

## GENTLEMEN, ON GUARD!

Awit once remarked: "Dueling benefits no one but the doctor and the undertaker." But in spite of the many drastic edicts against it, dueling lasted many centuries. Religions are always strengthened and fortified by persecution, and dueling has also had its honored martyrs.

However, dueling is not a human tradition; primitive barbarians have always been ignorant of it, and individual combats, legendary or not, were actually only the result of sudden quarrels or episodes in the rivalry of two tribes. David and Goliath, and Hector and Achilles are examples.

Curiously the origin of dueling, if not religious, is at least mystical. The fanatical faith of the Middle Ages held that in any armed encounter between a guilty and an innocent person, the latter, even though the weaker, could not fail to

triumph, because heaven permitted no injustice.

In Germany during the Romantic era things were done with the proper funeral decor. Before the combat an open casket was placed in the middle of the field in front of which the accused and the accuser kneeled in prayer and meditation. Dueling then was a veritable theatrical spectacle. One was not even obliged to fight one's own battle. If a man were rich enough he could hire a substitute to appear in his stead, as was the custom in China in regard to criminal executions. In France, under Charles V, one duel became a popular legend. It told of a battle between a dog and a man: Aubry de Montdidier, a friend of the King, had been mysteriously assassinated in the vicinity of Montargis. The victim's dog displayed such ferocity towards a certain Richard Macaire that

everyone decided he must have been the assassin. The King, therefore, ordered a judicial duel between Macaire and the dog. Although armed with a heavy stick Macaire was conquered by the beast and confessed to the crime which he expiated on the scaffold.

It was once a custom to fight six against six, against all comers, about anything. This was called "hurling a challenge to the winds, and any one who cared to might accept it. Under Henry III and Henry IV, the French aristocracy lost 8000 nobles in such duels. This was the period in which Cyrano de Bergerac challenged any casual passer-by who seemed to avoid his gaze. "When I see the chance for a good duel," he said, "I never let it go by."

Women, too, have exchanged pistol-fire. In the 18th Century, two mistresses of the Duc de Richelieu — Mme. de Nesles and Mme. de Polignac — fought each other under the trees in the Bois de Boulogne. "Fire first," said Mme. de Polignac. Mme. de Nesles fired and missed. Mme. de Polignac fired in turn. The

ball grazed Mme. de 'Nesles' ear and she promptly fainted. It is notable that in modern times the women who fight (usually with hat-pins and scissors) always try to mar each other's faces. It seems to me, however, that women have their real duels not with weapons, but with their eyes.

After the Nineteenth Century had broken down class distinctions, the bourgeois believed they could elevate their social standing by wielding the foil, the sabre and the sword. At the time veritable social laws existed about dueling. There was a distinction made between the duel of "first blood," which was halted by the seconds after the first scratch; the duel to the death in which the seconds did not interfere until one of the adversaries had fallen; and the ferocious duel which was begun with the pistol and finished by the sword. The offended person was allowed the choice of weapons. The adversaries, armed with pistols, were separated by a given number of paces, and then would turn and fire at command, or would walk toward each other firing at

will. After the encounter the adversaries either shook hands or refused a reconciliation. If one of the adversaries was killed, a little comedy took place before the courts in which the survivor was always acquitted.

The reconciliation was followed by a repast in the open, or in a cabaret. (There are instances where these feasts have been ordered the day before.)

The lions or dandies of the Boulevard de Gand fought for the merest trifle: Under Napoleon III, the young Duc Grammont-Caderousse, a consumptive and a gay liver, overhearing someone blaspheme the Holy Virgin, challenged the blasphemer: "I do not know the Virgin, but you have insulted a woman and you shall answer to me."

In the meantime the custom of dueling had crossed the ocean and began to be practiced in America. The first encounter took place in Plymouth in 1621. As the adversaries were domestics, the authorities were merciless, condemning them to exposure for twenty-four hours in the stocks of the public square. Later, Castle

Island, in Boston Harbor, became the popular dueling ground. The most famous encounter took place in 1804: Colonel Burr, Vice-President of the Republic, fought and killed General Hamilton. But many other duels occurred which remained more secret and more primitive. Sometimes the opponents were let loose to hunt each other in the forest. The first to see the other fired.

A singularly terrible form of duel was popular in Mexico: the two adversaries, stripped to the waist and armed with knives, were left in a darkened room to hunt each other out. Or again they entered unarmed, while a poisonous snake previously left there by the seconds decided the victor.

Certain duels in Europe, which occurred around 1900, took place in deserted gardens from which reporters were excluded, unable to scale the high walls. These were called *duels passionnels*. It was permissible at that time for a betrayed husband to take the law into his own hands and fight with his wife's lover, under the eyes of a private detec-

tive. Sometimes two lovers dueled — unknown to the husband.

Nowadays men in public life no longer settle differences on the field of honor, not even in Spain, which lost its last glamorous duelist in the person of the great liberal novelist, Blasco Ibañez.

The duel, with all its tragic, comic, and unexpected aspects, has been well exploited in literature and particularly in the theater. Melodrama has thrived on it. There are plenty of duels in Hamlet and in

nearly all the plays of the Elizabethan dramatists. How many dramas, how many plays could never have been concluded without a duell!

Today, dueling has almost disappeared, even among the student corps at Heidelberg. It has been forbidden by Mussolini in Fascist Italy, and in France other sports have taken its place. The young men of our generation have fought too much to begin again killing each other off in twos. Democracy has given the death thrust to dueling — *By Paul Morand, condensed from Vanity Fair (September, '30).*

## JUSTICE DELAYED

The most galling and oppressive of all grievances is that complicated mass of evil which is composed of the uncertainty, delay, expense, and vexation in the administration of justice. — *Jeremy Bentham*