

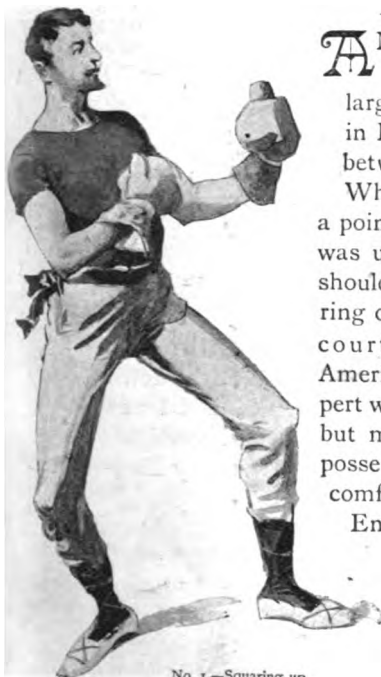
"FIGHTING WITH FOUR FISTS."

THE IDLER.

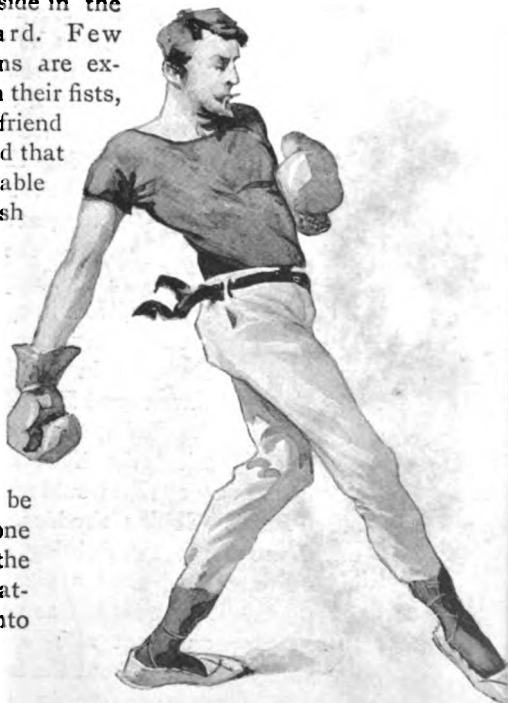
Fighting with Four Fists.

BY ROBERT BARR.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HAL HURST.



AN artist friend of mine, whose stātuary now adorns the Hotel de Ville of a large Western city, was once studying in Paris. A question of etiquette arose between him and a French student. When the discussion had reached such a point that words failed to deal with it, it was unanimously agreed that the dispute should be referred for final settlement to a ring outside in the courtyard. Few Americans are expert with their fists, but my friend possessed that comfortable English



theory, which had doubtless descended to him from his forefathers, relative to the number of Frenchmen that can be conveniently dealt with by one Anglo-Saxon, so, on reaching the courtyard, he struck the correct attitude for putting his theory into practice. The poet remarks—

"Thrice armed is he who hath his quarrel just,"

and the flippant man has added—

"But four times he who gets his blow in fust."

It proved so in this case, for before the American knew the battle had

begun, he received a terrific kick that simply doubled him up. He stretched himself across a bench and waited for his second wind, which was a long time in coming. I regret to have to add that the American was not satisfied with what he had received; that he again faced his foe, and this time caught the foot, and then the Frenchman, whom he flung over his head, bringing him down on the pavement with a crash that ended the fight for some days. Now, each of these students thought that the other had not fought fairly. It is hard to make an Englishman believe that a kick, however delivered, is legitimate

fighting. The Frenchman's point of view is different. He thinks that if a man is set upon by two or three ruffians, the person so attacked should be able to defend himself with all the limbs he has. The use of the foot, therefore, has been brought down to a system in France, and I was astonished to find, on investigating this subject, that many English boxers have a great admiration for

the

French "savate," and in each of the boxing-schools I visited in Paris I saw several Englishmen being trained to wield the light fan-

tastic toe in a way that would make Miss Lottie Collins shudder. I never use the foot in fighting, except to aid me in putting as great a distance between my opponent and myself as possible. My fists I never use at all; and, knowing absolutely nothing about the boxing of any country, I am therefore in a position to write calmly and dispassionately on the sub



No. 4.—First position, Coup de Flanc.



No. 3.—Parry for first kick.



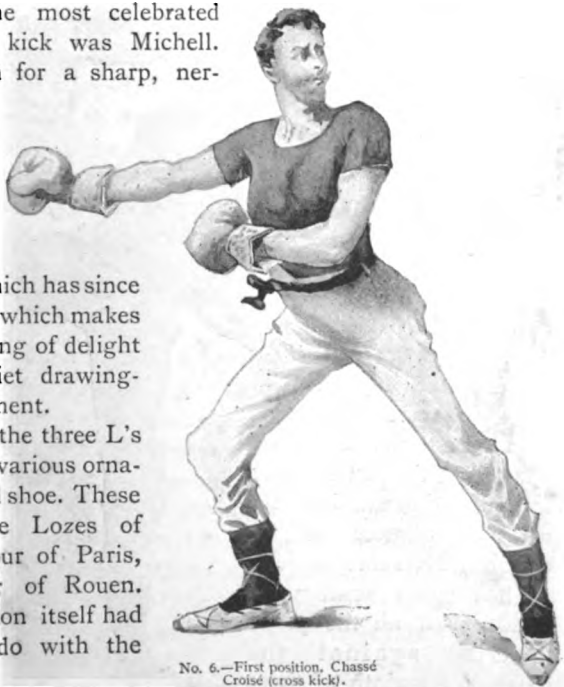
No. 5.—Second position, Coup de Flanc.

ject of the French savate. "Savate" literally means "old shoe," but in French boxing parlance it has come to mean the kick scientifically delivered. The reason of this is, doubtless, because the kick was first used in settling the quarrels of *souteneurs*, or bullies, and by the *habitués* of Barrier Balls. Their old shoes did marvellous execution, and so the name has been retained now that professors of the art of kicking have reduced it to a science. The savate is a comparatively modern method of attack, although perhaps our forefathers did some kicking when Cæsar landed, and, off and on, since that date.

It is a strange thing that the French nation, which is perhaps the only civilised nation using the foot in legitimate fighting, should have no one word that corresponds with our energetic monosyllable "kick." The nearest term they possess is the three-worded phrase *coup de pied*. Thus they are driven in characterising the play of the foot to words that relate to the foot, but which do not at all correspond with our terse word "kick." The *chausson*, meaning a sock or a light shoe, just as you choose, has practically the same significance in French boxing as "savate"; in fact, it is considered less vulgar than the latter term.

In 1830, the most celebrated master of the kick was Michell. Michell went in for a sharp, nervous, but plain kick that was eminently practical for out-door use, though lacking the airy grace which has since been added, and which makes the savate a thing of delight for a nice, quiet drawing-room entertainment.

Afterwards, the three L's did much to put various ornaments on the old shoe. These professors were Lozes of Toulouse, Lecour of Paris, and Leboucher of Rouen. Staid old London itself had something to do with the

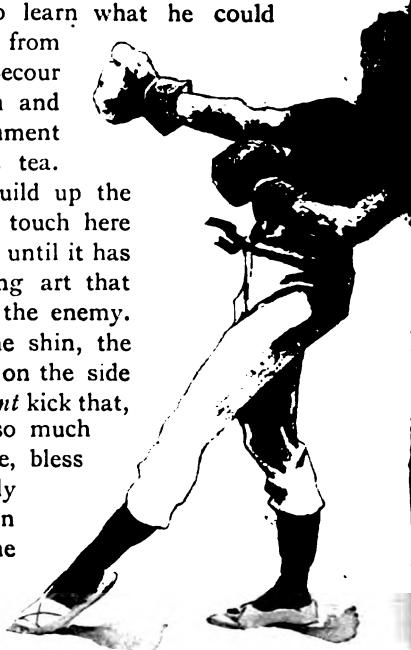


No. 6.—First position, Chassé Croisé (cross kick).

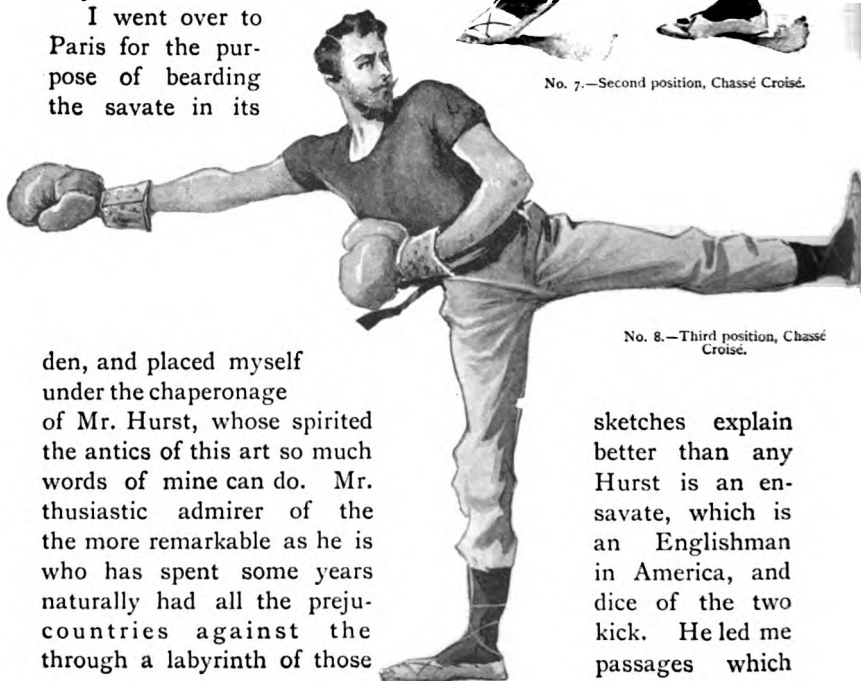
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formation of the present brilliant French kick. Charles Lecour came over to England to learn what he could of English boxing, and took lessons from Swift and Adams. In London, Lecour probably pranced around his room and invented new kicks, to the astonishment of the person who brought in his tea. Thus did the French professors build up the science of savate, adding a loving touch here and a modern improvement there, until it has become a glittering and bewildering art that carries confusion into the ranks of the enemy. We have now the low kick on the shin, the heel kick on the body, the toe kick on the side of the head, and the ferocious *tournant* kick that, to misquote Shakespeare, is ever so much more blessed to give than to receive, blessing him who gives, but decidedly doing the other thing for the man who takes, landing him right into the very centre of next week.

I went over to Paris for the purpose of bearding the savate in its



No. 7.—Second position, Chassé Croisé.

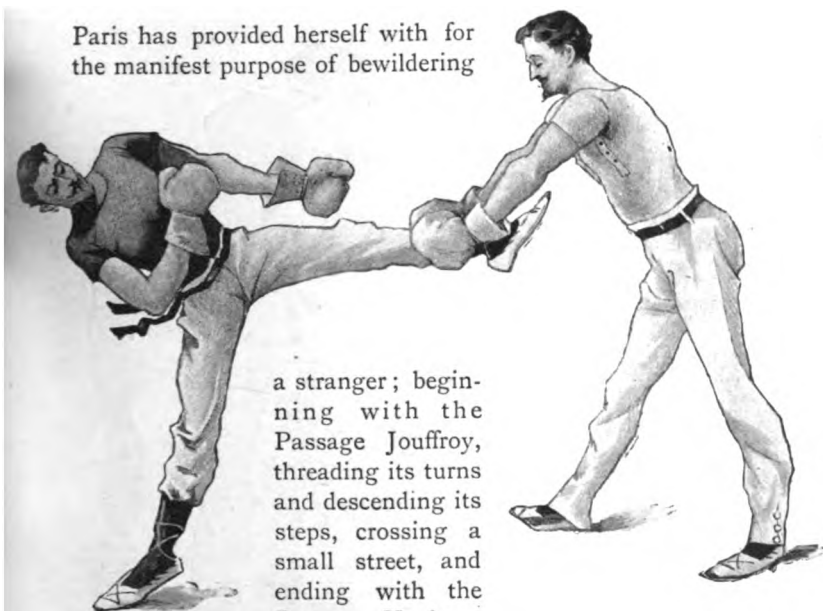


No. 8.—Third position, Chassé Croisé.

den, and placed myself under the chaperonage of Mr. Hurst, whose spirited the antics of this art so much words of mine can do. Mr. enthusiastic admirer of the the more remarkable as he is who has spent some years naturally had all the preju- countries against the through a labyrinth of those

sketches explain better than any Hurst is an en- savate, which is an Englishman in America, and dice of the two kick. He led me passages which

Paris has provided herself with for the manifest purpose of bewildering



a stranger; beginning with the Passage Jouffroy, threading its turns and descending its steps, crossing a small street, and ending with the Passage Verdeau,

where, on the first floor of number something *bis*, he ushered me into the Salle d'Armes where the boxing is taught.

No. 9.—Running Chassé Croisé, showing method of parrying.

I was never able to find the place alone except by accident; otherwise, I would know more about the savate than I do, for I missed several appointments there. Unfortunately for me, cabmen are not allowed to drive along the passages, which is about the only thing they are prohibited from doing in Paris.

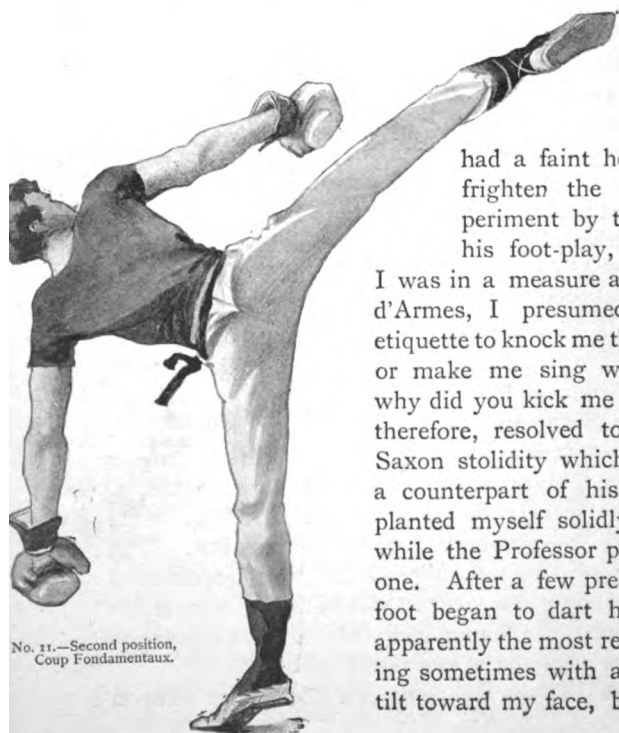
The Salle was wainscoted with rapiers, as in the daytime it was a fencing school. In the corner of the room, a small but energetic man was kicking savagely at nothing. He was delivering a low kick, guarding himself from an imaginary foe with determination and perspiration on his face, bringing to the whole mythical encounter a seriousness that made it all seem immensely ridiculous to a stranger. But that is the way perfection is attained. If anyone believes the kick is acquired without nearly as much teaching and practice as piano-playing, he is mistaken. The Professor stood over six feet tall, a powerful, well-proportioned man, who, notwithstanding his size, was as light and airy on his feet as a dancing-master. At the request of the artist, he gave me some specimens of the accuracy of aim of the savate.

The Professor was William Tell, with his foot as the weapon

instead of a bow and arrow ; I was the unfortunate boy, with a cigarette in my mouth instead of an apple on my head. The Professor impressed upon me the necessity of standing rigidly still. I was to press the button—in other words, smoke the cigarette—and he would do the rest. He asked me to keep the cigarette-holder loosely between my teeth, as it was his intention to kick it from its place without ruffling the moustache, and if I held the holder too tightly there might be a dental operation added as well. I may be doing the Professor an injustice, but I suspect he



No. 10.—First position,
Coup Fondamentaux.



No. 11.—Second position,
Coup Fondamentaux.

had a faint hope that he would frighten the subject of the experiment by the general glitter of his foot-play, but, knowing that I was in a measure a guest of the Salle d'Armes, I presumed it would not be etiquette to knock me through the partition, or make me sing with the poet, "But why did you kick me down stairs?" I, therefore, resolved to give a sample of Saxon stolidity which would be remotely a counterpart of his Latin agility. I planted myself solidly on my two feet, while the Professor poised lightly on his one. After a few preliminary passes, the foot began to dart hither and thither in apparently the most reckless manner, coming sometimes with appalling energy full tilt toward my face, but just missing my



No. 12.—Coup de Pied Tournant. First position, immediately after parry from adversary.



No. 13.—Coup de Pied Tournant. Second position



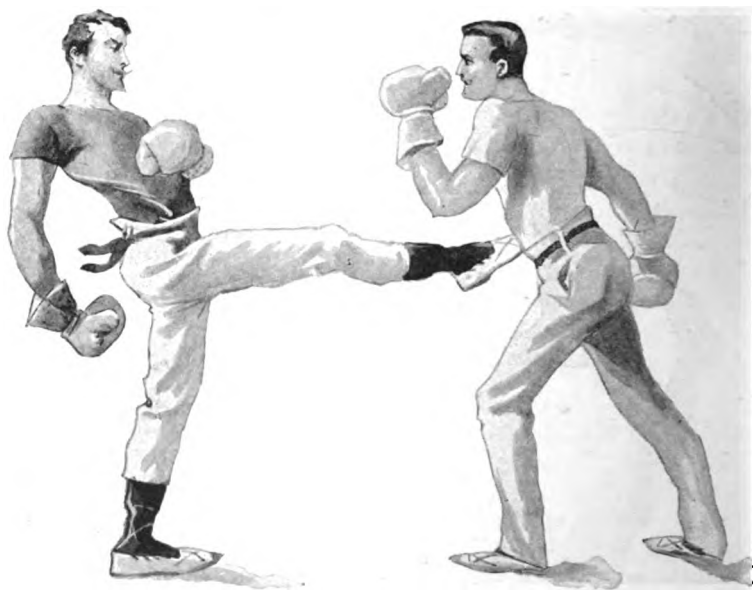
No. 14.—Coup de Pied Tournant. Third position.

cheek by the eighth of an inch ; then over the head, under the chin, now on one side, now on the other, playing around my head like summer lightning. All the time, there was running through my mind, with the persistence of "Punch, brothers, punch with care," the refrain of an old negro melody of by-gone days—

"There's not a foot can swing a boot
Like this here foot of mine."

The negro referred to dancing, but any dancing that I have ever seen was not in it compared with this exhibition of savate by the French Professor. All this time, the cigarette was accu-

mulating a long piece of ash on the end of it, which did not shake off because I stood so still. Once, part of the ash was blown away by a whiff of wind from the flying foot. When this brilliant and ornamental foot-play was finished, the Professor announced that he would now attend to the cigarette in three passes, each one different, and again asked me to press loosely on the holder with my teeth. First, with a straight kick, he knocked the ashes off; then, with a downward pass, he struck the cigarette from the holder to the floor; finally, with an upward whisk of the foot,



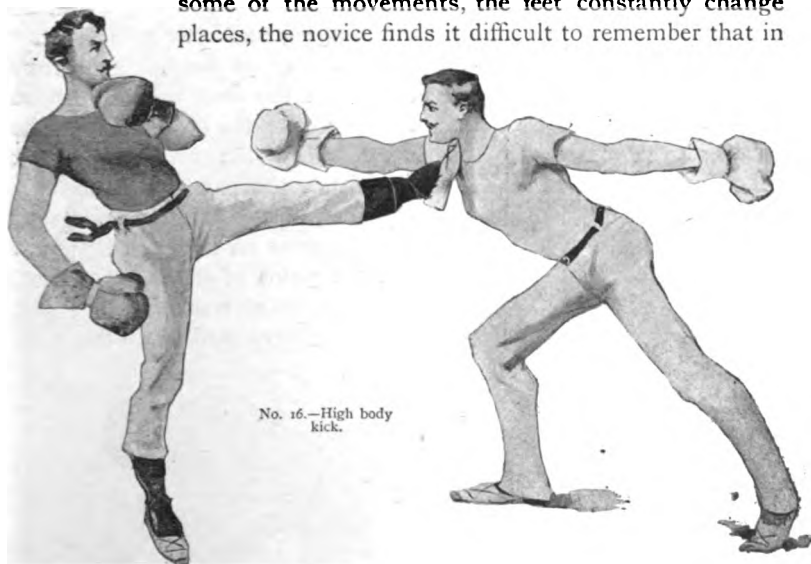
No. 15.—Belt kick (given on first signs of adversary's attack).

he sent the holder whirling to the ceiling, caught it deftly as it came down, and presented it to me with a flourish that would have done credit to Beau Nash. All this struck me as very wonderful, but I ventured to suggest that if a man did this sky work with his foot, a real opponent could easily, with a quick movement, push him over, standing, as he did, on one leg.

"Try it," said the Professor kindly. I think, if it is all the same to the reader, I will pass lightly over my disastrous attempt to upset a man who stood only on one leg. I felt an easy victim to the flying foot, which swept my own from under me with a suddenness that was a great surprise to me at the time, and a subject of sad remembrance afterwards. The shoemaker should stick to his

last. I was somewhat consoled, however, when I saw one of the most stalwart men in the school fail to push the Professor over, even when he succeeded in imprisoning the foot that was doing the kicking.

One of the first things to be learnt in attaining the art of savate, and apparently one of the most difficult to learn and to remember, is that the weight of the body must be supported by the hind leg, if the use of such a term is permissible. The foot that is furthest to the rear must always bear the weight of the body. When, as in some of the movements, the feet constantly change places, the novice finds it difficult to remember that in



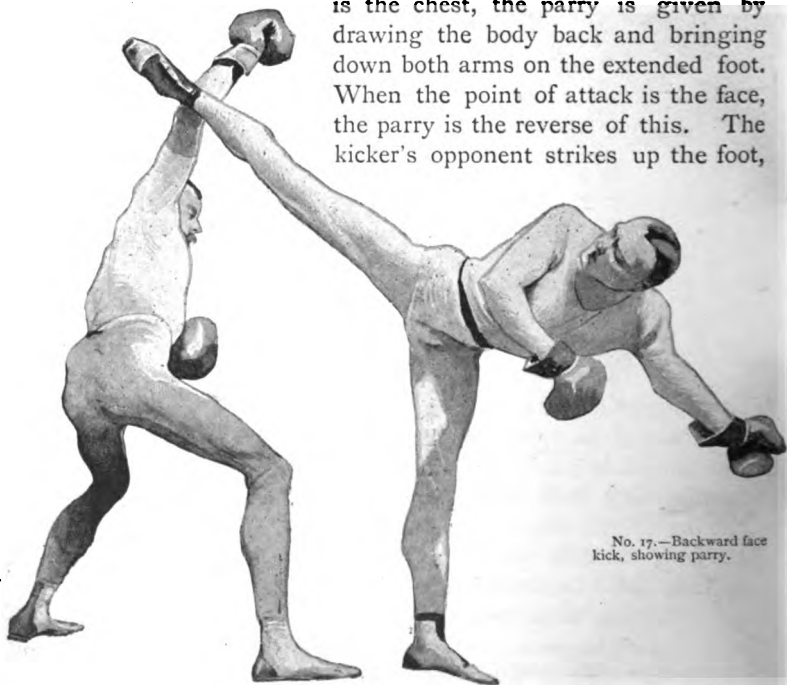
no instance is the foot furthest forward to bear any of the body's weight. If he takes the liberty of forgetting this axiom for a moment, it is gently brought to his recollection when his forward foot is swept from under him, and he finds himself in a heap on the floor. As often as the foot shifts to the rear, the weight of the body must be shifted upon it. The foot in front must be entirely free to wave about in the air or skim lightly over the floor.

Ignorance of the primary rule of the savate places the opponent of a French boxer at a terrible disadvantage. If he plants himself firmly on his two feet, one a little in advance of the other, and takes up the usual boxing attitude, he receives a side kick that knocks his forward foot from under him and brings him down, or, worse still, gets the cow kick on the shin and finds himself with a broken leg. When the pupil has had a few tumbles, and begins

to realise the importance of not resting any of his weight on his forward foot, he is initiated into the mysteries of the low kick and the parry thereof. This, the *coup de savate*, is simply an ordinary kick, with the toe pointing out and downward, aimed at the shin of the opponent, as shown in No. 2, and is parried by "bending the pregnant hinges of the knee," so as to bring the foot up and back, as shown in No. 3. There are, of course, different methods of dealing with the *coup de savate*. A man may spring forward over the extended foot and deal the kicker a right-handed blow on the head (No. 18), or he may spring back, stoop, and endeavour to throw the kicker over backward by flinging up his extended foot.

Next we come to the side kick, the *coup de flanc*. This may be a high or a low kick, and may attack the face, the side, or the chest. In the *coup de savate* the toe hits the opponent; in the *coup de flanc* the heel strikes. When the point of attack

is the chest, the parry is given by drawing the body back and bringing down both arms on the extended foot. When the point of attack is the face, the parry is the reverse of this. The kicker's opponent strikes up the foot,



No. 17.—Backward face kick, showing parry.

and endeavours to throw the attacker over on his back. When the *coup de flanc* is aimed at the side, the foot is thrown to the right or the left by the man defending. He does this by a sweep of the arm, and it is a very dangerous parry, as will be seen when we come to consider the kick which follows. The first and second positions of the *coup de flanc* are seen in Nos. 4 and 5.

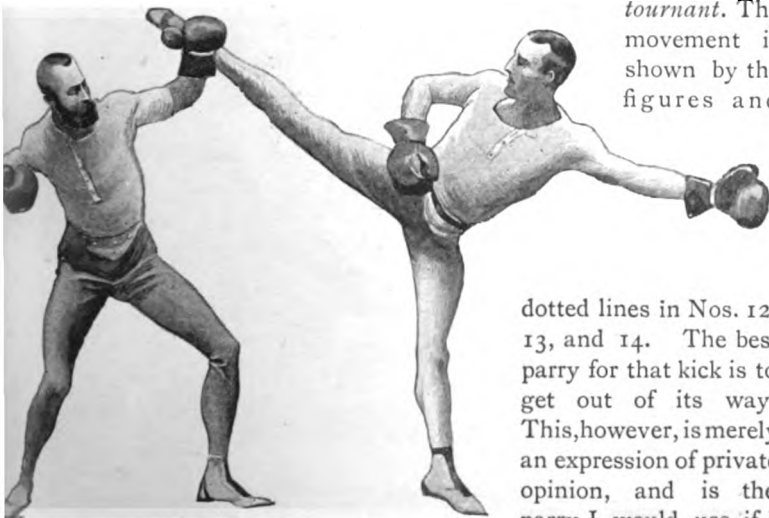
The danger of the parry to right or left arises from the fact

that this parry forces the *coup de pied tournant*, probably the most effective and terrible kick in the list. It comes with lightning-like rapidity, requiring an entirely different parry from the one just given, and from which the defender rarely gets time to recover before the *tournant* is delivered with terrific

force. In fact, the first kick is often given for the purpose of having the second forced by the parry of the first. When the defender flings the attacker's foot to the right or left, the latter takes the momentum

thus given, whirls around like a flash, and delivers the *coup de pied tournant*. The movement is shown by the figures and

No. 18.—Coup de Savate parried, and returned with right-hand blow (after photo.)



No. 19.—Face kick parried (after photo.)

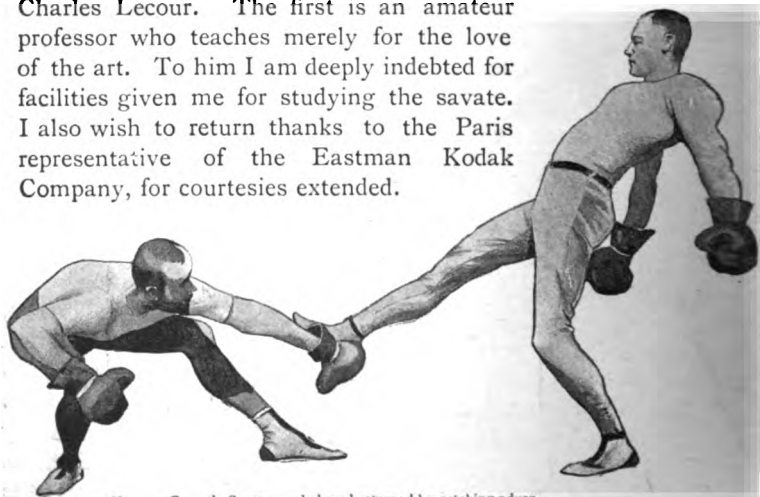
dotted lines in Nos. 12, 13, and 14. The best parry for that kick is to get out of its way. This, however, is merely an expression of private opinion, and is the parry I would use if I were confronted by such

a kick. The person attacked parries either by the upward or downward sweep of the arms, depending on whether the kick is delivered at the face or at the chest.

The *chassé croisé*, or cross kick, is another vicious specimen of the savate. It is a heel kick, and is delivered with a rush, thus having the momentum and weight of the body behind it. The three positions are shown in Nos. 6, 7, and 8. It is parried by drawing back the body, and bringing down the two hands on the foot (No. 9). The *coup du vache*, or cow kick, is another that has the momentum and weight of the body behind it. It is a sort of a hop and a kick, and is used when you rush at an opponent. The cow kick is given in two ways, first by quickly replacing the front foot by the rear foot, and kicking out with the foremost foot, so that the heel strikes the enemy. Second, *en croisant*, by bringing the rear foot across the other, and then kicking out.

The *coup fondamentaux* is an ornamental kick of little real use in actual fighting. This is the kick that plays around the head and face, that lightly taps the blushing cheek, and playfully pats the top of the cranium. The two positions are shown in Nos. 10 and 11. Nos. 15 and 16 show the belt kick and the high body kick. No. 17 shows the backward side face kick and the parry, while No. 19 is a striking picture (as they all are) of front side face kick and parry.

The present representative professors of the savate in Paris are Messrs. O. Quillier; Charlemont, jr.; and Leclerc, successor of Charles Lecour. The first is an amateur professor who teaches merely for the love of the art. To him I am deeply indebted for facilities given me for studying the savate. I also wish to return thanks to the Paris representative of the Eastman Kodak Company, for courtesies extended.



No. 20.—Coup de Savate evaded, and returned by catching adversary's foot, endeavouring to throw backwards (after photo.)