

THE ART OF THE ÉPÉE

CHAPTER I

WHEN pupils are just beginning to study fencing, progress in the exercises to be learned is regulated more or less according to the program set forth in the following pages, dividing it into lessons. These exercises, also common to the foil, (First Part of *The Art of the Foil*), are indispensable for the acquisition of control in handling the weapon and also for learning the mechanism of the principal actions in fencing.

1. PRELIMINARY INSTRUCTION

1. Idea of the position of the guard, of the advance, retreat, lunge, etc.
2. Invitations, engagements (Binds), direct thrusts and disengagements in all lines.
3. Parries and simple ripostes.
4. Direct feint and feint by disengagement in all lines.
5. Counterparries with their ripostes.
6. Two simple parries in opposition to the feint. Make riposte follow.
7. Oppose to the same feints a simple parry and a counter-parry.
8. Circular feint and double disengagement against a counter-parry.
9. Double feint used against two simple parries.
10. Double feint used against a counter-parry and a

simple parry and vice-versa.

11. Double circular feint and triple disengagement (redoublé) against two counter-parries.
12. Compound riposte.
13. The remise.
14. *Appuntata*.
15. The same actions of remise following the riposte.

NOTE: The remise (13, 14, 15) is very well adaptable to épée fencing, particularly in the following two cases: when the adversary remains still after parrying or delays the riposte, make a continued attack (redoublement) by disengagement; when the adversary parries and detaches his blade, or performs a riposte also detaching it; execute a straight thrust in the same line (the *appuntata*). The last action is an exception admitted under a rather subtle interpretation of the rules governing épée fencing. In effect, it is taken for granted that the point of the épée of the fencer who *performs the remise* is closer to the target than that of the fencer who executes the riposte, and therefore the remise scores before the riposte. But this is not always true There sometimes arises a very dubious exception, opening the way to chicanery, because of the difficulty of measuring by sight a difference in time amounting to a few thousandths of a second.

The rule being what it is, a word to the wise is sufficient. If you wish to cut short all discussions, riposte by the filo. Nevertheless, it is profitable to overdo the actions of remise, because their execution is easy and instinctive and almost always effective because of the system adopted for adjudicating the double touch.

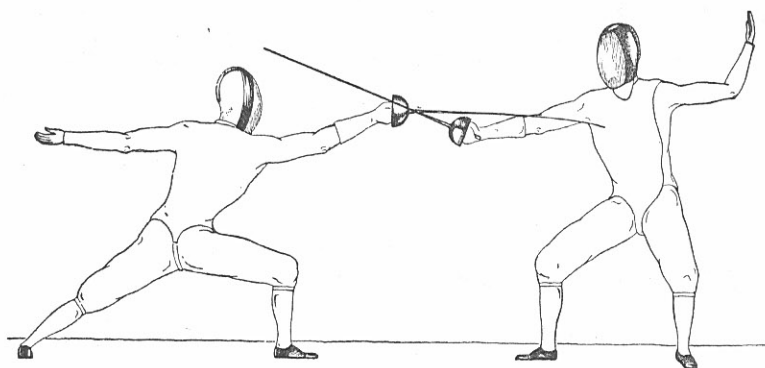


FIG. 1

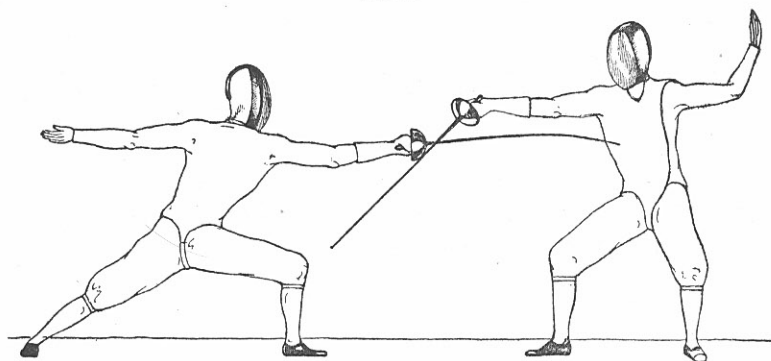


FIG. 2

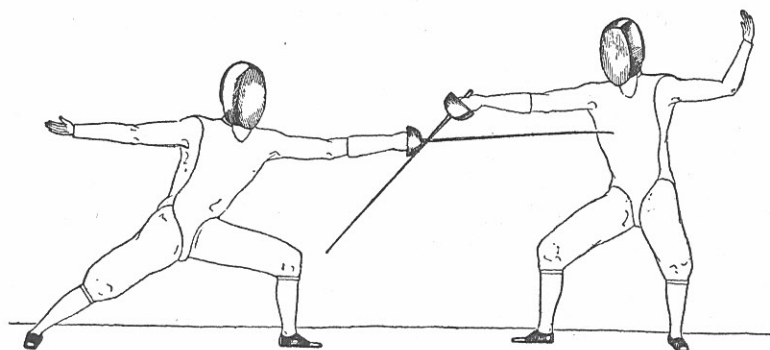


FIG. 3

16. The filo in all lines. (Figs. 1,2,3,4,5)
17. Feint of thrust by filo and disengagement.
18. Beat and straight thrust.

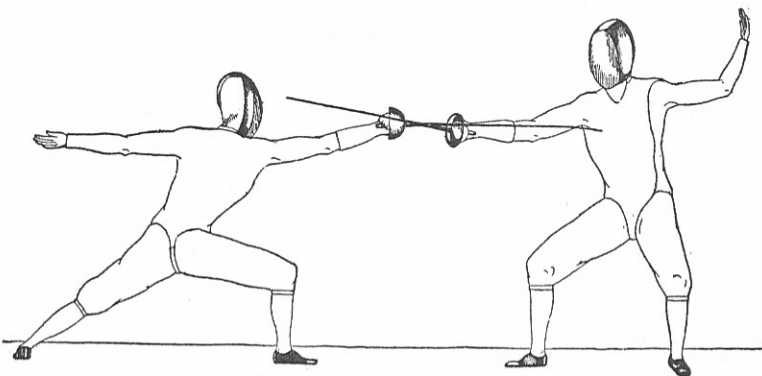


FIG. 4

19. Beat and disengagement.
20. The same actions (filo and beats) followed by two feints against two parries.

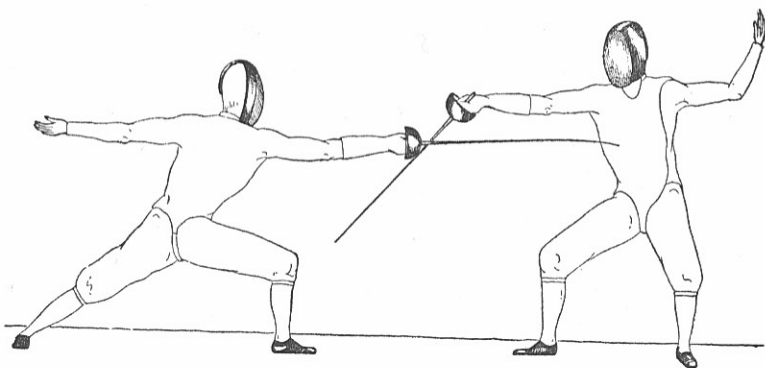


FIG. 5

It is understood that the exercises so far described, are to be executed either at medium distance, or at

normal distance (which requires a step forward before you lunge, so as to bring you within striking distance), insisting particularly upon the second method. It is not necessary to assign a whole lesson to the study of each one of the foregoing paragraphs; several of them may be taken up during the lesson, according to the time available and the capacity of the pupil. However, it will be well to start each new lesson with a résumé of the preceding one, taking up the simple movements first, and afterward alternating them with more advanced actions.

2. ACTIONS PECULIAR TO THE ÉPÉE

ACTIONS OF ATTACK

- a) Angular thrust to the forearm (simple or preceded by a beat) against an immobile adversary who keeps the arm in line of attack.

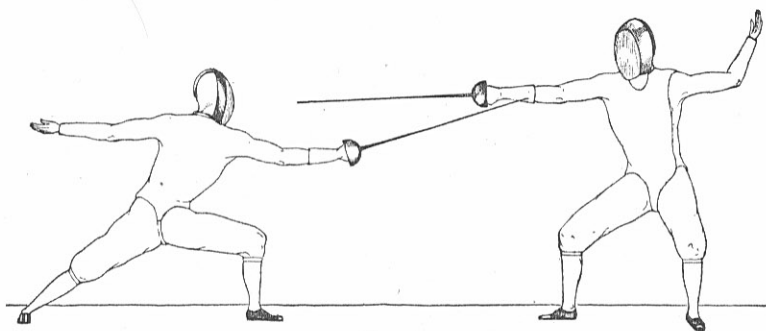


FIG. 6

- b) Straight thrust or disengagement against the adversary who exposes his arm.
- c) Scape of blade and thrust to the forearm when your adversary advances taking hold of your blade.

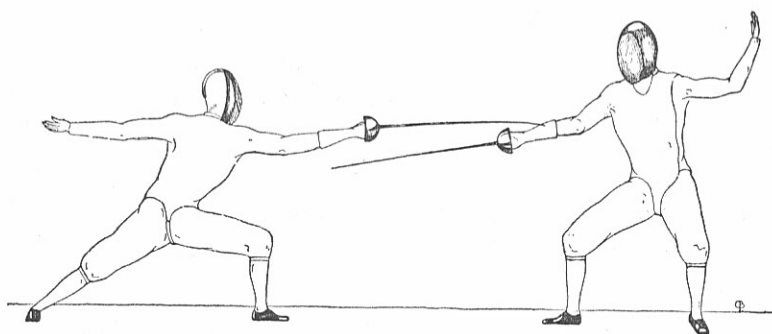


FIG. 7

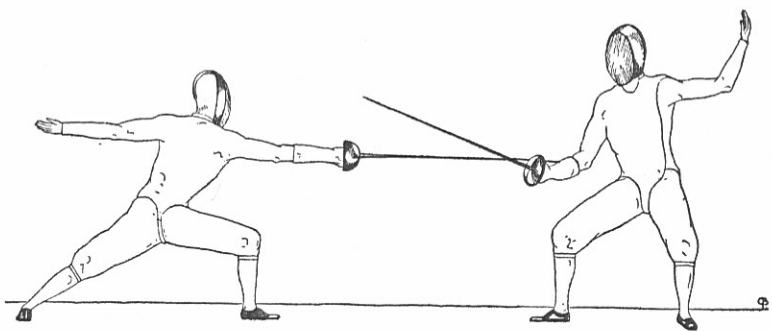


FIG. 8

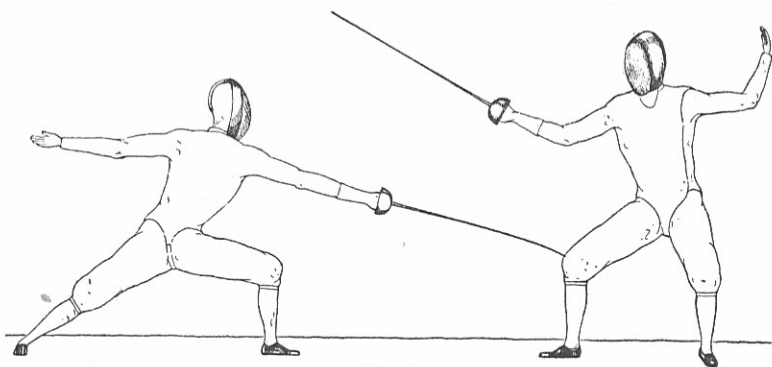


FIG. 9

- d) Thrust to the knee of the adversary who keeps his arm bent too much and the point of the weapon too high. Same attack in the many analogous situations.

AGAINST YOUR ADVERSARY'S ATTACK

- e) Stop to the arm, remaining in the position of the guard.

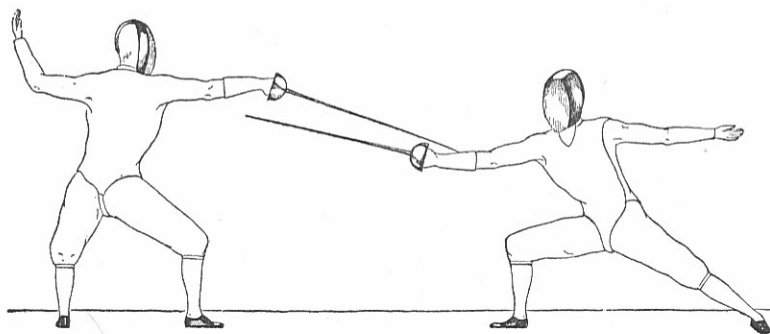


FIG. 10

- f) The same but joining the right to the left foot and standing erect.

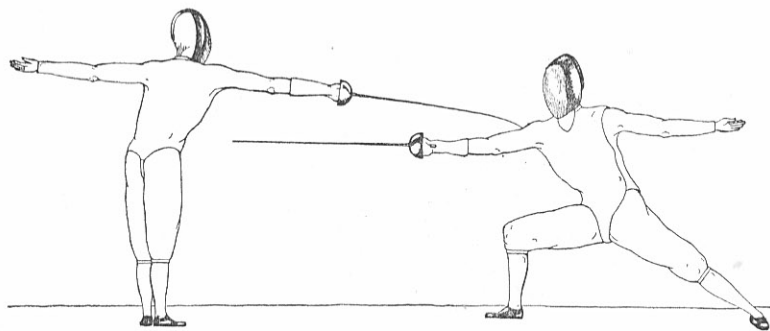


FIG. 11

- g) The same, retreating.
- h) *Time* thrust against the opponent who attacks blindly and esposes himself. The thrust is delivered at the start of your opponent's movement.
- i) Stop thrust to the chest, obstructing the *final* of the action when your opponent attacks using feints.

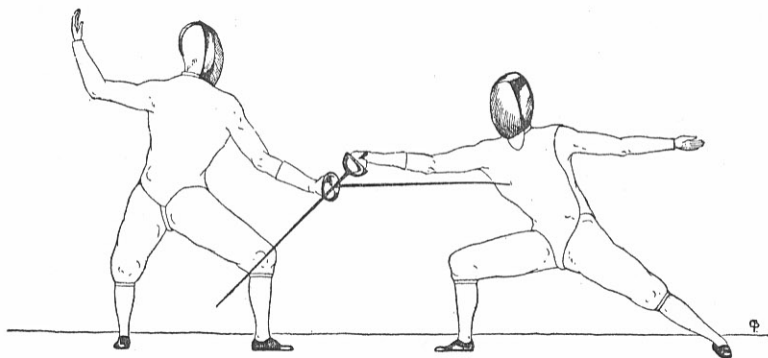


FIG. 12

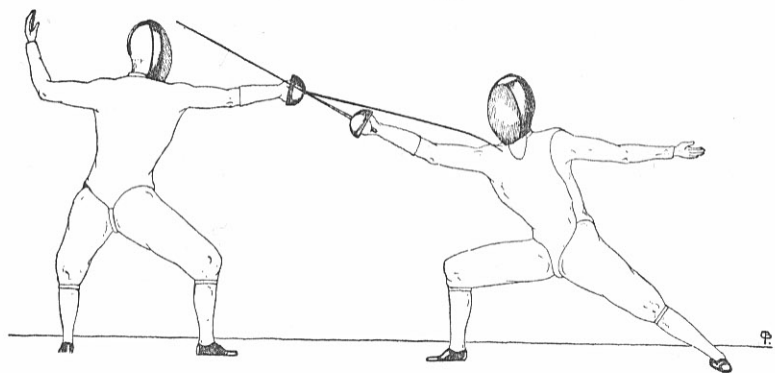


FIG. 13

- j) The inquartata.

The execution of these last three actions is not difficult on the mechanical side. The only thing im-

portant is to learn to take your opponent by surprise and to take advantage of the habits you may discover in his swordplay. It is by all means opportune to make

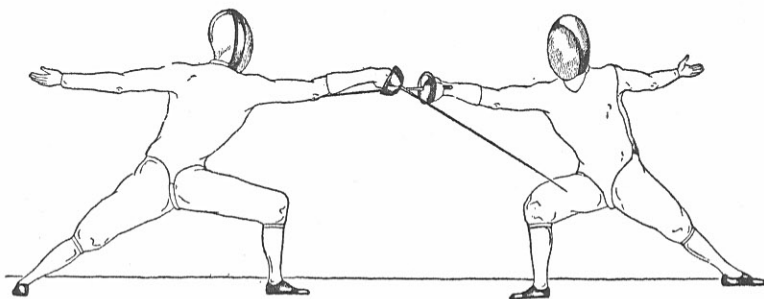


FIG. 14

him multiply his defensive movements and to retreat in order to compel him to deliver his attacks in a more vigorous manner, and at greater distance. Above all, it is necessary to avoid haste or repeating too often these tactics. Patience is the first virtue of an épée fencer. The accessory actions, in particular those directed against the adverse attack, are a source of strength to those who are slow on their feet. With a perspicacious and artful use of these expedients alone, fencers of this type can make themselves quite dangerous, but they must, of course, devote themselves to a particular study of the defensive method embracing these actions, and above all to parries of Second Intention against blows into tempo listed under e, f, g, h, i, j.

Summing up, it is necessary to specialize in those actions best suited to one's own temperament inasmuch as our art is a domain so extensive that it affords a place for all.

CHAPTER II

3. STUDENTS' FINISHING EXERCISES

- a) Conventional exercises (See Section 54 of *The Art of the Foil*), which we recommend.
- b) The actions with second intention (See Section 63 of the same book).
- c) Parries and counter-ripostes in consecutive series, without interruption and varying the parry during the course of the sequence of action.

The last one is a complicated exercise but of the utmost usefulness; and for this reason it is necessary to repeat it constantly until it becomes automatic, because in this manner it constitutes the best method of facilitating and making more certain the defense. In the beginning there will be difficulties to conquer, but multiplying the trials with perseverance, all obstacles will disappear.

In order to illustrate this exercise, I offer the following two examples:

A.	B.
Invitation in Tierce.	
Parries Quarte and performs riposte by inward thrust.	Delivers inward thrust.
	Parries Quarte and executes counter-riposte in the same line.

Parries Counter of Tierce
and executes downward
thrust.

Parries Quinte (demi-
circle) and performs coun-
ter-riposte by inward
thrust.

etc., etc.

Parries Seconde and per-
forms upward thrust.

Parries Counter of Tierce
and delivers downward
thrust.
etc., etc.

A.

Engages blade in Quarte.
Parries Counter of Quarte
and performs riposte by
outward feint.

Parries Seconde and exe-
cutes counter-riposte by
feint.

Parries Counter of Tierce
and performs downward
counter-riposte.

B.

Performs outward disen-
gagement.

Parries Quarte and Tierce
and executes riposte by
downward thrust.

Parries Tierce and Quarte
and executes inward coun-
ter-riposte.

etc., etc.

Parries Quinte and counter-attacks by inward thrust.

etc., etc.

It is to be noted that "A" changes the line when executing the riposte, while the only thing "B" does is to oppose the adequate parry. This is only during the beginning. As the exercises progress, when his turn comes, each fencer will change his tactics during the action *without agreeing* upon a *preconceived theme*. It is necessary to begin this study very slowly. The rapidity of the movements comes from the suppleness which is gradually acquired, or in other words, as a result of a long and patient exercise, which nevertheless is interesting.

- d) Individual exercises for developing speedy foot work.
- e) Exercises in lunging with a straight thrust.

You must try to touch the target with your point, lunging, just the instant before your right foot touches the floor. It is precisely this instant in advance which determines the success of the blow. The movement of the lungs must not be considered as a means of increasing the reach of the thrust, but rather as a means of regaining the equilibrium of the body after it is thrown forward by the extension of the left leg. Those who get a clear picture of this movement will be able to simplify their play considerably.

In order to learn to execute this movement correctly, it is necessary to begin to practice the straight thrust at a short distance, trying to overcome the ad-

verse parry, gradually increasing the distance. This is the best way to obtain the sense of distance, determined by your own suppleness.

All these exercises must be performed with the greatest possible vigor so as to surmount the most arduous difficulties by your own skill, just as you would have to do in a real combat. Only in this manner is it possible for a fencer to learn to appraise his own abilities and defects, and likewise his difficulties.

Each fencer must continue to make it as difficult as possible for the other at all times, while observing all the conditions previously agreed upon.

CHAPTER III

4. THE TACTICS OF THE ÉPÉE

IN ESTABLISHING a new style for the duelling épée, the rules and conventions governing the judging of the touches have been abolished.

In the numerous and varied cases of *double touch*, the first blow to reach a target which now includes the whole body—even when the difference in time is only the minute fraction of a second—is the only one to be scored.

But the advantage in a double touch does not depend on the time factor alone; there is also the question of the comparative length of the thrusts. For example, in a simultaneous attack, if one of the adversaries is touched on the wrist and the other on the elbow, the touch on the wrist takes precedence because this part of the arm is nearer to the point of the adversary's weapon. This principle is applied to all similar cases.

The absence of conventions and the extent of the target tempt the fencers to use any expedient in order to make the first touch, without trying not to be touched themselves. It is on this account that there is a tendency to overdo the stop-thrust, particularly to the arm, which is the nearest target and the easiest to reach. In effect, it is sufficient to extend the arm forward, in line—the easiest method for the fencer who is not very well trained—in order to overcome the difficulties offered by a stronger fencer.

If worse comes to the worst—the majority of the épée fencers say, and they are not wrong at that—there is always the *double*, which leads to an argument. . . .

All the foregoing has completely overturned the traditional tactics of assault, by reversing the fundamental principles of swordplay in favor of the weaklings in the art of fencing.

All the real fencer has to do in order to adapt himself to modern conditions is to become more prudent, and to avoid any action unless he is sure of the success of his attack, such as tradition has always demanded.

Those who nurse the ambition to become strong fencers, must concentrate on the study of the attack by means of the simplest and most direct actions, having the chest as an objective, and consequently must develop the legs if they have a strong muscular system. Otherwise, they must specialize in the art of defense, studying the details of the parry in the second intention attacks, which are within the reach of every one.

5. A FEW SUGGESTIONS

THE GUARD

The rational position consists in keeping the arm extended in line of attack, with the point of the blade a little lower than the fist and constantly directed to the nearest target (your adversary's hand or arm) as if attracted by a magnet, and following all its displacements. Avoid contact with your opponent's blade. The point of your épée must always threaten your adversary.

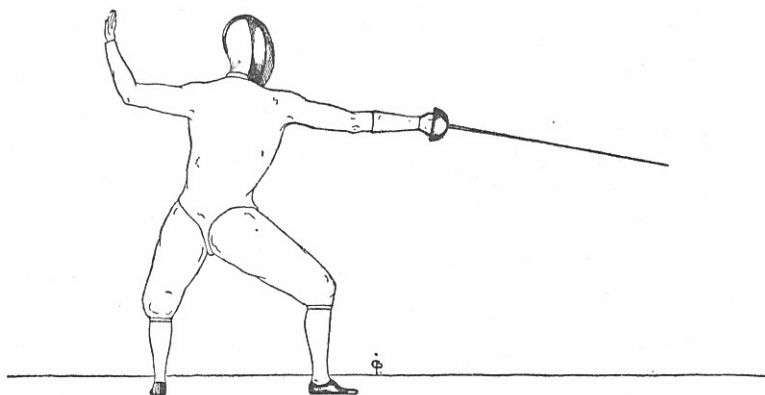


FIG. 15

6. THE MOBILITY OF THE LEGS

The majority of fencers, when they are preparing an attack or trying to avoid one, advance and retreat very much as boxers do who are sparring for an opening. This procedure is not advisable because the advance and retreat during the assault must be made rapidly, by bounds and at irregular intervals in such a fashion that the adversary may not notice the action until it is too late. The attack should then be launched as suddenly as possible accommodating itself to the automatic movements of the opponent.

7. THE LUNGE

A good épée fencer rarely exposes himself by long lunges, because he is concerned principally with returning to the position of the guard as soon as possible in order to avoid the riposte. He lunges just enough to deliver the thrust and to recover rapidly, *keeping the point in line.*

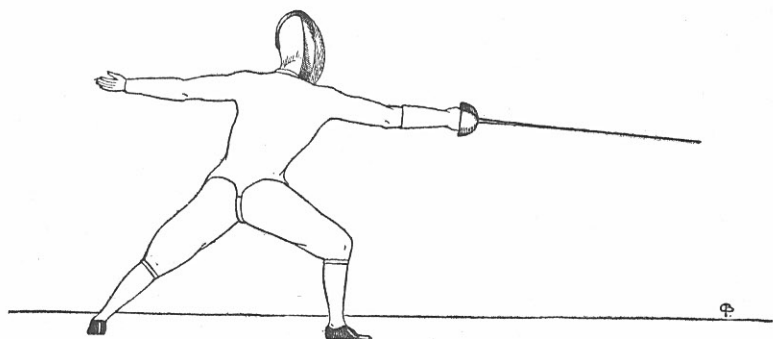


FIG. 16

8. THE DISTANCE

The fencer must possess a sense of distance. Training develops this faculty; and since it varies with the physical means of different individuals, each fencer has his own best distance, which he adapts as well as he may to his opponent's speed in parrying. In Section 3 (d) (Chapter II) I have explained the method for obtaining the *sense of distance*.

Figure 17 shows the position in taking the right distance before the guard.

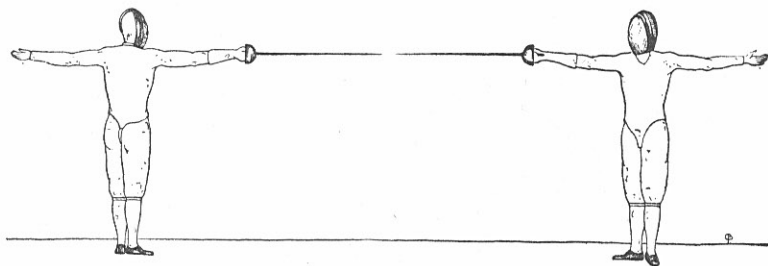


FIG. 17

CHAPTER IV

9. ACTIONS OF ATTACK TO THE CHEST

THOSE TO BE PREFERRED

- a) Attacks against the blade in line. The *Beats*, the *Fili*; the last ones specially, because they are the best protection against counter-offensives.
- b) Surprise attacks against *movements of preparation* of your adversary, thereby stopping his attack.
- c) Second intention attacks, which are most essential in épée fencing.
- d) The *Counter-Tempo* actions.

10. THE PARRIES

There is a style of parry very much like the parry used in foil, which is the most efficient against the thrusts aimed to the chest. (Figs. 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22.)

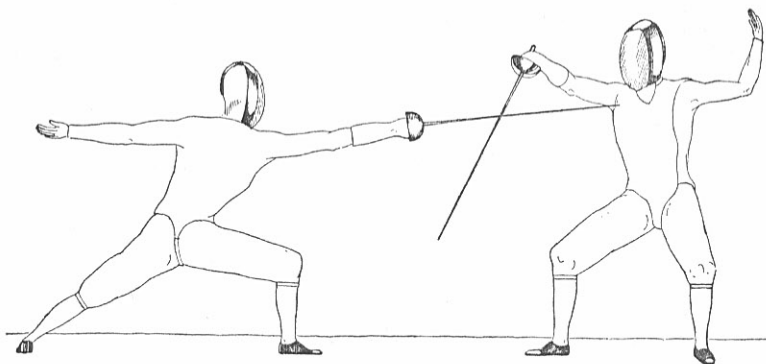


FIG. 18

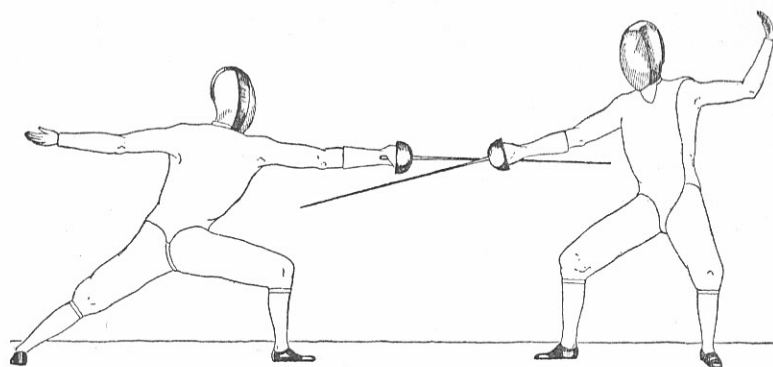


FIG. 19

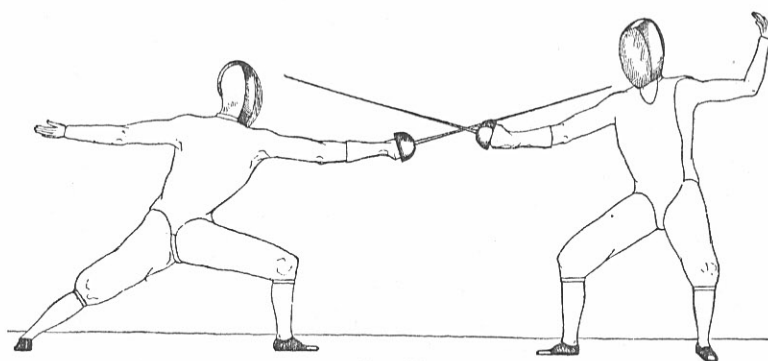


FIG. 20

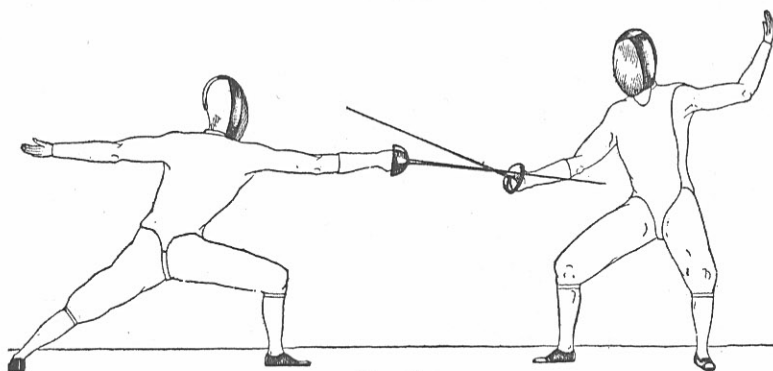


FIG. 21

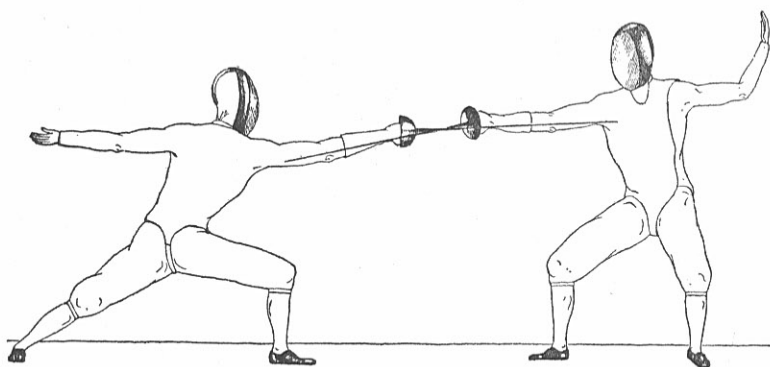


FIG. 22

The method differs for the thrusts directed against the forearm. Here it suffices to interpose the guard of the weapon, slightly displacing the fist or describing a complete and rather ample circle with the point, extending the arm in order to be protected against blows converging to the angle which might otherwise be formed, and deflecting the point of the opponent's blade toward the inner line. (Figs. 23, 24, 25 and 26.)

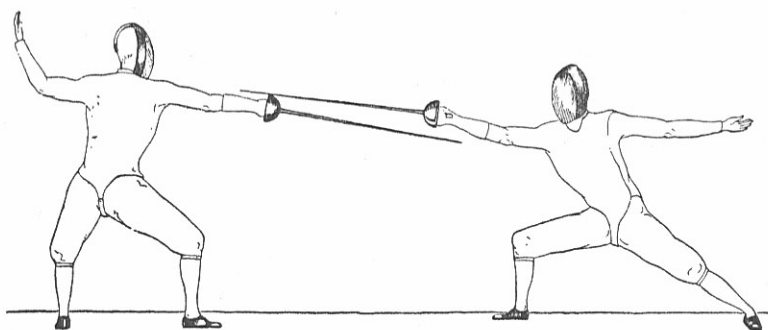


FIG. 23

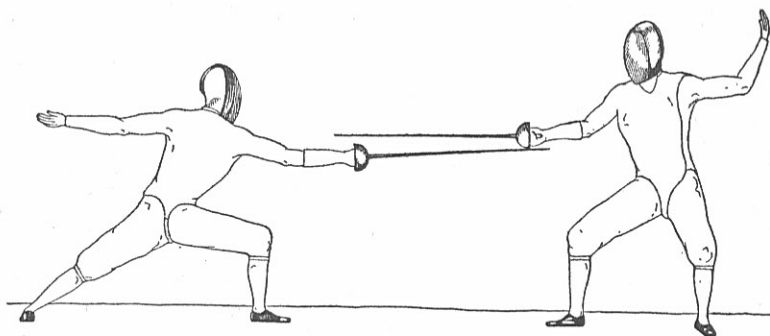


FIG. 24

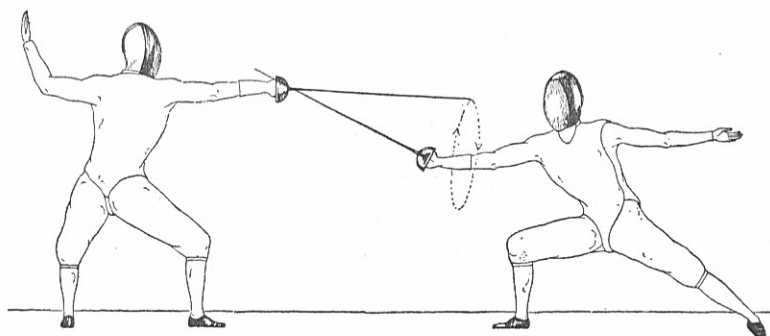


FIG. 25

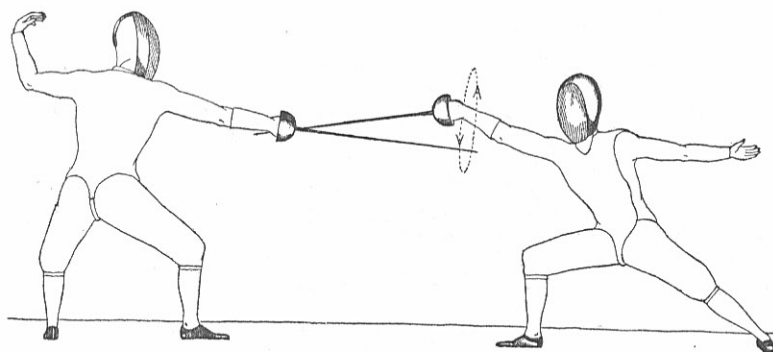


FIG. 26

Naturally, the best course is constantly to maintain, if possible, the weapon in line of attack: this would be the best protection. However, this is not always possible in actual practice because much depends upon the attitude of your opponent. It may be advisable to adopt tactics quite contrary, such as keeping the épée out of the line. (Fig. 27). The choice of method depends upon the fencer's ability.

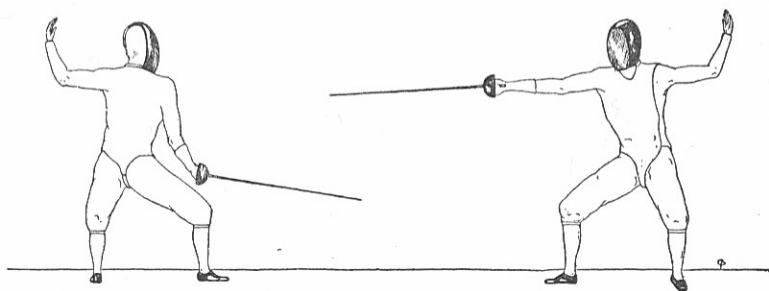


FIG. 27

When you encounter an adversary who is not very rapid in the attack and who insists upon annoying you with thrusts directed to the hand or to the arm, or in other words, who forces you to a passive defense, deprive him of this target and compel him to direct his weapon toward your chest which he cannot easily touch with a simple thrust.

However, take care to maintain the necessary distance which will force your opponent to advance one step if he wishes to strike. Here his offensive action must be composed of at least two movements of the blade, both of them being bound up with the actions of the defense.

Bearing in mind this ensemble of possibilities, the fencer attacked should first of all avoid letting his opponent foresee the parry he is about to offer, and then he must be sure always to make two parries, a simple one followed by a counterparry, lest he be taken by surprise, or should be uncertain of the nature of the action his opponent wishes to launch.

11. PARRYING EXERCISES

To make these exercises profitable, the attacking fencer should exhibit as much energy as he would in an assault. To ordinary actions against the chest, should be added those against the arms and legs, and even the so-called fancy actions, though they may seem a little extravagant. Such a procedure is most useful to a study of the defense, which should always be able to adapt itself to the irregular attacks that often occur in épée fencing.

There are fencers so eccentric that they upset even an expert in the art of parrying if he is not used to their tactics, which are however, perfectly admissible.

12. PARRYING WHILE IN THE LUNGE

When launching a thrust, particularly against the chest, it is always necessary to consider the riposte it will provoke and to prepare for it. One usually decides his course after observing the habitual reflexes that the adversary betrays in constantly using the same riposte.

Here it is possible to remain in the lunge and to execute a counter-riposte from this position. This should

be done only rarely or as a bit of shrewdness, but never with regularity. The best rule is to return promptly to the position of the guard, even if instinctively you happen to precede your opponent with the parry.

Finally, the riposte from the position of the lunge should be a second intention action, or in other words a premeditated action. (See Figs. 28, 29, 30, 31, 32.)

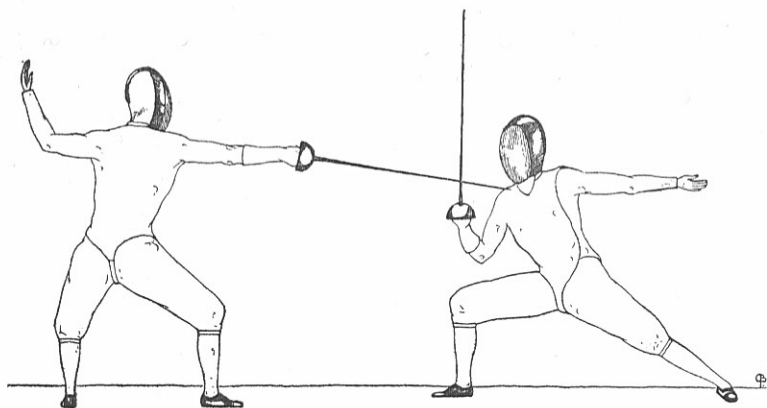


FIG. 28

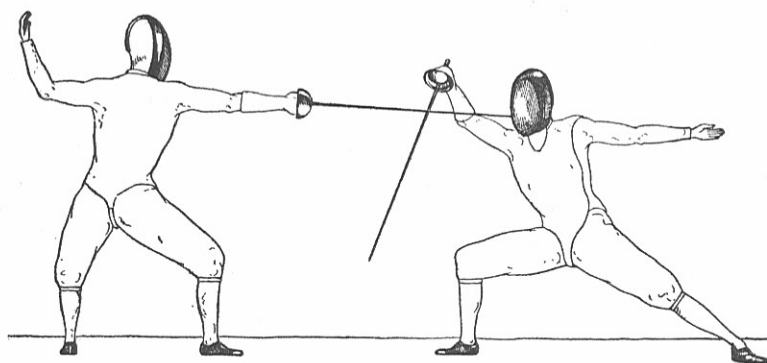


FIG. 29

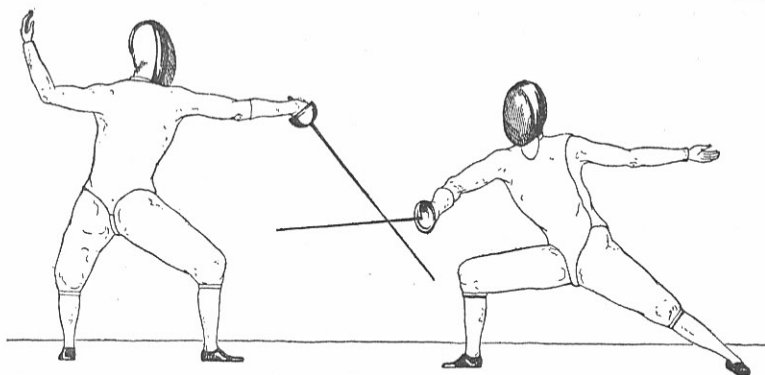


FIG. 30

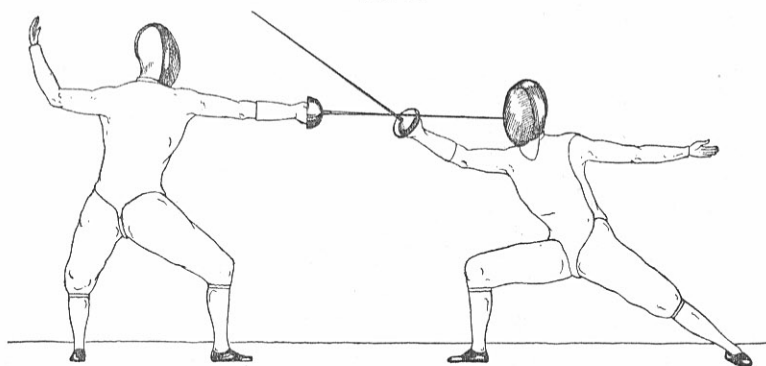


FIG. 31

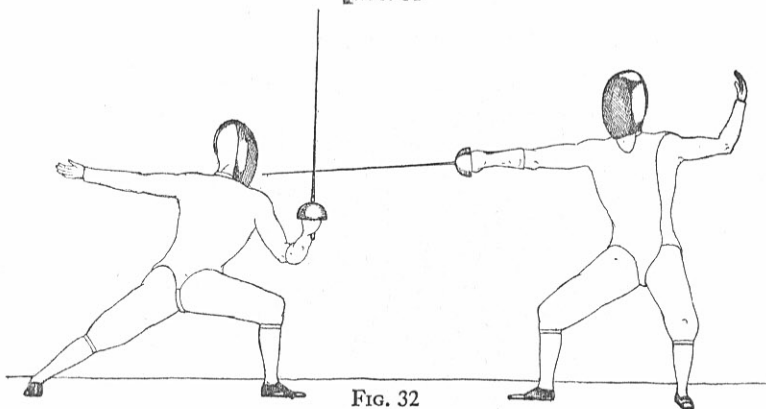


FIG. 32

The two positions shown on Figs. 33 and 34 are to be studied particularly for opposing a left-handed fencer, as explained in Part 72 of *The Art of the Foil*.

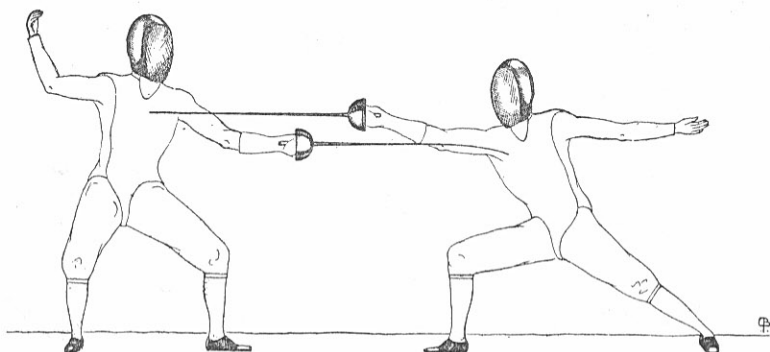


FIG. 33

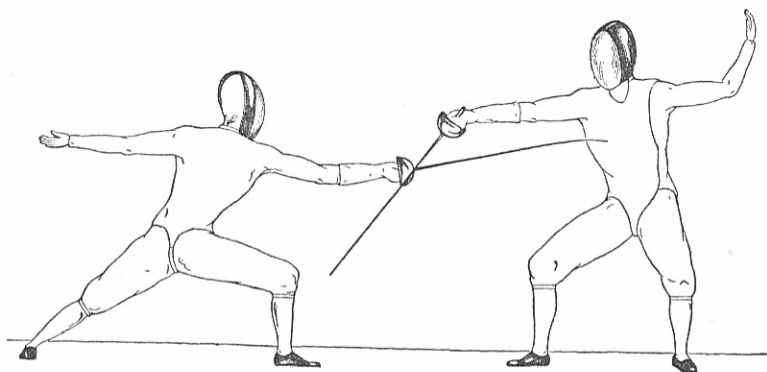


FIG. 34

13. CONCLUSION

The repertoire of exercises indicated in Chapters I and II constitute an adequate preparation for the mechanical phase of the assault. But I recommend

Chapters III and IV to the young people who are starting the free study of the assault.

In duelling-sword fencing, as it is practiced today, the use of certain principles derived from direct experience—which each fencer afterward elaborates in his own mind—count for more than the simple technical virtuosity.

These principles spring from sound remarks and observations presented earlier in the book; and those who know how to interpret and adapt them will have a sure guide, founded on an experience which could be duplicated by one's self only at the end of years of hard work.

Here are stated few things, but they are essentials; that is, they are indispensable to the beginner. At any rate, these remarks should increase the pleasure and awaken an interest in the study of fencing. Without these, fencing would be no more than a gymnastic drill.

The essentials to be derived from this short exposition of the art of the épée are more than enough to direct your initiative and bring you to the desired goal.

The point to be stressed is the rational application of the second intention actions. On their method one could expatiate, but this would only end in long drawn-out theories, which are not easy to understand, since in reality, every one would comprehend them differently according to his temperament.

It is only when facing your adversary's blade that you really use your reasoning powers to solve the ever new and unexpected problems presented by methods which only actual assault provides.

An excellent preparation may be acquired by the study of the exercises indicated in Chapter II.

It is necessary to accustom the muscles to respond immediately to the intuition of the instant called "*tempo*," an elusive instant which is lost if there is an interval between the intuition and the execution.

These exercises, which in reality are but a detailed analysis of the assault, furnish the means to acquire spontaneity in execution.

This study will be beneficial for all, even for the less gifted, because it will teach them how to estimate their powers.

GLOSSARY

<i>English</i>	<i>Italian</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>German</i>
Appuntata	Appuntata	Remise	Appuntata
Attack	Attacco	Attaque	Angriff
Assault	Assalto	Assaut	Freigegecht
Beat	Battuta	Battement	Battut
Bind	Legamento	Engagement	Bindung
Circular feint	Circolazione	Tromper la contre	Umkreisung
Circular feint and disengagement	Circolazione e finta	Tromper la contre et dégagé	Umkreisung und Finte
Continued attack	Rimessa	Redoublement	Rimessa
Counter-tempo	Controtempo	Contretemps	Controtempo
Counterparry	Parate di contro	Contre	Contreparade
Cut-over	Coupé	Coupé	Coupé
Cut to the head	Colpo alla testa	Coup de tête	Kopfhieb
Cut to the face	Colpo alla figura	Coup de figure	Gesichthieb
Cut to the abdomen	Colpo al ventre	Coup de ventre	Bauchhieb
Cut to the chest	Colpo al petto	Coup de poitrine	Brusthieb
Cut to the arm	Colpo al braccio	Coup de manchette	Vorhieb
Disengagement	Cavazione	Dégagement	Cavation
Disengagement into tempo	Cavazione in tempo	Dérolement de fer	Cavation ins tempo
Distance	Misura	Mesure	Mensur
Double touch	Incontro	Coup double	Incontro
Engagement	Legamento	Engagement	Bindung
Épée	Spada de duello	Épée	Degen
False attack	Falso attacco	Fausse attaque	Falsche Angriff
Feint	Finta	Feinte	Finte
First intention	Prima intenzione	Première intention	Erste Intention
Flanconnade	Fianconata	Flanconnade	Flanconnade
Foil	Fioletto	Fleuret	Florett
Foot call	Battuta di piede	Appel du pied	Fuss Schlag
Graze	Filo	Coulé	Filo
Graze and disengagement	Finta di filo	Coulé dégagé	Filo Finte
Guard	Guardia	Garde	Fechstellung
Half-lunge	Mezzo-affondo	Demi-fente	Kürze-Ausfall
Inner line	Dentro	Dans les armes	Innere Linie
Imbroccata	Imbroccata	Imbroccata	Imbroccata
Inquartata	Inquartata	Inquartata	Inquartata

<i>English</i>	<i>Italian</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>German</i>
Invitation	Invito	Invite	Einladung
Jump backward	Salto in dietro	Saut en arrière	Sprung Rückwärts
Lunge	Affondo	Fente	Ausfall
Molinello	Molinello	Moulinet	Schwingung
Outer line	Fuori	Sur les armes	Aussere Linie
Parry	Parata	Parade	Parade
Passata sotto	Passata sotto	Passata sotto	Passata sotto
Reprise	Raddoppio	Reprise	Raddoppio
Sabre cut	Sciabolata	Estafilade	Hieb
Second intention	Seconde intenzione	Deuxième intention	Zweite Intention
Slinging parry	Parata di picco	Parade du tac	Schlenderparade
Stop thrust	Botta in tempo	Coup d'arr^t	Arr^tstoss
Straight thrust	Botta dritta	Coup droit	Geraderstoss
Target	Bersaglio	Jour	Blösse
Thrust into tempo	Colpo d'arresto	Coup de temps	Stoss ins Tempo
Traverse	Sfriscio	Froissé	Schleifen
Yielding parry	Parata di ceduta	Parade en cédant	Cedirunsparade