



ON PISTOL SHOOTING

The following three pages from an 1835 book on self defense and shooting should be read carefully and thoughtfully.

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HELPS AND HINTS - HOW TO - PROTECT LIFE AND PROPERTY.

WITH INSTRUCTIONS IN RIFLE AND PISTOL SHOOTING,

BY LT. COL. BARON DE BERENGER - LONDON - 1835

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...Having promised to give you some instructions, I must confess my conviction that little, if any, real utility devolves from the mode pursued in common, and at pistol shooting galleries especially : although it may answer as an amusement, the skill so acquired, be it ever so great, in case of need, instead of being available, will have to be laid aside ; I repeat what on a former occasion I maintained, namely, that "practice to be useful should take place in the situation, and in the very manner, in which the acquired improvement is likely to be called into action." It certainly is amusing, and it proves cleverness, when we see a person snuff a candle with a pistol ball, or cut a wafer in two, but what is the use of it? since highway robbers, housebreakers, &c. will not allow time for taking a deliberate, or rather slow, aim through sights ; in battle it would prove destructive to yourself so to do : nay, as even the duellist must not take aim aided by sights, wherefore my humble opinion is, that a pistol having a front sight only answers every useful, that is, self-protecting, purpose, provided you have acquired the habit of dropping your pistol neatly towards, or rather directly on, the object you intend to hit, all the while looking at it, rather than the pistol, and which, with very little practice, is easy enough, since the swordsman and the billiard-player hit their object by looking at it instead of looking at or along the tool. Self-defence requires rapid pistol shooting, and therefore precludes a deliberate aim along the barrel ; nor can you be certain of your usual steadiness of nerve when you look into the muzzle of a pistol presented at you, and menacing a fatal blaze, although you may make quite sure of it when the harmless blaze of a candle points out the situation of its snuff, as a candidate for your sportive fancy.

There is much more in all this than nine-tenths are candid enough to allow! The practice I advise, is to point suddenly, even with your finger, at objects, when you are alone, and

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then, shutting one eye, to look along it, before you alter its situation, to ascertain if your aim has been correct or not : by practising this for some time you will acquire much skill before you resort to the same practice with a pistol ; and which, at first, you should use without powder, and with a snapper instead of a flint, that, by pulling the trigger, and immediately after looking along the barrel, you may ascertain if, and how much, you have erred in your (for so it will become,) instinctive present. The ease and simplicity which is connected with such a mode of practising ought to become a recommendation as to a trial : accordingly, bear in mind that you ought to pull by a motion, or rather pressure, of your finger only, and not by an action of the arm ; the middle finger, instead of the forefinger, is to be preferred, (by a young beginner especially,) since the anatomical situation of its muscles is less likely to diverge your pistol by a pull at the trigger, than one from the forefinger, instead of pulling with the end of the finger, (as with a gun you ought to do;) your passing the whole of the first joint beyond the trigger is also a desirable mode, and on similar grounds.

I strongly recommend to all, and especially those who begin pistol-shooting, to practise with the left hand, in preference to the right ; it preserves the use of the right hand for purposes which the left could not be employed in ; and, the pulsation of the heart alone excepted, I see no reason why the left should not be preferred, since, to a beginner at any rate, it cannot make any difference which is practised for such a weapon.

If you are determined upon slow pistol-shooting, and on taking a laborious aim through your sights, you will find the following the best mode of succeeding. Instead of either gradually raising (as most persons do,) your pistol perpendicularly and centrally upwards from the bottom of the object you intend to hit, or dropping it from the top perpendicularly down, and over it, as others do, I advise you to make a smart present, much to the left of your mark, and high over

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it, (that is, if you shoot right handed, and reversed, if left handed ;) thereupon, and viewing the mark with attention, to draw your pistol towards the bottom corner, the one which is not under the top corner you first aimed at ; thus slowly to describe a diagonal line crossing a perpendicular one, which latter you must fancy as if falling through the mark : now, the very place where you cross by a diagonal movement, the fancied perpendicular line, will be the situation of your mark ; and which, on perceiving the smallest part of before your sight, you should instantly fire at ; or, you may make your angles shorter to move your pistol quicker, yet always diagonally over the mark in the centre ; even by a quick up-and-down motion of your pistol you will perceive that the tremulous changes from the true line are great and many, whilst the making of similar trials diagonally will convince you that you are much less subject to tremulous deviations. Having stated these particulars, I still repeat that the other, the rapid modes of pistol shooting, are by far the most desirable, for wafer shooting is no more than a skilful plaything.

A friend of mine happened to be wounded in a duel, by a very inexperienced shot, himself a " crack" wafer-shot : on being addressed thus, "How could you, who looked so steadily at him, miss so very large a man?" he replied, "You mistake; my steady look was not at him, but at his pistol, and which, just then, appeared to me even larger than himself, big as he is !" "His candour was of more use to him than his wafer skill, for it converted an antagonist into a warm and truly valuable, because highly influential and opulent, friend, for life. It may not be amiss to remind you that having given you some information as to the best use of a pistol in Letter ix., folio 125 to 128, and in Letter xi., folio 157 to 160, it may be useful to re-peruse those pages

[Here's a direct link to the whole book in PDF form. You can save a copy by clicking on the disk icon](#)

[at the top of the file. You may find the info on rifle shooting and the folk lore tips and hints to be of interest.](#)

End.