

Correspondence.

ACROSS THE DEEP.

A Student Duel.

HALLE, Germany, Jan. 20, '94.

In a recent ruling of the PILOT, I see that one must sign his name to any communication that appears in its columns. This will doubtless affect the tone of any paper, and many communications that have recently appeared will likely not do so again so long as the present ruling is in force. Sometimes one is situated in such a position that it makes little difference whether his name is attached or not. Unfortunately for the readers I am so situated or else that ruling would certainly cause me to make room for more valuable matter than these rambling letters. As it is, I hope anything that I may say will be "footed up" against me as distance renders all bodily harm, at present, impossible; otherwise I should prefer that the editor be the responsible person. So far as responsibility is concerned I might add that these letters are written in a hurry and I have never been particularly precocious in my gifts of penmanship as doubtless the "devils" have experienced. And so it happens that many serious mistakes in spelling, construction of sentences and quotations are noticed in the printed page. And if reprinted, as in one instance, with all the mistakes, with several others added, it makes very disagreeable reading. Besides, the original paper should be acknowledged, as was not done in this case.

I am not certain that any of the readers of the PILOT, besides the German readers, have heard of the practice of duelling between German students or not. It is the purpose of this letter to briefly notice the practice as it exists here, in some of its phases. As we landed in Jena, the one thing that impressed us greatly was the number of persons that we met on the street with sober, scared faces. We had heard a great deal of the custom of duelling among German students, but looked upon the matter as rather a long departed custom, as in America. But the living hero of the actual practice is a familiar person on the street and has a large following among certain classes of students.

Before noticing the practice in particular, a few general considerations are necessary. Duelling is forbidden by law, yet if an army officer should be challenged, the unwritten code causes him either to accept the challenge or resign his position, which means in disgrace. The Emperor of Germany in a recent speech referred to his many pleasant experiences in the "code" while a student at Bohn. So we have an anomaly in the ruler of a nation advocating a custom contrary to good sense as well as the law of that nation. No man is free from challenge in Germany. An interesting instance occurred a year since in Halle. The present professor in Political Economy, Dr. Conrad, had occasion to severely criticize a student in the class room. This the student resented and proceeded to challenge the professor. The challenge was, of course, ignored. Americans are usually free from challenge. I am glad to say, because the German has been lead to believe that they will choose pistols. This idea they have gathered from various sources. But this is not always true. Last year an American student from Illinois received a challenge from a German student, who visited his room and demanded an acceptance. This the American would not do and thanked him for his kind visit. Not long since a Kentuckian acquired considerable of a reputation at the University of Heidelberg in the art. He had a trick that the German student could not acquire until many had tested the steel in his hands, but his turn came at last and he carried home with him a beautiful souvenir of German student life, in the form of a spoiled face.

Every national student body has its customs so far as I know. These customs in the eyes of the others are very odd and singular. The England and American students have their foot-ball and boat races, while the continental students have their beer, wine and duelling, or as they call it, "Mensuree." If you tell the

German student that as many as five students, last year, were killed in foot-ball in America, and that as many as 30,000 people assemble to witness a single game, he simply cannot understand it and wonder why we permit such dangerous games and why the public are so interested. And if the American student should see the student body as at Bohn or Jena, he would be simply disgusted that such a practice as duelling is permitted, and that persons would be such fools as to permit themselves to be carved in such indescribable shapes. There are arguments to be presented in favor of both standpoints as well as against. As far as real danger is concerned, the German student has the advantage, for it is a rare thing for one to be fatally injured. So far as outward appearances are concerned as estimated in blood the duel is simply hideous. We will not attempt to compare the two customs, both of which, in their present form, should be abolished.

It is not my intention to convey the idea that all German students fight even if challenged. There exist a great many societies among the students founded upon the same plan as college fraternities in America. Some of these are founded upon the express purpose of preserving the practice of duelling. All members are compelled to fight, in some instances as many as three times and as often as they desire. There are grades of fraternities which fight together. But opposed to these fraternities there also exist those opposed to the principle of duelling. There are also occasional duels between individuals not belonging to these societies. The societies are distinguished by colored caps.

Being in a land of duels, I had the same desire to see one that a German student would have to see an American foot-ball game. It was with considerable interest that I was informed that the next morning at 8 o'clock in a small village near the city of Halle, a duel or "Mensuree" was to take place. This out-of-the-way place was selected in order to avoid interference by the police. We rose before it was fairly light and made our way to an old inn about two miles distant. We were early but did not wait long till students began to drop in by twos and threes. Below was a long, large room. At the only entrance was posted in German "geschlossene Gesellschaft," which was a warning that only privileged persons would be allowed to enter. It seemed that our efforts would be without result when we tried to gain admittance and were told that we could not enter. In the meantime different students were busy in preparing the duellists. Presently one of the number, whose face resembled a crazy quilt, informed us that five Mensurs were to take place and told us how to arrange matters to gain admittance. He informed us also that we could not see the first one as one of the men was troubled with heart disease and the crowd would excite him. At the same time there were fifty or more Verbinding students in the hall. In the center of the room was stretched a thick mattress in order to protect the floor from blood stains. Physicians were present in order to render medical aid. Persons were carrying to and fro basins of water and hot toddies to strengthen the contending parties. The persons were dressed in special garb, heavily padded around the waist and right arm so as to inflict no wound where it could not be seen. The face is the objective point and the more hacked and slashed it is the greater the honor enjoyed by the possessor. A winner without a scratch has no visible sign that he has participated in the fight of honor. The modern gladiators were lead through our room into the arena, I suppose, as they thought, like their brothers of old, but it seemed to me more like deluded fools trying to sustain a barbarous past when honor was expressed in terms of blood and physical force. I confess my heart did not move in as cool and quiet a manner as one could desire. I had never before been so near an actual combat for life, as it seemed to me. The door was closed and complete quiet reigned in the room of the duel. I waited attentively for the clash of swords and presently I heard what would be, in English, equivalent to "Attention!" and then "Ready!" followed by a tremendous clash of rapiers, as these were the weapons used. This process was repeated several times, when the door opened and

one of the contestants came out without a scratch, so far as I could see and I began to think that the affair was not so serious as I had been lead to think, but I ventured to the door in order to see what had become of the other man when a most hideous sight met my eyes. He lay on the floor, while his face was covered with blood as well as his clothing, as it had streamed down before he fell. As a matter of fact, I suppose, this seemed more serious than it really was. He was taken to an adjoining room and his wounds dressed, while the next pair was being prepared for the contest which I awaited with considerable mixed feelings. I was not, certain whether I wanted to see the operation performed or not as I attempted once to witness an arm amputated, but was not equal to the occasion. As the men were led in by their supporters I followed, back in the rear, crowded into a corner and took a lean against a chair. I found that the eyes and throat were protected but leaving a good margin for work. The contestants were placed about ten feet apart, sitting on the back of a low chair, while their right arm, heavily gloved and padded, rested on the shoulder of a friend. Two other persons, also protected, stood at their sides with rapiers in hand, acting as seconds in the fight. The rapiers were placed in the hands and the men stepped forward and measured weapons, and then took their respective places. One of the armed seconds called for "Attention" and both weapons were raised in the air in a position to strike, when the other second called, in this case, "Ready," and the weapons fell with deadly aim and force. A half dozen strokes were interchanged when the seconds interfered with their swords, and the face of each was examined, as well as the weapons. If no serious wound was inflicted time was called for the next round, which was continued until one contestant was pretty badly wounded. The "game" continues until one receives serious flesh wounds. This may occur in one round or several. These two were pretty evenly matched and fought several rounds. Both men were punished. One received a cut clear through his nose, sidewise, while the forehead of each were badly scarred. There is no question about the force with which they strike, and their intent to cut. These men were taken away and two more victims were ushered in. In the meantime I began to grow more courageous as I had had some experience in killing hogs, and since parties were voluntary victims, it did not seem to be much more human than a slaughter house. This was short and quick, only one round and the top of one man's scalp fell to the floor. This was enough for me in the duel line. But the poor fellow took it as a huge joke as it was done so quickly, and trotted off laughing. I was not long in taking my leave, and on my way to the city met two policemen on their way to the scene. The occasion of these duels occur through imagined insult but more often as a test of skill. The contestants are not necessarily enemies. The challenge is usually made by the challenger presenting his card and the challenged returning his. Seconds are then appointed who arrange the whole affair. The challenged have the right to choose the weapons and have six weeks in which to practice. Some very singular wounds occur in these combats. You often see a deep and ugly cut across the entire cheek. I have noticed one or two with the ends of their noses cut off and grafted on again. At times ears will be half clipped off as well as the lower part of the chin. One man was cut through the mouth, opening both cheeks almost to the ears. But these are exceptional cases yet perfectly possible in every combat.

I have attempted to report this occasion as a base ball game would be reported in America. It is true the aims of the two are entirely different. Blood and a scar is the only visible acknowledgment that honor is satisfied. A foot ball game has not the primary object of blood, but that does not deny its presence. Both are supposed to be games of skill and doubtless are in their way. The influence of both as display of physical force in questionable form is, in my mind, demoralizing in the extreme.

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Harry Turner's girl has been quite sick, but at last reports she was gaining slowly.

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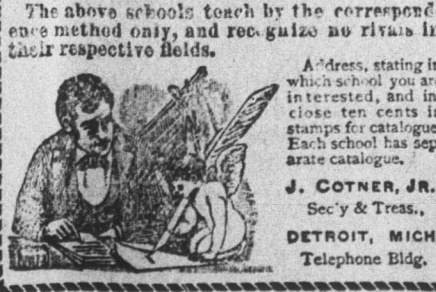
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