

BOXING WITH THE FEET.

By Garçon

ENGLISHMEN, taken as a whole, have an abiding horror of anything to do with the feet playing a part in boxing. Now this may be all very well when judging from the manner in which an East-Enders puts in his blows, but, taken from other standpoints, the objection loses much of its force.

The Whitechapel boxer will deliver a terrific kick, which just doubles his opponent up.

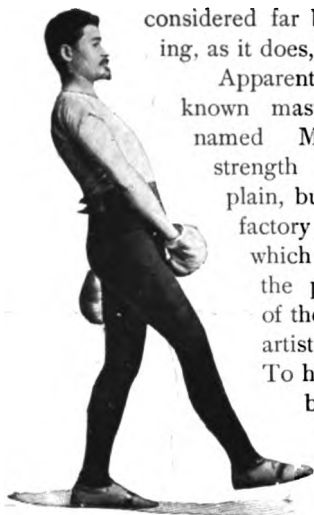
The Frenchman's point of view is different. He will playfully flick you off the only leg you have to stand on; he will probably pat you on the chest with his heels; he will even go so far as to walk upon your neck, but as for stamping you out of existence with the kick of a mule—it would not be at all scientific, and therefore insufferable. In fact, boxing with the feet has been reduced to a science in France, and, in Paris, the few Englishmen who have taken it up are as keen on *la Savate* as the Frenchmen themselves.

Intending Savatiers, however, need not despair of learning, through inability to visit Paris. As I found to my cost, there are one or two professors in London willing enough to teach all or any who may pass their way.

To commence with, if you wish to be thought an adept in the art, you should not call it *la Savate*, for that shows ignorance. *Savate* means an old shoe, and the boxing probably took its name from the old street bullies of France, who did wondrous execution with their worn-out boots, much after the fashion of our East-Enders. The *Chausson* has the same significance as *Savate*, and is

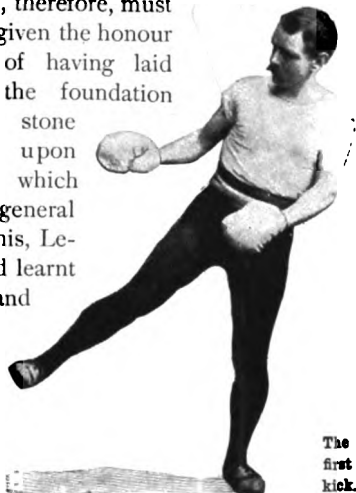


Feeling the "coup de pied tournant."



The first guard.

considered far better form, meaning, as it does, a light shoe. Apparently the first well-known master was a man named Michelle, whose strength lay in a sharp, plain, but eminently satisfactory out-door kick, which lacked hopelessly the polish and finesse of the present and more artistic indoor variety. To him, therefore, must be given the honour of having laid the foundation stone upon which



The first kick.

Professor Lecour built the general system now in use. To do this, Lecour came over to London and learnt English boxing with Swift and Adams, after which he returned, taking with him the most striking points of the English method. Thus was the art of kicking developed, while the indoor part of the business has been practically left to the modern teachers, who have added a touch here and a swing there, with the result that the whole has become one of those glorious, glittering arts that strike terror into the hearts of the enemy.

The first, and by no means the least difficult thing to learn in negotiating the scientific kick, is to keep the weight of the body supported upon the foot farthest from your adversary. This sounds easy enough. The beginner invariably concentrates his mind upon the steering of the leg that is flapping in the air—which is fatal. For with the constantly changing feet you are apt to forget which foot is in the rear, and to place your weight upon the leg that is farthest from the ground—which, by the way, is

more fatal still. To keep your weight on the foot farthest to the rear, therefore, is the secret of the whole thing, for, should your adversary see that your body rests upon the foot within his reach, he will promptly jerk it from beneath you. Another disadvantage is that your weight will have to be shifted to the rear before you can lift the front foot.

Disregard of this rule places the English pugilist on the terms of the greatest inequality with the Frenchman. If he place himself stolidly upon his two feet in the usual boxing attitude, he becomes a victim to one of two terrible blows. The one consists of a side kick, which promptly sweeps him off his feet; the other is the *coup de cache*, or cow-kick (a most expressive phrase, which has been known to break the shin of the receiver).

Early lessons in *la Savate* and in horse-riding are somewhat similar—a few tumbles and you gain confidence. You soon get to see that quickness and lightness of limb are essential in keeping out of harm's way.

On the other hand, you must not be over quick, for too much speed is apt to make you



A counter blow.

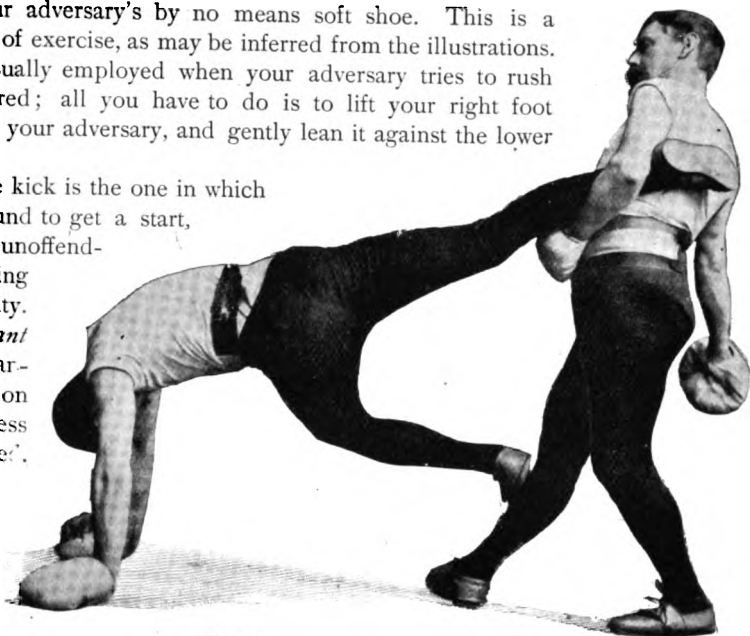
dash forward upon your adversary's by no means soft shoe. This is a distinctly unhealthy form of exercise, as may be inferred from the illustrations.

This stop-thrust is usually employed when your adversary tries to rush you. It is easily delivered; all you have to do is to lift your right foot on the first movement of your adversary, and gently lean it against the lower part of his chest.

Another uncomfortable kick is the one in which the boxer turns half round to get a start, then lets loose upon your unoffending head a long, flowing blow with terrible rapidity. This *coup de pied tournant* is, perhaps, the most dangerous in the whole list on account of the quickness with which it is delivered. One never quite knows when it is coming, as it is always used in combination with a simple kick, from the parry of which your opponent gains the required impetus.

The illustrations on the title page show two methods of receiving this murderous attack: the one is simply with the arm, much in the same way as one would guard a hit with the fist; the other is to drop or bob the body, and lash out with the hand as the adversary's leg passes your head.

But the most devastating kick, the



It's bad to catch your adversary's leg.



The trip.

kick infamous, the kick which may be likened to a cavalry charge, is the cross kick. This vicious sample of the *chausson* is delivered with a rush — impetus behind strength and weight behind impetus. Moreover, there are only two ways of frustrating this attack: either to dump your two hands on the advancing foot, or to get out of its way. A beginner will find the "getting-out-of-its-way" parry the safer.

Lastly there is the *coup fondamental*, which is to *la Savate* as the tail is to a peacock—chiefly for ornament. It plays around your head like summer lightning, taps your



A nasty shock.



The stop thrust.

chest, and pats your cheek. It is the kick by which suppleness, stability, and quickness may be obtained. In other words it is practised in order to give ease and grace to the muscles.

A good example of this kick is to be seen in a trick which seems to be common property among the professors. An assistant stands with a cigarette and holder in his mouth. Crouching like a tiger ready for the spring stands the professor measuring his distance. After a few preliminary passes his foot gains speed and darts here, there, and everywhere with appalling recklessness, apparently just missing the vulnerable parts by the sixteenth of an inch. As soon as the bolting foot has been pulled up and got in hand, however, it settles down to business. The settling down consists of three separate and distinct blows; a whisk sideways knocks off the ash, a downward blow releases the cigarette, while an upward stroke sends the holder flying across the room.

All this is but a picture of the *chausson* in a playful mood. If it be unmolested it will remain as kind and as gentle as possible. Try to stop its vagaries, to seize, or

otherwise hamper it, and see what happens. As a rule, its fellow comes to the rescue.

Referring to this particular subject, I remember visiting a *Mattre* with a Sceptic.

"It is all very well if you are boxing with Frenchmen," said the Sceptic, "but suppose you tried *la Savate* against an English pugilist, and he caught you by the foot, what would you do then?" and he smiled blandly as does a man who imagines that he has the whip hand of an argument.

"Try," beamed the *Mattre*.

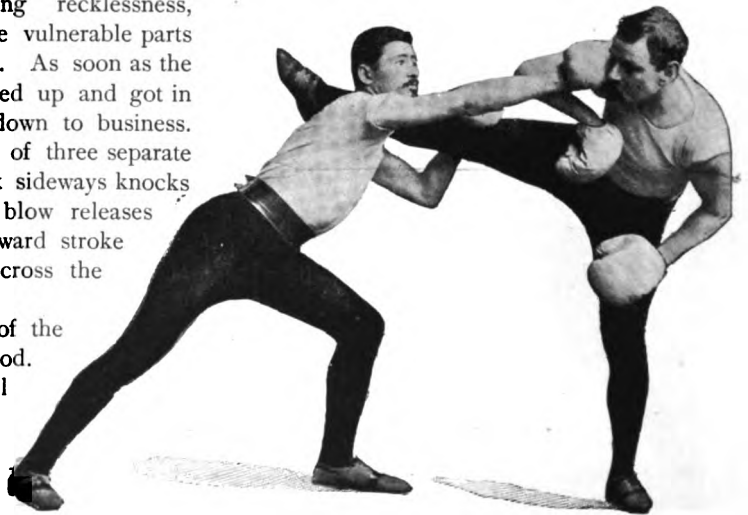
The Sceptic tried. The foot slipped through his hands, circled twice round his outstretched arms, hurtled towards his chest, and

finally lifted him into a corner of the room, dazed but unharmed.

The Sceptic was unconvinced. "But suppose I *had* caught it, what then?" he insisted.

"Ah," again beamed the *Mattre*, "I will show you."

This time the foot moved more slowly. Moreover, the Sceptic was alert, and, taking a double handful of his prey, planted both feet firmly on the ground, and waited. The Professor dropped lightly upon his hands and promptly lashed out with his left hind foot,



Another counter.



A back view.

catching the adversary beneath the chin. Undoubtedly, it is easier to play these games upon a person whose safety lies in his own ignorance, for sometimes when your leg is imprisoned by an expert he will follow up his advantage with his fist.

There are all sorts of ways in which a combination of blows is made. The hands may make the feints, the feet the blows, or *vice versa*.

The feet may feint, the feet may hit, and there are one hundred and one fiendish little snares and pitfalls to which the novice falls an easy prey. Perhaps one of the neatest of these is a playful way the professors have of throwing you. If you try to kick your adversary's shin, he promptly steps forward and, catching with the back of his heel the leg you are standing on, jerks you off your balance. Then, by way of completing the operation, he places an upward push stroke upon your chin.

All these motions, delivered with the utmost rapidity and alertness, look easy enough until you come to try them; it is then that you realise the years of training needed to acquire this much despised art.

The sight of a room full of men practising the motions would be absurdly ludicrous, were they not so very much in earnest. All around one sees supple limbs straining their utmost to climb up the walls. Dotted here and there, are ferocious little ruffians systematically kicking at nothing. They deliver quaint shaped kicks, and guard themselves from invisible foes with dexterity and perspiration on their faces. But this, I am assured, is the only way by which perfection can be obtained.

To realise properly the difficulty in reaching to any great height with the legs, and, at the same time, keeping perfectly rigid, one has only to mark a spot upon a door some

four or five feet high, and to raise the foot slowly until this spot be touched. It is worth trying anyway.

My best thanks are due to Monsieur Danguy for much of the information embodied in this article, and also for his assistance in arranging the poses for the illustrations. Monsieur Danguy figures on the left in the majority of the photographs reproduced throughout this article.



The foot at play—



—and at work.