

# The Independent Master of Arms

Charles Besnard

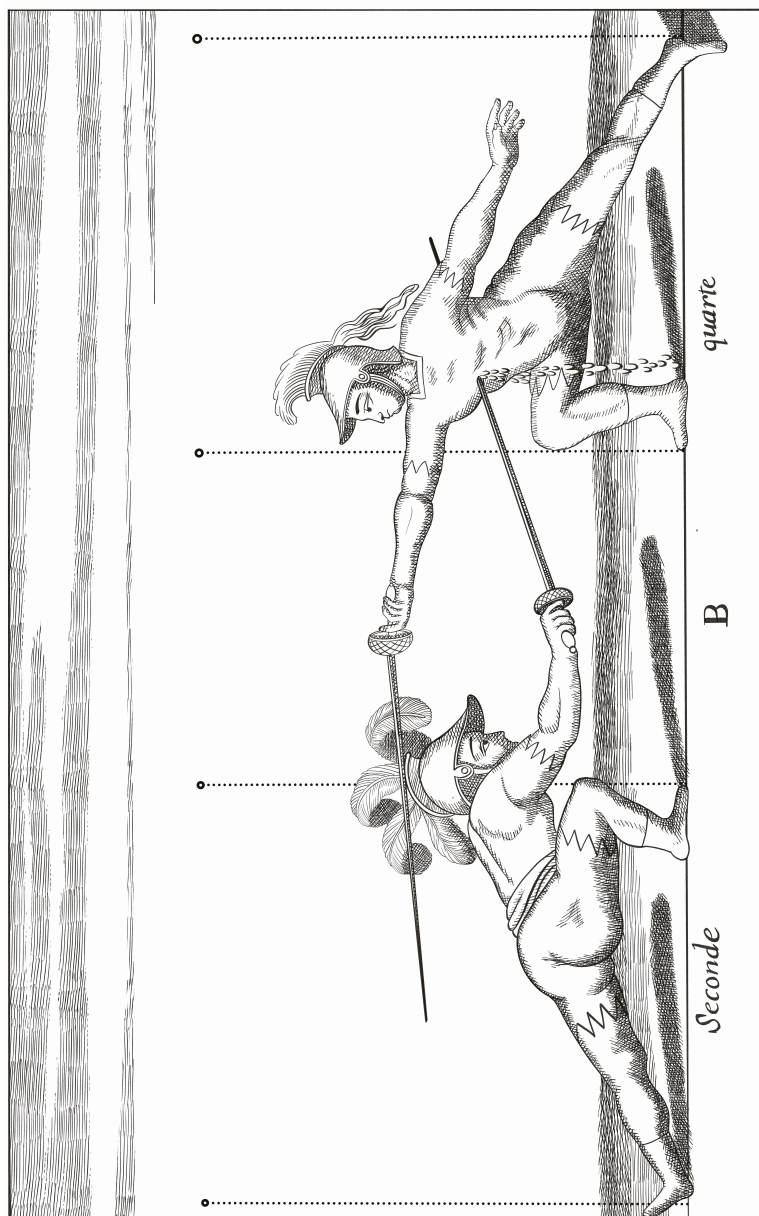
*Le Maître d'Arme Libéral*

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And on the fifth tempo, you will make a step forward with the [right?] foot, and you will put yourself in guard and stance in the manner we have previously taught. And it should be noted that in making this salute, you should not lower the head nor bend the body, as in the salutes of politeness that one makes. On the contrary, it is necessary to hold oneself straight in order to look fixedly at your opponent and consider his guard and stance.

Many people make their salute in another manner. But each does as seems good to him because it is only a small ritual which does not do anything to the foundations of this science.

After having made your salute to your opponent, who will have similarly given it to you, and you both being in guard on the fifth tempo, you will narrow the measure gently, considering his guard and posture.

Now you should be certain that no one can hold his guard except in one of the four manners, namely, high or low or in the middle, which is covering himself with the sword, in *quarte* or *tierce*, and it is necessary to not put oneself to pains in this since each is as easy to enter as the others. For in these four different guards, you have to make for each its own [particular] engagement.<sup>60</sup> But you should have a good foot, good eye, good hand, and good judgement with all the required dispositions of the body in order to well execute the tempos, counter-tempos, and counters of the counter with agility, vigour and elegance.

## Of the Engagement in *Quarte*

If your adversary holds his guard in the middle and covers himself with his true edge, the strong and half-strong of his sword to the outside, leaving no opening except on the inside of it in *quarte*,<sup>61</sup> you will narrow the measure until you can touch the half-strong and true edge of your sword to the weak of his and, in putting yourself at this measure you will engage the weak of his sword with the strong and true edge of yours, close very well three of your four doors and openings, giving no daylight except to the outside of your sword in *tierce*.<sup>62</sup>

Now, holding the sword of your adversary thus engaged and subjected on the inside, in *quarte*, you should know how to remedy these four things, which are:

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<sup>60</sup> *vous avez à leur faire à chacune son engagement*

<sup>61</sup> i.e.: the opponent leaves an opening in *quarte*

<sup>62</sup> i.e.: you leave open your *tierce* position

1. Where your opponent disengages and thrusts at you into *tierce*,
2. Where he disengages without thrusting at you, either making a feint or just to free [the sword],
3. Where he will contest against your sword,
4. Where he will not move the point of his [sword], that is to say, where he will remain engaged.

If your opponent takes a tempo to disengage from the inside and push his thrust into *tierce* at you, you will make one of the counters below to him as it pleases you, namely:

1. Where parrying with the strong and true edge of your sword, turning your wrist roundly from *quarte* to *tierce*, bring back in an instant the weak of your sword to the inside (where it was on the outside) holding it a little high in order to better close this opening and turn away and let your opponent's thrust pass by to the outside. This being done, you will riposte and thrust him in *tierce* or *seconde*, if he closes the opening of *tierce*, or in *quarte* if he closes both openings.
2. Where you will parry it with the false edge of your sword (as many people do) and after you will thrust to the body.
3. If he thrusts this strike at you forcing his strong on the weak of your sword so that you cannot turn aside his weak to the outside, you will be served by one of these three counters, namely, the two made by ceding to the force, and the other by turning.

One of the ways to cede to the force is done thus: in the same instant that you feel your weak being forced by the half-strong of your opponent's sword in extending his thrust in *tierce*, you will allow your point to go down and to the inside, softening the wrist, turning and lifting it up in such a manner that the pommel makes the height of your shoulder, your fingernails turned towards your opponent's head. And in this posture, you will find the strong and true edge of the sword on the inside, which will be opposed to the weak of his, which will turn it away and make it pass on the inside without being able to touch you at all, provided that you remove your left side in doing this. And in the instant that this strike is finished, you will lift again the weak of your sword with a movement of the wrist, pushing your riposte in *quarte* at him, where you will not fail to find an opening. This strike is not common, although very excellent.

4. This other manner of ceding, sword in hand, is very good, even against left-handers: it is done almost like the previous, but with this difference. When one thrusts at you in *tierce*, forcing thus as we have just said, you will obey from the wrist, lowering the point of your sword down and lifting the wrist by turning it until the thumbnail is turned towards your knee, the pommel high and to the outside and immediately you will make a turn of your sword in the form of a windmill<sup>63</sup> by turning the movement of the wrist circularly and raising the point from low to high. And in doing this turn, you will not fail to meet the weak of his with the strong of your sword, which will throw it, and it will pass in front of you without it being able to touch you. Finishing the turn of your sword, you could, with a *revers*, give a disarming strike or *estramaçon* with the true edge on the head or the arm of your opponent before he can retire or return to guard and, without which, it would be difficult for him to avoid this strike which, being well applied, which will put him in a state of not being able to do you any harm. And if you want to use this strike with the foil, in place of giving an *estramaçon*, it is necessary in completing and finishing your turn of the foil to strike at him and extend the thrust in *quarte* above the strong of his sword. These two ways of ceding to the force are very clean and useful to all those who do not have a strong wrist and will greatly deceive those who throw their thrusts in *tierce*, forcing the strong [against] the weak, because, not finding any resistance [and] instead of adjusting the body, [they] pass very far by across the front.
5. At the same time your opponent throws this thrust in *tierce* at you, turn your wrist into *quarte*, raising it and holding the point of your sword directly opposite his flank below the strong of his sword and, in the same instant, turn and quarter the body by turning on the right heel, a half-turn to the left, making two steps backwards, namely, the first with the left foot, putting the ankle of it behind the right heel, as it is represented in the plate labelled C, and the second with the right foot carrying the point of it behind the ankle of the left foot. And make these two steps sufficiently wide in order to find yourself very close to his right side to prevent him from being able to hit you with the point of his sword through an abbreviated re-taking, and also to prevent him from grabbing you and getting rid of your

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<sup>63</sup> *moulinet*

## Chapter IV

### Where It Is Seen that the Devil is the Author of Combat with Pistols

I have previously shown by good and strong reasoning, the damage, misfortune and disorder that this new combat with handguns brings to France, both to the private individual and in general, for which I have attributed the fundamental cause to ignorance and awkwardness in the exercise of the sword, which is a common and honourable weapon to all those who carry it, being also indeed the most noble and ancient of all the others and the most cherished and esteemed by the great who always carry it by their side, as much as a mark of their greatness and quality as to preserve their persons against those who would like to offend them and of which, at all times, men have been very curious and careful to learn the exercise and skill because, at all times also, [it] has been the usual custom to end differences with it, and notwithstanding any prohibitions that the Church and the Kings may have made, and all the remedies that they have known to do and to bring to prevent these hateful fights and duels, which were all of no use. That makes one see and know that it is a fury from hell that the demon has put from the beginning<sup>116</sup> into the heads of men and now it is impossible to take it out of their imagination, preferring rather their honour than their bodies and their souls. But seeing that this sword fight was not yet sufficiently pernicious and profitable for the increase of his empire, he knew and wanted lately<sup>117</sup> to bring it [swordsmanship] down and abolish it because most often he was only wasting his time and his effort, considering that after having employed all his diabolical industries and subtlety to put dissension and quarrels between men and to make them go out onto the meadow to cut their throats, he saw that by thinking of deceiving them he was deceiving himself, especially since instead of carrying out his designs and intentions they ended an instant their old quarrels and enmity by disarming each other with skill and giving each other quarter and from the irreconcilable enemies that they were, they became great friends and, therefore, he was frustrated by their claims.

And in order to not fall into the same trap, what did he do? He removed from most men who make professions of honour the knowledge of and skill with their swords in order to afterwards use their ignorance as an opportunity to found, establish and put into fashion and to make them fight with handguns on foot in order that in this

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<sup>116</sup> *de toute ancienneté*

<sup>117</sup> *depuis peu de jours*