

BOXING.

THOUGH to many people the sentiment may seem absurd, I assert, with all earnestness, that the Englishman who cannot swim and box is imperfectly educated, even if he knows as much about mathematics as a senior wrangler, or can speak as many languages as a Russian. The swimmer can save himself and others very often without risk, simply from feeling at home in the water; the boxer can constantly protect the weak without actual violence, by just keeping a big bully at bay while the victim escapes and a policeman comes up, where the interference of a stronger man, who had never learned to spar, would only result in injury to himself without benefitting the object of his compassion.

It is all very well to laugh at the police for their absence in cases of riot, but they cannot be everywhere at once, and, unfortunately, while drunkenness is so common a vice in this country, acts of violence will occur in public places, and I do not know any spectacle more degrading than that of a fellow ill-using a woman or child, and men looking on without daring to interpose.

However, without insisting further on its utility, boxing is a capital exercise, with this advantage over fencing or single-stick, that there is no padding of the body or covering up the head with mask or helmet required. All you want are two pairs of boxing-gloves, and the tables and chairs put away to the sides of the room.

The gloves should be well padded, but not so stiff that you cannot clench the fist. Many spar with open hands, and flick over the guard rather than hit straight, but this is all wrong; the fist should be doubled, just as though it had no glove upon it.

It is a singular fact that the beginner is almost sure to put himself in an attitude which combines every possible fault. He plants himself firmly, braces up every muscle, and holds his hands high. Now it is impossible to be too easy and unconstrained, or to let the limbs play too freely. It is only at the moment of striking or parrying that the fist should be clenched tight and the muscles contracted. The left foot should be in advance, with the sole flat on the ground; the right foot about half an ordinary pace in rear, with the heel slightly raised, and the toes in line with the left heel; care being taken not to bring the left foot too far to the right, which would destroy the balance. The knees must be very slightly bent, just as in dancing. And mind carefully that when you advance, the left leg must always step out first; when you retire, the right leg must step back first. When you move to the left, the right foot takes the pace, the left foot following it. When you move to the right, the left foot is first shifted, then the right.

All this is very important, for if the legs and feet get confused, their owner must lose his balance, and become powerless either for attack or defence, and a slight blow will suffice to knock him down. You require to step forwards, backwards, sideways as lightly and quickly as possible, always keeping the right foot in rear of the left. Thus, when you deliver a blow the whole weight of your body is thrown into it; when you receive one, you *give* to it, as it were, and much of the force is lost. Or, if you step back very smartly, it falls short altogether, while, your left foot being still in advance, you are ready to step up again at the instant and deliver your return before your opponent can recover himself.

The left arm must be in advance, playing backwards and forwards easily, the fist about on a level with the centre of the chest. The right arm held across the body, but not stiffly (Fig. 1).

Keep the chin down *and the mouth shut*. If you want to know the reason for this last recommendation being printed in italics, you may have your mouth open, just for once, and get somebody to give you a slight tap on the jaw. But you had better take the hint without trying the experiment.



Fig. 1.—POSITION.

The beginner should, if possible, commence sparring with an antagonist who knows something of the art; but if this is impracticable, as in the case of a couple of lads at a country house who want to amuse themselves with boxing, let both follow the rules carefully, and stop directly they find themselves hitting wildly, or in any way approaching to fighting at close quarters—in-fighting, as it is called. So long as they keep to out-fighting, which is hitting and guarding at arm's length, they will be able to correct faults and improve themselves.

Once sure that they have got the correct attitude (Fig. 2), and having practised advancing, retiring, and stepping sideways, they should commence with leading off alternately. Let A begin, we will say, and B confine himself to the defence. A should weave round B with a series of side paces, his left arm playing easily backwards and forwards, though not more than a few inches, his right foot always retaining its position

with the heel off the ground, his eye never taken off that of his adversary, and measuring his distance. When he thinks he has got this accurately, he leads off with his left at the centre of B's face, not drawing back the arm for the blow, but simply straightening it as quickly and smartly as he can, at the same time stepping in with the left foot, the right coming off the ground; for the attack should be of the nature of a spring.

This lead off with the left at the head (Fig. 3) is the very groundwork of boxing, and cannot be practised too carefully. It must be a dart forward, with the whole weight of the body behind the blow, and the movement never can be rapid enough. The object is to strike before B can put his guard up, and the drawing back the hand, or the advance of either hand or foot, the minutest fraction of a second before the other would warn him of the attack and frustrate your intention. Take great care not to push or chop downwards; with big gloves on his own hands and on those of his opponent, the novice sees very little opening, and is apt to get into a slovenly style of hitting. Be sure, therefore, to clench your fist at the moment, and dart it out like a snake's tongue.

To guard his head B throws his right arm upwards and outwards, keeping

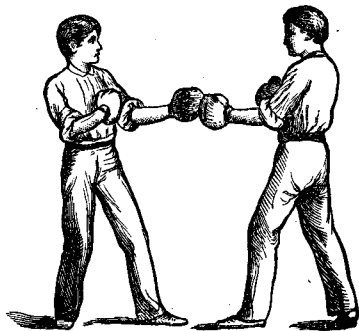


Fig. 2.—POSITION.

the elbow down, clenching the fist, and turning the wrist slightly outwards, the inner part of the forearm being less tender than that over the sharp bone.

When A can lead off cleverly and B throw the blow off neatly (there should be no fear of stopping it with his nose in this exercise, when he is aware of what is coming), B should lead off and A guard. And when both are pretty accurate, A should lead off, B parry and return; then B lead off, and A parry and return.

Then lead off at head; guard and return at head; guard and return at body.

When you are directed in sparring to hit at the body, the upper part of the chest is not meant, for that is so well defended by ribs that it would take the kick of a horse to stop a man. To hit below the waist, again, is a foul blow. But there is a region between the chest bone and the belt which is fair punching ground, and where a smart tap will knock all the wind out of the tappee's body, and sometimes quite double him up. This vital point is the "body," the "wind," or more colloquially the "mark," in boxing parlance.

In hitting with the left at the body (Fig. 4), slightly draw back the arm and turn the elbow outwards, ducking the head to the right as you advance the left foot, to avoid being stopped by a blow in the face, and spring quickly back before raising the head again.

The body is guarded by pressing the arm close to the body and receiving the blow upon it, or, better still, by divining your antagonist's intention, and stopping him before he can duck with a straight shoot in the face. But in merely practising the lead off mentioned—head, head, body—the former guard must be adhered to.

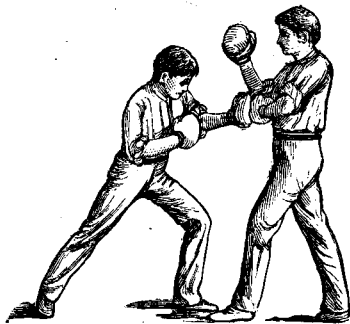


Fig. 4.—HITTING WITH THE LEFT AT THE BODY.

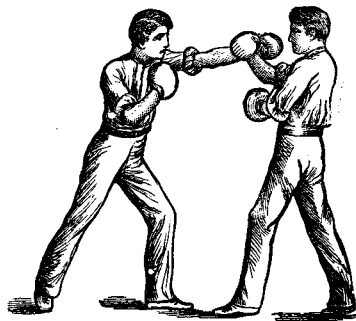


Fig. 3.—LEADING OFF WITH THE LEFT AT THE HEAD.

In loose sparring the body blow should generally be prefaced by a feint at the head, in order to draw the adversary's right arm up for the head guard, which will leave the "mark" open to your attack. The guard for this is to bring the left arm across the body to receive the blow, while the right is thrown up to guard the head (Fig. 4).

Feinting with the left is done by darting out the left arm, and slightly advancing the left foot; feinting with the right by advancing the left foot and drawing the right arm back.

To counter is to hit at the same time as your adversary, the object being to take a light blow and inflict a heavy one. Your eye must always be kept fixed on your opponent's, and thus you may often divine his intentions. When he is intent on aiming a blow at you he is thinking less of guarding himself, and if you can forestall him by the smallest fraction of a second, he is *hit off*, as it were, as he delivers his attack. As both bodies are converging at the time, a

counter is heavier than any other blow. The perfection of a counter is to avoid the other blow altogether, letting the hostile fist pass over your shoulder by a turn of the head, and at the same time to plant your own glove full in the middle of your opponent's face.

But I do not much recommend the practice of ducking until you have made some advance, can make sure of hitting quickly and strongly, and are active on the feet. Yet some of the prettiest attacks depend upon it—notably, the cross-counter with the right. When your adversary leads off at your head with the left, you avoid the blow with a turn of the head to the left, and simultaneously stepping in, swing your right into his jaw over his left shoulder. Of course it is easier said than done, and if you are not the quickest you get his left very severely on your nose; but it is very telling when successful.

An upper cut is delivered if your opponent holds his head down to receive your blows on his forehead. You guard your face with one arm, step in, and hit upwards with the other, the knuckle being downwards, and the elbow, of course, downwards also. Note this, for upper cuts delivered, as they often are, with the elbow turned out and the knuckles uppermost, have no powder in them whatever.

If you get to in-fighting, try to keep your hands inside your opponent's, and punch away with both of them at the face only, getting away to out-fighting again as quickly as possible.

Never strike with the palm of the glove, where there is no stuffing.

Never wrestle.

Stop when you find yourself swinging your arms wildly.

KEEP YOUR TEMPER.

WRESTLING.

It is very difficult to give directions for wrestling in intelligible language. If you had hold of me, I could say, "Now put your foot *so*, and turn your hip *so*—that's it; and now a sudden heave like *this*," and so forth. But on paper, or by word of mouth, it is different. The only consolation to me in attempting the task is that if you commence wrestling you will find out some of the "chips," as the tricks of the art are technically called, for yourself, and the meaning of them, and so of others, will become clear to you. For wrestling differs from some other exercises in this, that it does you no harm to commence unscientifically. In fencing or rowing, for example, a bad style once acquired is very difficult indeed to unlearn; whereas two beginners may wrestle together and learn something by practice and experience, and, when they get useful hints from an adept, will be the more able to turn them to account for their previous rough-and-ready attempts.

Well, at any rate, I can tell you how to take hold, and so start you fairly, premising that we follow the Cumberland and Westmoreland rules, ignoring Cornish and French wrestling altogether, as too rough for encouragement in any way.

On taking hold, then, the wrestlers stand chest to chest, each placing his chin on his opponent's right shoulder and grasping him round the body, each placing his left arm above the right arm of his antagonist (*see figure*).

When both have got hold, and are ready, they commence, and are allowed to use every means to throw each other, with the exception of kicking.

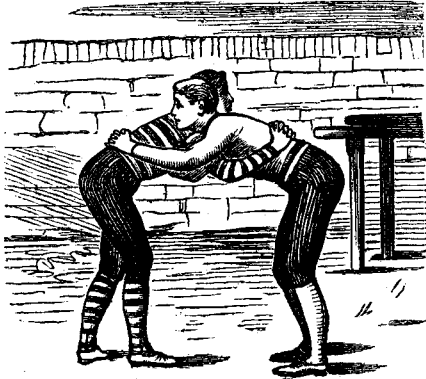
To *strike* an opponent's leg with your own leg, so as to knock it from under him and make him lose his balance, is not kicking, and is perfectly fair.

If either party break his hold—that is, leaves loose, though not on the ground—and the other still retains his hold, the one so leaving loose is the loser: it counts against him as a fall.

If the antagonists fall side by side, or in any such way that the umpires cannot decide which was first on the ground, it is called a “dog-fall,” and must be wrestled over again. But if both fall, and one touches the ground first, or falls under the other, he is the loser.

If either combatant touches the ground with a knee, or any other part of his body, he is not allowed to recover himself, but is considered thrown, though he may still retain his hold.

These rules are few and simple; how can you get an advantage? Well, in the first place, in taking hold, your right arm is under your opponent's left; it is obvious, then, that the farther you can force your right shoulder beneath his armpit the greater purchase will you get; at the same time, you must keep your left arm well



THE HOLD.

pressed inwards, to prevent his getting his right shoulder too far under your left armpit. If you get the best of this preliminary struggle for the grip, try to take advantage of it at once; but if your hold does not satisfy you, wait on the defensive, and try to make it a better one during the struggle.

The *Back-heel* consists in putting your foot behind your opponent's heel, and endeavouring to bend him over it. One great advantage of this chip is that it renders your own position so very firm. When the back-heel is put on you, the way to meet it is to suddenly slacken your hold (don't let go, mind, that cannot be done without losing), and try to turn your side for a buttock.

The *Buttock* is done by turning as far as possible, so as to get under your adversary, and so to shoot him over you. It is not easy to do, but is very effective when neatly managed. If you get him right, over your shoulder he is bound to shoot.

The *Hank* is a chip which any beginner might practise, without knowing what it was called. You simply turn sideways, twist your leg round that of your opponent, and endeavour by sheer weight and strength to pull him backwards and tumble on him. When the hank is tried on you lean forward, and strengthen your hold.

The *Cross-buttock* comes in when your adversary has succeeded in getting behind you; it is done by crossing both his legs with one of your own at exactly the right moment.

The *Outside Stroke*.—Lift your adversary and twist him round, striking his leg from under him with one of yours. Or, if you cannot lift him, make him walk round, and as he is lifting his receding foot strike it quickly. This is not kicking, mind: the leg is struck with the leg.

What is called the *Click* consists of pulling your opponent towards you, to make him resist you and drag back, and then unexpectedly darting forward and simultaneously clicking his left leg with your right (or his right leg with your left), and if he is pressing backwards at the moment, and is prevented by your click from stepping back to regain his balance, down he must come. If you click your opponent's right leg with your right leg (or his left with your left), it is called a "cross-click." If you are much stronger than your adversary you may throw him by grasping him firmly and swinging him from side to side till you have him over. This is the *Twist from the Chest*.

We now come to the *Hipe*, which is the high art of wrestling. Make your adversary go round to your left, at the same time getting your right shoulder as far as you can under his left arm; lift him up with all your strength; catch his left leg with your right leg, and drag it up. If all this is done simultaneously and cleverly, down he must come on his back. Or you may make him go round to the right and hipe him with the left leg, but your left arm being under his right you cannot lift him so high. However, if you fail you are then left in position for the buttock, as when he saves himself his left foot will touch the ground first, and you have the chance of crossing it with your left leg.

Another chip is to get your left leg round your adversary's right and raise it; then suddenly release it and cross the left leg, on which alone it has been standing, before he is firm upon the other. This is the *Hitch Over*.

To sum up, the first thing is to get your hold right, with hands clasped behind your opponent's back, not to be unclasped till the struggle is over. Then you endeavour to get him down by swinging him sideways, shooting him forwards, or pressing him backwards, these efforts being combined with varieties of tripping difficult to explain on paper. If I have done so with any clearness, it is only fair to acknowledge the assistance received from a few short paragraphs in Mr. Walter Armstrong's admirable little work recording the wrestling-matches of a London society, and entitled "*Wrestliana*." Its descriptions of the principal chips were so much more lucid than those in more elaborate treatises on the art that I took note of them, with practical advantages which I hope that you will share.

In the Cumberland and Westmoreland wrestling it is customary to take off the shoes, and contend in stockings, by which means kicking becomes impossible. I have said that this style of wrestling is the only one we need take much note of; but it is only fair to confess that there are other people who think differently, and Cornish men may boast that their style is the true old English one with some show of reason. For in it the competitors wear a short strong jacket, and the object in taking hold is to seize the jacket with one hand as far as possible behind the shoulder, and with the other to grasp the sleeve of the opposite arm about the wrist or elbow. And in the old accounts of the exercise we find that the hold was by the collar and waistband in ordinary wrestling, and when the competitors were stripped for the prize contests, in which no garments were worn above the waist, each had a girdle over one shoulder and under the other for his opponent to take hold of. And except in the Northern counties of England this was the accepted style of wrestling; and the great matches between London and Westminster, and those held at Bartholomew's Fair, were competed for in this manner. Indeed, the objection to Cornish wrestling lies, not in the hold, but in the practice of kicking.