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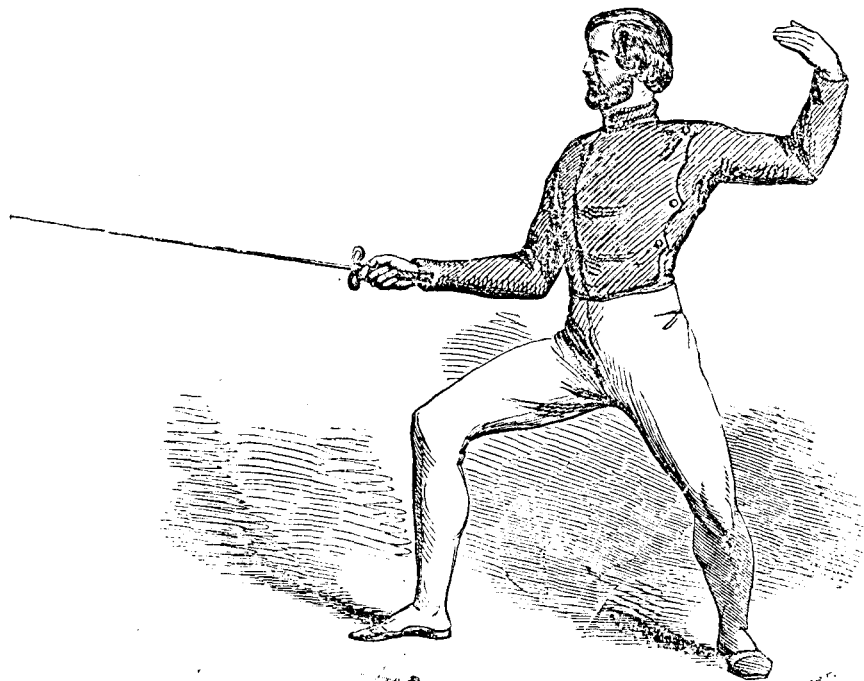
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ON GUARD.

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THE  
**FENCER'S MANUAL:**

A PRACTICAL TREATISE ON

**SMALL-SWORD EXERCISES,**

ALSO,

SINGLE-STICK PLAY,  
DEFENCE OF SABRE AGAINST BAYONET, CAVALRY, &c.,  
CLUB EXERCISES, PREPARATORY EXTENSION MOTIONS,  
HINTS TO PROFESSORS AND AMATEURS; &c., &c.:

WITH

**ILLUSTRATIONS**



BY ROBERT MEIKLE.

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1859.

## INTRODUCTION.

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THE principles and practices of the Art of Fencing, as taught in the best Schools of Arms at the present day, are herein presented to the reader, divested of all intricacy and obscurity. A moderate expenditure of time under a qualified instructor will now suffice for the acquirement of a fine execution of the comparatively small number of movements necessary for all purposes of offence and defence with the sword, in contrast with the time spent uselessly in learning but a part of that vast complexed system of thrusts and parries, which is still advocated and taught by some antiquated professors, with equivocal success; for to it many of those confused and ineffective movements, which disfigure the performances of their pupils, can be clearly traced.

Considerations arising out of the limits within which it is deemed advisable to confine this Hand-Book, have necessitated the excision from the original plan of a critical comparison of the old and new systems of Sword Fencing, written in illustration of the above observations. As a Practical Guide, however, its value remains intact, and it may, without irrelevancy, be stated here, concerning these systems, that, whilst the Old is chiefly remarkable for an ostentatious display of cumbrous complications and obscure tediousness,

the New is distinguished for simplicity and brevity. The practicable, the useful, the sufficient for all emergencies, is substituted by the one for the impossible, the unnecessary, and the inadequate of the other. To the extent that a book can be serviceable to Fencers, this Manual is, on account of the care bestowed upon its compilation, and the opulence of explanation interspersed throughout its pages, worthy their fullest confidence. It will prove useful to them, by either correcting a fault, recalling a movement forgotten, by suggesting one that is new and better; or by authoritatively confirming what may be but imperfectly known or understood. It is designed to be, in fact, a repertory of the result of analysis, observation, experience, and reflection, each having contributed its quota to the instruction it contains, so that all swordsmen thoroughly disciplined in conformity therewith may enter the lists with confidence.

The LESSONS are progressive: gradually introducing the pupil to those combinations of most general use in loose-play. The only attacks really necessary in practice are those sufficient to frustrate all the parries that an adversary can oppose to them (*See Part I.*). The consideration of others, which would be of no utility to the student, and adverse to that simplification of plan so desirable to preserve, is, therefore, purposely omitted.

The PRACTICE TABLES comprise a series of combinations under an arrangement which requires the parrier, in the first practice of any movement, to be the assailant in the second practice of it. Perseverance in this method will produce the most satisfactory results.

The LESSONS and PRACTICES together will, under the tuition of a Master and the loose-play of the Fencing School (both of which are, for a time, indispensable), serve as a base for the superstructure of the pupil's own style, bearing the im-

press of his individuality; and, as a fencing lesson demands concentration of thought as well as free action of the limbs, he ought always to exhibit an earnest willingness to receive the instruction which a skilful and zealous teacher will not fail to impart to him.

In the formation of the fencer's habits, *correctness* is of primary importance. The Master must, therefore, patiently reiterate his remarks until the pupil shows, by self-correction of his errors, that he understands what is required of him: faulty execution, whether owing to deficient knowledge or a slovenly manner, must never pass uncorrected or unreproved.

The sooner theory and practice go hand in hand, the quicker will be the progress of the pupil. When he can execute the *positions*, the *disengagements*, and the *simple feints*, he should be set to loose practice; he will thus acquire a *tact* which no mere instruction can communicate, and which he ought to regard and cultivate as the pioneer to excellence.

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THE FENCER'S MANUAL;  
OR,  
SMALL-SWORD EXERCISES.



FENCING EQUIPMENT.

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- A leather jacket with military collar, made double-breasted and to button on both sides, or on left side only; easy, correct fit. It may be made of elastic cloth, or flannel, if preferred, with breast and right sleeve facings of soft buckskin, or other pliable leather.
- A cambric, silk, or Cashmere cravat, or leather stock.
- Pantaloons of leather, elastic cloth, flannel, or linen, fitting closely round the body, but allowing free movement of the legs. A strap and buckle may be substituted for a belt.
- A leather pad or apron, with waist buckle and a strap to carry under fork and button on belt at back.
- A pair of foils.
- A mask, with frontlet and wing-pieces.
- A gauntlet-glove, stuffed with horse-hair.

A pair of buckskin leather shoes to lace over instep, with bands and spring heels; or elastic spring ankle boots of a similar make.

Quilted plastrons and leg-guards of leather, buffalo hilts, ash sticks, practice swords, and *fleurets de fantasia*, for use in public assaults.

The foil may be divided into two parts—the *hilt* and the *blade*: or subdivided into FIVE parts, viz.,—the hilt into three—the pommel, gripe, and guard; the blade into two—the *fort* (from the shoulder to the middle of the blade), and the *feeble* (from the middle to the button). The gripe is rectangular in form,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches long, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch in diameter; slightly convex on the upper side, and concave under: it is covered with string that it may be held without unnecessary compression of the fingers. A *round* form of gripe is *objectionable*, because of its liability to turn in the hand.

The best foil blades vary very slightly in length (say from 33 to  $34\frac{1}{2}$  inches), are of a quadrangular shape, strong at the shoulder, and tapering gradually from it to the point. The superior qualities are manufactured and stamped at Solingen (a town on the Wipper, in Rhenish Prussia, long celebrated for its sword cutlery articles). A No. 4 blade is preferred for lesson practice, and No. 5 for assaults; the former is a very flexible blade, less likely to give to the hand of a beginner a rigidity injurious to light and ready movement. The other has rather more metal in it, and possesses, besides, a certain degree of stiffness and superior finish more suitable to a weapon intended for severer exercises.

A certain curvature renders a foil less liable to fracture, and handier. This curvature should be given to the blade by the mounter, in part, before attaching it to the gripe. The button of the foil, when mounted, should be about two

degrees lower than its shoulder, inclined inwards, and the average length of the finished weapon, from pommel to button, may be stated at  $41\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

The possession of well-made, properly-balanced foils is usually much coveted by young fencers; but considerable experience in mounting blades being necessary to achieve success, it is recommended to procure them, as well as the other articles of equipment, of a master; or, if purchased of a dealer, the following precautions in the selection should be observed: first, examine the blade for any flaws; the point being on the ground, bear the hand down the foil a little and gradually, observing if the curve is true and extends at least three-fourths of the length. Reject all blades that begin to bend at the middle, that have cracks, unequal tapering, or that feel weighty in the hand.

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## EXPLANATIONS.

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IN fencing there are three divisions of the body, thus technically distinguished, viz.:

*Inside of the arm; or, Within the blade.*—The space between the sword and left arm.

*Over the arm; or, Outside the blade.*—Includes all that part of the body over the sword arm, between the weapon and the right shoulder.

*Under the arm* is that part of the body exposed under the right elbow.

*Hand in quarte.*—Nails up!

*Hand in tierce.*—Nails down!

*Distance; or, Measure.*—The space between the opponents on guard; *i. e.*, the distance at which either can be touched by a correct longe.

*The line of direction; or, The Alignment,* is, in a general sense, a right line in front of the second position.

*A riposte* is a thrust delivered immediately after a parry, from the second or third position.

*To longe.*—The act of extending yourself the full distance of your stride in delivering a thrust or cut.

*To recover.*—To resume the second position (the guard) from the longe (the third position).

*Uncovered; or, Open.*—To be unprotected by the position of the sword.

*Covered; or, line closed.*—To be protected by the position of the sword.

*To change the engagement* is, simply, to pass your point (generally under your adversary's wrist) from one guard to another.

*To disengage.*—To connect rapidly, in one movement, the extension of the arm, the change, and the lunge.

*To cut over point.*—Another manner of disengaging.

*A direct, or straight thrust* is delivered on the same side as the engagement.

*A disengaged thrust* is one made on the side opposite to that of the engagement.

*A counter* is a movement *opposed* to a change. It consists in *following* the adversary's blade by passing under or over it, describing with the point of your foil a complete circle, and returning to the original engagement from which the opponent's change was attempted. This movement is to be performed with the fingers only, the position of the arm remaining unaltered.

*A beat.*—An abrupt collision with the *fort* of one blade against the *feible* of the other.

*A false beat* is a slight shock with the *feible* against the *fort*. Beats should be done altogether with the hand.

*Feints* are movements intentionally made to deceive an adversary, with a view to procure openings for attacks, by disarranging his hand.

*Attacks* are simple or complex, just as the feints which precede them are of one or more movements.

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## Part II.

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### LESSON I.

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#### Of the Three Positions and manner of Recovering.

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##### FIRST POSITION.

1. Place the heel of the right foot close against that of the left, so that the feet will be precisely at right angles to each other; the legs being well braced and knees straight without stiffness; the chest thrown out, shoulders low and square, arms falling naturally by the sides, the head erect, eyes to the front. Now take the foil between the thumb and finger of the right hand; the *concave* side of the handle resting on the middle joint of the finger, and the thumb directly over it on the *convex* side, about half an inch from the guard; stretch the second and third fingers along the gripe towards the pommel. The foil is to be worked by the thumb and first finger, the others affording only a slight support in sustaining the weapon; blade pointing downwards to the left, or in left hand; nails turned down.

[The first position prepares the body for being placed with ease, precision, and firmness in the best position for instantaneous offensive or defensive movements.]

## SECOND POSITION, OR THE GUARD, IN TWO MOTIONS.

2. The pupil being correctly placed in the first position (1) will, at the command, *One!* (2) describe arcs of circles with both arms in front and above the head (the left arm being innermost) with a graceful bold movement, and drop the right arm until the elbow is about two or three inches in front of the body, and turned inwards; he will then bring the right hand forward on the same plane as the elbow and hold the foil so that its point will be two degrees higher than the hand, in *quarte*, in line with own shoulder, opposite to the adversary's right breast. During this movement of the right arm and hand, the left arm is to be brought backward and held laterally, in such a manner that a line from the hand to the shoulder will appear to describe a semicircle, the hand being held as high as the top of the head—the fingers closed, slightly curved, and pointing to the rear. Both hands simultaneously assume their respective positions.

3. At the command, *Two!* raise the right toe and detach the right foot from the left, advance it twice and a half or three times its length, planting the sole firmly but lightly on the ground, the heels being on the same line; now, sink the body so as to open the knees equally, bend them well, let the right thigh be nearly horizontal with the ground, the knee vertical over instep, the left leg, pressed well back, sustaining the principal weight of the body, and the knee falling over the foot.

[The advantage of this position, when taken as described, is, that from it all movements of the body in attack or defence, in advancing upon, or retiring from, an adversary may be effected with the greatest degree of security.]

## THIRD POSITION; OR, THE LONGE, IN TWO MOTIONS.

Place yourself on guard (2, 3).



4. *One!* Without stiffness or exertion, extend the right arm and raise slightly the right toe.

5. *Two!* Now, jerk the left knee inwards with force, that it may act as a spring to straighten the leg and project forward suddenly the body and right leg the full length of the stride, when the distance between the feet should be nearly twice that of the second position. On commencing 5, instantly depress the left arm until the little finger all but touches the left leg, the palm of the hand shewing to the front. The left foot must be kept flat on the ground, and firm, the ankle-joint supple and well bent, the right knee perpendicular over foot, the body and head erect. The right foot and left hand assume the positions described at the same moment.

[The *longe* enables a fencer to carry his attack with rapidity as far as length of arm and legs will permit, and from this position he can return to the guard with celerity, order, and firmness.]

6. *To Recover (from the third position).*—Raise the toe and thrust strongly with the heel of right foot, throw back the head, bend the left knee outwards, raise the left arm, withdraw the right foot and arm, assuming, as quickly as possible, the position of the guard (2, 3).

[The return to the second position from the third should be carefully practised until the performance of it exhibits an easy grace and lightness.]

In advancing the right foot, in the *longe*, the common error of sliding the heel along the ground, or describing with it a perceptible curve or step, must be avoided. By the former, the velocity of the movement is checked; and by the latter, the balance of the body is deranged, and the equilibrium consequently lost. If the knee hang at all *over* the foot, the *longe* has not been made far enough; and if the

knee is not so advanced as to make the leg vertical, the fencer will have over-longed. Further, if the body be allowed to fall forward upon the right leg whilst on the *longe*, the danger is incurred, in an assault, of throwing one'sself upon the adversary's point; the hand will be incapable of performing any movement with ease; the player will feel embarrassed, and his return to guard will be slow and ungraceful. If the shoulders be kept too stiffly back, which is the opposite error, the advance of the right foot will be constrained, a full development, or *longe*, prevented, and the quickness and accuracy of the attack impaired. "Many fencers, from faulty instruction or other causes, turn the body to the left in order, as they say, to prevent them from presenting too great a surface to their adversary. These seem not to suspect, however, that in turning the body we turn the hips also; that the knee falls on the inside, and the knee is no longer firm: and, consequently, that it is impossible any longer to preserve that command of our movements which is indispensable to a perfect execution."\*

The three positions, performed in accordance with the foregoing instructions, are undoubtedly the best, because no others can be taken in which and from which so much can be done with equal unity of action, ease, and velocity. The precision and success of the attack and defence mainly depend upon the correctness with which the second and third positions are assumed and maintained. In that of the *guard* a fencer is enabled to march forward—backward, to parry, to thrust, to spring to the third position, to execute plans of attack or defence instantaneously, without any previous movement. In that of the *longe* he can perform most of the things that are capable of being executed in the second po-

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\* Hamon.

