

## THE NOBLE ART OF SELF-DEFENCE IN CHINA.

THE NOBLE ART OF SELF-DEFENCE.\* Canton, Imprinted and sold at the sign of the *Five Cassia Trees*, Kao-hing Place.

If the gentlemen who made and published the notable discovery that everything in China is the exact contrary to what it is in the West,† or, to speak more strictly, in the narrow villages where they had been “raised,” and beyond which, it may be presumed, their experience had not, up to that time, been extended—if these gentlemen had looked a little deeper into Chinese life than the mere surface on which they descried such trivial accidents as the colouring of shoes or the side on which you mount a horse, they would possibly have discovered that almost every Western institution (except the railway and the telegraph) has its analogue in China, and that even some of the things which we look upon as more particularly occidental are reproduced in China with a curious likeness, and yet with curious differences also, which make these resemblances well worth attention. There are curious differences of course, for even the writer who did the comic business for the *Chinese Repository* would hardly expect that Chinese social life should be a mere abject copy of those European customs which we well know to be in every way more excellent than anything the world ever has seen or ever will see—more especially the convenient, healthy, and comfortable dress, so

### \* 雄拳拆法.

† See a paper in the *Chinese Repository* (I forget in which volume), reprinted, and a little purified, by Sir John Davis in his book on China.

well adapted to the tropics, which we delight to persist in wearing in China.

So little truth is there in the principle of universal contrariety, that it had need be at once replaced by a principle of universal resemblance, with only such differences of species as obtain between the English dog and the Chinese dog. Most people would admit that there are dogs in China, and that they bark; whereas, *a priori*, it might be supposed that they would mew. A sometime police magistrate of Hongkong, having before him a petition purporting to be from “The elders and gentry” of a certain district, remarked from the bench, with considerable warmth, that there was no such thing as a gentleman in China, meaning, of course, a Chinese gentleman. To which the only possible answer was, that, adopting this method of criticism, there could be no such thing in China as a *shoe*, or a *pencil*, a *book*, or a *ship*. These things certainly exist in the middle kingdom and so do gentlemen, but in a form slightly different from that under which they are seen elsewhere. The same thing is true of what, at first sight, seem such thoroughly Western institutions as circulating libraries and Fire Brigades, which were probably fully developed in China before they were perfected in either England or America.\*

A walk down Fleet Street or the Strand

\* *Notes and Queries* (China) Vol. I. p. 100 and Vol. II. p. 1.

is not after all such a very different thing from a walk down a stirring Chinese thoroughfare. The accidentals are different; the essentials are nearly the same. Remove the English Police and the resemblance would be much greater than it is. There are the same itinerant dealers and professors, anxious to relieve your every want, whether bodily, mental, or spiritual. The same sort of men bawl "'Ere y'are, "Sold agin," and "Come on," over, relatively, the same sort of things. Keen-eyed sharpers lie in wait for the unwary in one town as they do in the other, the main difference being that the London black-leg is a little more moved on. Quack doctors, and the advertisements of quack doctors are just as easy to find in Canton as in the British metropolis, nor is it altogether unlikely that you will come, in the former place, upon the Chinese prototype of the gaunt man in seedy black who, in a quiet side-street off some main artery of the latter, exhorts his hearers to flee from the wrath to come.\* The title of the little pamphlet placed at the head of this paper is not in the least a free translation, but literal. It is a fact that, for less than a penny, you buy at a stall in a Chinese street a *brochure* called, in so many words, *The noble art of self-defence*, and that the purchaser who is able to read it will be curiously reminded of whatever he may have heard of the slang of the ring at home, by phrases, not so literally exact as the above, but quite sufficiently suggestive of "stand firm on your pins," "pop in your left," "hit straight from the shoulder," and "let him have it in the bread-basket."

Chinese street literature mostly consists of such little books as this, with very imposing titles and very meagre contents, in addition to plays and song-books. Books that give any real information must be sought in shops; as to the song-books, the less said

\* It is perhaps necessary to explain that the above does not refer to native teachers of Christianity. Men may sometimes be seen in the streets preaching simple morality.

about them the better.\* As to the plays, readers of this Review who may have read the farce of *A-lán's pig*,† will remember that the respectable Mr Ho A-lán was taken in hand by a professor of muscular paganism, who taught him four feints or tricks, to wit, those named *Speedy Promotion*, *Kwan Ping presenting the Seal*, *the Three Hands*, and the *Bright Arrow*; which feints were not, in the sequel, quite so successful as he had hoped.

The Chinese have very little idea of fighting with the fists. It takes a good deal of provocation to induce them to fight at all. The amount of bad language which will be bandied between two strapping coolies and end in nothing more decisive than bad language would serve to provoke a dozen fights in the British fore-castle, where "Now Bill, call him an adjective substantive, or he'll call you one," seldom fails to initiate the assault and battery which all present are longing to see. When Chinamen do fight, bamboos, or half-bricks are much more in request than nature's unassisted weapons, or if they are driven to an empty-handed encounter they will seize each other by the head and scuffle about in a way which would go to the heart of any member of the sporting interest. Anything more exquisitely ludicrous than a couple of Chinese induced to put on the gloves (after an example of their use from Englishmen) I have never seen. They cautiously backed on each other until the seats of their trowsers almost touched, each one bending himself nearly double to avoid the imagined terrific blows his antagonist was aiming at his head, and at the same time striking vaguely round in what schoolboys call the windmill fashion. If either of them "got home" at all it was generally somewhere in the region of the other's knees.

As in England, so in China, the noble art of self-defence seems to be handed down

\* Vide *Notes and Queries*, Vol. I, p. 130 on Hakka songs.

† Vol. I, p. 28.

rather by oral tradition than by books. In the former country there are not, that I am aware of, any standard books on the subject. I have never seen any, and should not have the least idea how or where to procure them. Possibly the burning and shining lights of the prize ring are not much given to literary composition, or it may be that the mysteries of the Fancy are not to be revealed otherwise than by a verbal initiation. Now as to China, on looking over the little book before me, I became aware, to my somewhat disappointment, that the author only gives two lessons on boxing, three on the quarter-staff, and the remaining seven on feats with very appalling swords, shields, and tridents. Nay, even what he does describe are only those *ad captandum* tricks shewn upon the stage, where the pet of the ring, knowing exactly what the other man is going to do, easily discomfits him, bringing his antagonist and the house down together.

It is probably actors out of employ who make a precarious living by exhibiting, and professing to teach these tricks in the street. Contemptible as they may seem to a man fresh from Oxford, it cannot be denied that they often exhibit surprising quickness, strength, and agility. I once had the pleasure of conducting a young gentleman who was *facile princeps* amongst the muscular Christians of this Colony to some of the lions of Canton. Amongst other places we came to a courtyard where soldiers were exercising, and he was not a little disgusted at his small success in attempting to do what they did. Bows which they drew to the ear would no more yield to his hand than if the string had been a bar of iron. Of certain stones which they lifted up to their chests and shoulders, and flung about, he could just raise the lightest from the ground; whilst a huge bar of iron, which one of the Chinese played with as if it had been wood, he could not lift at all. In all three cases I believe it was knack that was required more than strength, just as six trained artillerymen will easily remove a

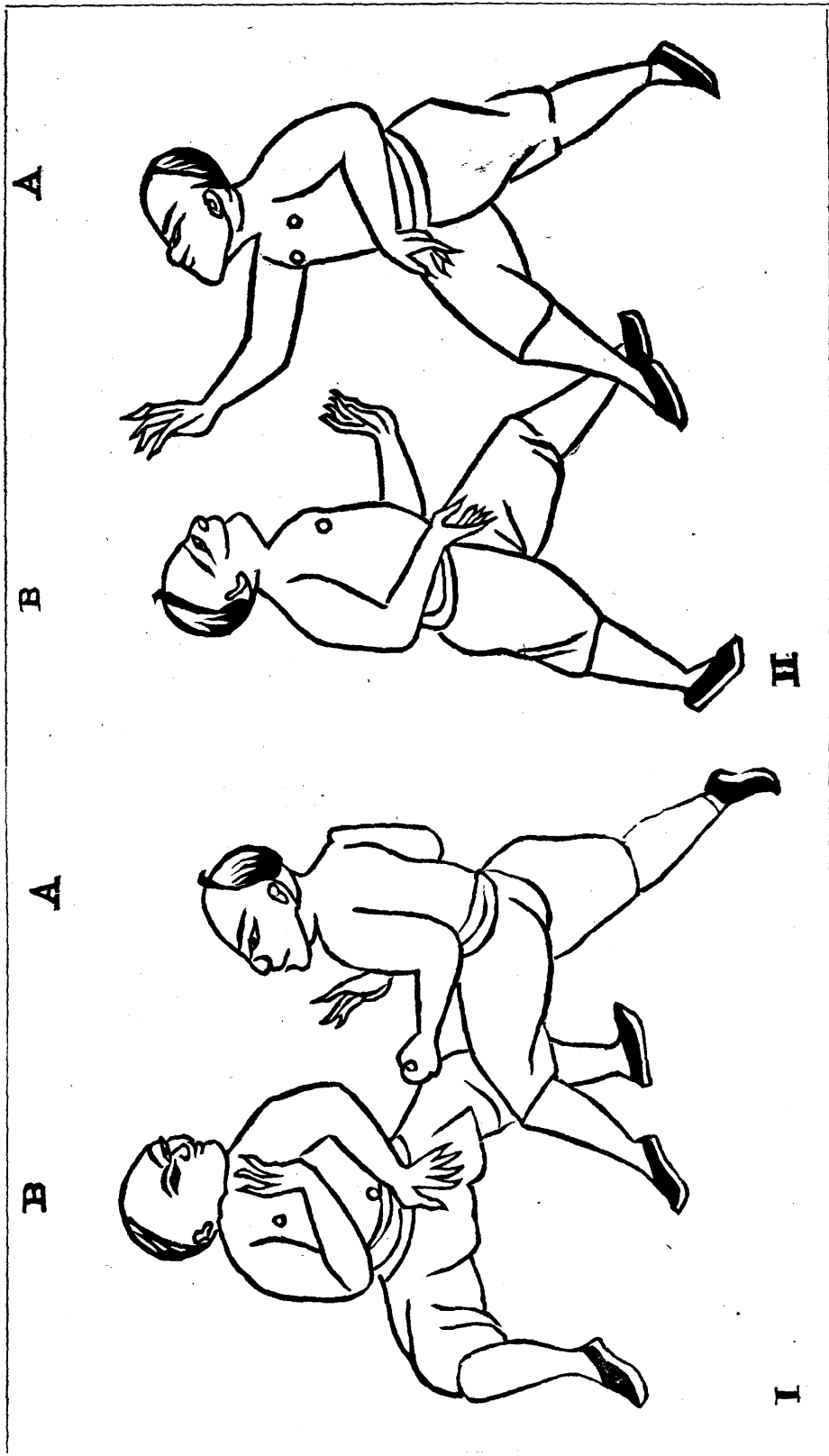
gun that four and twenty amateurs cannot stir, but the incident shewed that the Englishman has not always got the muscular advantage on his side. In days when we did not know quite so much of the French as we now do, when, in fact, the frog-eating nomenclature had not quite died out, there used to be circulated wonderful stories of Frenchmen's habit of jumping up into the air and knocking you down with the sole of the foot, a habit against which all the resources of *le boxe* were supposed to be in vain. I have often wondered what an English pugilist would make of his Chinese representative, who, really and truly, does that very thing. Would he (the Englishman) find his universal panacea of a hit straight out from the shoulder as satisfactory as he is used to deem it, or would he be like the Prussian soldier when the pig ran at him? For the Prussian soldier knew how to repel infantry, and how to receive cavalry, in fact how to comport himself on every conceivable warlike emergency, but he had no rule for stopping a pig, and in this completely unprecedented situation the pig got between his legs and he was ignominiously overthrown, bayonet and all.

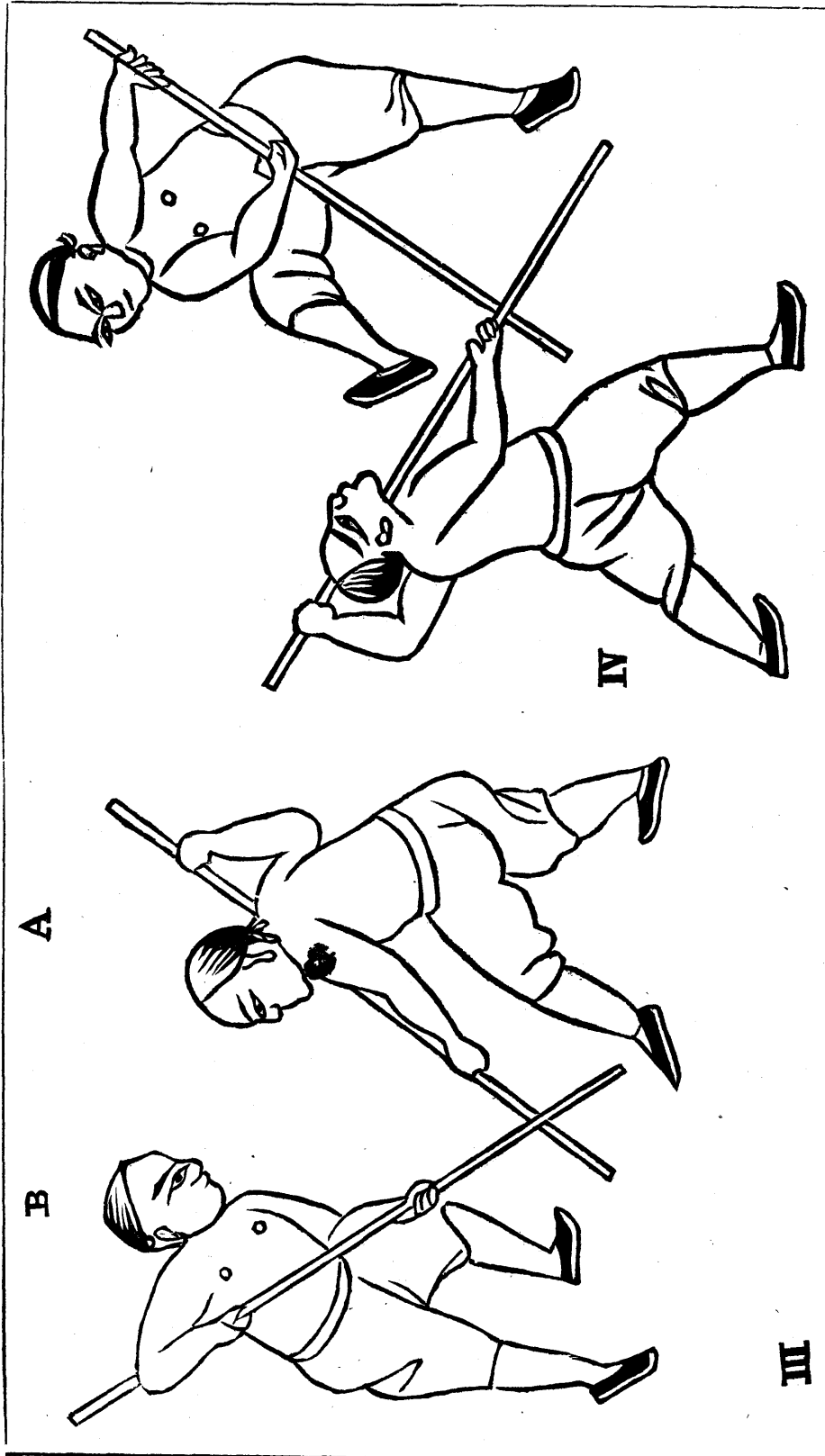
In order, however, that the Chinese neophyte should not be thus taken at a disadvantage, the pamphlet under review carefully instructs both parties what to do. Practically, no doubt, it would be awkward if either were to depart from the conventional proprieties and do something totally different, but it may be presumed that the book is intended only for gents as *is* gents, who would not take a low advantage by inventing any new plan of attack. Thus, for the reprisal known as *The hungry tiger catching the sheep*, the following directions are laid down (See Illustration I.);—

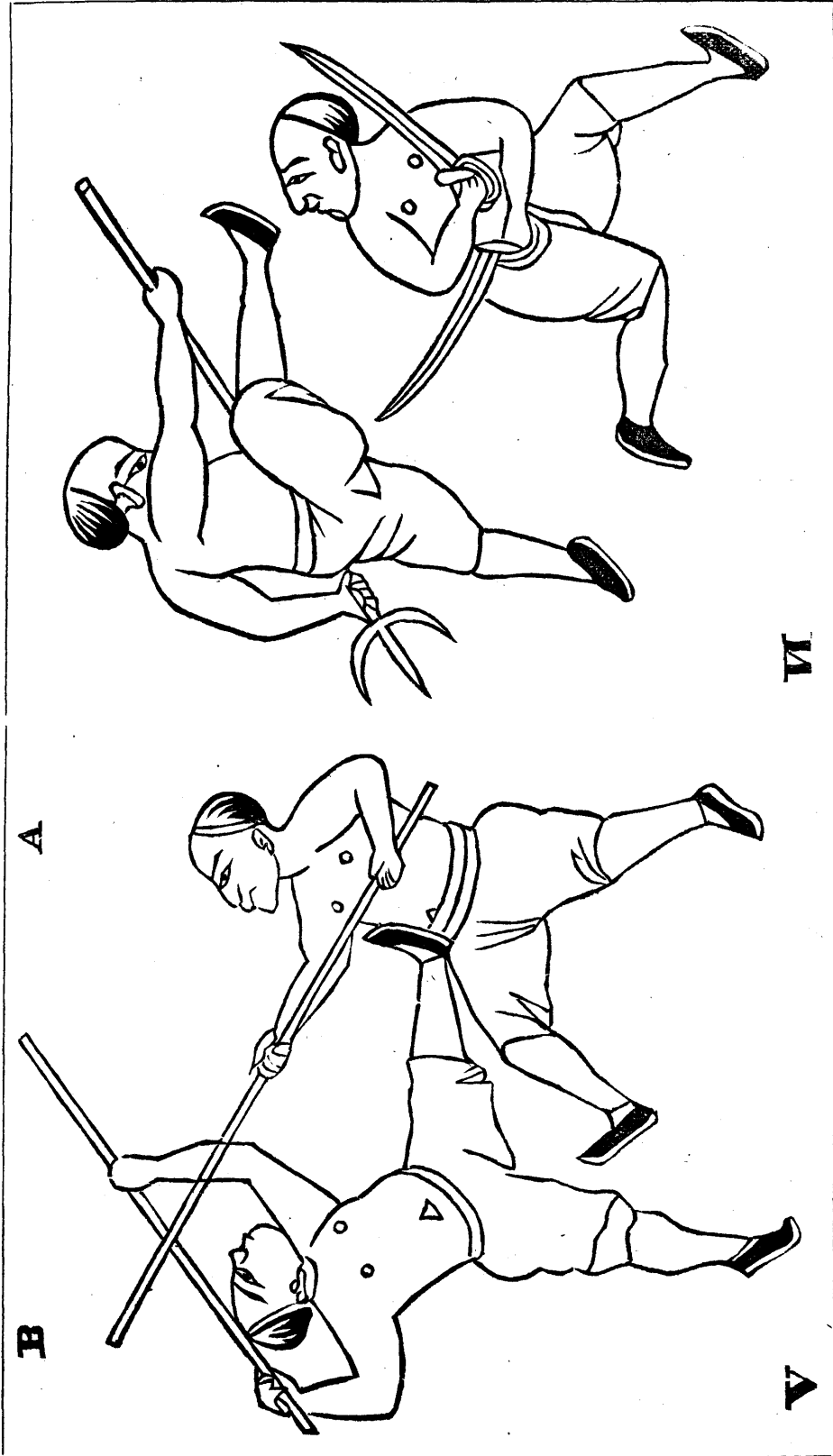
- A—advances his left foot, and attempts to strike a blow with his open right hand:  
 B—brings both feet together, standing up firmly, pops in his left with a downright blow, and lets him have the right over the chest to aid the effect.

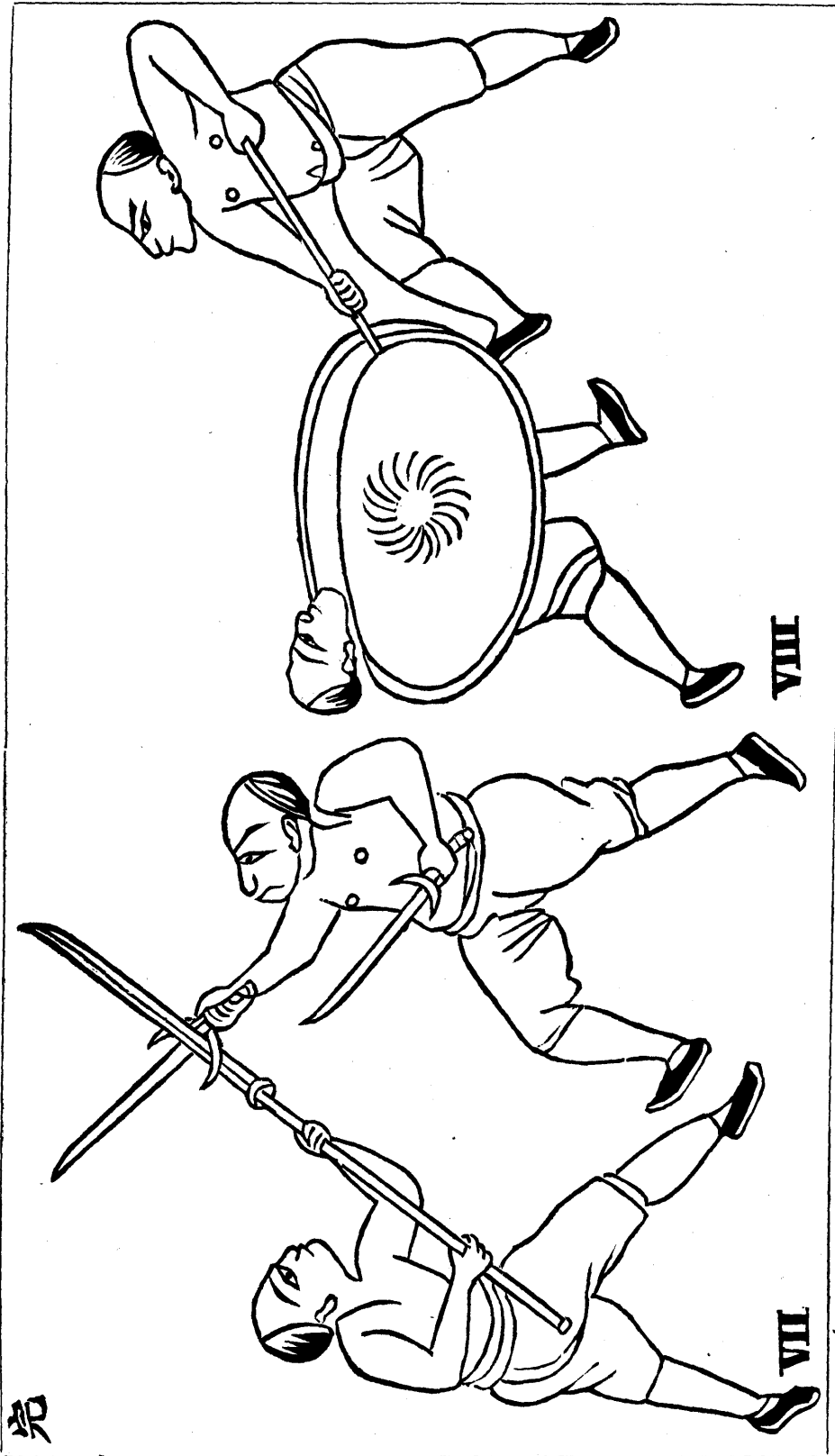
A glance at Illustration II will shew that

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Chinese bruisers are not particular as to what we should call unfair play;—

- A*—draws back his left foot and attempts to scratch *B*'s face with his right hand:  
*B*—draws up his left foot suddenly, strikes out with his left, and lets him have the right over the waistband.

The next three Illustrations are occupied with the old English game of quarter-staff. In number III *A* is trying with all his might to prize up the end of *B*'s staff (each apparently oblivious of the lovely blow on the left side of the head to which he is exposing himself, without any possibility of parrying it) when *B* suddenly inserts his staff under *A*'s left ancle and tumbles him over, *A*'s own efforts contributing to his ignominious fall. This is looked upon as great fun.

The next device is entitled *The stopper over all* (see Illustration IV). The gentleman on the right is trying to be offensive with both foot and staff, but his intentions are frustrated.

Number V., however, is well worth attention as an example of that successful use of the foot which seems so exasperatingly unfair to us;—

- A*—stands well up, gets his hands together and strikes a down blow (7th cut) at the same time drawing back his right foot:  
*B*—gathers himself well together on his right foot, gets up both ends of his staff (7th guard), parries the blow with all his strength, and at the same time pops in his left foot.

Please observe him popping in his left foot. An example of the same kind will be found in Illustration VI., though here it is difficult to see, if the combat were “on the square” (which I believe to be the correct equivalent, in sporting circles, for *bonâ fide*) and not merely got up for show—it is difficult to see what is to prevent the man with the two swords from striking a sound back hander with his right which would cause his antagonist to take his meals standing and sleep on his face for a considerable period.

Of the remaining six pages of this unsatisfactory little work, four are devoted to exercises with double swords, and two to those with shields. They all partake of the

same got-up-beforehand character. In one (see Illustration VII.) he with the spear appears to be concentrating his whole attention upon carefully putting it into the guard of the other's right hand sword, where it is immediately jammed by a turn of the wrist, leaving the unhappy wielder exposed to his enemy's left hand weapon. In practice, however, nobody but a born fool would do such a thing. The same observation applies to the last Illustration with which I will trouble the reader, number VIII. This is called *The Snipe and the Oyster*. There is positively no connection with “Alice in Wonderland,” or “Alice through the Looking-glass,” although juvenile admirers of those works might think so. Once upon a time, it appears, a snipe poked his bill between the shells of an open oyster, intending to feed upon him. But the oyster closed his valves upon the snipe's bill and then neither party saw his way out of the mess. They were relieved from further anxiety by a fisherman carrying them both home for supper. Hence the Chinese proverb, *when the snipe fights the oyster, the fisherman has the best of it.*\* The man with the spear is carefully putting it between the two shields of the other, who closes their rims upon it and holds fast, matters thus coming to a deadlock, and the audience looking on, whilst the combatants tug and pull with well simulated rage, in such breathless suspense as may sometimes be witnessed at transpontine theatres, when two ruffians, having carefully locked the hilts of their daggers together, proceed to drag each other all round the stage to very *agitato* fiddling and the lights turned down.

The worst of this profitless and dismal foolery is that it is taught to what the Chinese are pleased to call their army instead of anything really wholesome or useful. The people look on with amazement and admiration at the antics of the idle and dirty vassals who lounge about what by courtesy and a huge stretch of imagination are called

\* *Divide et impera.*



guard-houses or barracks. "Ah," they say, when they see these useless persons jumping over each other's heads, or turning somersaults in the air, "here are valiant men!

You won't easily find an enemy who will get the better of *them!*" As an excellent proverb of their own has it, *where there is no cennabar they think a deal of red clay!*

L. C. P.

## 洗 冤 錄

### THE HSI YUAN LU, OR INSTRUCTIONS TO CORONERS.\*

[TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE.]

(Continued from page 38.)

#### CHAPTER V.

##### *Washing and prepering the Body.*

When the body has been removed to a convenient spot, first inspect it as it is. Then dash water over it. Next wash off every particle of dirt with soap, and throw more water over it, the corpse lying all the time on a door or a mat to keep it clean. This finished, grains and vinegar may be spread on as usual, the clothes of deceased laid over the body and saturated with hot vinegar, the whole being covered over with mats (to keep the steam in.) In a little while, when the body has become soft, remove the coverings, wash off the grains and vinegar and proceed to examine. Don't trust too much to your assistants; if they only sprinkle spirit (without the grains) and vinegar, the wounds will not appear.

Prepare plenty of grains and vinegar, also paper for putting under the body. The best kinds of the latter are *t'eng lien* and *par ch'ao*. Bamboo paper is spoilt by vinegar and salt, and may injure the body.

At the beginning of spring and during winter the vinegar and grains should be used very hot; in the middle of spring and towards the end of autumn they should be rather less so. In summer and autumn, if the grains and vinegar were at all hot, this,

\* Lit.—"Record of the Washing away of Wrongs."

added to the heat of the weather, might cause injury to the skin. Late in autumn use them hot, and at a distance of from three to four feet on either side of the body light fires to stimulate their action.

In very cold weather, when the corpse is frozen hard and no amount of grains and vinegar, however hot, or clothes piled up, however thick, will relax its rigidity, dig a hole the length and breadth of the body and three feet in depth. Lay in it a quantity of fuel and make a roaring fire. Then dash over it vinegar which will create dense volumes of steam, in the middle of which place the body with all its dressings right in the hole, cover it with clothes, and pour on more hot vinegar all over it. At a distance of two or three feet from the hole on either side light fires as before. When you think the heat has thoroughly penetrated, take away the fire and remove the body for examination.

At the end of winter and beginning of spring it will not be necessary to make a hole, but merely to light fires on each side. This, however, must be left to the judgment of the Coroner.

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### *First Examination of the body.*

At a first examination, if it is a case where death resulted from blows, it will not do to