

THE OAKS.

THE OLD DUELLING-GROUNDS OF NEW ORLEANS.*

BY JOHN AUGUSTIN.

[JOHN AUGUSTIN was born in New Orleans, February 11, 1838. His volume, *War Flowers* (1865), is a collection of poems that were written by him during his service in the Confederate Army. He held, at different times, the city editorship of nearly every newspaper of New Orleans. He died February 5, 1888.]

UNDER the wide-spreading oaks of ancient Gaul the consecrated Druids with golden sickle cut the holy mistletoe that sanctified their foreheads in the stern celebration of their rites of blood. Happy was the victim offered in sacrifice; for to die was to *know*, and to go forward *knowing*, in that eternity of progressive acquirements and bliss which ended in the perfection of knowledge, the sublime identification with nature on some ultimate star, radiant with omniscience and musical with the rhythmic pulsations of eternal peace.

I cannot sit of a calm evening under the pensive oaks, from whose gray beards, waving under the sway of the breeze, comes a murmur as of a prayer and prophecy, without reverting to that stern yet hopeful creed of Runic times, which held knowledge to be the supreme good, and pointed to sacrificial death as the first step to its acquirement.

It is curious that rites of blood should have been the foundation of every religion. Even the meek and divine Jesus found it necessary to die on the cross so that humanity might be saved. There is a problem full of yet unfathomed meaning in this perpetual theory of blood atonement. Else why the traditional sanctity of war and the undying fame which attaches to successful military chieftains, loftier than the apotheosis of saints? Why the glamour around the heroes of knight errantry, riding alone and full-armed in search of blood to spill for the redressing of wrong? Why the trial by single combat, introduced by Holy Church and but recently fallen into disfavor?

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Where the Metairie Ridge, slightly undulating, barely breaks the monotonous flatness of the hazy landscape, standing near the dilapidated tomb of Louis Allard, such thoughts crossed the mind of the

* [Written in 1887.]

writer as he gradually became enveloped in the dark shadows which the rays of the setting sun slanted from the oaks of the Lower City Park.

These oaks were formerly known as the "Chênes d'Allard," otherwise called "Metairie oaks." These, also, in their time, witnessed rites of blood, and lent their protecting shade to many a preconcerted, solemn and deadly encounter between man and man.

A short walk from the terminus of the Bayou Road street-car line in New Orleans, at the foot of Esplanade Street, after crossing the bridge over Bayou St. John, brings the visitor in front of a magnificent little forest of gigantic live oaks. It is the Lower City Park, in former days a wooded plantation belonging to Louis Allard.

This gentleman, who was a man of letters and a poet, owned all that tract of land extending from Bayou St. John to the Orleans Canal, and from the Metairie Road to the old toll-gate. That portion of it which is now called the Lower City Park was purchased previous to his death by the millionaire philanthropist, John McDonogh, at a sale made for foreclosure of mortgage by the Citizens' Bank of Louisiana. McDonogh left it by will to the cities of New Orleans and Baltimore, and the city of New Orleans acquired it in full ownership at the partition sale.

During the latter portion of his life, Allard, who, being a poet, was an indifferent business man, crippled in health and fortune, was permitted, after the sale, by special agreement, to continue his occupation of the place. There he would spend all his days, reclining in an arm-chair under his beloved oaks, reading his favorite authors and dreaming of what might have been. He died not long after the sale of his property, and in compliance with his dying wish lies buried in the old place under the very oak where the last years of his life had been spent.

A few bricks, uncared for, a tomb burst open by time and ruthless hands, protected from the sun and rain by the faithful boughs of his favorite oak, mark his resting-place.

To one coming from the Metairie Road, this tomb is on a wooded plain in the rear, well to the right of the park proper, from which it is divided by a small, swampy ravine, crossed by a primitive wooden bridge. From its site, glancing obliquely to the left, the legendary oaks rear their majestic heads in solemn grandeur.

Scarcely half a century has passed over these centenarians since Louis Allard, in the full vigor of youth, walked under their branches. Allard is dead. McDonogh, who purchased from him, is also gone, leaving behind him, as undying monuments, the public schools with which he has gifted the city. A terrible war between two sections of our great country has changed and revolutionized the entire social sys-

tem of the South. But the grand oaks are still the same, solemnly brooding at night over memories of the past. Perhaps their gnarled trunks are somewhat more rugged; but they are as majestic and vigorous as ever, their green boughs throwing back the sunlight with all the brightness and elasticity of everlasting youth.

But the fame of the Metairie oaks does not rest upon the poetry or scholarly accomplishments of their former proprietor, nor upon the memory of the philanthropist who bequeathed them to the city, nor upon the sturdy strength or the perennial youth of their green branches; the great interest that lingers among them comes from the memories which they recall, and it is the witchery of tradition that makes them immortal.

The antithetic lights and shades of their leafy arcades, typical of a state of society where tragedy and gayety walked side by side in chivalrous converse, take back our memories to a period scarcely fifty years remote, when it was an every-day occurrence to see under these very branches a meeting of adversaries in mortal combat, with rapier or pistol, sabre or shotgun.

At that time New Orleans, though even then to a degree cosmopolitan, was essentially a Creole city, and under the full influence of the traditions which governed that high-strung and chivalrous race. The descendants of the early possessors of the soil, many of whom were of aristocratic blood, had grown up with the more plebeian sons of the other settlers, and, what with education in common, received in Europe or at the Collège d'Orléans in this city, what with intermarriages, the habit of command acquired from the ownership of slaves, and the refining influence of well-employed leisure, formed a sort of aristocracy from which the South derived some of its brightest intellects. It was a nobility less of birth than of manners, breeding, education, and tradition.

Besides, life was easy in New Orleans at that time, for the city was not only a great place of import and export from its position near the Gulf, but owing to its river facilities, not yet antagonized by the railroads, it controlled with scarcely any competition the whole trade of the West.

Money was therefore acquired without the absorbing and deleterious consequences of incessant labor; there was time left to merchants and clerks for mental culture, and imagination was not, by the nature of things, excluded from the active world.

The women, bred at home, under a mother's jealous surveillance, educated by the best private teachers or at the renowned Convent of the Ursuline Nuns, were versed in arts and letters. Invariably treated with the most deferential gallantry by the men, none of whom were

ever known to smoke or otherwise demean themselves in the presence of a lady, they had naturally acquired manners of great refinement and distinction.

The world and society were therefore of courtly brilliancy. Merchants and lawyers were incidentally poets and wits, and the ladies accomplished musicians.

Over all this: over men and women, there ruled a supreme sense of dignity and honor, maintained by the strictest and most unflinching public opinion.

At that time bankrupts committed suicide, and women fallen from virtue disappeared and were never heard from. There was no compromise with honor; society did not permit it.

Under this moral condition of affairs, the punctilio among men was strict even to exaggeration. The least breach of etiquette, the most venial sin against politeness, the least suspicion thrown out of unfair dealing, even a bit of awkwardness, were causes sufficient for a cartel, which none dared refuse.

The acceptance, however, did not mean that the quarrel must inevitably be settled on the field. The seconds, two on each side, discussed the quarrel dispassionately, sometimes with the assistance of mutual friends, and often arrived at an amicable and honorable settlement.

A blow was strictly forbidden, and sufficient to debar the striker from the privilege of the duello. A gentleman who would so far forget himself as to strike another, was exposed to the ignominy of being refused a meeting. Some who have so lost their self-possession have been known to submit to the greatest humiliation in order to obtain from their adversary an exchange of shots or a crossing of swords. Nor even was an insult permitted to go beyond a certain decorum of form. Experienced friends, well versed in the law and precedents of the code, settled beforehand every nice point, so that the adversaries met under the oaks in full equality, morally and socially.

How many a bloody combat originated in a ballroom, where the cause of the difficulty passed unnoticed by all!

Said a gentleman to a much-courted lady dancing in a brilliant ballroom:

“ Honor me with half of this dance?”

“ Ask monsieur,” answered the lady; “ it belongs to him.”

“ Never,” spoke the dancer, when appealed to, whirling past in the waltz, and just caught the words softly spoken by smiling lips as he passed by:

“ Ah, vous êtes mal élevé.”

Not a word more was said that night between the two gentlemen, though they subsequently met and bowed; but early the next morning

the flippant talker received a challenge, and in the evening a neat *coup droit* under the oaks at the Metairie.

So well recognized was the code by all who had any pretensions to good breeding, that even judges on the bench would resent an insult from lawyers at the bar. A typical anecdote of the time is here given as exemplifying the then existing feeling about the duello.

Judge Joachim Bermudez, father of the present * Chief Justice of the State, while on the bench, made a ruling against a certain lawyer, who objected in rather unbecoming terms. He was ordered to sit down, and refused; whereupon the judge ordered the sheriff to take him into custody for contempt of court. Drawing a pistol, the lawyer defied the sheriff, who feared to advance. The judge, leaping from his bench, seized the lawyer by the arm and handed him to a police officer, who led him to prison.

The judge soon after ordered his release.

That evening he received a challenge from the lawyer, which was promptly accepted. On the field the lawyer offered to apologize; but that was not permitted by the code. Never, on the field. The judge absolutely refused any apology, and the lawyer had to leave the country. He could not have practised, after this, before the courts of the State.

The oaks of the Metairie, or "Chênes d'Allard," did not become a place of rendezvous for duelists until the year 1834. Previous to this the favorite place for fighting was the Fortin property, now the Fair Grounds. The fact is, New Orleans being then but sparsely built in the rear, there were a number of convenient places closer at hand where those who had a stomach for battle could satisfy their cravings to their heart's content, without fear of interference. To say the truth, interference was the exception. It is true that there existed a law against duelling, but the practice was so strongly welded in the customs of the people that the statute served only to add the glamour of mystery and the flavor of forbidden fruit to the other fascinations of the deadly game, and might as well not have existed.

Things being so, it is not astonishing that New Orleans should have been a favorite resort for professors of fence or *maitres d'armes*. Most of these, having no further personal value than their skill with the foils, lived in blood, wine, and profligacy their circumscribed lives, between the *cafés* and *salles d'escrime*, and even their names are now forever forgotten. Others, who pursued their calling as an honored profession, acquired a certain standing in society, and old residents love to talk over their skill in arms and their other lovable and manly traits. Others, again, have acquired fame for having killed or having been killed in duels.

* [1887.]

Among the latter were Marcel Dauphin, who was killed by A. Nora in a duel with shotguns; Bonneval, who was killed by Reynard, also a professional swordsman; L'Alouette, who killed Shubra, another professor, and who was Pepe Lulla's teacher of fence and subsequently his associate; Thimécourt, who killed Poulaga, and of whom more hereafter, as also about his *confrère* Monthiach; and more of the same sort.

Among the former were E. Baudoin, a Parisian, who was very popular and well esteemed; Émile Cazère, who had quite an aristocratic *clientèle*; and Gilbert Rosière, familiarly called by his pupils Titi Rosière, perhaps the most popular among all the fencing-masters that ever came to New Orleans. I must not forget Basile Croquère, who, though a mulatto, was such a fine blade that many of the best Creole gentlemen did not hesitate, notwithstanding the strong prejudice against color, to frequent his *salle d'armes*, and even cross swords with him in private *assauts*.

Gilbert Rosière, whose son Gustave, himself an admirable swordsman, followed the Gardes d'Orléans to the plain of Shiloh at General Beauregard's call, is the *maître d'armes* who has left the best and certainly the most vivid souvenirs. All of us who were young before the war, remember the gay, whole-souled, though irascible, fencing-master. A native of Bordeaux, he had come to New Orleans when a very young man, to make his fortune at the bar. But he was of a wild disposition and fell in with a wild set: so he dropped the Code Napoleon for the Code of Honor, became a leader in all the escapades and devil-may-care adventures of the *jeunesse dorée* of that time, and turned fencing-master. During the Mexican war he made a fortune (which he squandered as lightly as made) teaching fencing to officers. Brave and generous to a fault, he was every one's friend, and, contradictory as it may seem, this hero of seven duels in one week was, in some respects, of womanly tenderness. He would fight with men to the bitter death, but would not have hurt a defenceless thing, woman, child, or fly.

He was passionately fond of music and nervously sensitive to its melting impressions. A great frequenter of the opera, his superb head could be seen almost every night towering above the others in the parquette. On one occasion, deeply touched by the pathos of a well-sung *cantilena*, he wept audibly. An imprudent neighbor laughed, but his amusement was of short duration, for Rosière had scarcely noticed it than his tenderness turned to anger.

"C'est vrai," he said, "je pleure, mais je donne aussi des calottes."

By this time the man's face was already slapped, and the next day a flesh wound had taught him that it is not always good to laugh.

Well might Rosière have exclaimed with the old German knight at the close of his career :

“ I have lived my life, I have fought my fight,
I have drunk my share of wine ;
From Trier to Kohn there never was knight
Led a merrier life than mine ! ”

It was in the spring of 1840. There was a grand *assaut d'armes* between professors at the old “ Salle St. Philipe,” which was filled with the gilded youth of old-time New Orleans. None but brevetted experts, who could show a diploma, were allowed to participate. The valorous Pepe Lulla, now famous for a large number of successful duels, then a vigorous young man, skilled in the use of all weapons, was refused the privilege of a bout because he had no papers to show.

An Italian professor of counterpoint, named Poulaga, a man of magnificent physique and herculean strength, was there holding his own with the broadsword, and bidding defiance to all comers.

Captain Thimécourt, a former cavalry officer, opposed and defeated him. The humiliation was too much for the Italian's pride, and he remarked with a sneer that Thimécourt was a good “ *tireur de salle*. ”

“ *Qu'a cela ne tienne*, ” at once exclaimed the soldier, “ let us adjourn to the field.”

Without further parley, they took rendezvous for the oaks, and there Thimécourt cut his adversary to pieces.

This same *assaut d'armes* was the cause of Pepe Lulla's challenging a French professor named Grand Bernard, who had insisted upon his producing a diploma before crossing swords with him in the *salle d'armes*. They fought with broadswords, and Pepe with his good blade, though he had no diploma, opened the master's flank in two places.

Thimécourt was one of the most noted professors of fence of the period, his favorite weapon being the broadsword, in the management of which he excelled. An admirable expounder of the counterpoint, he was not otherwise highly cultivated in any manner, and delighted principally in broils and battle.

Another well-known and contemporaneous professor was a German swordsman named Monthiach. He was tall, fleshy, and muscular, and at the same time the best-natured fellow in the world, but of course always ready for a duel, particularly with a *professor*. Professors of all kinds have always been, more or less, jealous of each other, but the *maitres d'armes* of that period were peculiarly and aggressively so.

Well, Thimécourt and Monthiach had some slight difference about

a *coup*, and, naturally, as they disagreed completely, the only way to come to an understanding was to fight it out.

They fought with broadswords, because it was about that weapon that they had disagreed. The duel was short, sharp, and decisive. At the first pass, Monthiach made a terribly vicious cut at his adversary, evidently intended to cut off his head at one blow. The *coup* was admirably conceived and executed.

Thimécourt, who had his own idea, did not parry with his sword, but dodged. His hat was cut clear in two, Monthiach's blade grazing his scalp. At the same time the Frenchman, passing under his adversary's sword, opened his breast with a splendid *coup de pointe*. The seconds interfered. The gash was a frightful one, and the blood flowed freely, yet the German professor insisted upon going on with the fight. The seconds, however, would not permit it.

They had taken no surgeon with them, and Monthiach, to the horror of the bystanders, pulled out some tow which he had in his pocket, and packing his wound with it, to stop the flow of blood, walked home in a frenzy of anger, cursing at the seconds who had stopped the fight, for, as he said, it was a beautiful *coup*, and he would have assuredly chopped off Thimécourt's head if he had had a chance to renew it. Three days after he was on parade, marching, musket in hand, in the ranks of the "Fusiliers," a German militia company, then commanded by Captain Daniel Friedrich.

There was not a day passed without one or two encounters at the oaks or elsewhere. The spirit of the age might have been expressed in Don Cæsar de Bazan's terse saying in Victor's Hugo's *Ruy Blas*:

"Quand je tiens un bon duel je ne le lache pas."

Old citizens who lived in the neighborhood of the oaks say that for a time it was a daily procession of pilgrims to this bloody Mecca. Some of them walked or rode back, others were carried home for burial, but once on the field, honor required that some blood should be spilt. Sometimes it was a drop only, sometimes a draining of the veins.

The following double anecdote is typical of the manners and customs of the period :

Mr. Hughes Pedesclaux was a tall, muscular, and athletic young man, whole-souled and popular, but somewhat quick-tempered; brave as all of his race, and skilled in the use of arms.

Mr. Donatien Augustin was a tall, slim young lawyer, a great student, fond of his profession, but fond also of the military. Both were attached to the "Canonniers d'Orléans," a crack artillery company of those days. Augustin had just been made a lieutenant, and was rather proud of his uniform and trailing artillery sabre. Parade

had just been dismissed ; Pedesclaux came up to his friend Augustin (a child whom he had bullied and spanked at the "Collège d'Orléans"), and jovially, but irreverently, gave a deprecatory kick to the swaggering weapon, saying :

"What could you do with this thing?"

Quick as a flash came the retort :

"Follow me a few paces to some quiet place, and I will show you!"

Not a word more was said ; each man picked up two friends to act as seconds, and forthwith, followed by the delighted crowd, eager for the sight of a scrimmage, marched to the scene of combat.

In those days New Orleans was not extensively built, and fighters not very particular about time or place. A convenient spot was soon reached, the adversaries doffed their uniforms, stripped to their shirt sleeves, and drew their weapons. The seconds, after placing them in position and enjoining each to do his duty as a gentleman, uttered the sacramental words, "*Allez, messieurs,*" and to it they went with a will.

Pedesclaux was in the full vigor of manhood and skilled in sword-play ; Augustin was a mere youth, with little experience in arms, but very active and willing. As luck would have it, after a few passes he cut his redoubtable adversary in the sword-arm.

The seconds interfered ; there was a great shaking of hands, and the incident ended in a gay and plentiful dinner at Victor's on Toulouse Street.

Some time afterwards, Pedesclaux had a quarrel with a retired French cavalry officer, reputed as a duellist. The cartel was passed between the parties with due solemnity, and the Frenchman, having the choice of weapons, selected broadswords, on horseback. They fought on a plain in the rear of the second district, known as "La Plaine Raquette," on account of the peculiar game of ball which used to be played there.

An eye-witness says : "It was a handsome sight. The adversaries were mounted on spirited horses and stripped to the waist. As they rode up to each other, nerved for the combat, their respective muscular development and the confidence of their bearing gave promise of an interesting fight. The Frenchman was heavy and somewhat ungainly, but his muscles looked like whip-cord, and his broad, hairy chest gave evidence of remarkable strength and endurance. Pedesclaux, somewhat lighter in weight, was admirably proportioned, and his youthful suppleness seemed to more than counterbalance his adversary's brawny but somewhat rigid manhood.

"A clashing of the steel, which drew sparks from the blades, and the two adversaries crossed and passed each other by unhurt. In

a moment, both horses had been vaulted to face each other by the expert riders, and the enemies met again. A terrible head blow from the Frenchman would now have cleft Pedesclaux to the shoulder-blade, if his quick sword had not warded off the death stroke. It was then that, with lightning rapidity, before his adversary could recover his guard, which had been disturbed by the momentum of his blow, the Creole, by a rapid half circle, regained his, and with a well-directed *coup de pointe à droite* (having taken care to keep his adversary to the right) plunged his blade through the body of the French officer, who reeled in his saddle, fell, and was picked up senseless and bleeding by his friends. He died soon afterward."

Another duel on horseback, which was much talked about at the time, was fought with cavalry sabres by Alexander Cuvillier and Lieutenant Schomberg of the United States Cavalry. They had a quarrel, which terminated in a street fight, the result of which was that Cuvillier was wounded by Schomberg with a sword cane.

As soon as he had sufficiently recovered from his injuries, Cuvillier sent Messrs. Émile Lasère and Mandeville de Marigny with a cartel to Schomberg, who immediately accepted it, choosing broadswords, on horseback. They fought on D'Aquin Green, a little above Carrollton. After the second pass, Cuvillier made a vicious cut at his adversary, which, falling short, or being otherwise miscalculated, severed the jugular vein of Schomberg's horse, that fell and died on the spot.

This put a stop to the duel.

Sometime afterward Alexander Cuvillier died, and his brother, Adolphe Cuvillier, who had charge of his succession, received a letter from Schomberg. This letter recalled the duel, saying that the horse which had been killed in the fight belonged to his Colonel, that it was worth five hundred dollars, which he had had to reimburse, and hinting that it would certainly be proper for Mr. Cuvillier to pay him back at least half that amount. Mr. Adolphe Cuvillier wrote back, saying that his brother was dead, and that he had accepted the succession, and had charge of all his brother's business, this quarrel, of course, included; that he would cheerfully send a check for two hundred and fifty dollars, as testamentary executor of his brother, and as such, would also be exceedingly willing to pay full price for another horse if the lieutenant agreed to renew the fight with him. He never received any answer.

It would seem that Donatien Augustin, who was later in his life judge of one of the district courts, General of the Louisiana Legion, and one of the most highly esteemed and conservative of our citizens, was lucky in the few duels in which the temper of the period caused him to be engaged. Two of his adversaries each killed his man in

subsequent encounters : Pedesclaux, as above stated, and Saintmanat, with whom he harmlessly exchanged one or two pistol shots in a slight quarrel, who afterward killed Azenor Bosque in a duel, also with pistols, and subsequently, with similar weapons, grievously wounded Commodore Riebaud.

The following affair, which he had with Alexander Grailhe, is told here on account of the interest connected with Grailhe's luck in a subsequent encounter. The cause of the quarrel is at this day of small concern. Suffice it to say that after the insult, or rather provocation, had passed (for in those days gentlemen rarely *insulted*), and each was sure that a deadly meeting was to follow, the two gentlemen travelled together in a carriage with ladies, who wondered, after the duel, at their mutual affability during the whole trip.

They met with colichemardes at the oaks. Grailhe, highly bred, and under, as he deemed, grievous provocation, as soon as the weapons had been crossed, and the impressive *Allez, messieurs*, had been pronounced, lost his temper and furiously charged his antagonist. Augustin, cool, collected, and agile, parried and evaded each savage thrust, till finally, by a *temps d'arrêt*, judiciously interpolated into a terrific lunge of Grailhe, pierced him through and through the chest.

One of the lungs had been perforated. Grailhe remained for a long time between life and death, and at last came out of his room, but bent forward like an old man. The physicians despaired of his life, for an internal abscess, which could scarcely be reached, had formed ; and it was now for the wounded man only a question of time and chance. The latter divinity came to his rescue in a most remarkable and original manner.

He quarrelled with Colonel Mandeville de Marigny, and they met at the oaks. The weapons were pistols at fifteen paces, two shots each, advance five paces, and fire at will. Grailhe advanced three or four steps, Marigny remaining perfectly still, and both fired simultaneously. Grailhe fell, pierced through the body, exactly in the place of his former and yet unhealed wound, the ball lodging directly against the spinal column. Marigny, pistol in hand, advanced, cool as a piece of marble, to the utmost limit marked out, when Grailhe, who was suffering dire pain, exclaimed :

"Achevez moi!"

Marigny lifted his pistol high above his head, and firing into the air, said :

"I never strike a fallen enemy!"

Grailhe was carried home more of a corpse than a living being ; but, sooth to say, the ball had pierced the smouldering abscess that threatened his life, had opened an exit for its poisonous accumula-

tions, and the wounded man, some time afterward, walked out of his room as erect and stately as ever. Thus for once did the messenger of death bring life and health.

Poor Frank Yates was less fortunate in his affair with Joe Chandler, some time in 1859. A lie, reported by an injudicious friend, brought a cartel, and it was agreed that the young men should fight with duelling pistols at ten paces. The fight was to take place in the afternoon, under the oaks at the Metairie; but the duellists were interfered with there by the police, so they repaired to a place farther on, near Bayou St. John, whence they were again driven away by the officers of the law. It was now getting late; a drizzling rain had set in, and it was urgent to bring matters to an issue before night; so principals and seconds jumped out of their carriages at a place somewhere at the foot of Bienville Street, where preparations were promptly made for the fight and the principals placed in position.

Night was coming on apace, and the drizzling rain added to the gloomy and desolate appearance of the surroundings. The pistols were loaded, handed to the principals, and the command given to fire. Two shots were exchanged with no effect, and an attempt was made by Chandler's seconds to settle the matter; but this was resisted by the opposite side, and a third shot became necessary. Both fired at the same time, and Frank Yates fell. Chandler's ball had struck him in the side, ranging upward through the bowels. He died a few days afterward.

The population of New Orleans has always been fond of music, and particularly of the opera, which in its palmy days it lavishly sustained. The Creoles, extreme in all things, carried this taste to the limits of passion. Many a deadly duel grew out of simple discussions over the merits of individual singers. It would take a volume to recite the various quarrels that were engendered by the opera. Journalistic critics, of course, who published their opinions, had to bear the brunt and be ever ready to back an article with steel or lead.

Many still living, and even who would not like to be called old, remember two delightful *artistes* who flourished here during the season of 1857-58, under Mr. Boudousquié's administration; namely, Mlle. Bourgeois, a contralto of great dramatic talent, and Mme. Colson, one of the wittiest and most fascinating of light sopranis. It must be added that Mme. Colson had replaced as *chanteuse légère* a Mme. Préti-Baille, who was a very pretty woman, a singer of great technical accomplishments, but cold as an icicle, and therefore not popular with the general public. She was a great friend of Mlle. Bourgeois. It is useless to add that there was no love lost between Mme. Colson and the contralto.

This Mlle. Bourgeois made it a point to show, on the occasion of her benefit night, for which she had chosen Victor Massé's opera of *Galathée*, when, instead of asking Mme. Colson, in whose *répertoire* the title rôle undoubtedly was, she went outside of the company, and asked Mme. Préti-Baille, who was then in the city giving music lessons, to sing the part. The announcement created great feeling among opera-goers, and was warmly discussed in the clubs. Mme. Colson was very much liked and admired, and her partisans, feeling outraged at the insult, as they deemed, thus put upon her, swore that Préti-Baille would not be permitted to sing. The friends of Bourgeois swore on their side that it was not, after all, the woman's fault, and that those who hissed her would rue it. That threat was sufficient in those days to create an army of hissers.

The matter, as before stated, was largely discussed at the clubs, on the streets, and at the *salle d'armes*. In one of the latter places Emile Bozonier and Gaston de Coppens, two of the most popular young fellows of the day, were with a number of others practising with foils, or lounging. Of course Bourgeois' benefit night was the topic of conversation. Some said that Préti-Baille should be hissed, others that it would be a shame. Bozonier said nothing (it is probable that he did not care much one way or the other). Suddenly Coppens, turning to him, said :

"What do you say about this, Bozonier?"

"I," was the deliberate answer, "think that a man who goes to the theatre for the purpose of hissing a woman is a blackguard and should have his face slapped!"

Coppens grew pale.

"Do you know," he retorted, "that I have proclaimed myself one of those who will hiss that woman down?"

"No," Bozonier replied, "but I nevertheless mean what I said."

"Would you slap a man's face who hisses on that occasion?"

"If he is close enough to me, I assuredly will," answered Bozonier, now thoroughly aroused and interested.

"Well, you will have your hands full," said Coppens, and the matter was dropped.

And so the benefit night came on. The opera house on Orleans Street was crowded to suffocation, and it was evident, from the excited and determined looks of the young men present, that a fire was smouldering all through that audience. Mlle. Bourgeois was the Pygmalion, and nothing special happened until the curtain covering the statue was drawn aside and Galathée began to live and move.

Then there arose such an antagonistic cacophony of hisses from one side, and applause from the other, as has rarely been heard in an

opera house. Cold as marble and all as white, but apparently unmoved, the singer, amid the growing tumult, which never ceased till the curtain fell, sang all her numbers undaunted, braver than any hero who ever repelled an assault or led a charge. And so on all along, also, during the second act and until the final drop of the curtain.

Little, indeed, did anybody that evening hear of Massé's music, most of the ladies, of course, having deserted long before the end. In that encounter of hisses and plaudits several quarrels were picked up by the young bloods, which ended at the oaks or elsewhere, but we are now preoccupied with only one.

Coppens had hissed, and Bozonier had seen him, but they were separated by a dense crowd; only their eyes met and a sign of defiance was passed. A day or so afterward, Bozonier met Coppens, who crossed over the street to him, smiling under a sneer, and accosted him with :

“ Well, Bozonier, what about those slaps ? ”

Bonzonier was of herculean strength, and his answer was a buffet which sent Coppens sprawling in the street. Quick as lightning, and agile as a cat, Coppens got up and grasped for his weapons, but Bozonier was too powerful for him, and soon had placed it out of his power to use either knife or pistol. A few days afterwards, Bozonier had received a challenge, and being skilled neither in the use of rapier nor pistol, chose cavalry sabres.

They fought at the oaks, within pistol shot of Allard's tomb.

Bonzonier was a trifle above the middle height, but remarkably active and muscular. Coppens was small in stature, but wiry and of feline activity. Both were dandies in dress and lions in courage.

In a twinkling the coats were on the grass. The principals were placed in position, and the usual recommendations made by the seconds, comprising the instructions that the fight was to last till one of the adversaries should be completely disabled.

The first pass was terrible; Bozonier engaged Coppens in tierce, made a feint, then taking advantage of the movement of his adversary to parry, rapidly passed over his sword and made a swinging stroke at him, which would inevitably have severed his head from his body, had not Coppens, by a timely movement, warded off partly the effect of the blow. But there was vigor to spare in the cut, for Coppens fell, the blood spurting like water from a terrible gash on the cheek and a severe cut in the chest.

It was lucky for him at that moment that Bozonier's generous soul prevented him following up his advantage, for he had his foe at his mercy. He paused till Coppens rose. This rise was the spring of a wounded tiger; a furious *coup de pointe* penetrated Bozonier's sword-

arm above the elbow, cutting the muscles and disabling him. Then Coppens had it all his own way, though his plucky adversary did his best, handicapped as he was by his now almost useless arm, which could scarcely hold the weapon. The seconds did not see his terrible position in time, neither could his furious foe appreciate it, and before the former could interfere, Bozonier had received two deep cuts in the chest, a terrible slash in the left arm, and a fearful *coup de pointe* in the side. He was bleeding at every pore.

Happily for his many friends, his strong constitution saved him, and he lives yet, though four years of war, superadded to this fearful hashing, have left but a comparative wreck from his once splendid physique.

Coppens, who was afterward colonel of the Louisiana Zouaves, died like a soldier at the battle of Seven Pines, flag in hand, forty yards in front of his command, while gallantly leading a Florida regiment, after his own had been cut to pieces.

At the period referred to, the opera season lasted six months, and such was the inclination of our people for this kind of music that the interest remained unabated to the end. So a month or so after the duel just narrated, a violent critique from the pen of Emile Hiriart, who was writing for the *True Delta*, appeared in the columns of that sheet. Hiriart, who was a very trenchant writer, had smote, as it seems, right and left, and spared no one.

The very same day he received two challenges—one from Mr. Placide Canonge, now the highly polished art and musical critic of the New Orleans *Bee*, and one from Mr. E. Locquet, both of whom had taken exceptions to the article. He accepted both.

Mr. Canonge's challenge having priority, he was first attended to. They fought with pistols at ten yards, and exchanged three shots, each shot of Hiriart's cutting Mr. Canonge's clothes, and that gentleman receiving those leaden warnings with the utmost composure and the sweetest of smiles. Their seconds thereupon withdrew them, and the matter between them was settled.

A few days after, Hiriart was out again with his faithful seconds, this time to answer Locquet's challenge.

There was more underlying this meeting than the conventional chivalry of the "point of honor." There was hate between the two, and a deadly purpose, as was evidenced by the choice of weapon—double-barrelled shotguns loaded with ball, distance forty paces. In the hands of Creole gentlemen, who were all practised hunters, this weapon was the deadliest. It was rare that both parties survived an encounter of this kind. Often the two adversaries were killed, and almost invariably one was carried away from the field a corpse.

Seconds rarely permitted the use of the shotgun, unless under the gravest provocation.

The preliminaries of a duel are always solemn, but here an atmosphere of awe pervaded the scene, as, in silence, the ground was measured, the principals placed in position, the weapons loaded and handed to them by their seconds. Both were calm and apparently unmoved; but the set chin, the firm lip, the eye coldly gleaming, told of deadly passion and intent.

Hiriart's friends had tossed, as is customary, for the word of command, and won it. In a close contest like this one—for both were excellent shots and men of recognized nerve—this was considered a great advantage.

The word was given: "Fire! one, two, three!"

Hiriart fired between the command and "one"; Locquet at the word "one," but it was not a second's difference.

Locquet turned completely around, leaped in the air, and fell flat on his face, without a word or cry.

Hiriart made a half pivot, exclaimed "I am done for," and fell on his hands apparently lifeless.

The mutual friends and surgeons rushed to their principals. Locquet was dead. The ball had penetrated the brain.

Hiriart's life had been saved, it appears, by his quick firing, which did not allow his adversary time enough to raise his weapon to a sufficient elevation, for his shot was dead in line. The ball had ploughed the ground within about fifteen feet of Hiriart, then glanced up and struck him in the stomach. A welt of the size of a duck's egg was disclosed on his body, black and protruding, while the skin was but slightly abraded; the ball was found in the lining of his coat. He recovered after a few days' seclusion.

Several memorable duels with shotguns are chronicled with letters of blood, among which are the unfortunate affair in which John de Buys killed young Castaing; the one in which Alpuente, fighting also with De Buys, was saved from death by a twenty-dollar gold piece which he had forgotten in his vest pocket, and which arrested the too true course of the ball; the duel in which Nora killed Dauphin; the affair between Arthur Guillotte and Piseros, in which the latter had a lung perforated and was disabled; the fatal meeting between George White and Packenham Le Blanc, in which Le Blanc was killed outright; the meeting in which General Sewell killed Thomas Cane, and other fatal affairs.

A duel which, at the time, created quite a sensation, was the affair between John de Buys and Aristide Gérard, in which the former received fourteen wounds at Gérard's hands. They fought with

colichemardes. De Buys, though the best of fellows, was fearfully quick-tempered and had fought some twenty-four duels, with more or less success, three or four of which with his mortal foe, Octave Le Blanc. The quarrel with Gérard happened at Belanger's Billiard Hall, at the corner of Orleans and Royal Streets.

A fatal duel with colichemardes was that in which Amaron Ledoux killed a Frenchman named De Chèvremont.

It would be possible to go on thus indefinitely, but, for the purposes of this writing, the cases cited are more than sufficient.

Whatever modernists may say, with great reason, against the duello, for it led to many deplorable abuses, there was more in the institution than a mere agreement to fight, or even than in that relic of mediæval barbarism, the "trial by combat." It was in many instances an impediment to bloodshed. Friends quarrelled in momentary excitement, and instead of seeking personal explanation, which, in high-strung people, is impossible under provocation, intrusted mutual friends with the demand of satisfaction. If the seconds were wise, calm explanation would follow, and the trifle was adjusted. The duties of the seconds were of paramount importance, for they assumed every responsibility, and were made answerable for the life or honor of the principals at the bar of public opinion.

The duello, however, had a refining influence, for every gentleman was forced to be guarded in his language and behavior, as he well knew that bare brutal courage was not sufficient to carry him triumphantly through. It is true that a gentleman was obliged to fight, but he had to fight well—that is, for reason, and under plausible and legitimate conditions, stanch enough to hold the current of public opinion. Otherwise he was quickly ostracised, and society sustained all who refused to cross swords or exchange shots with him. The code was very strict. You could not fight a man whom you could not ask to your house.

This is not an apology of the duello, which is now out of fashion and even become absurd, if it were only by reason of the almost total indifference of public opinion in its regard. It does not much matter nowadays if a man fights or not.

We have other ways of proving ourselves gentlemen.

The purpose here is only to recall a brilliant, though not altogether faultless epoch of Louisiana history, to show what reason our fathers had in their madness, and point out the lessons that may be profitably gathered by discriminating minds under the leafy shades of the oaks.