

DISCOURSE OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE EXCELLENCE OF ARMS

By Sieur Des-bordes 1610

Translated By Rob Runacres

Edited and with a Historical Note by Olivier Dupuis



Historical Note by Olivier Dupuis

Abraham Racinot was born in 1582 in Lorraine¹. After a trip to Italy where he affirmed having learned the art of fencing under the teaching of an unknown master, he came back to Lorraine and entered at a undetermined date the court of Duke Charles III, and became the fencing master of the eldest son of the Duke, Henri. There is no information about the date when he decided to change his name to André des Bordes, or André Desbordes, but this was already done in 1606 when his position with the Duke's son was confirmed.

With the death of Charles III in 1608, his son became Duke of Lorraine using the name Henri II. At that occasion, André Desbordes received the title of “*gentleman following the Duke*” and took apartments at the arsenal. He also became close to the Baron Louis d'Ancerville, favourite of Henri and illegitimate child of the former cardinal Louis de Guise². He married Marie Olivier in June 1609, a young lady from a distinguished family and in August of that year he obtained from the Duke his first title of nobility and with it permission to avoid paying the usual fee for such an event. It was during this fast ascension through the social classes that, in 1610, he had his fencing treatise printed in Nancy, dedicated to the Duke and with a preface by the Baron d'Ancerville.

From then on, he continued collecting favours from the Duke in the following ten years: annuities, estates, industry shares, hotels, ducal properties; a considerable amount of archives about his goods have survived! For example, he had two mills, a house in Nancy, two lordships, a tilery, vineyards and a village. He was named for a while captain of the castle of Boulay, and then after of Sierck, a huge fortress from the north of Lorraine, but he gave this title to his oldest son. He even entered the Duchy State Council in 1617, as a squire. It was truly exceptional, especially for a fencing master!

Duke Henri II had a young daughter promised to Louis d'Ancerville who would inherit the Duke's title. But the Duke's family disagreed with this project and proposed to marry her to the Duke's nephew, Charles of Vaudémont. It seems that André des Bordes did everything that he could to prevent this wedding, probably to help his old friend Louis d'Ancerville. Unfortunately for him, in 1621, the Duke consented to marry his nephew to his eldest daughter. Three years later, the Duke Henri II died and his nephew inherited the title. Charles probably could not take revenge against Louis d'Ancerville and so chose the fencing master as his victim for the difficulties he had encountered three years before. He started a judicial inquiry for witchcraft, having found two women to testify they had gone to a Sabbath with Desbordes. This was at the height of the witch hunts in Europe, and the Lorraine tribunals were particularly harsh in this matter:³ the father of the prosecutor claimed to have condemned not less than 900 people to death! Desbordes was imprisoned in Nancy and was examined twice by surgeons who eventually found a mark on his body they suspected to be of the Devil. With this information, they started a more complete investigation and gathered many overwhelming witnesses. Desbordes had been seen showing so much suppleness that he must have been helped by the Devil. He was also accused of casting spells, and even had made pictures in tapestries move. Other slanders continued to be gathered long after his death.

The trial records state that Desbordes eventually confessed, giving him the opportunity to face a last torture to reveal his accomplices. On 28th January 1625, he was strangled and his body burned to ashes. He left a widow and five children. The last feat of Desbordes was to be one of the three most important people killed following a witchcraft trial in Lorraine.

Thanks to the inventory of his goods after his death, the “*Guidon des Capitaines*” has been

1 Most of the historical information is taken from two articles: the majority is from Henri Lepage, *André des Bordes ; épisode de l'histoire des sorciers en Lorraine* in *Bulletins de la société d'archéologie de Lorraine*, T.7., 1857, pp.5-54. The second is from Christian Pfister, *Promenades aux environs de Nancy*, in *Société de géographie de l'Est*, 1907, pp.125-137.

2 This was an extremely influential family in France during the second half of the sixteenth century. See Childs Kohn Georges, *Dictionary of Wars*, pp.390-391.

3 Roehrig, *À mort, la sorcière : Sorcellerie et répression en Lorraine XVIe-XVIIIe siècles*, Strasbourg : La Nuée Bleue / DNA, 2007.

discovered in his book collection⁴: a compilation of various books printed in 1609 including the translation by Villamont of the fencing treatise from Calvacabo and Paternostrier.



4 Lepage, *André des Bordes ; épisode de l'histoire des sorciers en Lorraine*, pp.31-34.

Translator's Note by Rob Runacres

I have avoided modernising the language too far though, where necessary, I have contracted certain phrases; for example 'the guard of the sword of the enemy' is more often 'the enemy's sword guard'. On rare occasion, I have rewritten a sentence as the literal translation garbles the meaning. Having said this, Desbordes' language is often difficult to interpret.

The punctuation has been altered to break up the passages, which in common with many texts of the period often run with only commas and no full-stops. All fencing terms are italicised and I have kept to the French terms rather than the Italian, though a counterpart is noted where obvious. Words in square brackets are insertions to the translation, which I hope will render it more readable.

I would like to thank Olivier Dupuis and Marguerite Lacroix for their assistance and advice in this translation; in addition Thibault Ghesquiere for his ever erudite advice. As ever, Serafina Runacres helped in phrasing some of the more difficult passages.

Any errors are the translator's own.



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DISCOURSE OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE EXCELLENCE OF ARMS

By Sieur Des-bordes.

At NANCY, by ANDRE BLAISE, ordinary printer of His Highness, with Privilege.

MANET ALTA / MENTE REPOSTUM

NOBILIS LOTHARINGUS / ANDREAS DESBORDES

ANNO AETATIS XXVIII



This book you can make wise of the body, of the spirit, of courage

Made at Nancy by I.A. 1610

TO HIS HIGHNESS SIR.

My inclination, having taken me away from your regions, the place of my birth, [was] to make me capable in some way to the honour of your service. I made the choice of arms, to have more confidence to carry my life to that which Your Highness would look upon. Italy, which has given me the lessons [in arms], and the memory of my homeland obliged me to come offer the effects⁵. And now that the beneficence of your highness has drawn me from the exercise of arms and given me the means and leisure to put down the Theory, I have provided a few hours of my service with Your Person, for the employment in this work, who has sympathy for this feat, familiar to anyone of your house. Finding that it will always serve you, whether to teach for your nobles and from the greatest of your subjects and the bravest, to the least of your people, the most necessary postures for the preservation of their persons, so that one cannot reproach me of ingratitude that I pay the benefits of Your HIGHNESS, not to leave to posterity another mark of my obedience, the honour of being your premier *Valet de Chambre*. Therefore, receive in the attendant discourse that I am so happy to be able to merit the quality of MONSIEUR, very humble, and very obedient, a subject and servant of your Highness.

Des-bordes.



5

In other words, offer his knowledge and skills.

To Monsieur Baron D'Anserville, Sir

If it is allowed for everyone to talk about his art, and no one to abuse it, will I have license to talk to you about the excellence of fencing, and that my discourse cannot approach the esteem of you in deeds? You are born with this advantage that your valour makes your life without enemies, and [with] your courtesy you have acquired many friends. I promise myself at least this favour that cannot hate anyone, you honour me with your gallantry; taking the cause of this issue against those who despise its value, it is an effect of leisure that your good nature obtained me, which I beg you not to disavow the quality [of the aforementioned gallantry].

Your humble servant

Des-bordes

TO THE READER

I come to see you as a friend; do not receive me as unwelcome. Possibly, after you have paraded my reputation to your fancy, you say that I can be useful. Because I give you the same lessons that the most famous of Italy Have taught to many brave Cavaliers, French, Spanish, Italian, German, and others.

I know very well that many wish illustrations were in the suite of the discourse, some to better notice the difference in the blows, in the variety of the postures; others merely to discuss the pleasantness of the paintings. I satisfy therefore to those that the postures may only represent one action, and that through the discourse one can know all sorts of guards. I give to others the journey to Flanders or Italy to satisfy their curiosity about the pleasantries⁶ that are displayed there, telling them that I only speak to those who want to learn.

⁶ As in the pictures

TO HIS HIGHNESS

To honour the immortal
One provided, on their altar,
That which the one judged the most worthy
It gave the Peacock to Juno
To Venus one devoted a pledge
As something proper to their name.
So great Prince, equal to the gods,
DESBORDES presents to your eyes

A book who worthy sacrifice
Wants to speak to posterity
That you are in truth
That as Alexander is in esteem
His valour, his courtesy,
His great beneficence,
His prudence, were his glory,
But all that write of him,
May recognize today
In you, in effect in him, history.

To MONSIEUR DESBORDES on his book,
Desbordes knows to show, here by writing,
This that one owes the occupation to demonstrate by effect
One who can teach you well in your postures
Can be courageous, render Perfect Master,
That an ignorant critic does not mention through boredom
For I know that the effect may well save the life.

P. Ditheau



Chap. 1. Discourse of Mr Desbordes touching the theory, practice, and the excellence of weapons.

I want to show for the understanding of weapons (a subject that I have taken to task) that the practice and the use of fencing can save lives, analyse and scare our enemies, [and] triumph over those who assail us, provided that one has the time to defend oneself as is necessary. However, so as to reach the goal more quickly, I will not detain you to describe the praises that from day to day are recognized by the children of this art. However I wish to persuade the Masters and the students to follow the precepts that I teach, and which I practice to the advantage of all those who receive the lessons. I laugh at the opinion of the vulgar who say without reason that, coming to blows, one does not have the judgement to put into practice the cut and the thrusts that one has learned in the Academies. At least, one cannot deny that it strengthens the arms, that it renders a man fitter by exercise, even that it does not carry other favours to life, and even when it happens that coming to blows he will deprive himself of his posture, the other in order not to observe the tempi, always take the risk of being injured. Besides, it is even discussed in high society that he who often makes this exercise will extend his *bottes* and advance the foot with more flexibility and ease than he who has no other art than the natural [and] no other handling than necessity makes him take. I have therefore concluded that those who have contempt of fencing, and who want to be practiced in arms, are like ignorant goldsmiths, burning their gold instead of refining, very different to those who have the use and the science, who, far from burning it, give such a form as they please.

Chap. 2. Consideration as one must be in their guards.

It will not be amiss for us to place before the eyes the works of *Camille Agrippa*⁷, the most expert of all of this profession. He places the guards alphabetically A B C D, wanting this order to serve the progress of his work. Nevertheless, the *premiere* marked A should not be in my judgement as high as D: the arm should be more ready for the offensive and for the defensive, which makes me say that it must be a little more extended with the step, because it eases the right side to be quicker to attack and to parry the blows that may occur. Also, the posture for the offensive is more sustainable than he teaches, as the enemy is more in fear of being struck from this guard than any other, and because these principal guards are more understandable. I will discuss the first four as you will see in this discourse.

Chap. 3. The four principal guards

In this I outline the four main guards, *premiere*, *seconde*, *tierce*, and *quarte*, to serve as a beginning to this work, they consist of this kind. All those who wear a sword by custom or by merit, whether provoked by words, or agitated with anger to come to blows, represent all four. The *premiere*, having drawn the sword entirely out of the sheath, they raise the arm in the same tempo to strike. The *seconde*, while holding firm, they lower the hand a little, with the arm to the equal of the sword. The *tierce*, at the same time that they put themselves into posture with the sword near the knee at the outside⁸. The *quarte*, bringing the sword hand to the inside of the knee. These are here the principal guards, and from which all others derive as their elements, and from which they are strengthened as their foundations, that we placed here in order, but first I will discuss how to hit so

⁷ Agrippa, Camillo, *Treatise on the Science of Arms* (Rome, 1553)

⁸ In other words, on the inside of *that knee which is to the outside*. I am indebted to Olivier Dupuis for correcting my original translation, which was 'near the outside of the knee', similar to a 'Bolognese' guard of *coda lunga e stretta*.

you do not resemble the Alchemists without experience, who derive from their science only vanity, and who make it look like a trick, and an obscurity. The fencing masters must, by judgement and by reason, teach steps to their pupils, to strengthen them, and to make them acquire a greater disposition; to recognize for themselves the tempi to gain the advantage, to the inside, and the outside, and to all occurrences which may occur to parry and to attack, because they will have such ease in the handling of the sword, they will do everything by industry and nothing by adventure, even as they disturb the memory of their enemies so, that they cannot use their lessons to offend, nor refrain from being offended. I take as witness the most famous Masters of antiquity, like *le Pape de Milan le Beccaroni*, and the *Mancino de Boulogne*⁹, and many others who have made a worthy profession of this noble exercise.

That is why he who knows the way to advance and to retire may render himself expert in making his observations.

Here are the observances which I intend that one teaches to students. That they walk step by step, both forwards and backwards, with weapons in hand, traversing only the right and the left, exercising to make the steps on the line that traverse the circle.

Chap. 4. Of Tempo

Since in all other sciences the Masters observe an order, I want to see one here, even though I do not want to make this a profession, which is why I shall say that it is of tempo, half-tempo, and counter-tempo.

Tempo is when coming into combat your enemy strikes a blow of *maindroit* or of *revers* and in raising his arm to hit you he gives you the time to hit him.



The half-tempo is when one hits with the point, or with the edge, at the same tempo that one parries and is called on this occasion demi-tempo for what is a half sword. The counter-tempo is, when seeing your enemy in guard to strike you with an estocade, you go to the counter, sliding your sword against his. It is so called because the swords meet each other. It is a blow of an alert, well-practised by the French Nobility. The thrust is now in use in Spain, Poland, and in Germany, formerly little used, for which I praise and approve, especially as the thrust keeps the enemy farther away, because the slender man can measure his sword with the stronger, provided that he has experience of this fencing to make up for his weakness. The honour of this fencing is due to the invention of my Italian Master, who gave the teachings to defend in this way.

I will discuss several other ways of hitting such as with a thrust; a cut; with a *maindroit* as that of *revers*; a *fente*¹⁰; an *estramasson*¹¹; a rising [cut with the false edge]; with the *moulinet*¹²; the feint to the right; the feint to the left; *jartiere*¹³; *estocade*¹⁴, and of several other blows to the legs. But because they are commonplace, I will not make further discourse, especially that nature communicates the science to everyone, and although at present we do not face as large an estate of

9 Manciolino of Bologna

10 A vertical, downwards cut, equivalent to the Italian *fendente*

11 A rising cut with the false edge, possibly similar to the false edge cut described by Dall'Aggocchie

12 A circular cut to the opponent's right side, equivalent to the Italian *moulineto*

13 A 'garter' or cut to the leg. Note the term's spelling varies in this work.

14 A thrust

cuts as are among the common. However, even if this cut had been made promptly, it is helpful and prompt to strike as I have proved with experienced men, and brave, and who made me carry the sword to a palm's width near the face, or even less, in order to riposte my cut, [but] which was beyond their power because the movement of the wrist is swifter than the movement of the foot to carry a thrust.

Chap. 5. As one must have alert eyes

After having dealt with tempo, with striking, it is worth warning you, in what place one must have the eye to the time of combat. So many Masters so many opinions: some want us to look at the hand, such as that from which comes the blow, others at the movement of the arm, others the face. Very good opinions and well considered, but for me I require that one looks at the tip of the enemy's sword, as it is the quickest to offend, being closer to your body than the hand. Considering that, while you would take care of the hand or the face, you can be hit easily if you have not parried the tip of your enemy's sword by ensuring that it was past your body. But because this detail requires a different reason, I will distinguish the whole in order, putting the figures where I will judge the most necessary and the easiest to the reader.

Chap. 6. As it is necessary to know how to handle all kinds of weapons

Everyone holds that the sword is the queen of weapons, because all the others have some exception [in their use], and that the sword is worn everywhere and in all companies. So that in the army soldier puts down all kind of weapons except for the sword. This is a great ignorance of all those who show to handle several kinds of weapons, and do not show the single sword only because he can barely teach the handling of several kinds of weapons, if they ignore the handling of the principal; one must therefore exercise it from the beginning otherwise it is [like] beating the head against the wall, as the saying goes. Afterwards one must learn the use of two swords, and then the sword & dagger. I will teach you when it is expedient to use two swords all that one can. All that one being struck to right and to left. One must show how to defend oneself, secure with the hands and making steps to the right and to the left with disposition. It is necessary that the student learns to use the pike, carrying it with good grace, in order that being at war, and passing to show it in the presence of the Captains, he is seen to have experience.

When a soldier has experience of all these things, he is in better esteem. That is why it is a great error for Masters to not teach the handling of all kinds of weapons, and an even greater ignorance to presume so much faith to want to teach what they themselves do not know how to practice with reason, and with even less experience. I say that the use of weapons in general is very necessary to students who want to throw in with the militia, because their skill can be recognised to circumstances that happen in an army, according to the command of the Leader; that not being in the sight of his enemy, takes the time to exercise the soldiers, so as to harden them; as to give pleasure to some Prince who visits, so by any combat at the barrier which could be ordered, as by some other worthy exercise of his profession. It would be a shame to the soldier to pay an excuse to the command of his captain, and remain like a statue, having not devoted himself to the exercises of his vocation. Having the assurance to say he knows not how to handle the halberd, that he has not taken a lesson, since that in war he must serve in the custody of a door, and of a narrow passage, where one cannot use the pike, nor other weapons there, so if the soldier knows not how to handle it, and it is attacked with a two-handed sword, he will lose his posture. On the contrary if he knows how to handle the halberd, he will defend himself [Against the two handed sword] and with the pike

because the halberd is more agile for parrying, as I shall show in its place with such ease that you will be compelled to acknowledge that all the others have but skimmed over this discourse, and that I have hit the target.

Chap. 7. As one must defend with the thrust, and the manner of giving with great agility

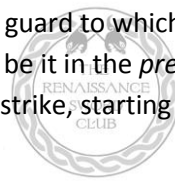
Many expert men have discoursed on fencing, and have even written on it, wanting particularly that to strike a thrust one makes the largest pass that one can, of which I cannot approve, for this reason. He that carries it is not assured to give, and although that he gives, by making such a great pass and turning his back according to the instruction of his Masters, he loses the sight of the use of the left hand¹⁵, it will be even precipitate against the sword of his enemy. Thus we can easily understand how this guard is dangerous, and that he must avoid the great pass, because in addition to the peril it causes, he wastes breath and force.

Chap. 8. As must give¹⁶ and parry

Having shown the four main guards, and given the essential rules for true fencing, of no small value, I will start with striking, and then finish with the parry, all for the common service of those who are inquirers of the virtue.

Chap. 9. Of striking

The philosophers are of opinion that we must understand things before starting them and that after it is easy. It is this which to me makes take guard to which the man engages most and by what manner he can keep from being offended, be it in the *premiere*, in the *seconde*, the *tierce*, or in the *quarte*. I will teach him as [to how] he can strike, starting with the *premiere* guard. To follow the proposed order, here is one example.



Take your sword, and put yourself in the position that we have said above; if your enemy wants to attack you in this *premiere* guard, it will be good to find his sword to the outside in a cross, in order for him to disengage his to strike underneath and, in case that he is not too distant, when he wishes to lengthen his thrust this way, you shall lower your point towards the ground, shocking his own in passing with the left foot, and striking him under the sword.¹⁷

Chap. 10. As one must strike *seconde* against *seconde*

From the *premiere* guard, it is fitting to come to the *seconde*, so if you want to attack from the *seconde* guard, you must find the sword of your enemy from within, so that he has subject to move. Let us say also, if he moves to strike at the same tempo as you have covered. So without parrying you lower your sword, while that of your opponent makes his journey towards yours.

Chap. 11. The *tierce* against the *tierce*

Having discussed the first two, we must not forget the *tierce* against the *tierce*, so that everything feels its order, facilitating our work to give a greater understanding to those who are curious to have

15 Probably a criticism of Agrippa's recommendation to turn the head away when lunging.

16 As in strike

17 Dupuis suggests that Des-Bordes is in fact suggesting the fencer lowers the whole sword as the enemy attempts to thrust underneath, thereby striking with the quillions. This author considers that the lowering of the point may indicate a parry with the false edge, but that would not lend itself to a following thrust under the enemy's sword.

knowledge of arms. Attacking with the *tierce* against the *tierce*, I want you enter to the inside with resolution, that you beat the sword of your enemy, feigning to carry a thrust to him in the stomach, which will oblige him to parry, and then you lower the point and strike to him to the right side over his sword, and it will hit without you running any risk.

Chap. 12. The *quarte* against the *quarte*

Since I have divided the guards into four, and as I have already talked about the first three, it remains to deal with the *quarte* against the *quarte*. In this exercise caution is necessary, and in this posture, we must be as swift in striking on the firm foot as to pass. I want that, going to find your enemy in this guard, you go to the outside, in order that he is forced to move his sword, and in the same tempo strike him with the *quarte*. At this time I have shown you the four principal guards for offending, I will speak of the defence according to the design that I have proposed.

Chap. 13. To defend against the *premiere* guard

Having shown how one can offend in the *premiere*, *seconde*, *tierce*, and *quarte* guards, I will teach the means of defence with the same postures. So while using the *premiere*, one comes to the outside to find he who is in the same guard; we must lower the body, and pass under his sword in the same tempo provided he comes, or deceive his sword, putting it to the inside of the *quarte* evading with the body. He will find nothing with which to offend, and will find himself offended. I will speak in another place as the tempo to make another blow.

Chap. 14. Defence of the *seconde* against the *seconde*

All the same, when being on the *seconde* guard you will go to find to the inside one who is in the *seconde*, so that your enemy *caver*, and gives you the tempo to carry to him; you will strike him with the *quarte* if you can, so that being forced to parry, and parrying he covers the stomach to guard his face, then making the *quarte* from under the sword, you will strike him beneath the armpit with the hand as you wish.

Chap. 15. Defence of the *tierce* against the *tierce*

So that one avoids with honour being offended with the *tierce*, as that one comes on this guard to give you, he must be taken on the inside; and lowering the point of his right side, carry to him in the shoulder, and if he parries turn the hand in the high *quarte*, and he will be hit hard in the arm, body, and elsewhere. This is why he that understands the force of this science holds that the angle can be more advantageous than the straight line.

Chap. 16. Defence of the *quarte* against the *quarte*

To put an end to the defences of the four guards, we must speak of the last. If your enemy is on the *quarte*, and that you want him to find [you] from the outside, so that he gives you the tempo to hit him, you must raise your sword above his making a high *quarte* and carry to him with resolution, so that you parry, and that in parrying you uncover yourself, then you will have the tempo to pass in *seconde* under his sword.

Chap. 17. The *quarte* against the *premiere*

I want to talk equally of the first style to show the other guards in the proof of the figures that follow. This is why I told you, being in the *quarte*, to wait for your opponent [who is] in *premiere*; when he advances his point, you will parry being in *quarte*, and going in *seconde*, you will carry to

him in the stomach on the right side, and if he parries, you will come in passing to fall under his sword.

Chap. 18. The *seconde* against the *tierce*

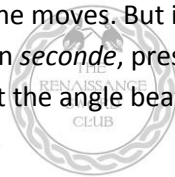
If you are in *seconde* wanting to attack he who is in *tierce*, you must with resolution go to your opponent's stomach, who for his defence will come to beat your point from the inside, as is more convenient for him and to his advantage; then you must lower his point down, and carry to him on the right side in a high *quarte*. If he comes to fall back, you will lift yourself from your position with resolution and strike him in the shoulder. One could even feint with similar blows but I shall finish [so as] not to weary you by the length of their lecture.

Chap. 19. The *premiere* against the *tierce*

If you put yourself in the *tierce*, and your enemy is in *premiere*, and that he strikes you, you must parry and present the point of your sword to his face, so that he parries; and while he parries, you will pass on his side, striking him with the *seconde*. By parrying still the same *botte*, you will be able to strike him a slash to the face and, parrying suddenly, lower a blow to his leg; in parrying you can even enter with the left foot and join the arms of your enemy to his sword, giving him a thrust in the stomach. Besides this you will be able to relieve him of his sword by turning your left arm.

Chap. 20. Various ways of the *premiere*

If you want to cover the sword of your enemy outside or to the inside so that he disengages, you will be able to hit him in the same tempo that he moves. But if he wants to set upon yours, and he does not move his, you will only put your hand in *seconde*, presenting the point to the stomach, and he will be struck; and you will understand that the angle beats the straight line, by observing the posture that I teach.



While your enemy sets upon your sword, you will be able to hit him, or in lowering the point, pressing on the sword, or, under the armpit in passing the left foot, he will be struck with the *quarte*, though this kind of blows rarely happen, and by observing the tempi you will make this blow, and many others even more difficult.

Chap. 21. Resolution of the single sword which is used in disputes

In the play of the single sword there are greater virtues which do not consist in the postures as for the other plays, that with the single sword you will find the enemy to give him terror. To do this, you must hold the sword high in the *tierce*, going against his opponent until you approach the point of his sword, then you must make a feint over his point to the outside, returning quickly with the hand in *quarte*; you will avoid the blow of his sword, and will carry to him in the face.

The same is made with the opposite effect; in striking you must move the sword in *seconde*. So this manner of fencing is called the step of deception.

He who has the patience to stand in that high *tierce*, when the enemy comes to cover his sword, while he covers it, must remove the body back without stepping, so that he [the enemy] pursues it, and he must as he advances the foot carry to him [the enemy] with resolution to the inside, depending on whether you recognize the advantage provided on the left foot, and therefore you will learn to break your measure, and to not let yourself be forced to leave by necessity.

Chap. 22. To strike with a cut

To strike with a cut, if you want to be the first assailant, you must be in the wide *tierce*, attacking him in this way: if your enemy holds his sword long in the *tierce* you will strike his point with the false edge on the weakest place, and if he carries a cut to your face or leg, remaining with his sword in *quarte*, to parry several blows by removing your point, you must parry in *quarte*, going in the *seconde* which you will carry to his stomach: afterwards you must retire first in order that he does not have the satisfaction of coming to carry to you. And in case he comes in desperation to thrust you below the hand, you must lower yours to hinder his sword, and suddenly you will strike to him in the stomach, striking him first.

Being still in the same *tierce*, you will carry to him a *quarte* to the face to force him to parry, and by feinting you will strike him a *revers* to the head, or a *jartiere*, or else some other downward blow, passing on your left foot to his right side, and if he parries and your sword remains in the presence, in his first movement you can enter with the point, feinting to give him a downwards blow to the arm with a *maindroit* or a *revers*, and if striking the sword to the inside he lowers the point in changing his posture, he will be struck by the sword in the stomach. If you want to wait for your enemy to force him to come to you and to carry to you with a *maindroit* or a *revers*, if he strikes with a *maindroit*, you need to parry with the sword to the end hand in *quarte*, by binding with the point as we have said here before. If he carries a *revers* to you, parry with the *seconde*, so that he lowers his sword, and with the same *seconde* you will carry to him in the stomach.

If your enemy wants to strike you with a *premiere*, you must parry with a *revers*, and strike him in the same tempo a *maindroit* to the face, or parry on the outside and strike him with a *seconde*. So I will put an end to the discourse of cuts and *estramasson* (stramazone). By our discourse it will seem to many that it is difficult to offend and to defend oneself with the point, to attack and to parry, because there are many feints, which nevertheless can be done easily.

To not cool the courage of the Cavaliers, and to not remove their assurance to strike their enemies [when] coming to blows, this way of striking is very good.

Especially since the *premiere* guard is dreadful, and it seems difficult to deal a more dangerous blow: however I want you to advance first up to two or three steps until you make your blow, and that you can hit your opponent, you must suddenly, without closing yourself, strike straight to the face, and inasmuch that such a blow leans to the ground you will turn the hand when you can in *quarte*, however, lowering with the same guard to the right side of your enemy that you want to hit with this *botte*, you can parry then that this *quarte* to such an industry when properly implemented. I say the same to those who understand this profession, that there are many things that can be understood naturally, even if they be children of the art.

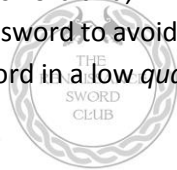
I will leave you in *quarte* having struck with the *premiere*, recommending you take similar guard to better parry all sorts of moves with this guard, without being subject to so many feints, as are other guards. When your enemy is in *quarte* for all sorts of blows, either of the point or the edge, you will put yourself in *premiere*, the point not as high with the arm so that your enemy cannot feint striking you in one place and striking in another, although parrying there you had the advantage of your body no matter what occurs, because the nature of the man is to carry thrusts under hand, with *maindroit* and with *revers*.

To all duels the feints are useless against those who know them. Nevertheless, it will not be out of place to learn them in order to uncover them so [that] they cannot harm.

So, reader, that you can have the practice, and to exercise to many blows and feints, to know the amount of surprises that your enemy prepare for you, you must understand how you can gain the outside or the inside, which will be in this way. By covering the sword of your enemy from within, so that he takes resolution to not be subject to yours; when he strikes with his sword, strike with yours, and strike him in the stomach. But take care that while you go to cover his sword, he can pass underneath yours, and for your defence in this accident you must lower the hand and the wrist in *quarte*, voiding with the body, and he will remain struck in the same tempo. But if you cover it from the outside so that your enemy goes each time with the same *quarte* lowering the point to the ground: in parrying, you will hit him where convenience presents itself, further you will be able to disarm his sword. In the same tempo, I want you to strike him straight to the face, in order that you incite him to parry and, in parrying he bends the body as you can see set above, in a similar guard. But if he uncovers outside of your right side, without moving lowering the head and the point of the sword, pass under his with the left foot, striking him with the point to the stomach.

While he covers, you can still go resolutely with a *seconde* to his face in order that he raises his arm, and [he] lifting it, pass under his sword in the same tempo, and then strike him with a *seconde*. Since you cover the inside, you can strike over his sword, and go to attack him with the right foot.

Covering the outside, feint to go under his sword and, in no way lowering the tip, turn it suddenly to his stomach, provided that it is on his own sword to avoid being subject to the feints which your enemy will make. You must lower your sword in a *low quarte*, seeing that such a guard can parry all kinds of feints.



But there is so much diversity that everyone makes them to their fancy. This is why I want to advise everyone to parry well with the sword as this serves the occasion of many quarrels.

We will leave aside all these moves that are made in *tierce*, and will talk about certain very useful guards, and swift for all men, weak or strong as they are.

Having shown clearly with care, and with exercise, which is the most useful and convenient guard.

I find that wanting to have patience to remain in *quarte*, or in *tierce*, which are the best, since they have the power to offend, and to defend all, and if Masters keep their students more covered as they can, not considering (inappropriately) that they have to defend, and that they would be compelled to uncover on the inside or outside. But instead going from *tierce* to a *quarte* to parry, you will have more force and while parrying, you will cover yourself as much as is needed in quarrels. But we must not parry negligently as at school playing with his master. These kinds of guards can make all kinds of injuries, and parrying with the edge, as with the point in the attempt, you will find the truth because these two guards, *quarte* and *tierce*, are the ships of our art. Many believe that a left-hander has the advantage against one right-handed, but those who have that view are wrong, especially since I cannot find a left-hander who has not had lessons other than from a Master who is right-handed, and that he works more with a right-hander than with a left-hander in the general exercise so that the left-hander makes with the right-hander, giving him a great advantage. But if you have to make an *estramasson* with a left-hander, I want you always be with

the weapons in *tierce*, wide on the outside of his sword, so that going to strike you, he is forced to uncover himself. Asking the case that a left-hander strikes you with the point, then you must parry with your sword of the left side, striking him with the point to the stomach to the face. Secondly, if a left-hander strikes you with the edge provided that it is with a *maindroit*, you must parry with a *seconde*, and then strike him a *maindroit* to the head, redoubling with another for your defence.

Thirdly, if a *revers* is carried to you, you will parry with the edge of the sword, carrying a *revers* to him on the face or you will parry with the false, striking him with a *maindroit* or a *revers*, with the edge or the point, inside or outside, depending that you are in posture. However, the right-hander is quicker to hit than the left-hander, albeit that this parry seems difficult to you, if that you exercise all will succeed very happily.



Second book of fencing of Sieur Desbordes

Chapter 1

Having promised to talk about the sword and the dagger as the main weapons of the Cavaliers, I want to carry out my promise, and all of it in order. But because in the first book I have shown those which are the principal guards, of which I kept the figures, I shall not make more repetition contenting myself with what I have written above. I will show how one must be with the body, and the hand, with the dagger, and the difference with the other guards, as one can see in the following teachings.

Chap. 2

I want to address at the beginning the *premiere* guard according to the started order. Here is why if you are in *premiere*, you will put your enemy in great terror seeing that he will not have the assurance of striking you, [and] seeing you so readily in the position to strike him to his face.

If by chance he resolutely came to bring you a thrust under the hand: rather than parry with the dagger, parry with the sword and, helping with the dagger, suddenly strike him where he uncovered himself, because in this way he will be able to make a feint on the dagger or other premeditated place.

While you parry with your sword, your enemy will be able to enter from the outside with the left foot, covering your sword with his dagger, and might thus have the convenience of hitting you, but if you have the intelligence of that art, when your enemy passes with his left foot, void with the body, and lift up the arm in the *premiere* guard, and you will have the upper hand, [both] for the force and for the guard.

Chap. 3.

To firstly assault with a *seconde*, I want you to attack your enemy in *seconde* so that he strikes you, and in striking, you parry with the dagger and strike him in the head.

To demonstrate the defence that can be made by your enemy to your fencing, if you go to strike resolutely as I have said, your enemy can strike you with a *premiere* in the stomach, or a cut on the head from the right side, or with a *revers*, but doing as I said, you will be victorious over them, although he is in *premier*. You will be able to strike him with a false edge to the hand, to provoke him to make a riposte with the point or the edge, or still with a false to the hand, he could turn his hand and void with the body, hitting you with a *quarte* in the stomach. Or removing the hand and the sword he might go with the weapons together above yours, that is to say with both the sword and the dagger, and may do other further blows. Still attacking with the sword and dagger, you can feint a *maindroit* to the face of your enemy so that he parries, and by parrying you gain with the dagger, hitting him with the point or the edge as the occasion presents itself. Many other blows and other feints can be made and taught, but I want to talk about all of them after the other two guards. I will leave for the present this *seconde* having spoken quite enough.

Chap. 4.

The *tierce* guard is suitable to all occasions, as can be known through experience. That is why being in *tierce* and wanting to attack your enemy in a narrow *tierce*, you must pretend to want to take his

sword with your dagger, forcing him to withdraw, and that in the retreat you use the presented opportunity to hit him in the stomach or else go with your sword to cover his from the outside so that he moves it, and that by moving it he gives you the convenience to hit him. Again you can carry it over his dagger to make him parry it, and during that you prepare yourself to strike him in the stomach.

Chap. 5.

The *quarte* and last of the four, [is] our principal guard, the best, and most convenient for striking and for parrying. Being in *quarte* to attack your enemy first, you go to find to the outside in the cross so that you constrain him to *caver* his sword with a low *quarte*, then you will lower your dagger from *quarte*, going to *seconde*, and from this guard strike him to the most convenient and most useful; although you can make a feint from the outside and to strike to his right side, and then strike him with a *quarte* to the stomach: but such feints puts the man in danger of being wounded in the same tempo that he puts them in practice. This is why I have little respect [of such feints], unless to respond to your opponent's feints.

Chap. 6. Other *Bottes*

Having brought to light the four main guards, I will show other *bottes* dependent on each other, which everyone may give according to their inclination, since all the blows and all the guards may succeed in each, in all the opportunities that may arise. Here is why when you see your enemy advancing his dagger, and holding his sword short and withdrawn, you can make many blows, but I want to teach you in my judgement the four most necessary *bottes*.

Firstly, you will go with resolution to strike him from within, close to his dagger, since you will force him to parry, thinking to do this and not finding your sword. Immediately repeat the step, and turning the wrist to advance a thrust straight to his stomach, and this is called a strike of the firm foot, being firm from the beginning.

The second blow you can do is that you pretend to go resolutely on his dagger; in parrying you lower the point, and present the sword to the stomach, hitting him with a *tierce*. After withdrawing the step, you will strike him another thrust subject to him wishing to follow you.

For the *tierce* strike, pretend to strike him a thrust to the stomach to the end that he passes with the dagger, after putting his sword on his dagger, you will strike him, but this blow is made in uncovering his stomach because the arm angle is large enough. If by chance he parries with the sword, lower your point, putting it to his right side, as I have said [regarding] the blows of the single sword then you can immediately help with your dagger, above or below as the occasion will present itself.

You will be able for the *quarte* strike to pretend to strike your enemy on his dagger, and suddenly raising your sword [along] with the tip of your dagger, strike him with a *quarte* in the stomach, being defended and well covered [if] offended by your enemy's sword.

You can still strike another blow to his dagger, so that your enemy defends himself, and as he parries, you can strike him in two tempi. Or pretend to go to the edge of his dagger, which being reached, he cannot know where you want to strike, above or below, because being so close to his stomach, you will strike him where you want as the occasion will present the most convenient.

It suffices to have spoken about these four guards; I want to address several other sorts of guards.

Chap. 7 Against a *tierce*

If your enemy remains in a low *tierce* joined with the dagger, so that he cannot be struck, and you want to attack him, go to the outside of his right side with your dagger and cover his sword, so that he is forced to withdraw, and as he withdraws in the same tempo, it is necessary to strike with a *quarte* to the stomach.

This guard also may be assailed by other means: in beating his sword from within, you will pretend to strike him above with the dagger, so that parrying he shows the stomach, and in the same tempo you may strike him.

You can even beat the sword from the outside, laying on it with the false edge, and strike him with a *quarte* to the stomach from the right, striking him over the sword.

Chap. 8. In *tierce* against a *premiere*

Being in *tierce* and your enemy in *premiere*, I want you to carry your *tierce* to his right side, without hitting him, so that he has the means to parry, then you lift your sword over the point of his dagger, and going in *premiere*, hit him over the dagger.

I can even teach you to cover his sword from within so that he removes it, and suddenly carry him a thrust to the stomach with a *quarte*. Furthermore, one can assault this *premiere* by another way, namely making a feint from the outside of his dagger so that he parries, and then you will strike him between the sword and the dagger, a thrust along the edge of the sword, turning the body like to that *quarte* of which I have written above.



Chap. 9. Feints

There are many kinds of feints with the dagger, and in particular the principals to feint from below to strike above; from above to below; to feint to the outside and striking between the two weapons to the inside, and striking resolutely with the sword to your enemy so that he makes a riposte, and then you can parry with the dagger, striking him in the same tempo; strike him with a thrust, so that he parries, and during this you will strike him a *maindroit* to the head, or with a *revers*, or other blows as the tempo helps you find out.

Chap. 10. Evading the feints

Having clearly seen the feints which can be made with the dagger, I want to give the method to avoid them. First, consider in which guard and in what posture your enemy puts themselves: if it is in *premiere*, point to the ground in awaiting his blow, if he strikes, parry with your sword from within, and pass with the left foot, with your dagger on his sword, by this way you will reduce him until you will strike him at will, and with this guard you will be able to still use it against the *seconde*. To defend yourself from the *tierce* of your enemy: against this *tierce* you place yourself in *premiere*, parry first, by lowering the point of his sword into the ground, because by sliding your sword against his, he will push it from the left side. Then you cover with your dagger, and you will remain the victor, and you will still be able to use the same against a *quarte*.

Chap. 11. Of the guard of the left foot

Having spoken hitherto quite fittingly of the guards of the right foot, being much assured in this posture, I want to henceforth teach the guards of the left foot, which are specific to the brave men. Here is why staying on the left foot, and being assailed with a point under the hand, parry from the outside with your sword, you will strike your opponent with this *seconde* cited above. If your enemy carries a thrust to you under the hand, parry with the dagger in passing with the right foot in front of his right side, giving him the riposte.

Your enemy wanting to strike you with a cut; while he raises his blow go resolutely to strike him in the stomach, by turning the hand in *quarte*.

Similarly, if you want to attack from the left foot, you must advance the left foot until you come to your enemy's sword with your dagger, and when your opponent moves in the same tempo as you enter, and beat him in the stomach with a thrust, being still on your left foot, and you feint to strike him a blow to the face in order that he parries, and when he parries with his sword, you go against him by passing with the left foot, covering his sword with your dagger, you will find the convenience of hitting him where he will be uncovered.



For fencing with the sword and the cape or mantle

Fencing with the sword and the cape or mantle is very prompt and necessary to the man in all places since it is a custom to all and by all to wear a sword and mantle. For the first instruction of this fencing, it is expedient to know when it comes to such a fight as how one can hit his enemy.

Firstly if your enemy is approaching and strikes you with the point or the edge, you will parry in this way.

If he strikes you with a *maindroit* or a thrust over or under the hand, carry yours from within and parry with the edge of the sword by pressing [with] the left arm, and passing the left foot together, and you will master your enemy's weapon.

But if he strikes you a *revers*, you will parry with a *seconde*, accompanying your sword with the mantle you will immediately strike him a thrust in the stomach.

If you want to assault with the sword and the mantle, carry a thrust to him under the hand, and thus you can force your enemy to parry by necessity, and as he will parry from inside you will lower the point, and will strike him a cut. With this blow you will remove his sword as this blow has force; you will even strike him with the point, with a *revers* or a blow to the head. Another shorter way: you will go to strike a *maindroit* on the head of your enemy so that he parries, and while he parries, you will pass with the left foot, giving him a jarretière¹⁸.

But in doing this, cover yourself with your mantle for greater assurance, and while you parry you will be able to throw your mantle on his face, as by this act you will make him tarry and you will take the convenience of hitting him where it is easiest.



Discourse on the combat with the dagger, of man-to-man.

To make a fight with the dagger alone, Man to Man, I will show you here an easy, brief, and useful method. He who wants to choose the weapons, although the duel is between unequal force, and that the strongest comes to seize, with the weakest.

Firstly, you will put your right foot in front of the left, keeping an eye on the point of your enemy's dagger. You will strike him a thrust to the hand from within so that he parries, especially as in parrying you have the tempo to take away his dagger with your left hand by passing with the left foot; then you will hit him where the opportunity presents itself.

To teach you another method, I want you to hold your dagger in *premiere*, and that you attack your enemy, and as he wants to parry the blow, you will pass under his dagger, giving him a thrust in the stomach. But if you want to wait, you will take care as [to how] your enemy holds his dagger: if he holds it low, coming to hit you with resolution; meet his dagger arm with your right hand at the same tempo which he strikes, holding the flat of the dagger back on the right side, and so you will disarm him.

Another example: if you put yourself in *seconde* and that your enemy awaits you in *premiere*, and that on that guard he strikes you, you will pull back his dagger with your left hand, and pass with the right foot, covering his arm, you take away the weapons. But in this you must take care and do not mock this way of fencing of which I have here written, especially since it comes from experience, that he is very fortunate that knows the means to defend himself.

FINISH



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Signed HENRY

And below

C. de Girmond