

**THE WORKS OF GEORGE SILVER,
COMPRISING "PARADOXES OF
DEFENCE" AND "BREF
INSTRUCTIONS VPŌ MY
PRADOXES OF DEFENCE"**

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The Works of George Silver, Comprising "Paradoxes of Defence" and "Bref Instructions vpô My Pradoxes of Defence" by George Silver & Cyril G.R. Matthey

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GEORGE SILVER & CYRIL G.R. MATTHEY

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THE WORKS OF
GEORGE SILVER

A.D. 1599

THE WORKS OF
GEORGE SILVER

COMPRISING

“PARADOXES OF DEFENCE”

[Printed in 1599 and now reprinted]

AND

“BREF INSTRUCTIONS VPŌ MY PRADOXES OF
DEFENCE”

[Printed for the first time from the MS. in the British Museum]

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

CYRIL G. R. MATTHEY

CAPTAIN, LONDON RIFLE BRIGADE; MEMBER OF THE LONDON FENCING CLUB; AND
MEMBRE D'HONNEUR DU CERCLE D'ESCRIME DE BRUXELLES

WITH EIGHT COLLOTYPE REPRODUCTIONS FROM THE MS. IN
THE BRITISH MUSEUM

LONDON

GEORGE BELL AND SONS, YORK STREET
COVENT GARDEN

1898



INTRODUCTION.

IN 1599 a certain George Silver published a work entitled "Paradoxes of Defence, wherein is proved the true grounds of Fight to be in the short ancient weapons, and that the short Sword hath advantage of the long Sword or long Rapier. And the weakenesse and imperfection of the Rapier-fights displayed. Together with an Admonition to the noble, ancient, victorious, valiant, and most braue nation of Englishmen, to beware of false teachers of Defence, and how they forsake their owne naturall fights: with a briefe commendation of the noble science or exercising of Armes. *By George Silver Gentleman.* London, Printed for Edvvard Blount. 1599.", dedicated "To the Right Honorable, my Singvlar Good Lord, Robert Earle of Essex and Ewe, Earle Marshall of England, Viscount Hereford, Lord Ferrers of Chartley, Bouchier and Louaine, Maister of the Queenes Maies-ties horse, & of the Ordenance, Chancellor of the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, Knight of the most noble order of the Garter, and one of her Highnesse most

honorable Priuy Counsell." This book is a small 4to volume of viii and 72 pages, containing three woodcuts—a work but little known to any save antiquaries and collectors; yet for all that it is a work which must have possessed considerable value at the time it was written, when duelling and brawling were matters of everyday occurrence.

It was in all probability very shortly afterwards that George Silver wrote "Bref Instructions vpõ my paradoxes of Defence for the true handlyng of all Mann' of weapons together w^t the fower grownds & the fower gou'nors wth gouernours are left out in my paradoxes w^{out} the knowledge of wth no Man can fight saf." This, as its title indicates, bears very materially upon the earlier work; so much so, in fact, that the "Paradoxes" without the "Bref Instructions" cannot be considered a complete work in the sense that was evidently intended by the author when he wrote the later part. The "Bref Instructions," however, so far as can be ascertained, were never published; and there is only the MS. to show that this second and completing portion of the work was ever contemplated, much less undertaken by the author. The reason why this was not published will probably never be known, but it must have been a matter of considerable moment to have hindered the completion of a work to which he evidently attached the very greatest importance.

Be that as it may, the MS. of the "Bref Instructions"

in question existed, but remained unknown except to very few people up to about the year 1890, at which time it was discovered in the MS. Department of the British Museum by the late Mr. W. London. He was warned at the Museum to beware of assuming the work to be autograph, but he afterwards stated in a letter to Captain Hutton that he found "the educated but careless and corrupt spelling to be characteristic of Silver," and also that he "considered it to be the oldest English treatise on arms, with the exception of that on the two-hand sword in the Harleian MS. (3542), which dates from the fifteenth century." The "Bref Instructions" consist of thirty-four closely-written pages in very good preservation there being but few places, and those of comparative insignificance, where the handwriting is too faded to be legible; in such cases the context, however, clearly conveys the meaning. It is interesting to note that the MS.* of the "Paradoxes" is also in the Library of the British Museum, having been purchased in 1892 at the sale of the MSS. of Edwin H. Laurence, Lot 603, at a cost of £11.

From the time that the MS. of "Bref Instructions" first became known to Mr. London he appears to have studied it with considerable care, and, although not himself a fencer, he became at once so convinced of the prac-

* MS. 47 pages. No. 34,192. "With 'Epistle Dedecatorie' (ff. 4-6) to Robert [Devereux, 2nd] Earl of Essex. Probably the actual presentation copy, &c." Vide Thimm's "Bibliography of Fencing and Duelling."

tical value to swordsmen of its contents that he made a complete transcript of it—by no means a light undertaking when the caligraphy and spelling are taken into account.

Knowing Captain Alfred Hutton by reputation as one of the most universally recognized authorities on all matters respecting the sword and its employment, it occurred to Mr. London after completing the transcript that Captain Hutton was of all others the one best qualified by his practical knowledge and experience to pronounce definitely upon the merits of the MS. He accordingly obtained an introduction, and, after some correspondence, left the transcript for perusal. This occurred in 1894. In due course it was returned, and then only Captain Hutton learned of the rather sudden death of the lender, who it appeared had some short time previously expressed a wish that the transcript might be allowed to remain in Captain Hutton's magnificent collection of fencing and duelling literature.

Thus it was, in 1895, that the "Bref Instructions," by far the more valuable part of George Silver's work, first came under my notice.

Realizing the value of this unpublished work Captain Hutton eventually extracted from Mr. London's transcript of it the material upon which he based a most interesting article in "The Indian Fencing Review" of January, 1897, on "Sword Fighting and Sword Play," constituting in itself a highly practical little work, and likely to prove of much assistance to the infantry officer

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desirous of rendering himself as "handy" as possible with his sword at close quarters. More recently still, namely, on September 25, 1897, Captain Hutton gave practical illustration of the "grips" mentioned by him in that article at an exhibition of swordsmanship at the Whitton Park Club, and this display following upon the publication of his paper immediately recalled to my mind the original MS. at the British Museum. I took an early opportunity of consulting this in order to make a closer acquaintance with Silver's later and more important work, which is probably the earliest (in English, at any rate) to teach what is now considered to be the most telling and classic style of fence, viz., "Parry and Riposte."

Much impressed by what I saw and afterwards read, it struck me that a work so peculiarly English, containing so much matter of value to all swordsmen, and to infantry officers in particular, ought not to remain buried, but should rather be published for the use of those who care to read and learn. I therefore determined to complete the work so nearly finished by George Silver, by publishing his MS. of "Bref Instructions." Captain Hutton and Captain Thimm, whom I consulted on this idea, gave me every encouragement, the former most kindly placing at my disposal the transcript made by Mr. London for comparison when my own transcript was completed.

After reading the "Bref Instructions" carefully through in conjunction with the "Paradoxes," I determined to