

This is a 1907 exchange of articles between Alvaro Calzado, fencing aficionado and member of the staff of writers of ABC, and Maitre Adelardo Sanz. Translation by Leonardo Bacarreza, Ph.D.

Bouts and Tournaments
ABC, October 13, 1907, p. 8

Twenty years ago there were only bouts. Today only a few bouts are organized and, in exchange, we get many tournaments and matches. We are living in practical times. When we watch an encounter between fencers, we want to know who won and by how many touches, or, conversely, how many times the loser has been touched.

But, has the art of fencing made any progress? Are present-day fencers stronger than those of twenty years ago?

My honest answer is no. Back in the day fencing was an art. Those devoted to it, besides paying attention to the aesthetics of an execution according to the rules, and to the combinations that were being conceived in their brains, did not pay as much attention to touches as nowadays. Overcoming a difficulty, even if such difficulty had been created by the fencer himself, was more valuable than a victory translated in numbers.

That was the way of thinking of Antonio Ezpeleta, who was, at the ending of the Second Empire and the beginning of the Third Republic, the best fencer in Paris. That was also the way of thinking of our compatriot Alfonso de Aldama, deceased, if memory does not fail me, in 1898, and who was considered the strongest fencer of his time.

I have had the honor of crossing swords with both of them in several occasions, in courteous encounters, and I can affirm that I have not met afterwards any master who could match their skill.

Back then, it was necessary for a student to work eight to ten years in order to properly fence with a foil, while nowadays, with the new methods, a man in regular physical condition believes he has achieved so in six months.

Fencing has undergone an evolution, and nowadays there are more fencers than before, but they are less strong compared to the precedent generation because preparation is deficient and too rushed these days.

Maitre Jacol, who was the first to conceive an épée method, had much influence in this evolution. With the system he adopted, fencing became available for everyone. Results were achieved soon, without much work, affecting negatively the aesthetic aspect and benefiting those who wanted to defend themselves with a blade without having to work too much. That school has produced many vulgar fencers, but not a single extraordinary one.

I must confess I prefer Ezpeleta and Aldama's romanticism to the practical sense of those who fight these days in tournaments and matches.

Besides, those romantic fencers were more fearsome in the field than the current ones because the latter have despised, in general, the technique of a weapon that, in my opinion, is the basis of fencing. I am referring to the foil, whose study is indispensable.

I beg of the director of the Spanish School to add one prize to those already announced: a prize for the fencer who has fought with correction, for the one who, in the heat of combat, has stopped to think about aesthetics, even sacrificing the result in favor of correction and elegance in movement.

Would it not be possible, in fencing, to treat practical sense and aesthetics as one?

Those who have preceded us have demonstrated so.

Alvaro Calzado

On Fencing
ABC, October 30, 1907, p. 3

Maitre Adelardo Sanz submits the following article, which we publish with pleasure:

"I have read with great satisfaction the article 'Bouts and Tournaments' written by my dear friend Alvaro Calzado and published by ABC. His opinion is very important to me, because I consider him one of the four or six aficionados in Madrid who can speak about fencing with an adequate knowledge, but I feel that we do not agree regarding our opinions about foil.

"Foil is dead, and it died in Paris, the center of the *belles armes*. Even if there are still some old fencers, nobody is working on this weapon with the seriousness required to become a foilist. Kirchoffer, Rouleau, Mimiague, and all the foil eminences, who only a few years ago took any mention of the *épée* as an insult, have accepted it now, and the only reason why they have not abandoned the foil completely is all the work they have already put into learning the technique of this weapon.

"Regarding the comparison between the strength of the old and the new fencers, I am convinced that Renand and Gaudin are stronger than Ezpeleta and Aldama, but I do not find this argument especially useful. Given that both of the latter have passed away, it is not possible for us to prove it. This is the single point in which I differ from the opinion of my friend Alvaro Calzado.

"Regarding the idea of treating practical sense and beauty as one, I have also advised this. In 1903, in "El Heraldo de Madrid," I wrote:

Fencing, in my opinion, should be a rational combat, both when it is practiced with a sword and when it is practiced with a foil. Some people believe that the idea of combat excludes beauty, but this is not the case, because beauty in fencing is found in the aplomb of the fencer, in the precision of his hand, in the maintenance of the proper distance, and all of this is precisely what is needed to combat with superiority.

Épée fencing is the same as classical fencing, just substituting the foil for the *épée* and parrying hits in all lines. If the master teaches the disciple to touch and defend the face, the belly, or the arm, his game will be more varied and practical than that of foil.

"I finish by telling my friend Calzado that I will indeed concede the prize he requests for the most correct fencer when we hold the competition of "Inter-Salle Trophies," and I will destine 500 pesetas to acquire it upon agreement with him, with the sole condition that then he writes another article, just like the one that originated these bad-written lines, for the goodness of fencing and to stimulate the interest of more aficionados to this noble art.— Adelardo Sanz."

I believe I need to respond to what is said by Adelardo Sanz. I will do so briefly.

First of all, I thank you for your words, which are as kind as they are undeserved.

I sustain my opinion regarding the ancient and modern fencers. I have fenced with Ezpeleta and Aldama, and I have also done so with Joseph Renand. I do not know Gaudin, except for his reputation.

I feel glad to read that *Maitre* Sanz is of the same opinion as me with regard to the aesthetic aspect of fencing and that, attending my request, he is going to concede a prize to the most correct fencer in the contest he is organizing. Soon we will see if other *salles* in Madrid respond to Adelardo Sanz's generous initiative.

Alvaro Calzado