

A PLAN TO ABOLISH DUELLING

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A plan to abolish duelling by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

**A PLAN TO
ABOLISH DUELLING**

A P L A N

TO

ABOLISH DUELLING.

"Spurn out the Duelloes out o' the kingdom."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.



LONDON

SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.

1844.

A PLAN
to
ABOLISH DUELLING.

As the extirpation of the at once abominable and foolish practice of duelling is confessedly the desire of all parties, it becomes the duty of the government to meet, or rather accompany, the fast-forming public opinion on the subject, if a feasible method of prevention can but be ascertained; but as most of what has been written on the topic has been in too brief and passing a form to embody all the principal arguments in any one essay, I here purpose placing, in one somewhat elaborate view, the entire question in its most important bearings; and especially to demonstrate the *uselessness* of the Duel, as a means of really advantaging any party concerned in it.*

* It may be as well to state here, that the whole of this pamphlet, save the small portion which obviously refers to recent discussions and transactions, was in manuscript fifteen years ago (the publishers can vouch for about *ten* of those years), and that, therefore, my arguments and propositions are not mere

Assuming, then, that, as it is an immoral procedure, the arguments, *quoad* that immorality, which have been urged for its discontinuance, are generally acknowledged to be irrefutably strong; my aim, in the course of the present discussion, shall be—*first*, to shew the absurdity of the duel with reference to all those social and worldly points in which, when superficially or partially viewed, it appears to be effectual; and, *secondly*, to suggest the means of its eradication, and to demonstrate the facility with which government might apply those means for the speedy attainment of so desirable an end. There are at present but two plausible reasons—plausible, as modern society is constituted—for countenancing the practice of duelling—viz., the care of reputation, and the circumstance of there being no legal redress obtainable for such personal insults as commonly impel men, in a certain sphere of life, to have recourse to it as a remedy. To do away with these two arguments, we have first to prove, that honourable reputation is not, in reality, either supported or cleared by our killing, or attempting to kill, the person who attacks it; and this will be a task of no great difficulty, where we have not the prejudices of the multitude arrayed against us. If,

copies of these now being adduced both in and out of Parliament. As, however, the subject had been handled by both moral and political writers before my time, I never professed to advance new reasoning, so much as to *locate* what had already, in various forms, been urged.

for example, a person denominate me a liar, or a scoundrel, whether in direct or in circuitous terms, he asserts what is either the truth or not the truth. If the former, my shooting him cannot, by any possible mode of reasoning, be held to make me less of a liar, or less of a scoundrel, than I was before; though it will superadd the crime of homicide to the guilt of falsehood. If the latter, it will be he who will prove the liar; and his being shot for *that* will not add one iota to the extent of his mendacity, nor to the untainted purity of my previous character, which, however, his needlessly and vengefully shed blood will stain, though his bitter tongue had failed to injure it.* This is an argument which cannot be refuted by reason, although it has long been disregarded by fashion; and from it we may derive, as from an abundant source, the whole of our demonstrations of what we desire to prove—the absurdity of the duel as a remedy for injuries not punishable by the laws of the kingdom.

* I know I may here be answered that, although the death of my calumniator (and still less my vain endeavour to kill him) can neither prove nor disprove the truth of his remarks; yet the fear of incurring that penalty will, in a great measure, deter one man from ever wantonly affronting another; and further, as there is no cause of determent so good as that, therefore it is both a necessary and a beneficial instrument of retribution. This would be a better argument than it is, if only the offender incurred the risk of the punishment; but at any rate, it will lose all its force when a still better determent shall be substituted, and a still better, I hope, to be presently enabled to suggest.

I have taken for my example the offence of giving, either in terms or by implication, the *lie*, because that is the one which is ordinarily the cause of the condemned practice; but there are two other offences against honour, which, as they are commonly deemed expiable only by a determined endeavour to shed the offender's blood, deserve a few words of distinct consideration, to shew how they, too, come within the foregoing line of argument, and make the remedy as absurd, in regard to them, as it has already been proved to be in regard to the imputation of deficient veracity. I allude, as will have been anticipated, to the accusation of cowardice and the giving of a blow. If to give and receive the fire of a pistol, under the manifest and numerous chances of escaping uninjured, and the still more numerous chances of being but slightly hurt, which all the laws and customs of duelling afford, were an indubitable proof of genuine courage, then might the sending or accepting a challenge be sufficient to disprove the allegation of its absence; but not only is the reverse of this the fact, but the mere circumstance of going out is so frequently brought to pass rather from a want of moral bravery, and from the consequent apprehension of pseudo shame, than from an innate principle of veritable courage, and likewise so often arises out of strong feelings of temporary desperation, and evanescent resolve, that it is no more, *per se*, a proof of true spirit to go out and fight a duel, than it is of true love to solicit the hand of

a woman in marriage, in a case where various other reasons were influential over the suitor.

I am acquainted with one instance, and have (as, probably, many besides myself have) learned of others, well authenticated, in which an officer misbehaved himself grossly in action, who not only had fought a duel, but who would have preferred fighting another to standing a Court Martial; and, *vice versa*, the instances are numerous of men of undoubted, because often proved, bravery, refusing to fight a duel, under circumstances of even the greatest aggravation. For my own part, if I had reason to consider a man to be devoid of the spirit necessary for the undaunted endurance of great and probable danger, my opinion would not be the least qualified in his favour by the circumstance of his fighting an ordinary duel; for though a truly intrepid man would not fear an adversary in an engagement of that nature, any more than, nor so much as, he might dread a daring enemy in the field of battle; yet a man of little or no real spirit will meet the former species of opponent, who would incontinently quail beneath the fiery regard and the determined arm of the last named adversary. In truth, it must, after a moment's reflection, or without the preparation of any reflection, be acknowledged, that the chances of escape in modern duels are far too numerous to admit of such a contest being made a criterion of the better sort of courage; for while those chances are almost incalculable on the side of escape with life, even after

the duellists have taken their ground, there are, besides, so many other chances and reasonable hopes, between the occurrence of the dispute and that of the meeting, that the *last* act of the farce, or tragedy (as the event may constitute it) will never be performed; that the exertions of friends, the natural desire of principals, the watchfulness of the police, and similar impeditives, will bring about a timely reconciliation or interpose an effectual obstacle to the combat; and so many *other* chances that, after *one* harmless exchange of shots, the difference will be adjusted, and the belligerents appeased;—in fine, so many chances and rational expectations, from first to last, that *blood will not be shed*, while a certain degree of mere *bubble* reputation will be acquired, or an entire one preserved (according to the current and foolish notions of the thing) by a risk so trifling, that it is little better than puerile to calculate a man's courage (especially a challenger's, who, if he have been deeply aggressed, may rely on his opponent's firing in the air) by the not rare fact of his having been nearly or remotely concerned in a duel, or the more atrocious voucher of his having killed his man. For, as to this last position, the person slain may possibly have been the braver, as well as the least blameful of the two; and, moreover, a timid tremulousness, as well as a resolute steadiness of hand, may have absolutely occasioned the mortal catastrophe. Add to this the fact, that a man may be an infamous scoundrel, or a notorious liar, and yet have plenty of physical