

DEFENSIVE EXERCISES by Donald Walker [1840]

UTILITY of BOXING

The art of boxing is analogous to the use of the cestus among the Greeks. That, however, was a leather gauntlet, plated with iron to render the blows heavy, and constituted a dangerous and cruel practice. As the victory was often stained with blood, it was never held in high esteem by the Greeks, who had none of the sanguinary ferocity of the Romans.

The Greeks, as well as the Romans, found the encouragement of gymnastic exercises essential to their national security and honour. They found in it also an invigorator of the public mind, by creating in it a love for whatever is athletic, manly and brave.

Self-defence, indeed, is essential to the safety of man as a social being; nor is it less requisite to him as an individual.

Now, there is a saying, no less old than true, that "nothing is worth doing that is not worth doing well." If self-defence be at all requisite—if it tend to the protection of life or property—then it is worth acquiring in its natural form, together with all the art it will admit of.

A man's bare arm is his natural weapon, at all times by his side, ready for his protection; and where art is united to muscular strength, it is extremely powerful and efficacious.

That any sanction given to its use will make that use more frequent, is probable: but then it will only substitute it, in common cases, for some more dangerous practice or weapon.

Let a contrast be drawn between the fair contest with the fist, and the modes of fight prevalent even in some parts of this country; or let us contemplate the offensive and defensive forms of attack in foreign countries; and then it will be seen whether a knowledge of pugilism is not a public benefit, as well as an individual security.

In our northern counties, where boxing is but imperfectly understood, and its laws are unknown, they fight up and down; that is, when one gets the other down, he who is uppermost throttles, kicks, or jumps on him who is down, till he has disabled or killed him. This, too, is pretty much the case in Ireland; and, indeed, all over the world, except in those parts of England where regulated boxing is in use.

In Ireland, men usually fight with sticks. In this mode of combat, a man may, at the onset, receive a mortal blow; whereas, in boxing, exhaustion frequently causes the weaker party to yield, and "give in" and thus disputes are settled by a less dangerous, though more protracted, mode of fighting. In the same country, owing to ignorance of the generous rules of boxing, and the spirit it inspires, a man, who conceives him-self aggrieved by another, does not scruple to waylay him, and murder him with a bludgeon or a pitchfork, or to set fire to his cabin, and burn him or his family in their sleep.

Not less repugnant to humanity are the barbarous contests in some parts of the United States of America. Kicking, biting, and even gouging, disgrace their inhuman fights. The latter is perpetrated by grappling the head of an opponent, and with the thumbs forcing his eyes out of the sockets. Nor is this all. The following is a short narrative of an American combat.—"A. one morning met B. coming from a fight. 'Heyday! Man,' he exclaimed; 'your eyes hanging on your cheek.' 'Yes,' replied B.; 'but I guess I've been a match for the rascal.' And holding forth his hand, he exhibited an indubi-table proof that, with a gripe and a wrench, he had unmanned his adversary."

In order further to form a correct judgment on this subject, it is also necessary to reflect on the different modes of assuag-ing the revengeful passions adopted by the lower orders on the Continent. There, it is not unusual to behold the long knife, or the stiletto, carrying with it the mortal castigation of an offence

What a contrast exists between all these barbarous modes of fighting, and the order which prevails whenever a fight occurs in this country! Here a ring is immediately formed,—seconds to each of the combatants step forward,—the surrounding throng maintain "fair play,"—and the business is settled with as much order and propriety as the circumstances of the case will admit of.

Thus boxing is really useful to society as a refinement in natural combat.—In England, it is curious, and interesting to see the beneficent rules of boxing affecting all the contents even of children. In passing a field at Paddington, I one day observed a juvenile fight. It was a serious affair: for there they were—the four alone, and no spectator, but, I myself, who came upon them accidentally. They were above being disturbed by an intruder: they did not even notice me. Each little antagonist had his little second, who, after a round, fell on one knee, and presented the other in the rectangular form adapted for a seat, to which, at the close of each round, he perseveringly pulled his principal, who at there, puffing and blowing as if he had been engaged in mortal combat. In one of the rounds, one of the principals fell, when the other was instantly withdrawn by his second, and the prostrate one lifted from the ground, and placed on the knee of his second. The amusing part of the battle was, that the fighters seemed to be more worn out by the perpetual and determined interference of the seconds, than by the fight itself; nor, though they most exemplarily submitted to it, did they seem to be much comforted by each having his face ever and anon wiped by his second's wet and dirty pocket-handkerchief!

Immoral effects have, however, been imputed to boxing. The gallows, it is said, has been supplied from the ring. But this, it has been well observed, means nothing more in substance than that these venerable institutions are contemporaneous. Pugilism includes nothing essentially vicious or immoral; and, if we may reason and decide from abuse, where are we to halt?

It is true, that boxing-matches, being proscribed meetings, unattended by any peace-officer, are particularly favourable to the congregation of thieves and other ruffians. But this is evidently not the fault of the boxing-match, but of the circumstances attending it. Boxing-matches, however, are not advocated, but deprecated here.

I will not answer, says a friend to boxing, for the purity of a congregation even at a gymnasium or five's-court (where boxing is merely an instructive display); but I am bold to risk the opinion, that a blackguard is as likely to acquire a sense of justice and fairness there, as at a love-feast in the recesses of Methodism.

In fact, it is to pugilistic schools, and their displays, that we owe "the whole of that noble system of ethics—fair play, which distinguishes and elevates our commonalty, and which stern and impartial reason herself must bail as one of the honours of Britain." Hence it is that, in regular combats, may be witnessed the most noble forbearance, in one or other, or in both of the contending parties—a forbearance which would do honour to combats of another rank.

"The display," says Payne Knight, "of manly intrepidity, firmness gallantry, activity, strength, and presence of mind, which these contests call forth, is an honour to the English nation, and such as no man needs be ashamed of viewing with interest, pride and delight; and we may safely predict, that if the magistrates, through a mistaken notion of preserving the public peace, succeed in suppressing them, there will be an end of that sense of honour and spirit of gallantry, which distinguishes the common people of this country from that of all others."

To those who decline boxing as vulgar, its advocates sarcastically reply :—There can be no objection to restrict boxing to the vulgar and inferior classes of society, when sensibility and resentments cannot be supposed so refined, so rational, and so permanent, as those of their high-born and educated superiors. In regard to them, we submissively give our assent to the indispensable use of the pistol and small sword, and to the unquestionable rationality of affording, to that man who has injured another in the highest degree, the opportunity of conferring on him the inferior injury of depriving him of life.

There is another view of this subject, which deserves serious consideration.

Though agriculture, manufactures, commerce, the arts and sciences, constitute the beat pursuits of human life, yet a nation exclusively devoted to these, and without the means of defence, would exist in an uncertain, dependent, or slavish state. From the inhabitants of every country, therefore, a portion is selected, whose duty it must be to defend the liberties and secure the property of the whole. Hence the military and naval professions.

But, in order to fit the people for these, and to prevent the too general indulgence of effeminacy and dread of enterprise, it is necessary to encourage the manly and athletic sports and contexts, which invigorate the human frame, inspire contempt of personal suffering, and enable men to defend that which they could not otherwise enjoy.

There can in fact be no better preparation for making effective combatants in our army and navy, than the national practice of boxing. "It teaches a man to look his adversary in the face while fighting; to bear the threatening looks and fierce assaults of an antagonist without flinching; to watch and parry his intended blow; to return it with quickness, and to follow it up with resolution and effect: it habituates him to sustain his courage under bodily suffering; and, when the conflict has ceased, to treat his enemy with humanity. The feeling of superiority which the practice of boxing gives an Englishman over a foreigner in private quarrel, is carried into the field of battle; for the boxer cannot think of turning his back on a foe whom he has always deemed his inferior in combat." To this feeling, and to the habit of fighting from boy-hood, hand to hand and face to face, more even than to superior bodily strength and courage, may be reasonably attributed the superiority of English soldiers at the charge,—of English sailors in the act of boarding.

PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF BOXERS.

The frames of boxers in general differ, in appearance, from those of most other men. They are formed both for active exertion and for the endurance of suffering in a severe degree. It might indeed almost be said of boxers, as it has been of poets, that a man must be born one. Certainly, if he be not in possession of certain physical peculiarities, he cannot excel in his art.

The eyes of professed pugilists are generally small. Their necks are large. Their arms are muscular, with strong well-turned shoulders. Their chests are in general expanded; and the backs and loins of some not only exhibit an unusual degree of strength, but a great portion of anatomical beauty. The hips, thighs and legs of a few are remarkable for symmetry. When boxers do not stand firm on their legs, and are thin about the loins, it indicates weakness; and where anything like struggling occurs in a contest, they frequently lose the battle from want of strength. The hands of pugilists in general are large, and should be firm.

ART ESSENTIAL IN BOXING.

Many intelligent persons have been of opinion that boxing depends more on strength than does the use of the sword; but it is certain that art is here still more important than strength. Strength, undoubtedly, in what the boxer ought to set out with—it is the fundamental quality; but, without art, he will have little success. A less degree of art will prove far more effective than a considerably greater degree of strength. Deficiency of strength may be greatly supplied by art; want of art will have but heavy and unwieldy succour from strength.

The strength of man chiefly consists of the power of his muscles. These, with the bones, form the strings and levers which execute the different motions of the body. Now, by art, a man may give additional force to them, as will be shewn in the sequel.

We proceed to more minute details, which will be found to be perfectly illustrated by the Plates. That entire confidence may be reposed in the guidance which they afford, will readily be believed, when we state that Harry Holt, by far the most intelligent and skilful boxer of his time, stood, during two successive days, for the drawings from which they were made. I owe it equally to this able man and to the reader to say, that if the latter desires instruction in this branch of exercise, he cannot do better than apply to Mr. Holt.

POSITION OF THE BODY.

The position of the body is of the greatest consequence in boxing. Here, the centre of gravity must be well considered; for if, conformably with that, the weight of the body be adjusted, and its proper equilibrium preserved, it will stand much firmer against opposing force.—Fig. 37 (plate.)

This, in the first place, depends upon a proper distance between the feet; which is, therefore, the first thing a boxer ought to regard. Without it, indeed, all his efforts will prove abortive.

In order, then, to obtain the true position, the left leg must be advanced to some distance before the right; and this carries also forward the left side and left arm.

This is the true position for the right-handed man, in order that, after having, with his left arm, stopped a right-handed blow from his opponent, he may have equal readiness and greater power of stepping in with his right hand's returning blow.

The feet should, for this general position, be about two feet apart, and one foot should be placed at somewhat less than a right angle in relation to the other. The left foot to be kept straight, that is, pointing to the adversary. The right toe is to be sufficiently turned out, to resist any shock the adversary may give, and yet sufficiently in, to allow the body to be thrown forward, by bending up the instep.

The knees must be kept slightly bent and very pliable, that advances and retreats may be the quicker.

The body, for this general position, should be erect; that is, the weight should be thrown equally on both feet.

The neck should be sunk.

The head is to be kept backward, and the eyes on the enemy's.

The elbows should be kept as close to each other as is consistent with their free action, in order to cover the body. The boxer, however, must be careful not to force the elbows together by muscular exertion, as this would soon tire the muscles of the arms.

The arms should be extended about half their length.

The left arm, as already said, must be most advanced, and the right arm kept closest to the body.

The fists should be raised about as high as the chin, the left being a little the highest.

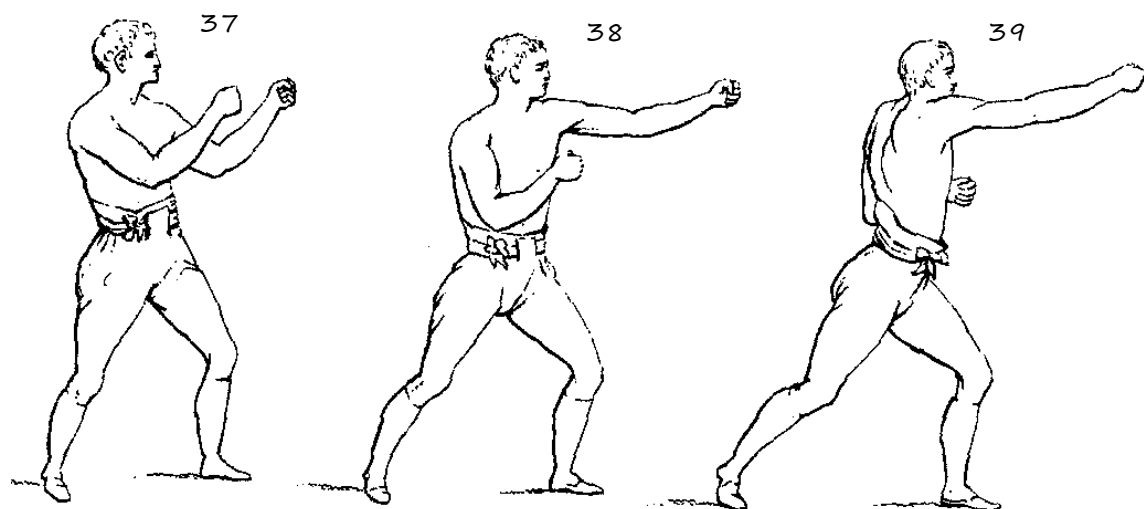
They should be so far apart as to allow them to pass each other freely without touching, and no further.

The fists are formed by laying the tips of the fingers in the principal cavity of the palm, formed by shutting the hand. The thumb is then laid over the first joint of the first finger, and its tip comes nearly up to the second joint of the second.

The fists should not be very firmly shut till they are to be used

In this position, then, advancing is effected by a step forward with the foot which is before, and by following it with that behind.

Retreating is effected by a step backward with the foot which is behind, and by following it with that which is before.



Position

Left Hand Blow

Right Hand Blow

MODE OF STRIKING.

Give your antagonist as little time as possible to direct his aim.

For this purpose, and to procure an opening, it is sometimes useful to confuse your antagonist, by making feints where you do not intend to hit.

When you are not striking, it is advisable to move the arms to and fro (not to their utmost distance), so as to render them supple, and to enable you to throw in a blow more unexpectedly.

The moment you see any part of your adversary's body open, strike at it for it is of course an object to hit your adversary oftener than he hits you.

It is of the greatest importance to avoid giving to your enemy the slightest notice where you intend to strike him.

For the left and the right-hand blow, see Figs. 38 and 39 (plate.)

To get a blow in, make a step forward with the left foot, and throw the weight on it; at the same time propping the body up from behind by means of the right toe.

The instep of the right foot is bent up at every blow, though more for the right-hand blow than for the left.

The whole body, however, must be thrown forward when a blow is struck, as though the intention were to throw a weight off the shoulder of the fist that strikes; at the same time swinging the shoulder and hip round with great velocity.

In this attitude, the whole body inclines forward; so that we find, from the outside of the right ankle to the shoulder is formed a straight but inclined line. Thus, the right leg and thigh, in a slanting line, strongly prop up the whole body from behind; and this is the strongest position a man can contrive. It is such as we generally use in forcing doors, pushing forward any weight, or resisting strength; for while we have all the direct force of the right side, the muscles of the left side, which bend the body forward, bring over the left thigh the gravitating part which thus augments the force.

It is usual, in attacking, to lead with the left first, and let the right follow: but too frequent a repetition of this prepares the enemy.

A blow should be struck as straight and as quickly as possible.

Straight blows come quicker than round ones, because they have not so far to come; and they are stronger, because they come directly from the centre of gravity. The quickness of the blows adds greatly to their force.

At the moment of striking, the fist should be clenched as firmly as possible. By this means the muscles of the arm will be braced, and this will strengthen the wrist. The velocity of the blow will also be greatly augmented by it. Thus, the power of the arm will be considerably greater than if the hand were but slightly closed.

The muscles which give this additional force to the arm, in shutting the hand, are the flexors of the fingers; the extensors being the opposite muscles, as they open or expand the same.

In striking, however, or using any violent effort with the hands, these two kinds of muscles contribute to the same action. Thus, if any one close the left hand forcibly, and clap his right hand upon the left arm, he will feel that all the muscles of it swell more or less.

Hence it follows, that muscles, calculated for different offices, yet aid each other in great efforts. This is of much advantage toward that artificial force in boxing, which beats much superior strength when art is wanting.

The fist must not, however, be clenched in the firmest manner till the moment when you intend to use it, as such a degree of exertion cannot long be continued.

It is proper also to bear on the heel, at the same time drawing under the toes so as to brace all the muscles of the leg; but not till the moment when you intend to strike a blow, or expect to be attacked.

By thus delivering up the power to the muscles of the advanced side, which, in a strong contraction, brings the body forward, the motion communicated is such, that, if the hand at that moment be firmly shut, and the blow at the same instant pushed forward in a straight line with the moving body, the shock given by the stroke will be able to overcome a force, not thus artfully contrived, twenty times as great.

Thus, it is in our power to give additional strength and force to our bodies, so as to render us far superior to men of more natural strength, not seconded by art.

It is necessary to be instantly collected after you have struck, and to recover your guard.

A blow should never be struck without its sequel being thought of. This may, indeed, be necessarily a guard; but it may be a second and far more advantageous blow.

MOST EFFECTIVE BLOWS.

We may now consider what are the most hurtful blows, and such as, consequently, contribute most to gaining a battle. This is a most important consideration to boxers, and claims their particular attention.

Very few of those who fight know why a blow on any particular part has such effects; yet, by experience, they know it has these effects, and by them they are directed to the proper parts,—under the ear, between the eyebrows, and about the stomach.

The blow under the ear is considered to be as dangerous as any that is given, if it light between the angle of the lower jaw and the neck; because, in this part, there are two kinds of blood-vessels—arteries and veins, of great size; the former bringing blood immediately from the heart to the head, and the latter carrying it immediately back.

Now, it is evident, that if a man receive a blow on these vessels, part of the blood proceeding from the heart to the head must be forced back, whilst the other part is driven forcibly to the head; and in the same manner, part of the blood returning from the head to the heart must be forced into the latter, whilst the other is driven forcibly to the head.

Thus the blood-vessels are immediately overcharged, and the sinuses of the brain overloaded. The man accordingly loses sensation, and the blood often runs from his ears, mouth, and nose, owing to the quantity forced with impetuosity into the smaller vessels, the coats of which being too tender to resist such a charge, instantly break, and cause the effusion of blood wherever the superficial skin is thinnest.

This is not at all: the heart, being overcharged with the blood forced back on the succeeding blood ascending from its left ventricle, stops its progress; whilst the blood returning from the head is violently pushed into its right auricle, so that the heart labours under a violent surcharge of blood, which, however, goes off as the parts recover themselves, and are able to push the blood onward.

Blows between the eyebrows contribute greatly to victory. This part being contused between two hard bodies, viz. the fist and os frontis, there ensues a violent echymosis, or extravasation of blood, which falls immediately into the eyelids; and they, being of a lax texture, incapable of resisting this influx of blood, swell almost instantaneously, and this intumescence soon obstructs the sight. The man, thus artfully hood-winked, is consequently beat about at his adversary's discretion.

Blows on the stomach are very hurtful, as the sympathetic nerves, their ganglia and plexuses, the great artery called aorta, the diaphragm or midriff, and the lungs, share in the injury.

The injury which the diaphragm suffers from blows under the breast-bone is considerable, because it is thereby brought into a strong convulsive state, which produces pain

Thus excited, the diaphragm also lessens the cavity of the thorax, whereby the lungs are, in a great measure, deprived of their liberty, and the quantity of air retained in them is so forcibly pushed from them, that it causes a difficulty of respiration, which cannot be overcome till the convulsive motion of the diaphragm ceases.

Violent blows or contusions in this, which is called the epigastric region, when they do not immediately destroy the individual, depress, in a remarkable degree, the vital energies. The animal heat is uncommonly diminished, the surface is cold and pale, the pulse scarcely perceptible, and the breathing feeble and very slow.

An effect is produced by concussion of the semilunar ganglion, in some respects similar to that which follows concussion of the brain; in the former, the vital actions are either exhausted or destroyed; in the latter, the mental operations are suspended.

A blow on the stomach "doubles up" the boxer, and occasions that gasping and crowing which sufficiently indicate the cause of the injury; a little more severe, and it is instantly fatal. A man, broken on the wheel, suffers dreadful blows, and the bones are fractured, but life endures: the *coup de grace* is the blow on the stomach.

It is, therefore, recommended to those who box, never to charge their stomachs with much food on the day of combat. By observing this precaution, they will avoid the extraordinary compressing of the descending aorta, and, in a great measure, prevent the stomach itself from the blows to which it must be the more exposed, when distended with food, and the consequence of which must be a vomiting of blood, caused by the rupture of blood-vessels; whereas, the empty stomach, yielding to the blow, is much less affected by it. Hence it is recommended rather to take some slight stimulant into the comparatively empty stomach, which, by its exciting the fibres, may contract it into smaller compass.

The boxer may render blows on this part in some degree less hurtful by drawing in the belly, holding the breath, and bending the thorax, or upper part of the chest, over the navel, when the stroke is coming.

GUARDING

Watch the inclination of your adversary's head and the direction of his eyes; as upon these depend the aim of the hit.

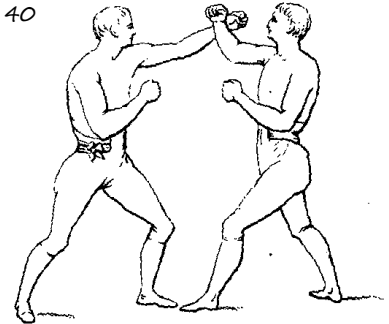
If the enemy aim with his right hand, the guard is generally with the left, and vice versa.

Blows aimed at any part higher than two or three inches above the pit of the stomach, are parried by striking upward and outward.—Fig. 40 (plate.)

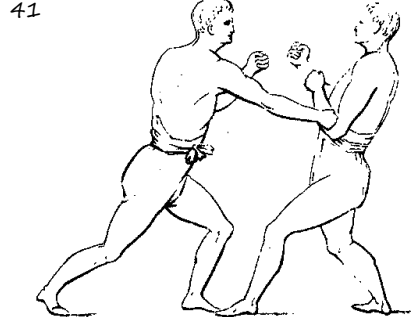
Blows aimed any lower than two or three inches above the pit of the stomach, are guarded by so covering the side with the elbow, that it shall secure the ribs and loins, while the fore-arm protects the stomach.—Fig. 41 (plate.)

In other words, blows aimed above the arms when in the general position, are parried by striking upward and outward; and blows aimed below the arms, by laying the arms as above described.

In stopping blows aimed at the lower part of the body, some recommend to strike them down. The advantage of this is, that it is not so much out of the common way of guarding as the preceding; but the disadvantage is that you may guard too soon, and thereby leave yourself open, which is never the case with the other method.



Blow at the Head and its Guard



Blow at the Loin and its Guard

CLOSING.

If your enemy be more powerful than you are, you should not close with him, unless you are very expert at the cross-buttock, &c. To prevent his closing with you, as soon as you expect him to do so, you must instantly strike at him in the face or body with great quickness, by way of keeping him busy.—and retreat;—then advance again,—and so on, to perplex him.

All this, however, may not succeed in keeping him out; in which case, if you cannot slip down, you must not throw away your strength by struggling with him for the throw, further than endeavouring, as hereafter described, to prevent his getting you in dangerous positions for the cross-buttock or outside lock.

The cross-buttock may be performed when you and your antagonist happen to come into contact with your sides together,—no matter which, provided you look the same way. —Fig. 42 (plate.)

Suppose that your right side comes in contact with his left; you lay your right arm over his neck, and take hold of his right shoulder; seize his right wrist with your left hand, and draw it as forcibly down, and to the left, as possible; place your right hip under his crutch, and your right leg close to his right leg; hoist him up as though you were going to throw him over your head; but when you get him a sufficient height, swing him right round on his back, and fall upon him.

If your adversary is so heavy that you cannot easily lift him from the ground to throw him over your hip (which, however, will very seldom be the case), you had better give him the outside lock. This (supposing you still have your right side to his left) is accomplished by swinging your right leg against the outside of his, and throwing him over it. This fall, however, is not so effective as the cross-buttock.

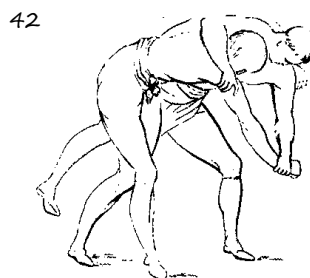
If he attempts this with you, you must (supposing you have still your right side in contact with his left) place your left knee in his ham, throw all your weight backward, and attempt to pull him over in that direction. But if this is to be done, it must be done before he hoists you on his back; for when he has done this, all is done.

BOTTOM.

Strength and art have been both mentioned as the principal requisites for a boxer; but there is another, which is equally necessary, and without which no pugilist can be complete. This is denominated bottom. In constituting bottom, there are required two things—wind and spirit or courage. Wind, indeed, may be obtained by a proper attention to diet and exercise; but it is spirit that keeps the boxer upon his legs. Without this substantial requisite, both art and strength will be of little avail.

The following rules are nearly those which were drawn up by Mr. Broughton, and which continue to be generally acted upon.

1. That a square of a yard in extent be chalked in the middle of the stage; and at every fresh set-to, after a fall, or being parted from the rails, each second is to bring his man to the side of the square, and place him opposite to the other; and, till they are fairly set-to at the lines, it shall not be lawful for one to strike the other.
 2. That, in every main battle, as soon as the men are stripped, no person whatever shall be upon the stage, except the principals and their seconds; the same rule being to be observed in by-battles, except that in the latter, a gentleman is allowed to be upon the stage to keep decorum, provided always he do not interfere in the battle; and whoever presumes to infringe these rules is to be turned immediately out of the place.
 3. That no champion is to be deemed beaten, unless he fail in coming, or being brought up by his second, to the side of the square, in the limited time of half a minute; or that his own second declares him beaten; but no second is to be allowed to ask his man's adversary any questions, or advise him to give up.
 4. That, to prevent disputes, in every main battle, the principals shall, on coming on the stage, choose, from among the gentlemen present, two umpires, who shall absolutely decide all disputes that may arise about the battle; and, if the two umpires cannot agree, the said umpires are to choose a third, who is to determine it.
 5. That no person is to hit his adversary when he is down, or seize him by the ham, the breeches, or any part below the waist; a man on his knees being to be reckoned down.
- These rules form the code of boxing.



The Cross Buttock