forward on the Lunge.*

Design No 1.

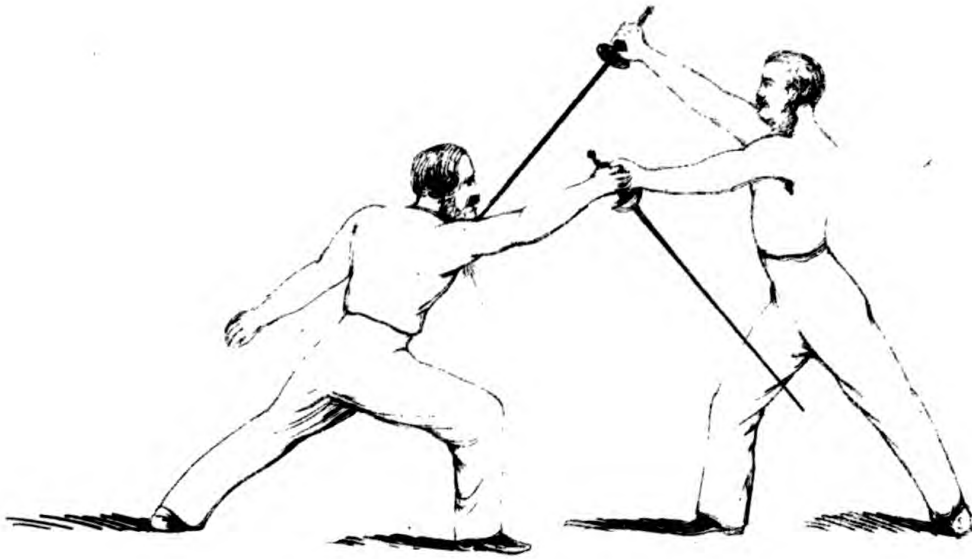


Positions.

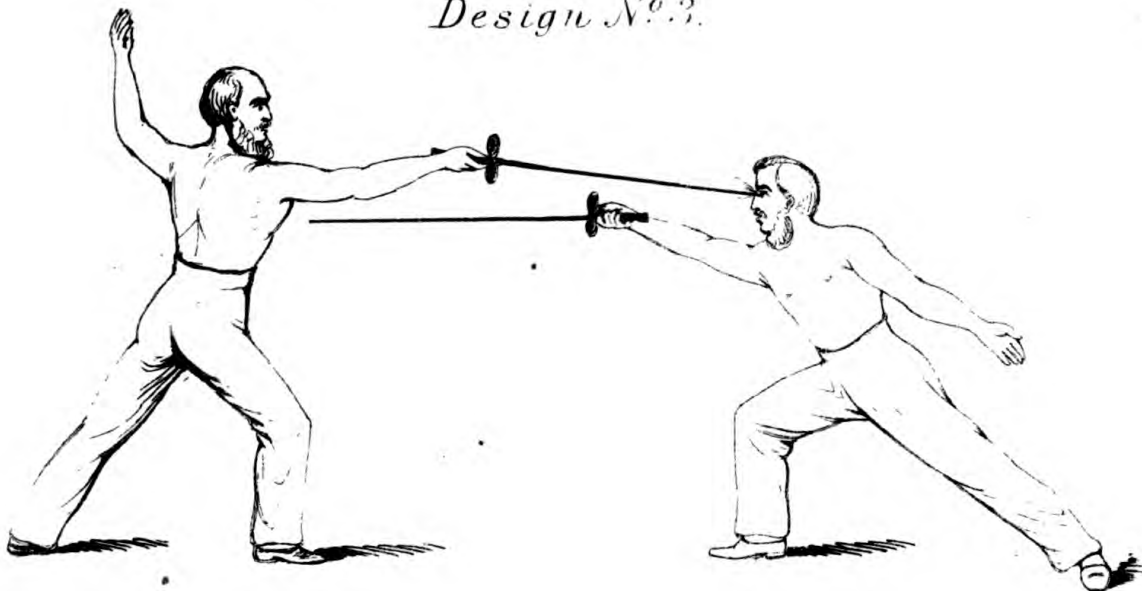
Of attack with the Lunge.

and

of Defence with a Parry in Carte.



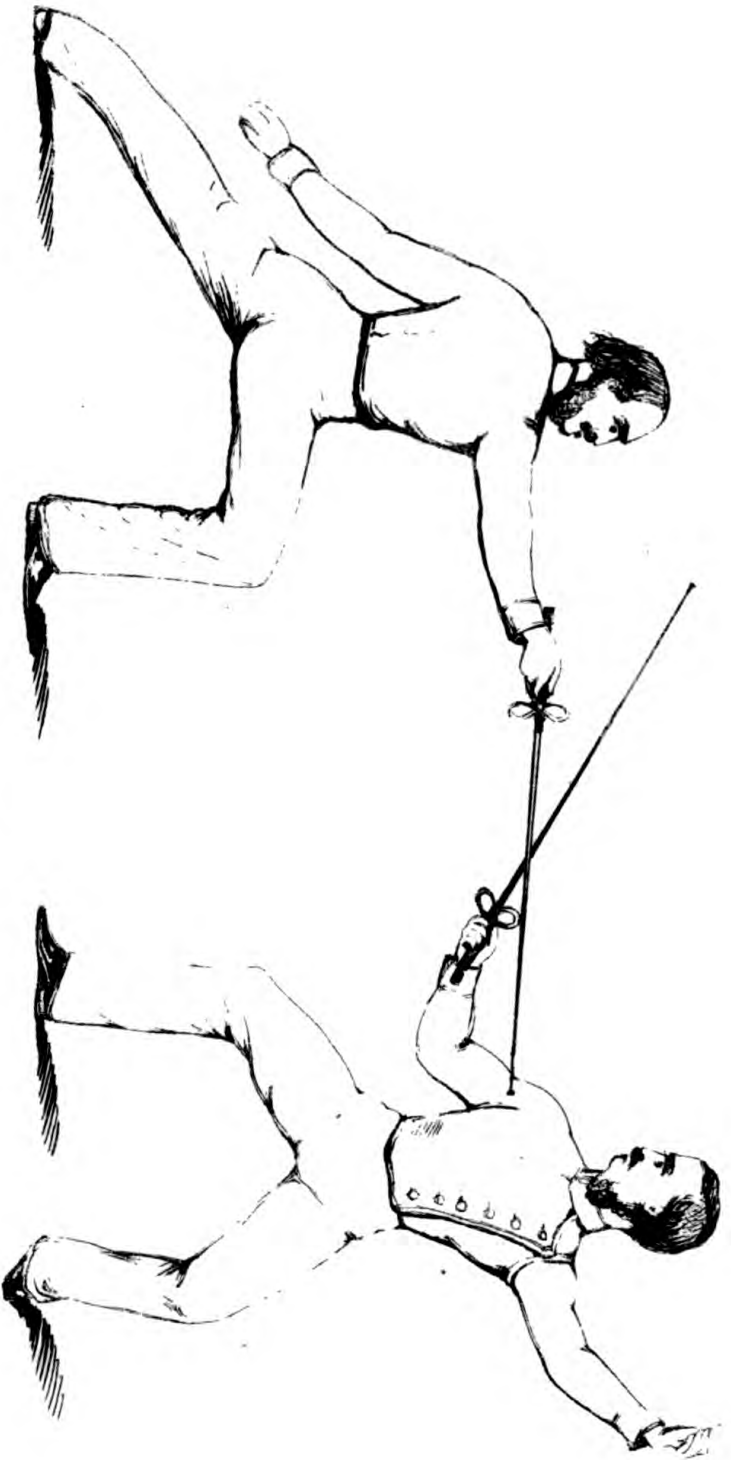
Design N^o. 2.



Design N^o. 3.

Danger incurred in throwing the head and shoulders forward on the Lunge.

Design No. 1.

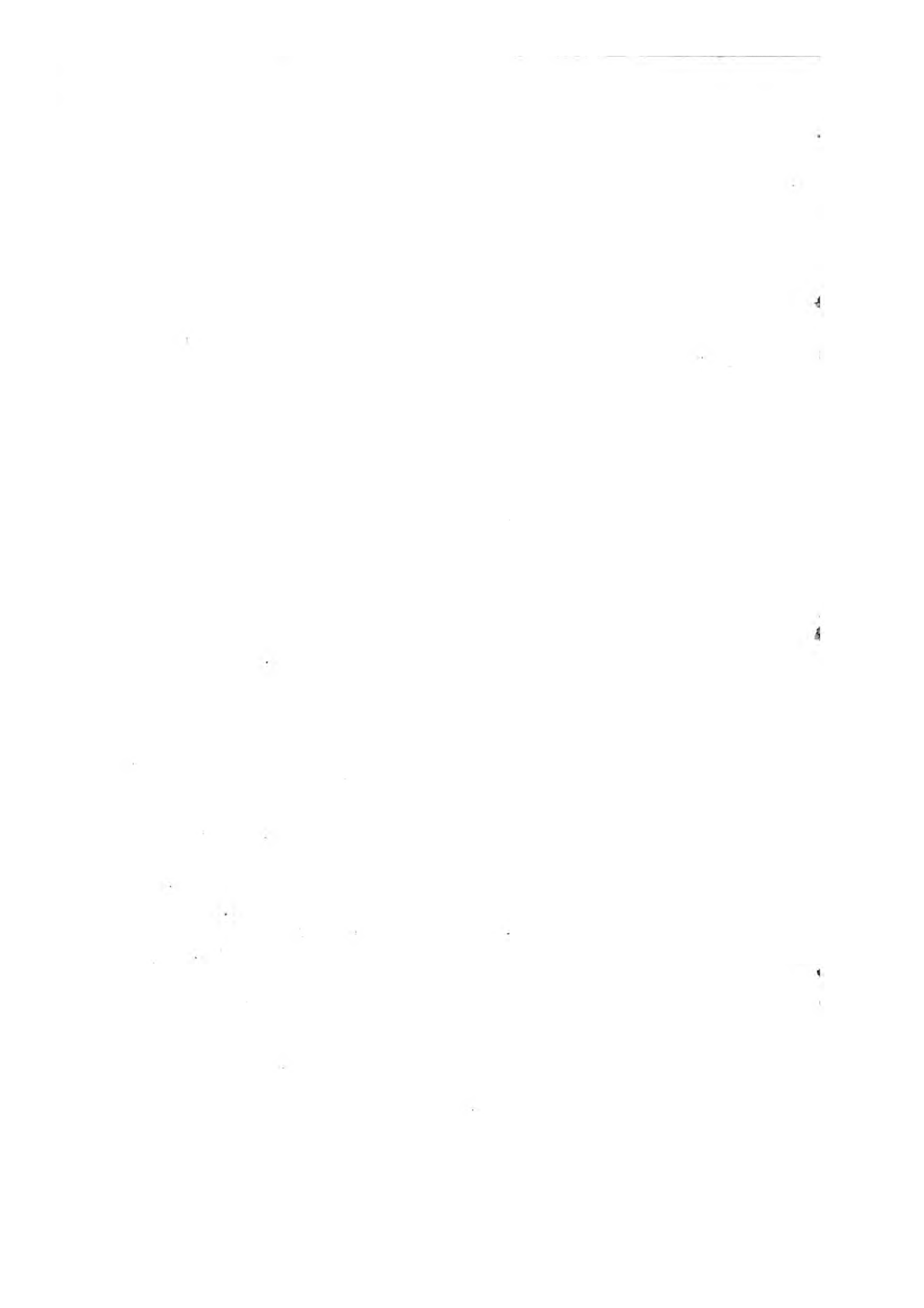


Positions.

Of attack with the Lunge.

and

of Defence with a Parry in Carte.



RETREAT, by the first moving the left backwards and then withdrawing the right.

In advancing or retreating the knees should be kept bent, and the shoulders carried on a perfect level.

Necessary as it is to support the body in an erect position while 'On Guard,' and whether advancing or retreating, it is of far greater consequence to retain that position, when upon the Attack in the performance of the LUNGE. To effect that performance—First: The sword-arm should be straightened without straining it, and without lifting the shoulders, the pommel on a level with the shoulder, the fingernails turned upwards, the hand borne either on the right or left according to the line of attack, the point directed at the opponent's breast. Secondly: The left shoulder and arm should be lowered, the hand open, the knuckles inclined towards the left knee. Thirdly: The left knee should be completely straightened. Fourthly: The right foot advanced two lengths of the Fencer's foot, or four times the length of the foot from heel to heel—[with a man of middle height at least forty inches in the stride]—the right knee remaining fixed and perpendicular to the instep. These movements, when understood, should be combined with the greatest possible rapidity, the head and body supported in an erect position throughout; the bust slightly turned towards the opponent and the left foot retained, toe and heel, to the ground (*vide* Design, No. 1); care should be taken that the left foot be neither raised, dragged forward, nor slipped backwards, and that the sword-arm be advanced previous to the right foot.

The Lunge or Attack.

Length in the stride.

The support of the head and bust in Lunging is,

Necessity of supporting the frame in an erect position and of avoiding the tendency of leaning forward.

Objections against the bad habit of throwing the head and shoulders forward when on the Lunge.

perhaps, one of the most difficult attainments in Fencing. Most Fencers,—even the most skilful, are apt, in the eagerness of Attack, or from momentary loss of nerve, to throw themselves forward, but this dangerous habit cannot be too sharply denounced, or too carefully guarded against.*

1st, It is most ungraceful in appearance. 2nd, It throws the Fencer off his balance. 3rd, It surrenders his sword arm to his antagonist's grasp, see Design, No. 2. 4th, It exposes his head to the opponent's point, see Design No. 3. 5th, It prevents the Fencer from recovering with ease or safety to the position of Defence. 6th, It deranges his sword-arm, so that while recovering he cannot parry the antagonist's Return Attack. 7th, It precludes the opposition of the blade. 8th, It confuses the mind; for in lowering the head, the passing action of the contest is to a great extent lost to the eye.

Lastly, if the bust be lowered in Lunging, it must be raised in Recovering, a double action attended with great risk, and certain to retard the Fencer's retreat after having recovered, or his Advance after having Lunged.

To recover to the position of Defence, the frame

* Some Foil players, under the protection of the mask, adopt this movement as a practice, purposely to cover the breast, and in abuse of the conventional rules of Fencing, by which hits are only allowed when delivered on the bust. In such cases all hits upon any part of the person, above the hips, should be accounted good. In parrying, three-quarters of the bust should be presented towards the adversary,—in the attack somewhat less. The attack should not be avoided by shifting one part of the body to the exposure of another, but by parrying the opponent's thrust.

should not be *tossed upwards* or lifted by the shoulders, but *drawn backwards*,—through bending the left knee,—a muscular exertion of the left thigh, and by lifting the right foot with a slight pressure from the ground. Thus the Fencer retains a level carriage both in the Attack and Defence. At the same time that the right foot is replaced on the spot it originally occupied, the sword-arm should be again slightly bent, and the left arm raised and placed as before, acting somewhat as a balance, *i.e.* rising during the Recovery, and falling with the Lunge.

Correct manner of recovering from the Lunge to the position of Defence.

In advocating a strict observance of the proper grasp, or manipulation of the foil handle, and also of the maintenance of the head and body in an erect position, it must, however, be allowed that finished Fencers occasionally permit themselves a certain licence in relaxing or slightly changing the hold upon the grip. In feigning or parrying, they also occasionally advance or withdraw the bust. For the Guard may be partly offensive or wholly defensive. It is termed offensive when the point is directly presented at the adversary, in which action the bust is sometimes slightly advanced: Defensive, when the point is raised with the sole intent on the part of the Fencer to parry, and in which action the head is often slightly thrown back.

Licence taken by Fencers during loose play.

Guard either offensive or defensive.

Duellists also occasionally adopt the trick of dropping the head or stretching the body forward, preferring the greater chance but lesser injury of being wounded on the shoulder to the less chance but more serious consequences of being hit below the waist. But it must be remembered that the duel

is usually conducted on ground selected for the purpose, and with seconds at hand to enforce the observance of conventional rules, by which, not only is the combat generally terminated at the first wound, however slight, but, all use of the left hand in grasping the adversary, or any attempt to wound an opponent who may have stumbled or fallen, is forbidden.

Advantages in
maintaining an
erect carriage.

The case is different, however, on slippery or rough ground or when no friend is near to interpose, and it may be easily conceived that a bold and erect carriage must be to a soldier in action, whether mounted or on foot, of primary importance,—so that he may keep his eyes about him and not throw himself out of his saddle or off his balance. Further, it may be remarked that a sword thrust should not be delivered with a dead-weight-like or slouching push, such as must be the case when the head and shoulders are thrown forward, but darted from the shoulder with a sharp light stroke, so that the weapon may be easily extricated and brought to a position in which, if necessary, a parry may be readily effected.*

The irregularities, therefore, which, as before stated, practised Fencers occasionally commit, must be regarded as exceptions—not as rules—and

* That a man may be desperately wounded and yet retaliate upon his enemy has been frequently witnessed in action.

In the historical record of a duel which took place in 1613, between Lord Bruce and Sir Edward Sackville, it is related, that before Lord Bruce was in the slightest degree hurt, Sir Edward Sackville had received no less than three severe wounds, and yet overcame his adversary. Lord Bruce was slain through his inability to withdraw his sword which had, in Sir Edward Sackville's own words, "entered my right pap and passed through my body."

although an infringement of rule must be expected, and even to some extent tolerated in loose play, no irregularities should be permitted in the lesson. Above all, a neglect on the part of an instructor, in permitting a pupil to abandon his position while on the Lunge, is most reprehensible. This negligence is never permitted by skilful Fencing Masters, but is often overlooked by indifferent teachers, either from carelessness or through not understanding the true principles of Fencing; for the mere fact of *professing* to teach does not constitute a man a Fencing Master in the true acceptance of the term. To justly assume that title a man should have served for some years as an assistant under a professor of repute, or at least have gained a reputation for himself in frequent and public trials of his merits before competent judges. Even then excellence in Fencing may not prove capability in teaching. Yet, certainly, no man should claim to be a good instructor who cannot prove himself a first-rate Fencer.

Neglect of indifferent Teachers.

Professing to teach does not constitute a Master in the Art.

When an instructor has neither had the advantage of acquiring experience as an assistant, nor the opportunity of gaining it through long practice with Fencers and Masters of public note, he naturally overlooks the nice but necessary points of Fencing.

A loss of activity will, of course, result from age or infirmity. But, to command the respect due to eminence in their art, Fencing Masters advanced in years, should have been at least remarkable in earlier life among the principal swordsmen of their day.

Teachers advanced in years should have been eminent in earlier life.

Certificates of capability are not to be trusted, and, indeed, they may be regarded, unless signed by conscientious and eminent Masters, as worse than

Certificates of ability not to be trusted.

worthless. Men are to be met with who can exhibit Certificates of Proficiency as Masters, and yet cannot place themselves properly on Guard,—pass a disengagement with exactness,—or reason in the slightest degree on the theory of Fencing. Such men, in attempting to teach, must evidently do more harm than good.

Choice of Teachers. Anybody, therefore, who may be really anxious to acquire a good foundation in the art of swordsmanship, should be particular in the choice of an instructor.

Extracts from works
in support of the
Author's opinion.

In conclusion, since the habit of throwing forward the head and shoulders on the Lunge is condemned in these pages as the gravest fault a teacher can permit, the following extracts are cited from works of authority in support of the Author's opinion. Many other works might be mentioned, but even from among those here noticed, the maxims of Gomard, Grisier, and Cordelois should be of themselves considered sufficient for the purpose :

Old Masters.

ANGELO, 1763.—“To Lunge correctly, after the sword-hand has been advanced, all the other movements should follow rapidly, taking care *that the body be held erect and the head raised.*”

DEMEUSE, 1778.—“The frame, by being thrown forwards on the Lunge, is cast off its balance, and placed in an inconvenient position. Through exhaustion, while in this posture it sinks beneath its weight. The Fencer cannot recover without difficulty, and then only by several efforts. Moreover, his thoughts become confused, and with his arm restricted in action, he is unable to protect himself during the disorder of recovery.”

LA BOESSIERRE, 1818.—In regulating the pupil's Lunge—"if the bust fall forward, it should be raised until *the erect position* is regained."

ROLAND, 1837.—In the Lunge "the left hip should be forced sufficiently home towards your right that the *body be quite erect* resting equally on both legs." Modern Masters.

GOMARD, 1845.—"Leaning forward on the Lunge should be avoided; for in doing so, with a view to increase the extension of the development, the Recovery is rendered difficult; even more so than by overstriding."

"Young Fencing-masters, credit my old experience, insist, at any sacrifice, upon your pupils employing the action of the fingers in handling the grip;—upon that action, together with the support of the frame in an erect position, success depends. Without the observance of these points, there can be no regularity; and without regularity, no good Fencing."

"As in the position of Defence, so also in the development of the Lunge, the body should be held *erect*, above the hips."

GRISIER, 1847.—"The support of the body in an erect position is one of the most necessary points in Fencing. Through the observance of this principle the Attack or Return Attack is rendered exact in its effect. The task of any teacher who endeavours to inculcate this excellent principle is always tedious; to check the natural tendency of leaning forward is contrary to our habits. We recommend all Fencers to practise this restraint

with the utmost perseverance. Upon it depends,—success in loose play, or safety in serious combat.”

“The pupil’s body should be *kept in a perpendicular line* both in the Defence and in the Attack, for to allow the frame to fall forward is *defective in principle*.”

ROBALIA, 1855.—“Upon the termination of the development of the Lunge the bust should be *upright*, without which there would be a difficulty in recovering.”

CORDELOIS, 1862.—“I cannot admit that in any attack the body should be thrown forward.—This position is dangerous, useless as a means of reaching the opponent, and unfavourable towards the Recovery from the right foot, after the Attack.”

“In the development of the Lunge the body should be throughout *steady and erect*.”

END OF NO. I.

