

words the better ! The ground was chosen yesterday by the seconds : in yonder copse, fifty yards away, a farmer's cart is ready by their appointment to bear away what cannot walk or sit a horse—what may never do either again. Delay is only risk of interruption, and the two swords are of a length. Strip the men to their shirts, and to it at once !

A village boy, a youngster of eleven, had been shrewd enough to see that this cart, starting in the early morning furtively, must portend something to be seen, something of interest and excitement. Else why should a gentleman he knew to be no farmer accompany it—the village surgeon who had bound up a cut hand for him and stopped the blood ? He had followed on, boy-like, always wondering the more as the cart went farther ; had hidden awhile that two horsemen should pass him by ; had seen them overtake the cart, and now slipped up to the scene of action undetected. But he is young, and cannot bear intent to kill. The swift glitter of the crossed swords is a terror to him, and he stops his ears that he may not hear their slicing ring and sharp metallic click. For all that, he is held spell-bound ; and must see it through, now.

He is young, but he can see and understand—enough, at any rate, to see that the older man is keen to kill, if he may. Keener than the younger and shorter man, who seems to this boy to hold his opponent in play, keeping well behind his own strong guard. A glorious art, thinks the boy through his terror, that can make of a mere quick-moving point an impassable steel wall. And he watches, still spell-bound, and is aware that the older man, warmer and warmer to his work, is taxing the swordsmanship of his opponent, albeit he himself is the lesser swordsman.

The ringing of the swords quickens, strengthens. A strong rally and a swift ! . . . What is that ?