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RAPIER, SABER AND PISTOL

Pretexts for Fighting—The Two Favorite Styles—The Recognized Code—Incidents.

HAVANA, Cuba.—The art of fencing as I have already stated, plays an important part in the education of the Cuban gentleman. As soon as a Cuban boy is old enough to appreciate the necessity of his being able to skillfully handle a foil he is sent every day to the salle d'armes. Fencing is the only violent exercise that the Cuban indulges in. Illness alone will prevent him from taking his daily lesson. At the Union Club the salle d'armes is always crowded. There the old-timer, the biased duellist, crosses his foil with the young stripling who is anxiously awaiting his first challenge. To take high rank as a fencer in Havana a man must be master of the art. Pini, the champion fencer of the world, said that he had never met in one city so many able fencers.

The French school of fencing has the most followers, although the Italian is liked by many. Nearly all duels are fought with the rapier, as the wound it inflicts is not very dangerous. Upon serious occasions, however, the duelling sabre and pistol are used. The sabre is a cruel weapon. It differs from any used in Europe. It is about three feet long, slightly curved, and very heavy. One-third of the blade is pointed, while both sides of it are sharpened to a razor edge. Rabbi, a Frenchman on La Calzada Galiano, is the recognized sharpener. The sabre, wielded by a skilful hand, inflicts terrible and dangerous wounds. Pistols are used by the older men and generally when the affair is to the death.

An offense that will warrant a challenge in Havana is purely a matter of personal opinion. With the man who is "looking for trouble" or the uninitiated who is anxious to be talked about, a mere trifle will suffice. A look, a sneer, a laugh in the wrong place, a push or a compliment about the other fellow's girl, is quite sufficient for the exchange of cards. Blows are rarely struck by gentlemen. A motion to do so is recognized as enough. The Cuban considers his face sacred, and the life-blood of the striker would not be considered sufficient to wipe out the stigma of a blow. As an instance, the experience of a poor but well intentioned boxing master may be cited. One day the unfortunate professor attempted to "land" on one of his pupils. A regular fracas followed which, although the Cuban came out second best, terminated the business career of the professor in Havana. All the men in Havana carry revolvers and if the occasion offers do not hesitate to use them. In justice, however, I will say that the victim is generally an impertinent cocher or an insulting carter. The revolver or the application of a stick about the head of the offending menial has always the desired effect. Americans are generally surprised at the respectful manner in which they are addressed by servants, conductors, etc. This is the solution of the mystery.

The rules governing the sending and accepting of a challenge are as strict as those governing the duel itself. For instance, a man while dancing or speaking to a girl has been sneered at by his rival or contradicted. Politeness and the rules of etiquette forbid his making any noticeable acknowledgment of the insult. A look or a nod is all that is needed to make his opponent aware that the insult has not passed unperceived. Both men make it a point to meet within a very few minutes, and if the offender does not apologize the seconds are named. When the dance is over the two men go in search of their seconds and place themselves entirely in their hands. The seconds, or padrinos, as they are called, then meet and the weapons are agreed upon. Sometimes it so happens that one of the men is not a good fencer. In that case it is considered the right thing to grant three or four days grace for him to practice. On the day named for the encounter each man writes a letter, in which he states that he has committed suicide. This is done in order to protect his opponent in case of a fatal termination to the duel.

Besides the padrinos and medicos a juez de campo figures in the duel. He is chosen by the seconds of the adversaries. His duty is to insure fair play, to order a halt, or to parry any thrust which, in his opinion, may have too serious a termination. He, of

course, must be an adept fencer in order to follow the play of the foils, and must be cool-headed so as to judge the thrusts. Augustin Cervantes, the champion fencer of Havana, is, as a rule, the juez de campo.

The wounding of one of the men is not always considered sufficient atonement for the insult. Nothing so ruins a man's reputation as a "fake" duel. Besides, an audience of several hundred persons is always present, and if a man be not a coward at heart their presence alone will be sufficient to make him fight like a tiger. Many a man has lost his life, long after his honor was sufficiently satisfied, on account of the presence of his friends.

One of the most famous encounters in Havana was the duel in which Alberto Jorin was killed. He was a man nearly six feet tall, strong as an ox and remarkably handsome. He was killed by a Spanish lieutenant named Eduardo Ramon, who was about five feet three inches short and as ugly as Alberto was handsome. A scapegrace all his life, Alberto had barely two years previously married Miss Ramirez, the belle of Havana. He soon tired of this new toy, however, and nighttime found him either at the club losing his wife's money or at one of the many balls of the half-world. It was at one of these balls that he met poor little, inoffensive Ramon. Alberto was in his cups, and while leaving the supper-room stumbled over Ramon. Like men of his class, Alberto was always followed by his coterie. Wishing to appear well in the estimation of his followers, Alberto, after he had gathered himself together, proceeded to thrash the insignificant little person who had caused the trouble. When he had finished with the operation the Spaniard took his much-bruised person out of the room. He had had enough and was going to let the matter drop. General Polavieja, then Captain-General of Havana, heard of the affair, however, and ordered Ramon to fight Alberto. Accordingly the seconds were named. Jorin, being the insulted one, chose the duelling sabre as the weapon.

The affair created considerable excitement in Havana. Alberto ordered a banquet to be prepared at the Hotel Inglaterra, so that he could fittingly celebrate his victory. Ramon, on the other hand, had a bed prepared in the hospital for his own reception. The place of meeting was the beach directly behind the Cabanas Fortress, in plain view of the city. So much noise had been made about the matter that a crowd of about 3,000 persons assembled to see the duel. The roofs of the neighboring houses were crowded with people and scores of rowboats dotted the water.

Alberto arrived in a carriage, followed by about a dozen others. He found Ramon awaiting his arrival. The two men stripped to the waist. They were handed their weapons and told to take their positions. Alberto's face wore a confident smile. He was a coward at the best, but rum had given him the necessary courage to hide his true feeling. Ramon was as white as a sheet, but the determined manner in which he shook his second's hands won the admiration of the crowd. The word "En garde!" was given, followed instantly by "Allez, messieurs!" Alberto fell in guard in the most approved manner, with the hilt at the height of his face and the blade pointing downward and outward. He presented a splendid picture, and he knew it. His conceit cost him his life. The next second Ramon had lunged. His head struck Alberto's chest; the sabre pierced Alberto's body through. Ramon was so placed that Alberto had but to lower his blade to kill him. The shock, however, had been too great. For a moment Alberto stood motionless, with a surprised smile on his face then he pitched forward to the ground. He died the following day on the very bed that Ramon had had prepared for himself. The latter was immediately deluged with letters challenging him to fight. Polavieja, however, saved his life by ordering him to Madrid.

Many years ago when Havana society was in its most prosperous condition, a regiment of hussars arrived from Madrid. The officers commanding the regiment represented the best families in Spain, and nearly all were very wealthy men. Their uniform was most gorgeous, and the fair sex was fairly taken by storm. This state of affairs did not exactly suit the tastes of those days, and it was decided to adopt a plan by which the regiment would be forced to leave Havana or be exterminated. The Caridad del Cerro was then the swell club in Havana. It was in this club-house that the annual charity ball was held. It so happened that this function was just then due. At a meeting of the club members the twenty-nine best fencers were picked out. This was the exact number of officers in the hated regiment. Each of the twenty-nine Cubans was given an opponent and each promised in some way or other to provoke a quarrel with him on the night of the ball, and in this manner keep all the Spaniards away from the dance. The night of the ball found the Cu-

bans at the head of the stairway. As soon as Spaniard arrived his opponent advanced and requested a few minutes' conversation. A pretext was offered as an insult and cards exchanged. Of course the Spaniards were forced to go in search of their seconds and so they were kept away from the ballroom. The following morning the twenty-nine duels occurred. The Cubans completely outfenced their opponents. I have forgotten the exact casualties, but I know that two of the hussars were killed. The regiment was shortly afterward ordered home.

Another sensational duel was that fought between a Cuban and a Spaniard in the Payret Theatre. This occurred six years ago. The Cuban was run through and his body was left on the stage. It was found there when the stage hands arrived in the evening. The blood stains can be seen to this day, directly beneath the left-hand box.

A duel occasionally winds up in a very ridiculous fashion. As an instance I can cite the one in which Andre Hernandez figured. I will not mention his opponent's name, as the poor fellow was killed in the revolution. Hernandez is very popular and pluck. His opponent was just the opposite; he was really chicken-hearted. The men fought in a field near Vento. The encounter lasted for over three hours, as Hernandez's opponent kept continually "breaking." A recess was taken for breakfast and the fight was resumed. At last Hernandez succeeded in touching his adversary and the affair was terminated. On the way back to the city the unfortunate adversary, abandoned by his seconds, was pelted with eggs and vegetables by the urchins in the street.

Up to within a very few years Varona Murias was the espadachin of Havana. He fought over forty duels and killed four men. When the revolution broke out, Murias, who was then an editor, sided with the Spaniards. Later on he changed his views and enlisted with the Cubans. He was killed in battle. Strange to say, he was not over-brave in war, and on several occasions showed the white feather. This lack of courage was also conspicuous on the part of several well-known brawlers when they were under fire.

The latest important duel fought in Havana was the Torriente-Sotolongo affair. It very nearly terminated in a general riot: As it was several men were badly wounded. The cause of the dispute was a woman, an actress. She was a member of a French opera company, and was good looking. Sotolongo, who has plenty of money, claimed her as his property a few days after her arrival. This was before she met Miguel Torriente, who is a very pretty boy. He laid siege to her fickle heart with great success. Of course Sotolongo became furious. The men met in the Cafe Louvre, and the damage done to the furniture and fixtures was appalling. This was one of the few times, to my knowledge, that a rough-and-tumble fight preceded a duel between two gentlemen. The sabre was agreed upon as the weapon. The following afternoon at five o'clock the men met at Vento. An enormous crowd was present.

The late Brig-Gen. Jose Maria Aguirre and his nephew, Charlie Aguirre, were Sotolongo's padrinos; Augustin Cervantes and Ramon Hernandez represented Torriente. The men fell in guard at the word and attacked each other savagely. It was give and take, and both men were full of grit. Torriente soon received a trivial wound in the left shoulder and a rest was ordered. After the swords had been washed with an antiseptic solution the order to proceed was given. The rest had told on the men and every one noticed that Torriente, as he took his place was very nervous. The second round had barely commenced when Sotolongo "reached" Torriente with a cruel slash. The sabre penetrated Torriente's shoulder about two inches and then, slipping down, split the entire right arm. The boy fell to his knees and the word to stop was given.

Sotolongo was too excited to hear the order and rushed at his helpless opponent, trying to strike him. Cervantes, however, knocked him down by a blow from his revolver. Instantly pandemonium broke loose. Every one present drew his revolver and several shots were fired. Julio Sanguliy's presence of mind alone averted a riot. The seconds on either side challenged each other, and cards were exchanged so quickly that it was impossible to count the challenges. Charlie Aguirre was challenged seven times and accepted each challenge. Some wanted to fight then and there. Finally, however, all was peacefully settled. There are today some men in Havana who will tell you that Torriente was wounded after he had slipped and fallen. This is not true. Sotolongo, who is naturally very nervous, did not know what he was doing when he attacked Torriente. Later on he apologized. Torriente lost the use of his right arm. Sometimes a man will refuse to fight. Then his life is made miserable. Letters stating the cause of the challenge and denouncing the man as a coward,

are published in all the newspapers by the challenger. The other man is cut by his friends, and in the end is either compelled to fight or leave the city.

The Cubans are just at present on their good behavior. I expect very shortly to hear that the duelling fever has again broken out. It is generally an epidemic and comes on the average of once a month. To my knowledge there are now nine accepted challenges. These are echoes of the war, and the principals agreed to wait until peace was established before fighting. One of these challenges was issued by Armando Menocal and accepted by Gen. Maximo Gomez.

THE HAVANESE.

A. R. De Fluente, editor of the Journal, Doylestown, Ohio, suffered for a number of years from rheumatism in his right shoulder and side. He says: "My right arm at times was entirely useless. I tried Chamberlain's Pain Balm, and was surprised to receive relief almost immediately. The Pain Balm has been a constant companion of mine ever since and it never fails." For sale by Benson, Smith & Co., Ltd., wholesale agents.

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In purchasing real estate, to do well, one must know where to buy and how to buy. I offer my experience and knowledge of values of property to those who desire to purchase business properties for income or lots for residence purposes. Information cheerfully given on all matters pertaining to real estate in San Francisco. Parties coming from the Islands who desire to invest are requested to call and absolute and positive bargains will be submitted to them. I will be happy to correspond with any who may wish to inquire about real estate in San Francisco. Full charge taken of property and taxes paid for absent owners. References: Any Bank in San Francisco.

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