
Manual of *Contre Pointe* Fencing

Joseph Tinguely

Translated from *Manuel d'Escrime à la Contre Pointe* (1856) by [Chris Slee](#), LongEdge Press, 2017

Translator's Note

I have left the terms for attacking and defending largely unaltered as each is understandable in context. In short, *porter*, *donner un coup* is 'to make or give a strike' or *riposte* and *pousser*, while rendered as 'to push', generally denotes a thrust. *Prendre une parade* is 'to make a parry'. Thanks to Julien Garry for his foreword and advice.

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The “Counter Point” of Tinguely

First, nineteenth century French sabre fencing originates in military tradition. The épée, the most blatant symbol of nobility and power, was disfavored after 1789 and the French Revolution to be progressively replaced by sabre, a weapon considered to be popular if not infamous until then, as the officer’s weapon. That is why no mention of sabre fencing is to be found in treaties until the nineteenth century, unless in Pierre Francois Girard’s 1740’s¹ manual, where it is presented as and “irregular weapon”, a tool for bandits.

Thus, in the early 1800’s, while the épée benefited of a vast literature, sabre, the newcomer in the world of fencing, still had to be defined. Consequently, the master of arms in both the civil and the military worlds, who had always worked with épées, took charge of the teaching of this new type of fencing. Since the revolution, these masters had taken the role of teachers in the various *salles d’armes* opened by the regiments for the exclusive use of soldiers and officers.²

As it was necessary, and because the épée-masters had to clarify this new type of fencing in order to teach it, sabre fencing was developed parallel to épée-fencing (that was known as ‘point’) and thus created ‘counterpoint’. Sharing values and references with ‘point’ fencing, ‘counterpoint’ added the use of cuts that cannot be done with a épée.

Treatises on counterpoint, whether it be this of Tinguely or of the other masters, like Romuald Brunet³ or the Franco-Russian Alexandre Valville,⁴ are conceived as responses to épée-fencing, as it finds its roots in the same culture. Indeed, Brunet divided his treaty in two parts, first the ‘point’ aka sword-fencing, and second the ‘counterpoint’ aka sabre-fencing.

Sabre-fencing is therefore defined by its relation to French épée-fencing, but it does not mean that we are dealing with an immutable “tradition”, as every new author and treaty added new specificities counterpoint.

For example, while Romuald Brunet used the “official” French sabre tradition of the school of Joinville,⁵ Valville burrowed some moves from Slav sabre-fencing.

As for Tinguely, French speaker from Switzerland, he created a method using absolutely no moulinet, which differentiates him from his fellow authors, and based his fencing solely on thrusting. Not only did he create a unique fencing style, but he also transposed a French tradition into a Swiss one.

The following is an excellent translation of Tinguely’s method by Chris Slee.

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¹Girard Pierre Jacques François, *Traité des armes. dédié au Roy*, Lahaye, Pierre de Hondt, 1740, page 93-99.

²François Jules Dérué, *L’escrime dans l’armée*, Quantin, Paris, 1888, page 16-17.

³Romuald Brunet, *Traité d’escrime. Pointe et contre-pointe*, E. Rouveyre & G. Blond, Paris, 1884

⁴Alexandre Valville, *Traité sur la Contre-pointe*, Charles Kray, St Petersburg, 1817

⁵The école normale supérieure de Joinville le Pont was the training center for military masters of arms and had great influence throughout its activity from the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century.

Manuel d'Escrime

A LA

CONTRE-POINTE

COMPOSÉ

POUR LES OFFICIERS DE TOUTES ARMES,

PAR

Joseph TINGUELY

MAÎTRE D'ESCRIME.

Cet ouvrage se recommande, d'ailleurs, à chacun, par la grande facilité qu'il donne de s'occuper, avec utilité et agrément, d'une branche de l'escrime indispensable à tout militaire armé du sabre.

Manual of *Contre Pointe* Fencing

Composed for Officers of All Arms

by

Joseph Tinguely *Fencing Master*

This work is recommended, moreover, to everyone through the great aptitude⁶ with which he deals, with utility and pleasure, with a branch of fencing indispensable to all soldiers armed with the sabre.

Payerne, Imprimerie Ch. Caille. 1856

⁶*facilité*

Introduction

The art of fencing is one of the most suitable means of obtaining excellent exercise as well as an elegant and graceful amusement. It gives to the man an easy carriage, simple step, a gaze of astonishing precision as well as a very great bodily agility. The different ways fencing is useful are incontestable so it is with infinite reason that one recommends its study to young people.

Sabre, Mask and Glove

The sabres must be generally in proportion with those of the Infantry Officers. It is usual to wear on the right hand a glove padded on the back as well as on the outside of the fingers. The masks must have a metal wire front strong enough to resist an accidental blow to the face. The top of the mask must be furnished with a cushion to protect against⁷ head strikes. Finally, it is usual in all the *salles d'armes* to wear practical attire.⁸

End of the Introduction

Manual of *Contre Pointe* Fencing

I. The Manner of Holding the Sabre

When one is put on guard, the handle of the sabre must be flat in the hand and the thumb placed against the upper back part of the handle two centimetres from the board. The pommel must protrude past the wrist.

II. Guards of *Quarte* and *Tierce* (Fig. 1 and 2)

Put yourself in the first position: the right foot before the left, the feet turned at right angles.⁹

Put yourself on guard in *quarte*: advance the right foot around fifteen centimetres from the left foot, the two heels on the same line. Turn the wrist such that the fingers are upwards, [such] that your hand is on the same line as the lowest part of the chest, the arm not extended but a little curved and the elbow a little inclined on the outside. The point of your sabre must be elevated around fifteen degrees and directed towards the upper part of the chest. Place the left hand on the hip,¹⁰ the fingers forward and the thumb behind. Your body must be on the side¹¹ and the head turned towards your opponent so as to see your point. The balance of your body must rest on the left leg. Hold the left knee bent and flexible in order that you are inclined a little to the rear. The right knee must be a little flexed perpendicular to the place on which your heel rests.

⁷*pour parer*

⁸*un habit commode*

⁹*les pointes des pieds tournées en équerre*

¹⁰*la hanche*

¹¹ie: in profile to your opponent

The position of the guard in *tierce* is similar to that of *quarte* except the right hand must be a little inverted so that the fingers may be turned downwards. The right arm must be a little extended on the outside to assure or cover the exterior side. The point must be as in *quarte*.

III. Engagement

To engage in *quarte* or *tierce* is to oppose the blade of your opponent, whether on the inside or the outside. When you judge it useful, first join blades in guard in *tierce*.

IV. The Advance and Retreat

To advance, carry the right foot for a distance of more than thirty centimetres and the left foot achieves the same distance. These two movements must be made almost in the same time. Let your body be firm and assured while you advance five or six times and there should be a short pause between each advance. After having made five or six steps forward, observe whether the position of your guard is exactly the same as when you began.

In the retreat, the left foot makes the first movement backwards and the right foot follows nearly at the same time.

V. Simple Parries in *Quarte* and *Tierce* (Fig. 3 and 4)

One distinguishes them from all the others because they defend the breast. As the superior parry, to parry in *quarte*, place yourself in guard in *tierce* and push your hand towards the left. Then, making a gradual turn upwards with the wrist, turning the fingers upwards, withdraw your hand a little towards your body in order that the opposition is greater and protects the face on the left side.¹²

Make the simple parry in *tierce* from the guard in *quarte* pushing and curving the arm obliquely to the outside, the fingers inverted by a gradual turn of the wrist. In achieving this parry, one protects the silhouette on the right side.

The point of the sabre, no more than your body and your legs, must not deviate from the line of attack [la ligne de direction in making one of these parries.

VI. Simple Parries in *Seconde* and *Prime* (Fig. 5 and 6)

The parry in *seconde* is an excellent counter to flank strikes and [strikes] from *seconde*.

To make it from *quarte en tierce*, the fingers and the wrist must be turned downwards, the point lowered, the arm well extended, the hand pushed to the outside and the wrist curved as much as possible in order that the point is directed to your opponent's side.

Make the parry in *prime* [with] the fingers turned downwards, the hand lifted higher than the mouth and pushed to the outside, the arm drawn against the body¹³ and the wrist lowered in order that the point can be lowered further than in all other low parries.

¹²*et pare la figure du côté gauche*

¹³*le bras bien tiré contre le corps*

VII. Simple Parries in Low *Quarte*, Low *Tierce* and *Quinte* (Fig. 7, 8 and 9)

To make the parry in low *quarte*, from *quarte en tierce*, the fingers and the wrist must be turned upwards, the elbow tight to the body, the point raised and the hand pushed to the outside. Lowering the arm, parry the forearm strike¹⁴ to the inside.

Make the parry in low *tierce* [with] the fingers forward, the wrist turned upwards, the elbow tight to the hip, the point raised and inclined to the right¹⁵ and the hand pushed to the outside. Lowering the arm, parry the forearm strike to the outside.

For the parry in *quinte*, from a low *quarte en seconde*, the fingers must be turned downwards, the wrist higher than the head, the arm a little curved, the elbow pushed to the outside, the blade horizontal before the head and the point a little forward.

VIII. Extend, Lunge, Strikes of *Quarte* and of *Tierce* (Fig 10 and 11)

The strikes are for the most part executed lunging, except for the forearm strikes.

To make the straight strike of *quarte* to the inside, your point must be directed towards your opponent's chest, the arm well elevated and pushed to the inside, the fingers upwards, your body advances making an extension of the right arm and of the left leg. Push then the strike in *quarte* lunging to a distance proportional to your height, the body must be a little inclined forward, the head straight looking to the outside towards the shoulder in order to see the point.

Approaching your opponent's chest, oppose a gradual resistance on his sabre, on the inside, to cover yourself lunging. Bend the right knee and, that it is perpendicular to your heel, the left knee and thigh extended, the foot fixed strongly to the ground.

To lift yourself with ease, push on the two heels, more strongly at first on the right then on the left. At the same time bend the left knee, and, inclining the body backwards, put yourself again in guard.

The strike in *tierce* differs from the strike in *quarte* only because one inverts the wrist, elevates the hand and pushes to the outside.

IX. Strikes in *Seconde* and *Prime*

Make the strike in *seconde* after the parry in *tierce*. When you are engaged in *tierce*, lower your point under your opponent's wrist and the fingers downwards, lunge and give a strike on the side [of the opponent].

The strike in *prime* is the natural riposte strike. Parry your opponent's strike when he is too advanced pushing vigorously at you. The strike in *prime* is only a simple extension of the arm or of the opposition. The fingers being lowered, the arm must be well elevated and pushed to the inside.

¹⁴*un coup de manchette* – the term *manchette* here refers to a strike at the opponent's sword arm and should not be confused with the name of the padded glove worn by sabreurs

¹⁵*oblique à la droite*

X. To Disarm

After having parried your opponent's strike in simple *quarte* or with the counter of *quarte* and without leaving his blade, push abruptly over the top binding it¹⁶ with yours. Invert the wrist, the fingers as in *seconde* and, with this movement, give a sharp strike to his blade. If this does not disarm him, it will throw his hand and his blade outside the line of attack¹⁷ so that you can set your point and give him a strike in *seconde*.

XI. Observation on the Counter of *Quarte* and on that of *Tierce*

One can eliminate the strikes of your opponent not only with simple parries but also by means of counters that consist of describing a quarter circle with the point of the sabre to gather that of your opponent and drive away the threatening point.¹⁸

Thus, for the counter of *quarte*, the blade leaves from the left, describes a quarter circle to the right in order to return to expel¹⁹ the opponent's blade to the left.

For the counter of *terce*, the blade leaves from the right, describes a quarter circle to the left in order to return to expel the opponent's blade to the right.

XII. Varied Strikes to the Legs (Fig. 12), Head and Forearm

Engaging in *quarte*, if the opponent makes a strike to your thigh on the inside, withdraw the wrist to the left shoulder, swing the right leg fifteen centimetres behind the left foot and give him a vigorous strike to the right temple. The strike in *terce* is made in the same manner.

If the opponent makes a strike to your thigh on the outside, withdraw the wrist to the right shoulder and give him a strike on the side of the left temple.

Engaging in *quarte*, if one makes a strike to your thigh on the outside, invert the wrist, the point of the sabre downwards, push the wrist to the outside, parry with a half-moulinet,²⁰ swing the leg backwards and make a head strike.

Engaging in *terce*, if one makes a strike to your thigh on the inside, parry in *prime* and swinging the leg backwards, give a forearm strike on the inside, invert the wrist and, the fingers turned upwards, push the hand to the outside, the elbow on the inside.

XIII. Variations on Simple Parries and Feinting Strikes

Engaging in *quarte*, if the opponent gives you a face strike on the outside, parry in *terce* and give him a riposte strike on the inside, the opponent will parry in *quarte*. He will then give you a flank strike that you will parry in *seconde*. Push²¹ on the blade and make a strike at the head. If the opponent is slow to make a riposte, give a flank strike from the wrist as you recover yourself.

¹⁶ *appuyez brusquement dessus en la resserrant*

¹⁷ *la ligne de direction*

¹⁸ *et l'éloigner du point menacé*

¹⁹ *chasser*

²⁰ *un demi moulinet*

²¹ *forcez*

Engaging in *tierce*, on a face strike on the inside, parry in *quarte* and give a face strike on the outside. If one gives you a stomach strike, parry in low *quarte* and push in *quarte* on the inside.

Engaging in *quarte*, if the opponent gives you a flank strike, parry in *seconde* then make a feint to the head and give a flank strike. The opponent will parry in *quinte* and *seconde* and will give you a strike to the head, thus parry in *quinte* and give a riposte to the breast.

Engaging in *tierce*, if the opponent pushes a strike in *seconde*, parry in *prime* and riposte with a strike to the left temple; but he will parry in *quarte* and give you a strike on the arm on the outside, parry then in low *tierce* and push in *tierce* to the inside.

XIV. Feints

Feints serve to force²² your opponent to uncover himself. The simple feint to the face²³ is made from two separate disengagements. One engages either in *quarte* or in *tierce*.

When the opponent makes a feint face strike, if you are engaged in *quarte*, parry [with] a simple parry in *tierce* or in *quarte*, present²⁴ a very small face strike in *tierce*, then quickly make a strike in *quarte*.

If he makes a feint *seconde* and gives a strike on the head, parry in *seconde* and *quinte* and quickly riposte with a strike in *seconde*.

Engaging in *tierce*, if the opponent gives you a feint face strike, parry in *quarte* and *tierce*, make a simple feint in *quarte* and quickly make a strike in *tierce*. If he goes to give you a stomach strike²⁵ and gives a strike to the right temple, parry in low *quarte* and *tierce*, and push a strike in *seconde* to the inside.

XV. Variations on the Engagements and Disengagements, Advancing and Retreating, Simple Parries and Strikes

Assume that you are engaged in *quarte*. If the opponent retreats, advance well covered in *quarte*. If he retreats again, advance with a disengagement in *tierce* and so on alternatively, taking care to be always well covered at each engagement. The advance and the retreat must take place at the same time. You can, in the same manner, retreat and your opponent advance.

In the engagement in *quarte*, if the opponent gives you a strike in *quarte*, parry it [by] making a parry in *quarte* and, in riposte, give a straight strike in *quarte*. The opponent will push straight in the same manner; then parry making a parry in *quarte*. In riposte, give a strike in *quarte* on the arm disengaging in *tierce*.

Engaging in *tierce*, the opponent will disengage and push a *quarte* to the inside, parry with a parry in *quarte*, disengage and push in *quarte* on the arm. The opponent will then parry and will return in *tierce* that in your turn you will parry with a parry in *tierce*, then you will lunge deeply with a straight strike in *tierce*.

²² *obliger*

²³ *la simple feint de figure*

²⁴ *montrez*

²⁵ *s'il vous passe un coup de ventre*

Note: All the lessons must be done with great attention and the students must repeat them very often in order to garner the benefits.²⁶ The student must always exercise with an opponent who is about the same level.²⁷ He will execute thus all the strikes, feintes, counters, engagements, etc, etc, while the opponent will remain in guard always naturally making use of the necessary parries to the strikes which are made [against] him. This latter must equally, on the other hand, make the applicable move in order that both can make progress in this exercise.

XVI. The Timed Strike

This strike is made when the opponent is slow. In this instance, taking care to cover yourself well while opposing yourself gradually but energetically on the blade of your opponent. Thus, there is no danger of exposing yourself to an exchange of blows,²⁸ that is to say simultaneous strikes or foul play.²⁹

XVII. The Salute Before Sparring

On the engagement in *tierce*, hit two lively *appels* or blows of the right foot that bring you immediately behind the left,³⁰ near the ankle. Extend and raise your right arm, the fingers turned upwards and the point of the sabre lowered. At the same time, graciously remove your helmet that you hold in the left hand extended along your flank. Then, with a circular movement of the wrist, and as if you would form the counter in *tierce*, withdraw your left foot to the distance of the ordinary guard, then, lifting the left hand and putting on again your helmet, making two other *appels*. Advance your left foot to the first position, that is to say, before the right, near the ankle. At the same time, extend your arm, the fingers upwards as before, and, in this position, graciously make also a parry in *tierce* and in *quarte*. Following, make a circular movement with the wrist and briskly advance the right foot to your first guard, covering at the same time your head. All the movements of this salute must be executed more rapidly than in the salute to push *quarte* and *tierce*.

Observe, however, that these movements must be made exactly at the same time as those of your opponent.

XVIII. Practical Observations

Take a bold air and an assured position. Fix your eyes on those of your opponent so that he cannot penetrate your plans. Keep a measured and a convenient distance. These dispositions are things very essential in sparring.³¹

Observe the size of your opponent as well as the length of his arm³² and make your arrangements³³ accordingly in order to manage your openings. If you can seize the opportunity to give a timed strike, take care to cover yourself well in opposing yourself strongly on his

²⁶ *pour en recevoir de bon fruits*

²⁷ *qui soit à peu près de même force*

²⁸ *un coup entre'échangé*

²⁹ *coup fourré*

³⁰ *que vous amenez aussitôt derrière le gauche*

³¹ *les assauts*

³² *la portée de son bras*

³³ *prenez vos dispositions*

blade, on an engagement in *quarte*, through a system of traps. Take your point higher than usual and if he wants to make a strike on the point, disengage at the contrary instant and push a *quarte* on the inside. Or you may, preferably, give a straight strike in *quarte* on the arm.

Do not press too far in making your riposte strikes. On being pressed, students acquire³⁴ the unfortunate habit of making their strikes crossing the arms.³⁵ But this is a grave fault.

Make your parries with precision³⁶ and accustom yourself from the beginning to make ripostes without disengaging.

If you want make a disengaging strike, you must make it at the moment when your opponent recovers and this strike must come from the movement of the wrist and not crossing the arms.

The distance of your guard must be reasonable. The distance for men is ordinarily from 60 or 70 centimetres. With a guard too large, you hold your opponent at too great a distance and you have no advantage for throwing your body [far] enough backwards when he advances and lunges. You can neither withdraw nor make a riposte with the necessary rapidity.³⁷ The lower parts of the body are also more exposed than in an appropriate and medium guard.³⁸

Never lunge too far for this will hinder you with coming back slowly into guard. Strive always to return quickly and as easily as possible, fixing your point at the body of your opponent. Try equally to make the most natural parry in the situation where your opponent makes a brisk riposte.

If you are engaged with an opponent of smaller size, attack him on an engagement in *tierce* which is more advantageous for a host of feints and strikes than an engagement in *quarte*, and which is, moreover, particularly favourable for the feint in *seconde* on the arm, etc.

If your opponent advances in his measure and strength a straight strike in *quarte* on the arm, or *tierce*, lift and bend therefore your arm, making a parry in *prime* before which he recovers himself, or, if your have not enough of an opening, disengage on his arm and give a strike in *seconde*.

When you begin a bout,³⁹ you can engage your opponent's blade out of measure in *quarte*, this engagement being more convenient⁴⁰ than others to execute your movements. But while engaging your opponent, hold yourself on the defensive for several moments to discover which feints and strikes he prefers. Change your parries as much as possible in order that in his turn he cannot be assured of those which your prefer. Even for a good student, once known as preferring this parry to that other, may be more easily deceived than is thought and be touched by an opponent very inferior in skill.

A student must make all the parries and change constantly, or at least as often as the occasion presents itself. He must endeavour to go from high parries to low and from latter to the former⁴¹ with all possible agility until, with sustained effort, he is capable of parrying nearly all the strikes.

³⁴*les élèves contractent...*

³⁵*en croisant le bras*

³⁶*justesse*

³⁷*la promptitude nécessaire*

³⁸*en guard moyenne et convenable*

³⁹*un assaut*

⁴⁰*plus commode*

⁴¹*des dernières aux premières*

If you engage the blade in *quarte*, cover a little your inside line⁴² and if you engage the blade in *tierce*, cover your outside line⁴³ to prevent straight strikes from these engagements.

When you attack, it is good to disengage with dexterity to the outside and to the inside, forming your extension as if you would attack.⁴⁴ If this does not offer any opening, at least you will have the opportunity of catching⁴⁵ the parries preferred by your opponent. If he only uses simple parries, you can deceive him easily making face strike feints. If he is a skilled fencer and he uses diverse counter parries, you must endeavour to perplex him with *appels*, strikes on the blade, feints in *seconde*, counter disengagements, etc.

In finishing, we recommend to our readers to practice their exercises with gentleness towards each other⁴⁶ and to endeavour to make all their parries with as much elegance as precision. Each must, in particular, show as little discomfort⁴⁷ as possible and, above all, give no access to any kind of fear.

⁴²*vosre intérieur*

⁴³*vosre extérieur*

⁴⁴*comme si vous vouliez pousser*

⁴⁵*surprendre?*

⁴⁶*avec douceur l'un à l'égard de l'autre*

⁴⁷*gène* (sic)

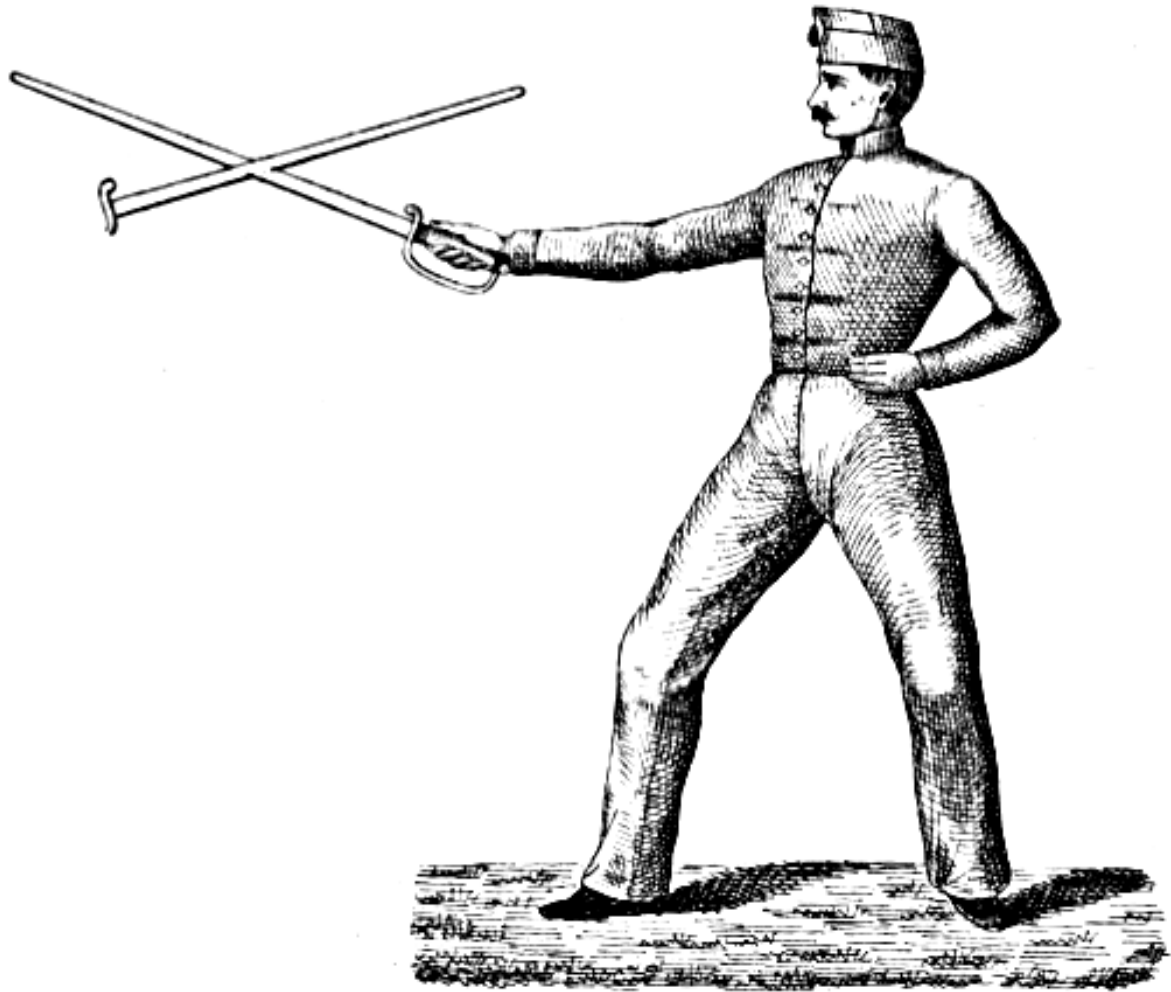


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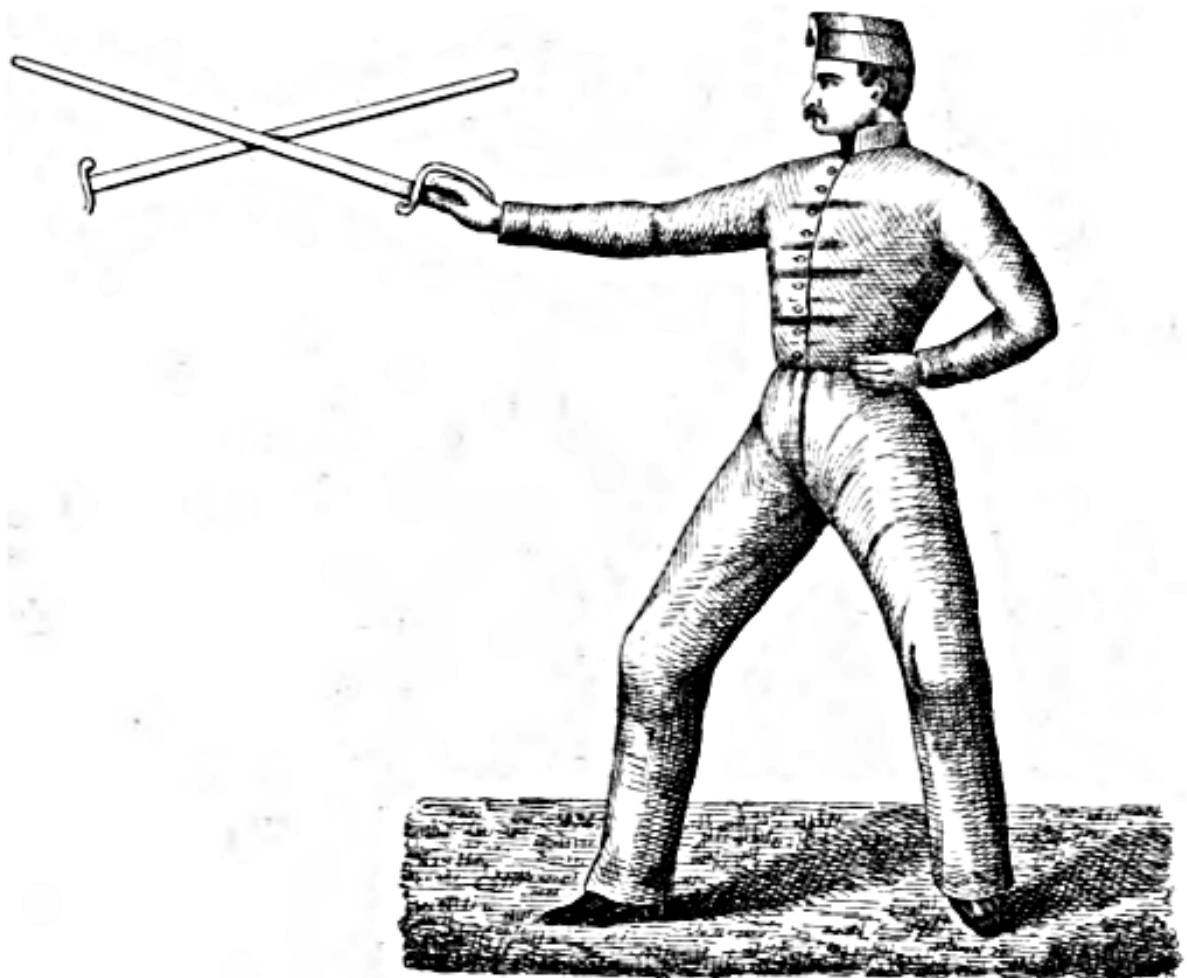


Figure 2:

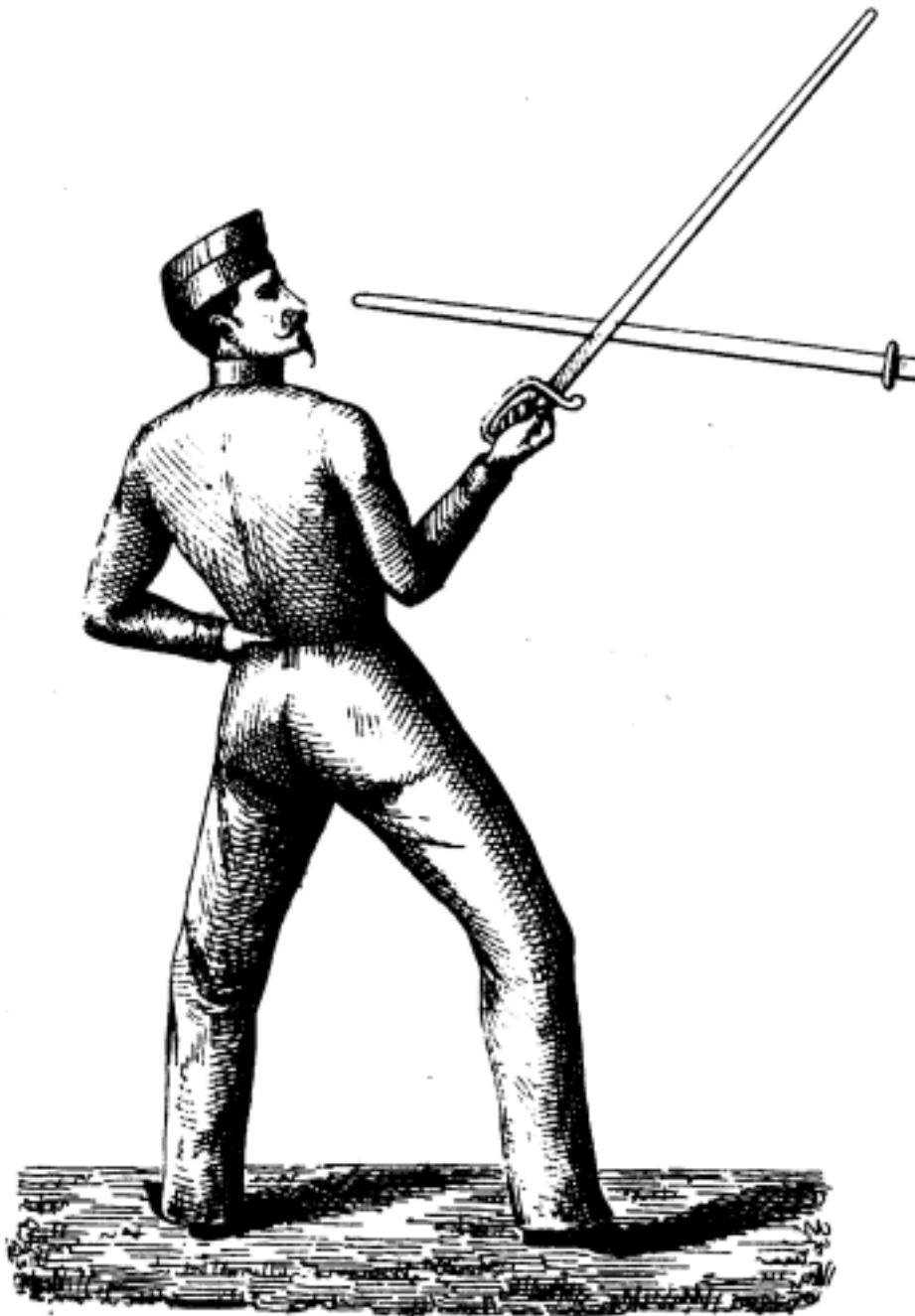


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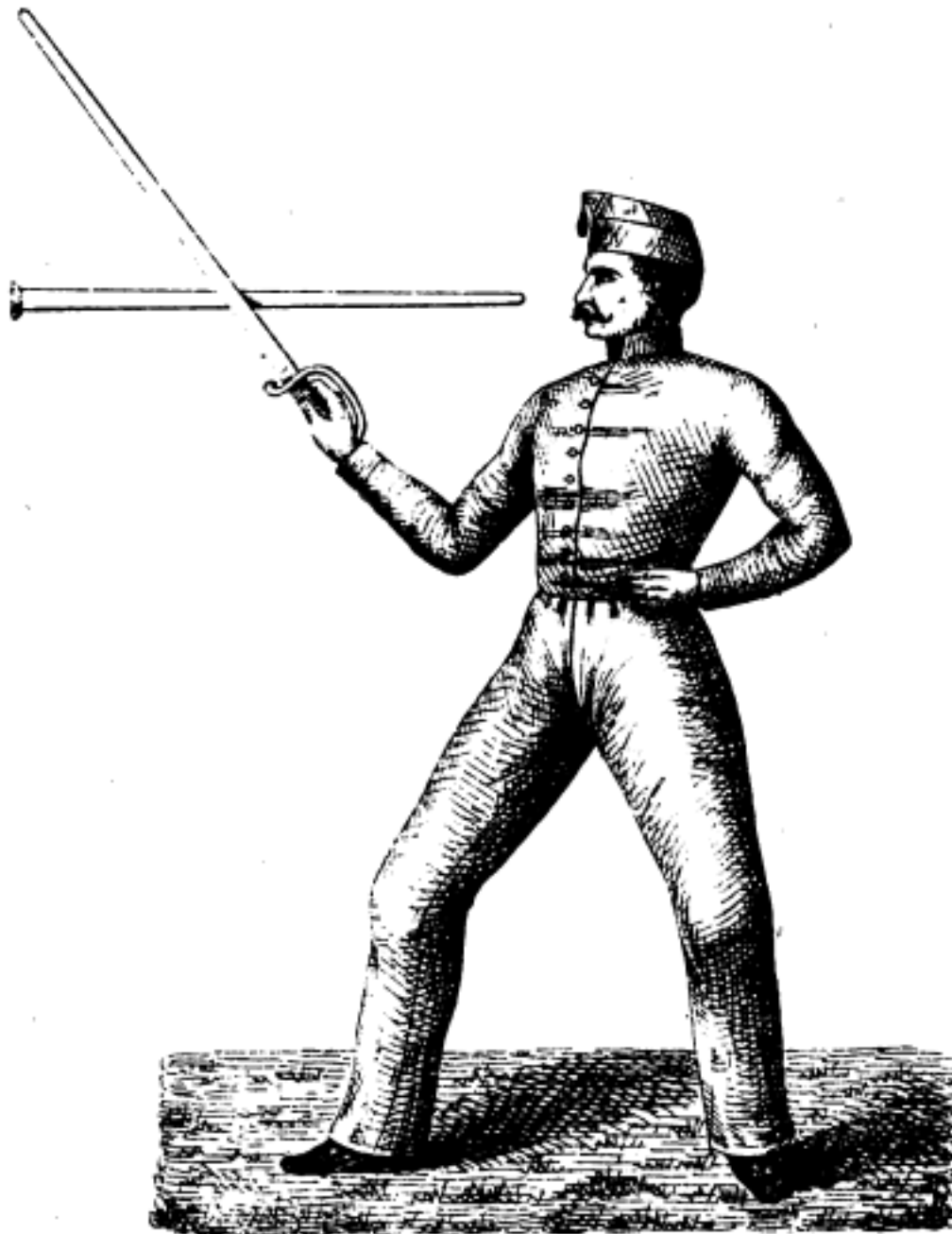


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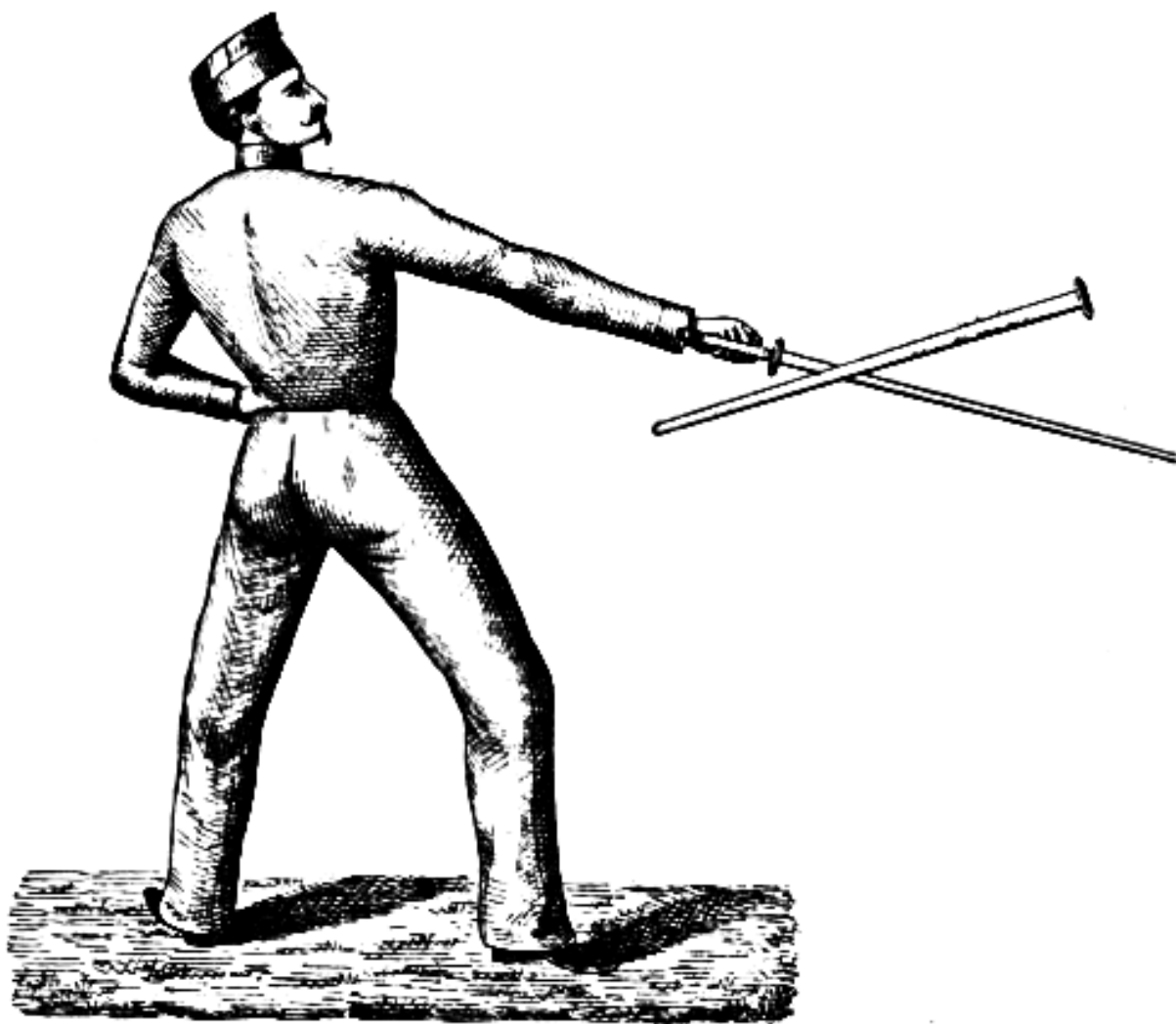


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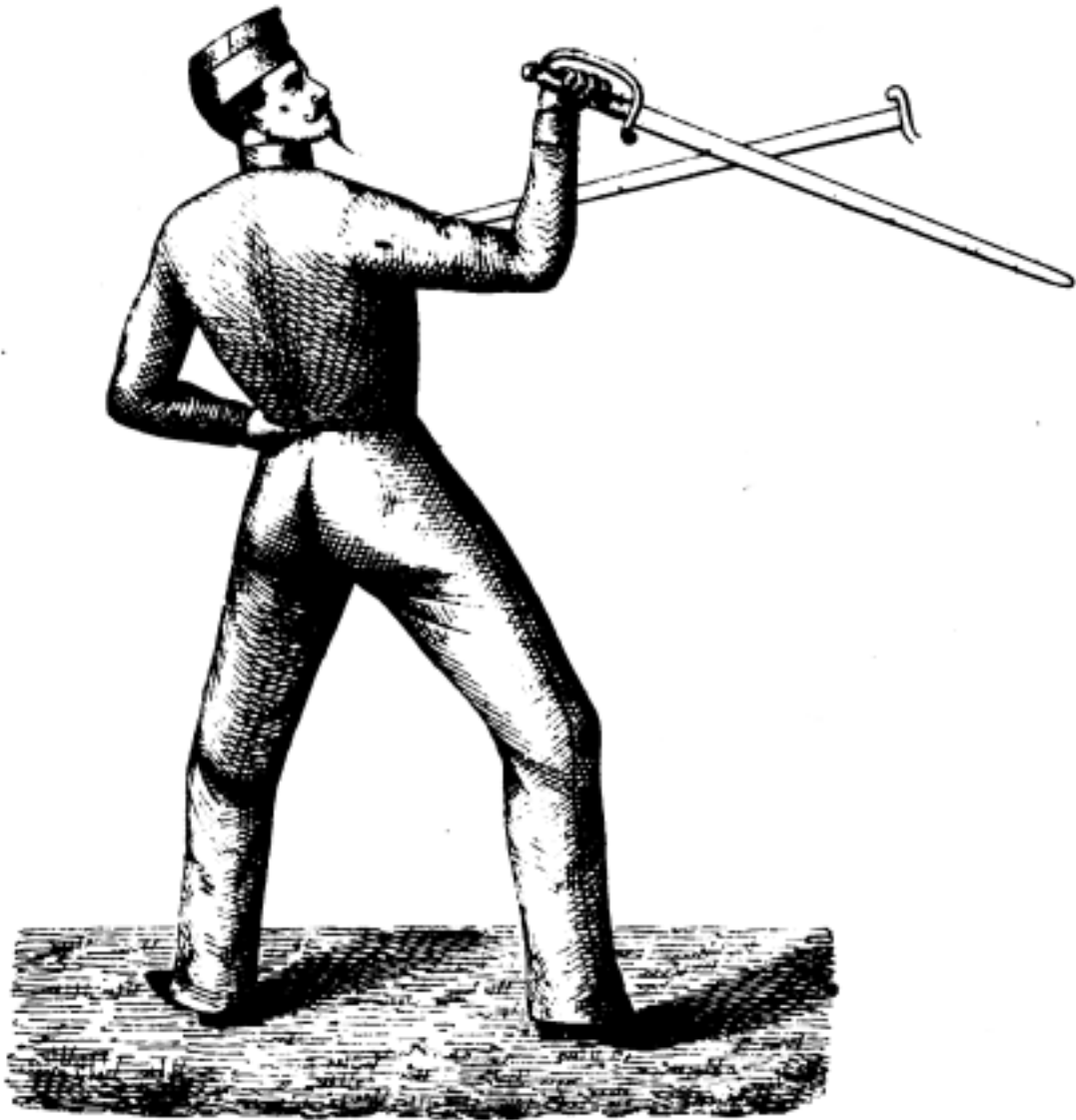


Figure 6:



Figure 7:

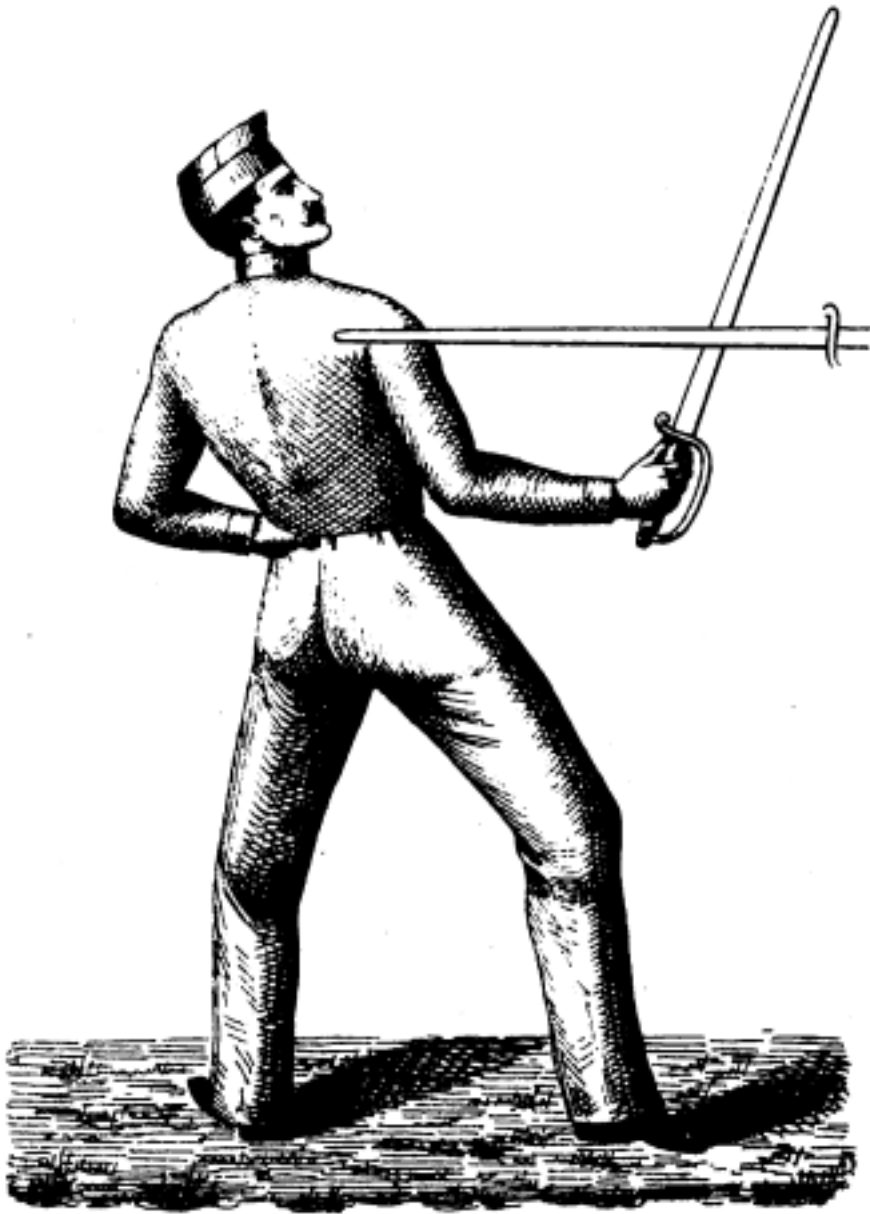


Figure 8:



Figure 9:

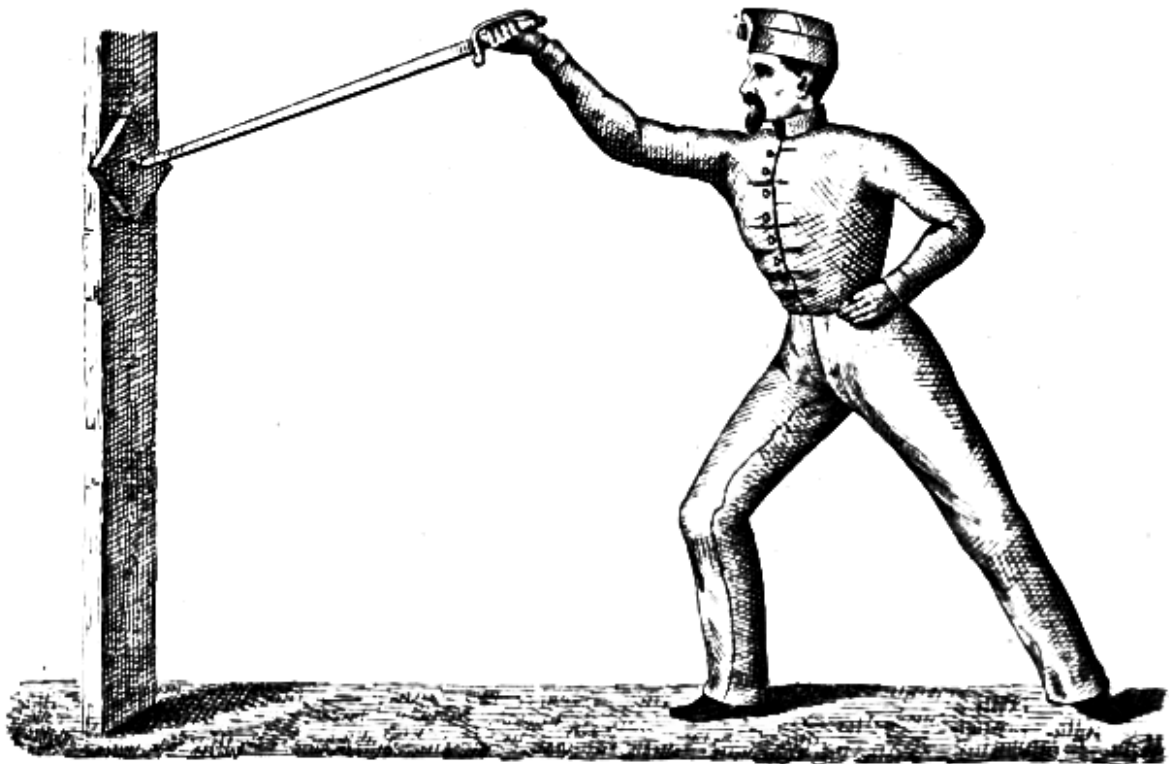


Figure 10:

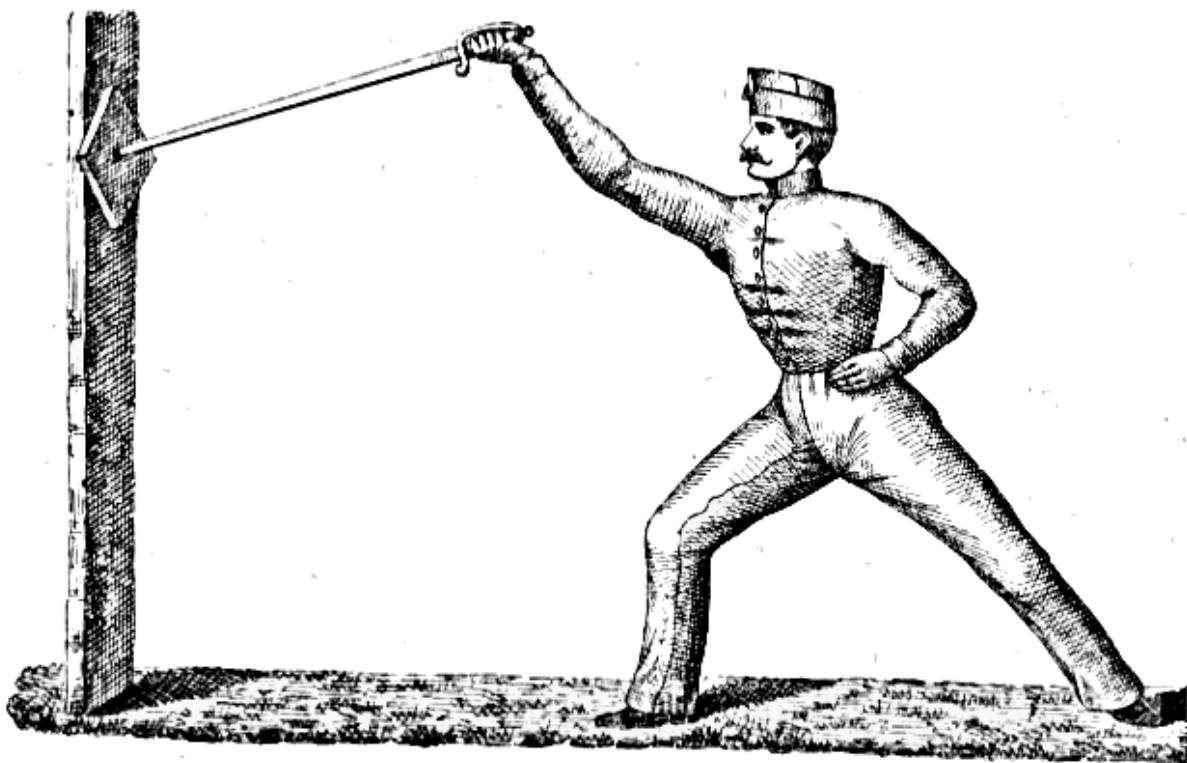
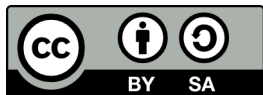


Figure 11:



Figure 12:



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