

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE PISTOL.

BY ROBERT POSTANS.

IN the London Illustrated Magazine there is an excellent article on the absurdity of settling disputes by means of the rapier or the pistol. The author, whose name appears above, is unsparing in his condemnation of the barbarous practice. He relates the following incidents in illustration of his remarks. They are so well described that we do not hesitate to give them a nook in the pages of the GARLAND:—

THE MIDSHIPMEN'S DUEL.

We lay at anchor in a sloop of war, in a snug cove in the southern part of the Malay peninsula, into which we had run to repair trifling damages done to our standing rigging. I was then a youngster, and my opponent was the dearest friend I had on board. We slept in the same berth, a very confined place, and our light and air came in through a scuttle in the ship's side. My cot was close to this opening, and my friend slept in another outside mine. One night after an unusually hot day, a dispute arose between us whether the scuttle should be left open for the admission of air or not, and certainly very inconsiderate language passed between us. However, it was only a boy's quarrel, and it was arranged that my mesmate should sleep next the scuttle, and have it open or shut, just as he pleased; and when the morning sun arose, none were better friends than we.

Unhappily our disagreement had been overheard by a superior officer, who sent for me into his cabin on the morning following. This person was a good seaman, and possessed what the world calls high notions of honor. He soon informed me that he was acquainted with all that had occurred between us; and expressing regret that such language had passed between gentlemen, desired to know how we had arranged it. I told him, simply by allowing my friend to sleep in my cot, and we were then as good friends as any in the ship. "Then, sir," said this advocate of honour, "if that is the way it is to terminate, I beg to desire you will not put your feet under my mahogany again, and that all communications except those relating to duty, cease between us." I left the cabin astonished at the turn the affair had taken, and was surprised to find another attaching an importance to circumstances which appeared to me so trifling.

However, upon consulting with the other officers I discovered, unless I called out my friend, and shot at him, they would imitate the example of their superior, and I felt I should be despised by all on board. At my inexperienced age it was not surprising I implicitly adopted the opinions of the elder officers, most of whom were veterans in comparison to myself. No time was allowed for reflection, and no one to advise with if there had been; and firmly believing that I was acting the part of an honourable man, I sent a challenge, demanding a meeting on shore at six o'clock the same evening, to afford me "satisfaction" for the insults my friend had offered me the night previous.

The stern ideas of honor which swayed our punctilious superiors prevented an apology, and nothing but a hostile meeting could make us friendly again, or wash away the supposed stains upon our characters.

The day wore away rapidly, and at the appointed hour a party of six, including my friend (for, so I call him, although by the opinions of others he was for the time converted into an imaginary foe), jumped into the boat and made for the shore.

We soon reached the land, which was covered with luxuriant tropical foliage; the distance was curtailed with mountains, whose swelling sides displayed a thousand different hues, and the whole spot was pregnant with myriads of animated things. The errand on which I came did not prevent my admiration of the beauties of nature. I could have fallen on my knees and worshipped the Being who had created such a place.

The short reverie was abruptly ended by my second, who placed the pistols in my hands: the distance was fixed, and trifling instructions delivered to each: when upon the signal being given, we both fired;—in an instant I felt as though I had been electrified, and finding myself wounded, was about to lean upon my second's arm, when I perceived my opponent fall upon the sand. My own wound was in the fleshy part of the thigh; it did not prevent my running up to the prostrate figure of my old friend, whose face exhibited intense pain, and kneeling down by his side I implored his forgiveness, which he instantly granted. My despair at his fate knew no bounds; and accusing myself of his murder, I upbraided, with the bitterest reproaches, those who urged me to send the challenge.

I thought no more of myself; all my care was given to the unfortunate victim of absurd notions of honour. With great difficulty we removed him to the boat and returned to the ship, when the surgeon minutely examined his wound, and pronounced it dangerous. For weeks after, his