

THE "NOBLE ART."

Self-Defense by Kicking Exemplified
by French Artists in London.

From The London Chronicle.

"Les Boxeurs Français," who made their first appearance at the Alhambra Theatre yesterday, have apparently come over on an educational mission, and though they may fail to convince Britishers of the superiority of "La Savate" over the ordinary fisticuff encounter, their exposition of the "noble art of self-defense," as it appeals to its votaries in France, may at least be expected to attract considerable interest, as showing how the use of pedal extremities has been brought to the level of a fine art.

This latest addition to the Alhambra programme was introduced to an invited company at a special rehearsal yesterday afternoon, at which M. Georges d'Armoric, who is in charge of the display, and has also prepared a short argumentative treatise in advocacy of the French method, explained all about it. The French motto in this connection appears to be "Defense, not defiance," the argument briefly being that if you are attacked you should be able to avail yourself of all the weapons with which nature has furnished you, and not merely, so to speak, the upper half. The idea is, therefore, not to provide a means of attack but of defense, so that if you happen to be attacked in the street by a ruffian who does not observe the "rules of the ring," you may be the better prepared to repel him. Whether this highly moral principle entirely controls the practice of the art is perhaps another question; but such is, at any rate, the theory.

As a preliminary to the boxing proper (according to French views) the display began with an exhibition of the uses to which the walking stick or umbrella can be put as a means of self-defense. M. d'Armoric apologized for the absence of M. Victor Castere (who, he said, is at least one of the two best exponents of "La Savate") on account of a broken arm, and introduced M. Boudin (professor at the Salle Castere) and M. Arnal (pupil at the same establishment), who accordingly gave an exhibition closely corresponding to single-stick play, except that the sticks were furnished with no guards, but merely with loops for the insertion of the thumb. Then came the illustrations of "La Savate," showing in detail the various forms of attack and guard. First there was a demonstration of the various guards and ripostes with the fists alone, and then some idea was given of the use of the feet.

In using his foot, the boxer generally swings round on one leg and shoots out the other sideways, sometimes shooting right up over his opponent's head; the same movement often includes quick, successive kicks at different parts of the body—for instance, the chest, and then the head. Occasionally the kick may be a running one, straight to the front, but, in fact, all sorts of attitudes are assumed in the delivery of the blow. The kicks, it is to be noticed, are invariably defended with the arms, the hands, of course, being incased in the customary boxing gloves. As a means of defense, the foot is seen to advantage in what is known as the "coup d'arrêt," which consists simply in stopping your opponent by thrusting out the foot at right angles against his chest. One way of meeting a kick is, of course, to seize your opponent's foot, if you can catch it. He may release himself by a jerk or by resting his hands on the ground and kicking with his free leg; but, on the other hand, the man with the imprisoned limb may sometimes be hurled backward to the ground. In addition to the use of the "coup d'arrêt," a French boxer possesses an advantage over an English opponent in his liberty to use the "back-heel" throw. This simply means putting the foot behind your opponent's heel and tripping him up, or, in the alternative, seizing him behind the heel with the hand, and so hurling him on to his back. Finally, wrestling can be added to boxing, and the proceedings made to assume the aspect of a mixture of boxing, wrestling, and acrobatic feats.

The rehearsal concluded with a sort of combined display of all the features of the French art, in the shape of four two-minute rounds with six-ounce gloves. This proved somewhat more vigorous and exciting than the preliminary demonstrations. The third round terminated with a knock-down kick on the chest, while the finale was reached when the victor seized his opponent and threw him over his head. On the whole, the display, however, is remarkable as an exhibition of skill and agility rather than of force.

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