

THE FANCY.

WITH a disposition little inclined to the violent, either in exercise or in amusement, I am sometimes prevailed on to mix with the multitude, and am then generally carried along with the impulse of feeling and curiosity excited by the occasion. I have an aversion to all brutal *sports* (as they are called), yet I nevertheless make a distinction between those which are voluntary, and those which are inflicted: by the voluntary, I mean pugilistic combats, in contradistinction to those imposed on animals, which, having no choice of their own, are instigated by the will of others who have the power over them.

Having accepted the invitation of a friend to witness some of those trials of skill in the noble art of self-defence, as practised at the Fives Court, I prepared my mind for the expected no-

vely, and bent my attention to the nature of what I was to expect.

I was perfectly aware that there was nothing new or peculiar to the present day in the practice, of which I was about to visit the exhibition. I was only puzzled at the name chosen to designate the amateurs in the science of boxing. To be one of the "Fancy" might, by a foreigner, be readily supposed to apply to something of the imagination,—some matters of taste or virtue, in which gentlemen of *fancy* were engaged. I had met with fancy bakers, fancy brushes, and fancy dresses; but of the application of such a word to the sports of the Bear Garden! It was at least an odd fancy.

The entrance to the Fives Court was surrounded by expectant groups of spectators, eager to catch a glance of those who entered, happy if they could recognise a Cribb, a Belcher, a Spring, or any of the other noted bruisers, as he made his way to the chosen spot; and envying those whose means

could procure them admission to so gratifying a spectacle.

After securing our pockets as well as we could, we elbowed our way through the motley crowd without, to as motley a crowd within. By this time my own eagerness became apparent, and I was glad to find we were in time, for I was as fearful of missing a blow as any of the combatants could be. Before the sparring began, I employed myself in observing the various company brought together on this interesting occasion; and nothing could exhibit more of contrast than this mixture of high and low, from the well-dressed amateur to the aproned cobbler. The hum of conversation and the shifting of stations were at length broken and interrupted by notes of preparation. The acting manager of the pugilistic stage announced that —— and —— were about to *set-to*, and, calling them forward, they came from among the crowd, with small marks of likelihood either in their dress or address: the elder, a man little short of fifty, mean in his

appearance, and with a head so bald, that it might well be imagined a warm night-cap would be better suited to it than an exposure to the buffetings of his antagonist; who appeared much younger, but whose habiliments and demeanour afforded sufficient evidence that he was one of the same class and character.

They made their bow in the true style of the Fancy, and, after having had their gloves tied on by the aforesaid manager, were left to pursue their sport, divested of their clothes, which showed the body to great advantage even in men not of the best make; and the animation of the countenance at once obliterated the character of meanness. The head thrown back, and the chest forward; the wary eye, the compressed lips, and the firm station of the legs, bespoke their practice. A short interval was spent in feints and manœuvring, when blows were given and parried with much dexterity, succeeding in rapidity till fresh breathing was required: several rounds went on in this way, till, as if by mutual consent, the first pair of pugilists made their retiring bow, amidst the shouts

of the company and the rattling of pence, which, to the eternal disgrace of heroism, were carefully picked up and pocketed.

There now followed several others, most of them very young; these sprigs of laurel showed but little science compared with the combatants whom I have described, their principal object being, to all appearance, to lay on blows till they were out of breath. We came at length to the scientific and skilful men who had distinguished themselves in the severest conflicts.—Belcher and Pullen were announced. They ascended the stage with a bounding elasticity, and, merely throwing off their coats and waistcoats, they went to work with a lightness and dexterity which gave a grace and interest to the sport. It need hardly be mentioned, that here no largess of copper coin (which in this elegant school I learnt was denominated *browns*) was offered.

Richmond the Black and Isle of Wight Hall came next. The former I had observed among the spectators: his countenance had an expres-

sion of menace even in his ordinary address, but when stripped and opposed to his man it assumed a higher character; steady and wary at the onset, it became gradually darker, and, as the rounds increased, was ferocious to a degree. This appeared the more striking, from the contrast it afforded, both in expression and colour, to Hall, whose features never once lost the temper and good humour with which he set out, or rather set-to.

Names of note continued to be given, and frames of the finest athletic proportion divided the attention, and, to the eye of the anatomist or the artist, afforded subjects of the first class for contemplation. The most manly forms among the antique statues can boast of nothing superior to what was here exhibited; and to the flexibility and varied action of the muscles, a light and shade, and colour were added, from which the painter might have taken his finest tints.

Nearly three hours were spent in witnessing these exploits, when my friend and I thought we had seen enough to satisfy our curiosity. Upon

our legs during the whole time, the sameness now became tedious, and we left the Court a little before the sports of the day were brought to a close.

The impressions made upon my mind by the novelty of the spectacle remained for some time; and, in the reflections which followed, I clearly convinced myself that, whether it elevated or degraded the national character—whether it gave to Englishmen true courage or ferocity—still it was not an amusement suited to *my* “fancy.” But so much has been said, and so ably said, both for and against the “manly science,” that I dare not trust myself in delivering an opinion upon that which, while it has found advocates and patrons even among the most distinguished of our senators, has been denounced by others as a blackguard and vicious pastime, calculated not only to check the growth of all that is amiable in the human heart, but to sink man below the level of a brute.

A QUERIST.

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