

COFFEE AND PISTOLS.

Such is the jocular, half-sneering byword by which we now designate an institution which has only come to an end in our own day; once the only method, among gentlemen, of settling even the most simple and trifling difficulties of every-day life; but at its best, a relic of barbarism, even when clothed in the garb of honour, falsely so-called. And yet, barbarous as it may seem to us of the present day, who look back upon it merely as something to be wondered at, or even, in some points, to be admired; yet, had we lived but a century ago, nothing would have ever occurred to us as a more just and more justifiable mode of making wrong right. But such is human nature; as water takes the shape and colour of the vessel into which it is poured, so are our thoughts and opinions moulded by the thoughts and opinions of those by whom we are surrounded, and by the circumstances in which we are placed.

In no country, with the exception, perhaps, of France, was duelling ever more in vogue than in our own motherland, where, happily, it is now entirely extinct. But, though in England the combined efforts of jurists, statesmen, churchmen and journalists have succeeded in putting it down, yet, like many another old custom, it was loath to die. And even since the courts have regarded the killing of a man in a duel as a capital offence, not a few hostile meetings have taken place. The last notable duel in England was in 1852, between two Frenchmen. The last between Englishmen was in 1845. But though stamped out of existence, its spirit still lives; for, as late as 1868, a challenge was sent from one Englishman to another; the termination, however, was anything but romantic, the challenger being arrested and bound over to keep the peace.

Ireland, too, has long been famous for duels and duellists. But France has exceeded every thing. There the duello is used by all classes and conditions of men to redress insults of the most absurd and fanciful character. Editors, when weary of fighting with the pen, take to the sword, and generally with equal success; for there every man is trained in the use of the foil. From the highest noble to the lowest peasant, all are ready at any moment to take that little trip to Vincennes, St. Germaine, or across the border into Switzerland, in defence of their honour. But among English-speaking people of the present day it is generally regarded in the light of a farce.

Dr. Franklin, after moralizing on the subject, proceeds to tell the following story:—A gentleman in a coffee-house desired another to sit further from him. "Why so?" "Because, sir, you smell." "That, sir, is an affront, and you must fight me." "I will fight you if you insist on it, but I don't see how that will mend the matter; for if you kill me, I shall smell too; and if I kill you, you will smell, if possible, more than you do at present."

Duelling, in its strict sense, and as we understand it, had its rise early in the 16th Century, in the reign of Francis I., of France, when numerous duels were fought, many of which were fatal. During the reigns of Henry IV., Louis XIII., and Louis XIV., many laws were made against duelling, which, if they had been rigorously enforced, might have long ago put a stop to the practice. During the reign of the last two, duelling was at its height in France. I do not incline to the belief of some, who hold that Cain called his brother out by a formal challenge, and that the affair was in reality a duel, nor do I think that we can rightly regard the judicial combats of the middle ages as duels, but, on the contrary, believe, as I have said before, that the 16th Century saw its birth. In England, we do not hear much

of it until the middle of the 17th Century. It reached its maximum in the reign of Charles II.; in the time of George III. it again broke out, and the laws against it seem only to have given it a greater impulse, as duellists were often known to have had pardons from the king before the duels came off.

The weapon first in use was the sword, and being worn by everybody, it was naturally whipped out on every occasion; a knowledge of fencing was therefore a necessary part of every gentleman's education. Next came the pistol, but instead of superseding the former, it became merely an alternative; the choice resting always with the challenged party. Both weapons had the most fabulous care bestowed on them, everything in connection with them being kept in the best possible condition. Many a sword and case of pistols has its romantic story attached to it. A good brace of pistols was constantly in use; if not in the service of the owner, then, in that of some of his friends.

According to computation, the chances of being killed are about fourteen to one, and of being hit about six to one. "Hence," as says Steinmetz, "the farce of duelling. Challenges have been of all kinds: from the polite and courteous invitation to a meeting, to the blustering threat of punishment; wrathful challengers have even ventured into the sacred domains of poetry; the Italians word their challenges with an almost Spartan-like laconicism. The following is a specimen:—

"Sir,—If your courage is equal to your impudence, you will meet me to-night in the woods."

Though the principals often fought alone, yet the custom of arranging matters through second parties was generally adopted; sometimes, too, the seconds took part in the fray, making an exceedingly agreeable quartette, especially for the person who dropped the handkerchief. The duties of a second were always arduous, as great knowledge and skill were required to bring matters to an amicable termination without compromising the dignity of one's principal; and many lives have been lost through ignorance or carelessness on the part of the seconds.

My purpose in writing this short sketch of duelling has not been to recommend it to any one, but if any are so disposed, I would advise them to adopt the following method of settling their disputes:—

A graduate of Cambridge gave another the lie, and a challenge followed. The mathematical tutor of the college sent for the youth, who told him he must fight.

"Why?" asked the mathematician.

"Because he gave me the lie," said the youth.

"Very well, let him *prove* it. If he proves it, you did lie, and if he does not prove it, he lies. Why should you shoot one another? Let him *prove* it.—Q. E. D.

READING ROOM.—A general meeting of the students was held on Tuesday, March 27th, to receive the report of the Reading Room Committee. The Treasurer intimated that there was a surplus on hand of \$21 odd, a statement so unusual for a college institution that it was heartily cheered. After receiving the resignation of the committee for the past session, the following were elected a provisional committee for the summer: P. D. Ross, R. Dawson, Holton Wood, J. F. Scriber, P. T. Lafleur. A vote of thanks was unanimously tendered to the retiring committee.

—The Harvard students complain of not being allowed to enter the alcoves and take down books. The *Crimson* says it takes too long to find the "Library Boy."