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P R A C T I C E o f B O X I N G.

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[ Price ONE SHILLING. ]

A  
L E T T E R

ON THE

*PRACTICE of BOXING,*

ADDRESSED TO THE

KING, LORDS, and COMMONS.

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By the Rev. EDWARD BARRY, A. M. & M. D.

CHAPLAIN to the LORD BISHOP of KILDARE.

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MDCCLXXXIX.

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T O

Sir WATKIN LEWES, Knt.

And M. P. for the CITY of LONDON,

COLONEL OF THE HONOURABLE ARTILLERY COMPANY,  
OF THE BLUE REGIMENT,

And COMMANDING OFFICER of the LONDON BRIGADES;

*This LETTER to the LEGISLATIVE BODY,*

ON THE

BRUTAL PRACTICE of BOXING,

IN TESTIMONY OF

His Fidelity and Attachment to the Interest and Prosperity of  
the great City he represents,

The Dignity she has lately acquired by his MILITARY EXERTIONS to  
make useful and respectable a large Body of Men for her Protection,

AND IN SINCERE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF

*His many other beneficent and social Virtues, in public & private Life,*

IS HERE PRESENTED,

By his highly-honoured,

Most obedient and humble Servant,

EDWARD BARRY.

Richmond-Buildings, }  
1st December, 1789. }

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A  
L E T T E R  
ADDRESSED  
TO THE LEGISLATIVE BODY  
OF  
THIS KINGDOM.

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*Most illustrious Guardians,*

THE established order, and good decorum of society, have been, of late, much disturbed, and nearly set at defiance. Deliberate boxing matches have been publicly exhibited, in direct violation of every law, of humanity, and common decency: these shameful irregularities have not merely been suffered, but report says, have received a sanction from men whose duty as  
good

good citizens, but especially as magistrates, it was to have prevented them.

Pugilism has revived its name, is much encouraged, and has acquired a scandalous popularity. New bargains are daily making for combats of this sort; scarce a newspaper but what keeps alive the subject! the print-shops disgust the eye, by holding out in full view the naked portraits of the bruisers; and almost everywhere the ears are annoyed with some remarks on this brutal fashion: It can scarcely be hoped, therefore, that such invasions will either be wholly prevented or lessened; but rather, it is to be feared, that they will increase, if the legislative power does not step forth, either to prescribe new laws, or else command a strict exertion of those already framed, for the maintenance of the public quiet! With such a hope, I have here ventured to address  
the

the legislators of my country ; and hope they will accept as an apology for such a freedom, the necessity of some appeal for regulation.

But, since the antiquity of boxing has been cried up, from the manners of Greece and Rome, and its advantages contended for, by shewing the valour of an Englishman, I shall, in the course of this letter, endeavour to shew, that whatever might have been the opinions, or the necessities, of those barbarous times, such examples ought not, at this time, to hold good ;—that they are repugnant to the laws and maxims of a civilized state—that they evidence but little if any courage—discover much barbarity—and that they are not instrumental to any service, but are certainly productive of many evils.

The Greeks, we very well know, had their public games, which consisted in five exercises—Leaping—Running—Throwing the discus—Wrestling—and, Boxing with the cestus; all of which were held in high estimation among them. Indeed, all such exercises as promised to make them hardy, and fit for war, to which they were perpetually exposed, were every one of them particularly countenanced: in their other games, the Olympian, the Pythian, and the Nemean, besides several others, which were all solemnly observed, in honour and perpetuation of some great action, either the Olympian game, to Olympian Jupiter, after his victory over the sons of Titan, at which time Mars is said to have been crowned for boxing, and Apollo to have been superior to Mercury at running; or the Pythian games, which are said to have been in honour of Apollo their founder, when he had

over-

overcome Python, a serpent or cruel tyrant: but it is evident, that all their exercises were intended to emulate their youth to courage and to fame. Ovid, alluding to this, says,

“ *His juvenum quicumque, manu, pedibusve, rotave*

“ *Vicerat, esculeæ capiebat frondis honorem*

“ *Nondum laurus erat.*”

At these games, great care was taken to prevent all unfair and underhand dealings, no treachery between the competitors was suffered under pain of the severest fine; and each contender for fame was obliged to swear, that he had employed ten whole months in preparatory exercises.

Such were the customs of ancient Greece; they held themselves in continual readiness for war.—Aristotle speaking of Greece in its more barbarous state, says “ That they



“ were a barbarous and uncivilized nation ;  
 “ that they thought they had a just title to  
 “ whatever they could plunder, and re-  
 “ signed their prey whenever a more pow-  
 “ erful enemy made his claim.”—Plutarch  
 likewise says, “ That at this time it was  
 “ dangerous to travel by land to Athens,  
 “ as no place in the country was free from  
 “ thieves and murderers ; for that age pro-  
 “ duced a sort of men—for strength of arms,  
 “ swiftness of feet, and vigour of body, ex-  
 “ celling the ordinary race of men : yet  
 “ making use of these gifts of nature to no-  
 “ thing good or profitable to mankind ;  
 “ but rejoicing and taking pride in insolence,  
 “ and pleasing themselves in the commission  
 “ of barbarous and inhuman cruelties\*.”

The Romans at length imitated, and even improved, the gymnastic, athletic, and spor-

\* *Vide* Potter's *Antiq.* page 22d, vol. II.

tive games of the Greeks. They had besides, in their amphitheatres, gladiators, who were usually slaves, and fought from mere necessity; some who were not slaves, yet for a livelihood, would hire themselves for this purpose.

It was at one time a custom among the Romans to sacrifice slaves, at the funerals of persons of rank; and rather than they should be instantaneously killed, they were permitted to fight against each other, and he who killed his adversary, preserved his own life. The people were so fond of these amusements, that not only emperors, but all rich citizens, and candidates for any public office, courted their favour, by frequently treating them with these bloody entertainments.

Julius Cæsar, in his ædileship, is said to have diverted the people with three hundred  
dred

dred and twenty couple of gladiators.—It was usual for the master of these wretches, to make them swear, before the battle, that they would fight till death; and if they did not succeed, they were tortured to death, either by fire or by the sword, or some other cruelty.

From slaves this inhuman exercise spread even to people of rank and condition; however, Roman emperors gradually lessened this brutal play, and confined it only to certain occasions: indeed, the republic of Rome, when Cataline's conspiracy broke out, imprisoned these gladiators, lest they should join the disaffected party; for such was the caution and suspicious dread of the senate, that those who had before spilt blood for sport, might turn the tables, and take the advantageous opportunity of spilling theirs in earnest.

**More**

More might be advanced to prove the barbarities of both Greeks and Romans; but we must admit, in extenuation of their baser entertainments, the very unpolished state that they were once in, wholly unacquainted with the modern refined arts of peace and war: they were in continual broils with themselves, and perpetually attacked by surrounding enemies; hence their tempers became ferocious, savage, and unjust; yet notwithstanding all this, luxury and dissipation at length crept in among them, which effeminated their manners, and thus they became the conquest and prey of others.

In this short retrospect of Greek and Roman customs it may be fairly discerned, that whatever was once a plea for such exercises, will by no means hold good in a more enlightened day, and in a society of civilized manners.

The

The laws of England, to which we owe obedience, protect every man, as well in the honest acquisition as in the peaceable possession of his property: as the good government under which he lives, is the guardian of his person and his rights, it likewise claims to be the sole avenger of his wrongs. There is scarce any thing which human wisdom could either foresee or suggest, that is not contrived for the justice—for the comfort—and, for the discipline of society at large; the meanest member of it, in point of justice and equity, claims peerage with the highest rank and fortune: we should therefore be jealous of such good laws, and tenacious of these enviable and comfortable privileges, and hold him an enemy to public and private ease, who wantonly violates the one, or unnecessarily disturbs the other.

English-

Englishmen are not born with the spirit of savageness nor of barbarism, nor are they introduced to it either by necessity or by example; such therefore among them as have acquired such a temper, must not only have been trained up in the most abject vulgarity and ignorance, but by habit and propensity have at last exchanged the feelings of a man for those of a brute: hence, such monsters are intruded on the better part of community, and under the pretext of valour and of bravery, impose on the credulous, and annoy the peaceable.

When men are legally called forth to battle, in the defence of their country, and in a just cause, it is a great, and it is a noble undertaking;—and to make the best defence we possibly can, when, either the property, or the person, of ourselves, or our neighbour, is endangered, and when out  
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of

of the reach of better help, is both natural and justifiable: but designedly to stir up matter of contention and strife, is both dishonourable and unmanly!—and the laws have not scrupled to brand him as a *murderer*, who, in a premeditated combat, shall kill his adversary; and this equally applies to the boxer as it does to the duellist.—The enormous guilt of murder is not confined to the combatants themselves, but is entailed on their seconds and abettors; stains them with the same opprobrium, and, of course, makes them liable to the same exemplary punishment.

Sir Edward Coke describeth murder to be “when a person of sound memory and  
 “discretion unlawfully killeth any reason-  
 “able creature in being, and under the  
 “King’s peace, with malice afore-thought,  
 “either express or implied.” And Judge  
 Black-

Blackstone observes, “ That this definition  
 “ takes in the case of deliberate duelling,  
 “ where both parties meet avowedly with  
 “ an intent to murder, thinking it their duty  
 “ as gentlemen, and claiming it as their  
 “ privilege to wanton with their own lives,  
 “ and those of their fellow-creatures, with-  
 “ out any warrant or authority from any  
 “ power, either divine or human, but in  
 “ direct contradiction to the laws of both  
 “ God and man ; and therefore the law has  
 “ justly fixed the crime and punishment of  
 “ murder on them, and their seconds also :  
 “ And, if upon a sudden quarrel, two per-  
 “ sons fight, and one of them kills the  
 “ other, this is manslaughter ; but if there  
 “ be a sufficient cooling time for passion to  
 “ *subside*, and reason to interpose, and the  
 “ person so provoked kills the other, this is  
 “ deliberate revenge, and not heat of blood ;  
 “ and accordingly amounts to murder: and



“ if two or more come together, to do an  
 “ unlawful act against the King’s peace, of  
 “ which the probable consequence might be  
 “ bloodshed ; as to *beat a man*, to *commit a*  
 “ riot, or to rob a park, and one of them  
 “ kills a man, it is *murder in them all* ; be-  
 “ cause of the unlawful act, the *malitia*  
 “ *præcogitata*, or evil intended before-  
 “ hand\*.”—From opinions, therefore, of  
 such high authority, it must be an hazardous  
 adventure even to witness outrages of this  
 description ; and much more so, of course,  
 in those who are manifestly interested in  
 them : seeing that if no better principle  
 should make a man to abhor these inhuman  
 sports, than a mere dread of what may hap-  
 pen to himself, since he may, perchance,  
 bring down on his head the guilt and ven-  
 geance due to a murderer : but even sup-

\* *Vide* Blackstone’s Com. ch. 14, p. 199, 191, 200.

posing that he should escape both, on what ground does the advocate for boxing rest his cause, or justify the measure? Will he tell me, that it is the good old English way of fighting, and keeps up the bravery of an Englishman?—That it may be the old English way of fighting, or not be, is hardly worth contending about; but I will go a step further, and allow, no civilized country whatever to be so much distinguished for this mode, as England is:—but does it follow, that either the singularity or the antiquity of any breach, either of law or of decorum, deserves imitation?—If it be so insisted on, Cain is the first example we read of; he first glutted a malicious soul in his brother's blood; and whether the Englishman with his fist, thinks himself a better copy of the original, than the Frenchman with his sword, the Italian with the stiletto, or the Spaniard with his poniard, is a matter of too base an enquiry.

**If**

If it be said again, that this kind of fighting is a proof of courage, and keeps alive the bravery of an Englishman—in these points I must beg to differ: Courage is a generous power of the mind, which gives support under a sense of danger; when exercised in a good cause, it is a virtue; but ceases to be noble, when employed in a bad one. True courage disdains to be petulant; it neither seeks a danger, nor shrinks to meet it.

If to every hazard and danger which men wantonly rush into, the name of courage is to be given, that illustrious title would soon be vilely tarnished; since the dauntless warrior, the highwayman, and the common midnight plunderer, each of whom exposes his life to danger, would, in such a case, share alike the honour: But courage and fortitude are the result of coolness and uniformity,

formity, under the influence of a proper sense of honour, and in a good cause. It is the *apparent justice* of a matter which gives the genuine courage: the other is only usurped and counterfeited. It was the supposed justice of the cause which inspirited the Greeks and Romans to their combats: they imagined their different deities to have presided at them, and to have determined victory in favour of that cause which was in the right: But in the battles which are now immediately alluded to, there is not the least shadow of either justice, necessity, or advantage, to provoke the contest. Justice cannot be concerned in it, since neither of the parties has been injured; and we are told, that when they strip for the combat, they feel no malice, resentment, nor ill-will, one toward the other;—and, so perfect in friendship are they, and yet such volunteers at the same  
time

time for the fight, that before its commencement, they give the token of mutual harmony, by co-joining of hands: so that, from their own account, and behaviour, there can be neither justice nor necessity in the fight. It must be, therefore, to say nothing worse, the engagement of fools, to hazard life for no reason—to fight without any provocation, and—to be in a posture of defence, where no harm is intended.

But the necessity of this fight is attempted to be justified on the score of self-defence; that as men are daily exposed to affronts and personal assaults, it is necessary for them to acquire some knowledge of defending themselves; and, as the fist is less dangerous than either the sword or the pistol, it is consequently a faster and better mode of redress.

But,

But, first, it does not appear at all necessary, that any person, not officially called upon, should be at *pains* to instruct himself in any way of defence ; and experience has proved, that the more ignorant in this respect a man is, the fewer quarrels he is exposed to ; for the very conscious possession of a fighting talent, too often gives presumption with it—and that presumption stirs up broils and battle.

In all cases of emergency, where immediate defence is necessary, Nature, as in a thousand other instances, is ever ready to exert her best : Besides, admitting the plea of self-defence as necessary—boxing is a very unfair mode. Scarcely can you find two persons, but what there will appear an evident advantage in one, more than in the other ; and supposing the abler one should have, in addition to his strength, the skill of fight-

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ing,

ing, the life of the one must be greatly endangered, if not sacrificed, whilst the *person* of the other is scarcely harmed:—In this particular, it has not even the apparent fairness of a pistol adjustment; for in boxing, there must always be a disproportion some way or other, which is not so manifest in a duel; and it is highly probable, that a fear of *what may be the immediate consequence* of an engagement with the pistol, prevents a more rapid addition to the already too numerous catalogue of duellists! Daringly to rush into the presence of Almighty God, uncalled for! and leave a society on earth, which has not deserved the insult of despising her laws;—nor parents, nor friends, nor children, have provoked such inhumanity, as abruptly to leave them—comfortless! are a few daggers, which I beg the duellist courageously to apply to his heart, when he reclines on his pillow, and  
then

then to ask him, *if he can fight?*—But my business at present is not so much with him, as the boxer; and therefore I resume that subject, with only this remark, That if, on the principle of self-defence, boxing be recommended, on a supposition of running but a small risk, it would be adopted on every trifling occasion; and instead of lessening, it would increase the evil.

The common people, who are principally in possession of the art, and who by nature are best fitted for the execution, would, either for profit or fame, have continual fights; and inasmuch, as a blow is sometimes as effectual a death as the application of a bullet, it is highly probable, that the victims to boxing would exceed by fifty times, those who are now murdered by the pistol.



If exercise be wanting for the amusement of the lower order, let them adopt such as is not sanguinary—and at the same time, manly and hardy; such as—running, coiting, &c. as did the Greeks and Romans; or any other good athletic game; but let not the infamy of boxing prostitute longer the name of courage—*that* is a virtue of the mind, and does not exist in gigantic form, or muscular power, else the ox and the ass would claim a superiority; nor is it evidenced by agility of body—by every quirk and shift; even the good old English fighting, I appeal to Englishmen, ever considered those little fugitives, as mean and timid. Justice! that sacred name, cannot, it is not, called in question here!

Self-defence! a dangerous, *useless*, and unfair one!—where neither necessity, nor advantage, has been proved; and if none  
of

of these can plead for the fight, it must be an unprincipled one;—and he is the ruffian and not the man, who engages in it! Such sort of defence can never serve a country in time of necessity; we do not determine the events of nations by combats of the fist; it is the discipline of a courageous army, and an undaunted navy, which stamps a lustre on British nobleness.

If therefore, in these several instances, boxing is so contrary to the maxims of a civilized government, and is neither directed by courage, necessity, nor by advantage to society; it follows, that these bloody scenes must be a brutal sport, unworthy of Englishmen!

These spectacles afford no entertainment to the warrior, or the valiant man—to the  
man

man of refinement—to the scholar—or, really, to the gentleman! No, it gives pleasure principally to those, who are charmed with the uproars of a bull-baiting, or the cruelties of a cock-fighting; minds of this cast, crowd to the field of carnage, and like leeches, thrive on the blood that is spilt!

What more degrading, what more filthy an exhibition does Nature scarcely present, than, two human beings, defacing the image with which the Almighty favoured them, and that with more fury, than even would the mastiff brutes to each other! The beasts of the earth, who may witness it, could they but reason, would contend for their superiority in creation!

It is high time, then, for the Legislature to interpose, and put an effectual stop to the career of these dishonourable exercises,  
which

which occasion, besides its brutality, so many other evils.

First, Boxing-matches encourage *idleness*—the fruitful root of every vice : money is gambled away, to the ruin of some, and the dissipation of others. The wealth which these fighters are said to accumulate, is a great temptation to many to attempt the same ; and where inclination is brought on, instruction offers at the same time ! Schools for this purpose are now open—for the benefit of the rising generation !—treatises are written on the *Art*, for as such it now ranks—and the praises of the conquerors are sung about the streets !

Inducements such as these, are too powerful not to have great influence on unpolished minds ; and are sufficient to persuade them, to throw up their useful labours in  
society,

society, and join the numerous list of trading boxers.

In fine, these enormities are too pregnant with every sort of mischief, longer to be borne with ; for they promise nothing less than rendering more *callous* the feelings, and making still more *dissolute* the manners of the lower order of the people, as well as the gradual extinction of that *bravery*, and *humanity*, which at present so much adorn the British character ; and if greatness or goodness be wanting to encourage others to withdraw themselves from these unworthy pursuits, they have lately heard of *One*, who, as he is in almost every other instance so deservedly copied and admired, should not fail to command that respect so particularly due to him in this. To the honour of the Lord Chief Justice, he has expressed his greatest displeasure and resentment

ment against those, who, in spite of all decency, shall treat the laws by which they are protected, with such wilful indignity; and it is truly praise-worthy in those magistrates, who, from a fidelity to their trust, *a respect to his Majesty's late proclamation for the suppression of immorality*, and every other becoming principle, prevented, as far as their power could extend, such abominable offences. It remains, however, with the wisdom, the virtue, and the dignity of the legislative body to crush effectually this great evil; and by giving a death-blow to its further progress, they may save the lives of many subjects, and preserve the happiness, the peace, and good order of society at large.

It was in the full assurance of the temper of that great body, to listen to every just cause of complaint, which emboldened my

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pen to utter it; and having so done, it is here laid down, *most illustrious Guardians*, with the profoundest submission and respect,

By your truly humble,

and most obedient servant,

**EDWARD BARRY.**

Richmond Buildings,  
Dean Street, Soho.  
1st December, 1789.