

The New Code Duello Is of the Upper Air

Ancient Custom of Chivalry Revived After a Century and Accepted as Fact in the Great War

By EDWIN C. HILL.

THE duel triumphs over edicts of State and anathemas of the church. In one century it is plainly ridiculous. In another it seems godlike. It survives against reason and policy because it functions the inherent and irrepressible passion of men to right wrongs, achieve justice, prove vanity, attain glory, accomplish revenge, at hand grips.

Kings and cardinals have sent fine fellows to the gibbet because of it. Popes have levelled the terrors of hell against it. Good officers, cashiered, have ended in the gutter because they would play at it. Since Louis XIV. civilization has labelled it murder. It made little difference in the sweep of time.

Force, all the powers of law and religion, could not abolish it. Ridicule was more effective, but not abolitionary. Boulanger lost his chance to be another Napoleon because he was foolish enough to get himself pinked by an ordinary fellow. Thereafter the French duel was a thing to laugh about for thirty years.

Nobody laughs nowadays. The code duello is practised in the air. Men assail each other above the clouds, as eagle-fight, and the very instinct which authority sought to stamp out is now lauded by authority as the noblest expression of courage.

"Good duellist, bad soldier," said the great Napoleon sententiously. Joffre pinned the War Cross upon the breast of a twentieth century duellist who had proved at 10,000 feet above the trenches that a good duellist is France's best soldier. Old Wellington knew better than the man he beat at Waterloo. "A little duelling now and then doesn't hurt the Hussars," said the Iron Duke when the Prince Regent consulted him about punishments. Wellington had been out himself.

Possibly Buckle had the feel of it—the sense of its potential value. To this big brain duelling was obviously a development of chivalry, as chivalry was a phase of the protective spirit. The flying fighters of France, of England, of Italy, of the United States, yes, even of Germany (though the German code has little of chivalry in it), duel to-day as the jack-booted swashbucklers of the thirteenth Louis fought out their quarrels in the Place Royale.

What was Guynemer but a D'Artagnan? Bishop of the British Flying Corps is another Athos—happily survived. Boelke was a Teuton De Wardes. The fatal encounters high above Flanders and Picardy that have thrilled the world for three years and more are simply the modern expression of the ineradicable thirst of men for personal combat.

The thing will not die out. Two thousand years ago Caesar's legionaries looked on with amusement and contempt while Germans in the Teutonic forests met in an atmosphere of judicial and religious mummery and banged each other over their thick heads to prove the right. As far back as that it was Teutonic doctrine that a just God's providence must favor the juster cause in private combat. Silly, of course, but all Europe adored the notion for centuries.

The wager of battle survived every attack save that of laughter. A century before Columbus sent a queen to the pawnbroker's an Italian lady complained of a blazing indiscretion on the part of a gentleman who called after hours. They gave the poor fellow a sword and set him against a bravo. Naturally he left the world in haste. Then the rascally sneak that had imposed upon the lady confessed his fault. Duelling was in poor grace for a century or two.

But always it has revived in some form or other to give it heroism or dignity. Queen Anne's gentlemen fought all over the shop. We know what a trial it was to Richelieu and how that eminent statesman shocked the noblesse out of the habit. Two hundred years later it turned up in republican France to make meat for feuilletonists.

We have our own tragedy of Weehawken. Probably there has not been a



year out of the calendar when hot blooded, hot headed gentlemen have not settled their differences with rapier or pistol in some corner of this commercialized world. The point is that duelling and the code duello have again become honorable and heroic things in the eyes of men. It is not called duelling, these Homeric combats of the French or the English against the Germans along the air roads. It is, however, the fact.

Guynemer died that way. Guynemer's victorious assailant was challenged and destroyed by Guynemer's friend, Boelke, a savage duellist, without bowels of compassion, as he proved in letters to his own family, died in a duel. Capt. Ball, the great British "ace," finished with life when he encountered a Teuton hawk that had pursued him for months. One of the most expert of British fliers was killed in an air duel by a German whom he had insulted in a Berlin beer garden two years before Germany set fire to the world.

These combats of individuals are not recognized officially by the French, British or Germans as duelling. Authority continues to frown upon the world while accepting anew the ancient custom. But duels they are and nothing else.

Boelke, the German, in forty air fights fought, it is said, ten duels with men he had challenged or been challenged by. In more than one encounter he escaped because his antagonists played the game according to the old chivalric rules. Boelke had no use for these rules.

The duel lives. Augustus Post of the Aero Club, just back from France, found France thrilled by tales of personal combat in the air—combat deliberately arranged for by rival heroes jealous, it may have been, of the fame of the others' prowess; anxious, certainly, to rid their side of terrible foes.

Innumerable duels have been hinted at in the condensed despatches. More and more air fighting has resolved itself into combats by squadrons and small fleets—"flights"—in which a dozen or twenty machines on a side will gain contact after complicated manœuvres. But duels have not been stopped nor are they likely to be so long as men remain what they are.

Early in 1913 a Prussian officer ogled an English woman in the most celebrated beer garden of Berlin. An English civilian rebuked him quietly for this offensiveness and then for excellent reasons slapped the Prussian's face. There was a great flurry and to do, but for political reasons (the Germans knowing what they knew) a duel was made impossible and the Englishman returned to his own home.

When the war began the Prussian officer in infantry service learned that the Englishman was a flying man in the British forces. He managed to get himself transferred to aviation, moved by the one obsessive thought of finding that Englishman some day and killing him.

For two years, each flying his course,

they missed contact, but it was observed that the Prussian before attacking an Ally machine invariably took extra risks by close flying and by taking time to scrutinize carefully the features of the enemy pilot. He killed, when he could, without heat. From time to time, flying over British camps, he dropped his card with provocative and insulting comments addressed to the Englishman he was hunting the air for. They met in 1916 above the Somme. Both were killed.

There are other such stories, doubtless, in the annals of English flying, but the English are close mouthed about their air exploits. They are averse to revealing their own triumphs or the successes of the Boche. The French are franker. We, it now appears, are following the custom of the French. It was revealed officially just the other day that one of Princeton's greatest athletic heroes, Hobe Baker, had shot down a German plane in a hard fought duel.

The new code duello of the air, thrilling heritage of the bad old centuries, has its recognized, defined provisions. These are always observed by the French and by the English, though often scorned by the Germans, as Boelke's case proves. It is applied when great identities appear.

The Germans develop eagles that seem unconquerable; men that count their victims by the score. The French breed air fighters that are hated individually by the Boches, who are pursued individually. This is true with the English.

It becomes a matter of military policy to search out and destroy individuals, each as dangerous as an army corps. Moreover, a sort of splendid jealousy develops. Boelke resents the greatness of Guynemer. It becomes his or another German's obsession to find and kill this troublesome rival. Conditions therefore have made for individual combat.

With insolent daring these supermen challenge each other. From pin point height a German plane drops a card of challenge upon a French or British camp, or an Ally aviator, swooping over the German lines, flutters down the dare direct. So acutely do these men observe that the actual lines of individual planes are perfectly recognizable. Two Frenchmen and an Englishman pursued the celebrated Von Riechthofen for a year before a Frenchman ended him. Guynemer won a score of such duels before his time came. Opportunities for these combats were deliberately made.

Capt. Georges Guynemer soared one morning to seek a certain German who had annoyed him. Capt. Charles J. Biddle of the aviation service in France tells the story to a friend who gave it to the *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, with the tale also of how Guynemer was avenged in another thrilling duel.

"He and another officer," wrote Capt. Biddle, "went out on Tuesday morning to hunt the Hun. They were flying fairly high, somewhere around 16,000 feet, I

Modern "Aces" Recognized as Champions, Guynemer Being Called Twentieth Century D'Artagnan

think, and Guynemer went down a little way to attack a biplane, while the Lieutenant who was with him stayed up to protect his rear.

"About that time eight Boche monoplane machines put in an appearance and the Lieutenant was busy trying to worry them and keep them from going down to the Captain. He succeeded and none of the Boches dived down, but in the general mixup he lost track of Guynemer and he has not been heard from since.

"The loss of this man is very great, as he was by all odds the greatest aviator and individual fighter the war has produced.

"As I have already written you, he was very small and of frail appearance. I believe his health was very far from good, and the high altitudes sometimes made him so sick he had to come down. He would fly for a week and then go away for a rest, as he was not strong enough to stand any more.

"In the course of several hundred fights he had been shot down seven times and twice wounded. To keep at it under such circumstances and after all he had gone through a man's heart has to be in the right place. He certainly deserved to live the rest of his days in peace, and one hates to see a man like that get it. Long immunity breeds a contempt of danger, which is probably the greatest danger of all."

As the world knows, Guynemer was killed in fighting. The body of France's greatest air duellist was found by a roadside. Capt. Biddle tells the story of the duel which avenged this superb fighter.

"One of our cracks," he wrote, "got square the other day with the man who is reported to have killed Guynemer. This German was a Captain and observer in a biplane. The observer is the man who handles the movable machine gun in a biplane.

"The Boche machine had flown from far behind our lines to take pictures, but was very high, over 20,000 feet, probably relying largely upon his height for protection, for an ordinary fighting plane will not go that high. Our man, who is very expert and who has been a pilot for a long time, was in a particularly powerful machine, and was the only one who saw the Boche who could get up to him.

"He climbed up under and behind his tail. Every time the Boche pilot would try to turn in order to give his gunner a shot the Frenchman would slide around also, always keeping the Hun's own tail between himself and the machine gunner, so that the latter could not shoot without shooting away his own controls.

"In this manner he got right on top of the Boche and at the first salvo put his machine gun out of business and probably hit the gunner, that is the Captain who is supposed to have shot Guynemer. After that there was nothing to it. The second dose the Frenchman gave him cut away the supports of the wings on one side so that they came out of position. The Hun flopped over on his back and Guynemer's supposed slayer fell out of his machine, taking a nice little tumble of 20,000 feet.

"The machine and pilot tumbled end over end, and as they went by a number of French machines waiting below, who had not been able to get up, amused themselves by taking pot shots at them.

This is a story of hundreds springing from the new code duello of the air. "Fantomax," a noted German flier identified as a bicycle rider who often took part in the six day contests here in Madison Square Garden, was shot to death by a Frenchman in a duel. The best of every service have ended that way, some of the German victims being Lieut. Werner Moss of Crefeld, with 47 machines to his credit; Capt. Boelke, with 40; Lieut. Wolf, with 33, and Lieut. Schafer, with 30.

Nungesser survives among the greatest of the French. Lufbery, a Major now in the American service with William Thaw, is nearing the 20 mark.

Man's desire to fight it out with his dearest enemy does not change. Achilles pursuing Hector around the walls of Troy is simply Nungesser seeking Immerrman among the clouds.