

THE FEATHER STAFF.

By VISCOUNT DILLON, V.P.S.A.

Among various weapons prohibited in Sardinia in 1723 and 1729 are mentioned "*des estocs et des épées dans les batons.*" Of the first of these, the estocs, we know that they were straight and stiff swords, used in the fifteenth century in *combats in champ clos* and generally in succeeding periods. They were only for "the point," and were certainly not of a class that could be concealed by the bearer, and consequently not of the insidious nature of daggers, stilettoes, or even the small sort of pistol which, from a *placart* or proclamation of the seventeenth century forbidding their use in the Austrian Netherlands, were known as "mouchoirs," a significant expression in connection with wiping out of a rival or enemy. Slang terms have often been used for weapons from early days, for we can hardly consider "a jolly popper" which Chaucer's Miller in the Reeve's Tale carried in his pouch as a strictly serious name for his knife. So also in 1547 Robert Bruen bequeaths "my dropper or hanger."

But the second weapon mentioned in the Sardinian proclamation might certainly be used treacherously. Sword sticks, though common and popular on the Continent, have always been looked on askance in England, save by boys. Still, the sword stick, or cane, is found not only in the West but also in the East. The *Gupti* or sword-stick (so called from the word meaning *hidden*) figures largely among Indian weapons. In the Indian Museum at South Kensington seven are mentioned by Lord Egerton in his valuable work on eastern arms. Of these, two are from Vizianagram, two from Bombay, and one from Lahore. This last one has a pistol hilt of ivory carved with low relief floriated ornaments painted and gilt, and the sheath is painted with gold floriated arabesques on a dark blue ground; it is 2 feet 11 inches long. Such a weapon might pass for a walking stick but could not be concealed.

In the Tower of London also are two *guptis*, but of most modest appearance and unsuspicious exterior.

M. L. Buttin notes that in the Bargello, Florence, is a rich sword stick of the sixteenth century, the blade bearing the name MARSON. This weapon has spring quillons. Turin¹ also has a fine example of late eighteenth-century work. But turning to a variety of the weapon in which one or more blades can, by a jerk, be ejected from the staff, we find a special name for it. In French it is known as the *Brin d'estoc* and in Italian as *Brandistocco*. A sixteenth-century example in Paris (K. 512) has a central blade of $30\frac{3}{4}$ inches. On each of the side blades appears the name DE LA GATA.

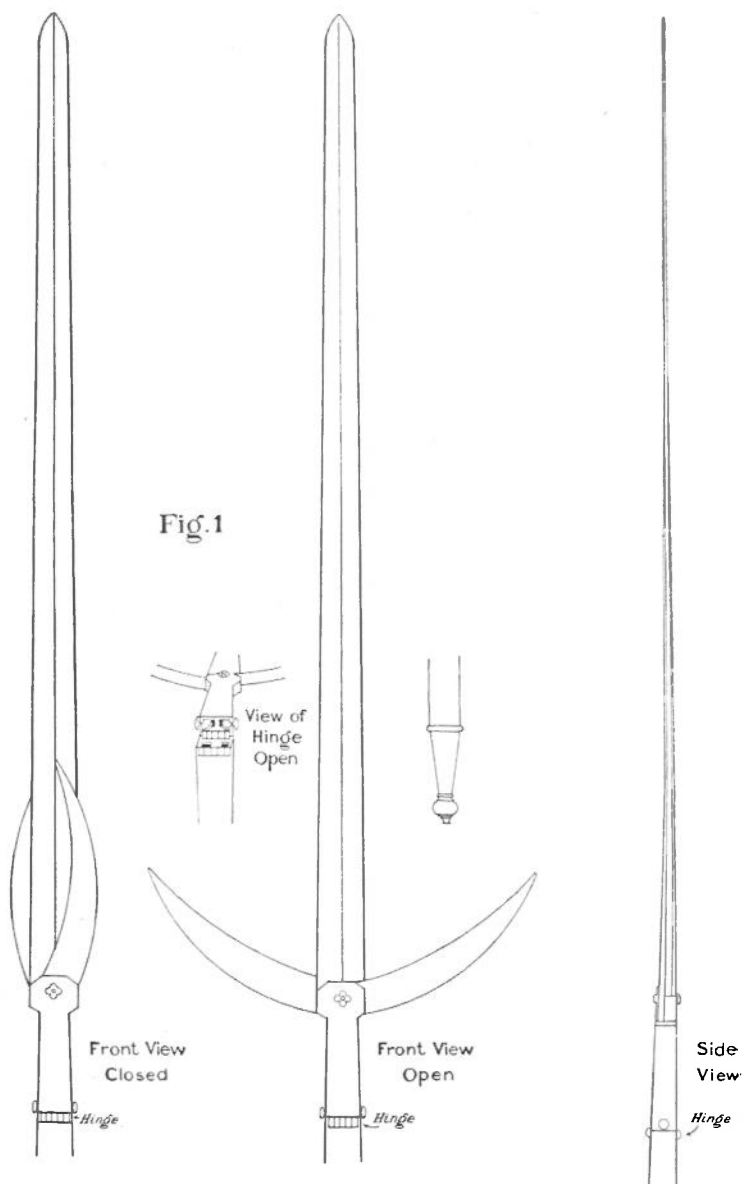
At Dresden, of Nos. G. 47, 48, 49, there called Runkas, No. 48 has a central blade of $37\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and all three blades are engraved with warlike devices; and No. 49 has the name BARTOLAM BIELLA on the side blades.² These arms are attributed to the period 1553-1586.

In the Museum at Munich is a feather staff with GATO on the side blade. At Berlin No. 5043 has COL . . . FE on the centre blade. The Vienna example, called by von Leber a *Wolfseisen*, is covered with *Tauschierarbeit* (damascening). The centre blade is 3 feet 10 inches long, when folded up the whole measures 3 feet $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches. When extended the extreme length is 7 feet 10 inches. The weapon is said to have come from the armoury of the Dukes of Friedland at Waldstein.

In the Armeria at Madrid there is a weapon that may be placed in the same class as the Brandistocco (Fig. 1). It is now numbered I. 96, and described as an articulated Corseque of Charles V. In former times it was absurdly attributed to Peter the Cruel, whose cause the English under the Black Prince espoused. It is figured by Jubinal at Plate xx, and by Lacombe on page 226. It may be described as a staff with a long centre blade and two curved side blades. The central blade is attached by a stout hinge to the head of the staff and may be bent down so as to lie close to the wood, by pressing two buttons which release catches at the hinge. The side blades are pivoted one on each side of the centre blade

¹ *Spiedo a forbice*, i, 237.

² Biella, according to Herr von Ehrenthal, is a town in the Italian province of Novara.



WEAPON OF CHARLES V. IN THE ARMERIA, MADRID.

and may be moved inwards so as to lie in the same line with and upon the centre blade. The side blades are somewhat curved and have sharp edges and points. Similar weapons are to be seen at Vienna, Berlin and Dresden, but this one has the blades engraved and gilt. The total length of the weapon when extended is about 7 feet 9 inches. When closed and bent down it becomes a staff of about 4 feet 6 inches, and might, like a feather staff, be held as a walking stick. Count Valencia considered it was for big game hunting.

At St. Petersburg is a so-called Stab-Runka, the middle blade of which is 28 inches long and about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch broad at base. The four-sided branches are 9 inches long and $\frac{2}{3}$ inch broad; the weight of the whole weapon is about $4\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. Each side blade is engraved "AL SEGNO DEL GATTO." A similar inscription is found on the side blades of two in the Carlo Bazzero collection at Milan and one in the Rigg collection. In the Ullmann collection (sold in 1891) was a weapon described as a Spanischer Pilgerstab, on which was engraved "DEL GAT." In the Veste Coburg is another with the inscription "AL. GATO."

In the Meyrick collection, Skelton has figured another weapon of this kind on which is engraved "ALSEGNO DEL COR," while in the Turin Armeria the inscription is "AL SEGNO DEL CORALO."

Count Wilczek has one bearing on the centre blade "STOGO CREMA," with the Spanish armourer Gio Batista's stamp. This inscription has been read by E. v. Liphart as the Venetian dialect for *sto*, I am, and *Crema* for Cremona, thus indicating its origin.

M. Edward v. Lenz, the learned curator of the Hermitage collection of arms and armour, in a communication to the *Zeitschrift für historische Waffenkunde*, considers that in these inscriptions we have the maker's address. Confirmation of this idea is afforded by the inscription "IN MILANO AL SEGNO DEL GATO" on a long blade of some 39 inches. This blade had not been mounted, but was apparently for such an arm. M. v. Lenz quotes another instance of the address of an armourer being given in the case of J.174 in the Musée d'Artillerie, Paris, a dagger inscribed "FRANCESCHO SPADER AL INSEGNO

DAL MURION IN VENETIA FECCE." (Francesco sword cutler at the sign of the Morion in Venice made this.) M. v. Lenz expresses the desire for more instances of the abodes of armourers being noted.

In England the Brandistocco appears under a totally different name and one which requires explanation. We all know that Gustavus Adolphus either originated or used largely in his army a staff with a long blade which could be ejected by a jerk forward. It is often found combined with the musket rest, thereby giving the musketeer an additional means of defence and one more ready than the sword. This invention, or commonly employed weapon, was known as the Swedish feather, a term often corrupted into Swine's feather. In its purer form the word appears as Feather staff, and as such is often met with in seventeenth century military works.

Sir John Smyth, in his *Instructions, Observations and Orders Militarie* 1595, speaking of a captain leading his band in his corslet complete, with his pique upon his shoulder and his page wearing his burgonet and his target, says, "but in case the captain be very olde . . . then he is to march before his band more lightly armed as he thinketh most convenient with his sword and dagger and his *leading staffe* in his hand."

Francis Markham in his *Five Decades of Epistles of Warre* (published at London, 1622), says :

The weapon with which the Captaine shall serve in his owne person is very much disputable in these daies amongst the best Souldiers, some for bravery wil carry nothing but a rich Feather-staffe all wrought guilt and curiously tasselled, but this everyone knowes is not for to fight withal, for neither is it of abilitie to wound deepe nor of length or substance to encounter either with Pike, Partizan, Halbert, nor with a good Sword and Target. Others will serve with a Pike, but that is found much too unnimble and troublesome for his place, for having once brought his men up to the push, he can have no more use for that weapon, their pressing upon him taking from him all meanes above once to charge it. And some will serve with a sword and gilt Target, but that is found as much too short, and ere he can get within the enemies Pike his life will be in great hazard ; so that in conclusion (according to the oppinions of the best Souldiers) the only weapons for a Captain, are a Faire Feather-staffe in the time of Peace or for glory in a garrison but in the time of Service and in the face of the enemy, then in a faire guilt Partizan richly trim'd, being not above twelve inches of blade, sharpe and well steeled, for it is able to encounter against any manner of weapon.

Of the Colonel of Foot, Markham says he

is to be armed at all points like the Captaine, onely his Leading weapon, and Feather-staffe is of much lesse proportion.

(G)ervais (M)arkham in the *Souldiers Accidence* London, 1643, says,

The Captaines shall be armed as the Lieutenants, onely as much richer as they please, and their weapons to lead with, shall be Feather-staves; but their weapons to serve or encounter the enemy with, shall be faire Partizans of strong and short blades, well guilt and adorned, according to their owne pleasures.

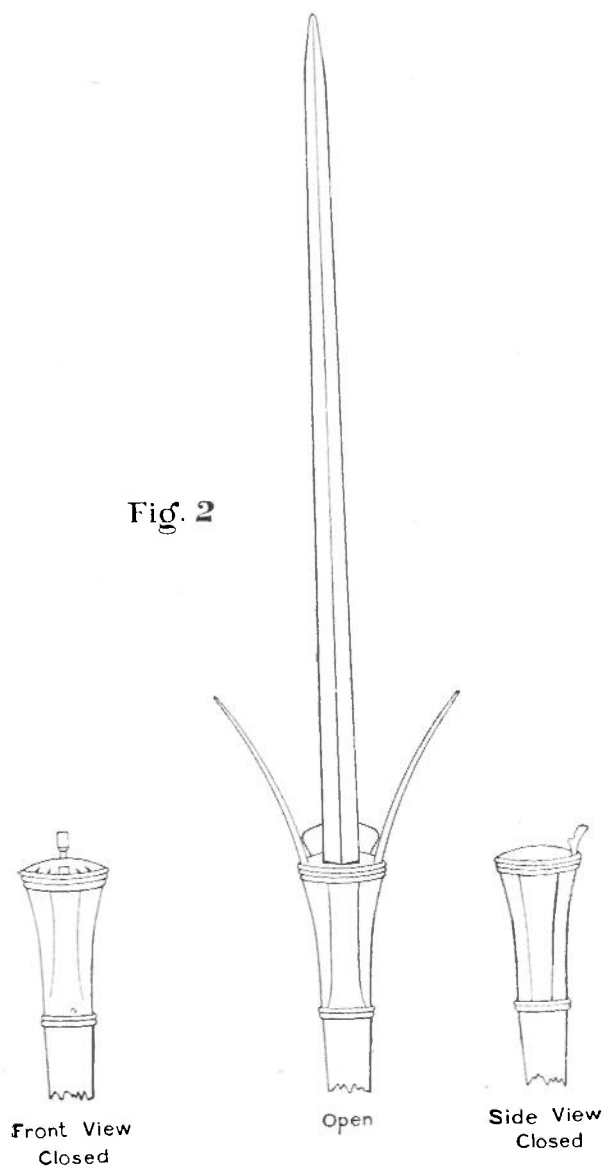
Captain Henry Hexham in his *Principles of the Art Military*, Delft, 1642, does not describe the arming of captains: nor does the Earl of Orrery in his *Treatise of the Art of War*, London, 1687.

Captain Ralph Standish in his will (Lancashire and Cheshire wills 1637) bequeaths "a targett and a leading staffe."

Robert Ward in his *Animadversions of Warre*, London, 1639, says: "The Captaine is to have his Armour of prooffe and a faire Pike for his defensive and offensive Armes."

The two examples of the Feather Staff in the Tower of London are Nos. $\frac{1}{14}$ and $\frac{1}{14}$. No. $\frac{1}{14}$ has an iron sheath covered with black leather and surmounted by a steel top with a hinged cover which conceals the spears and is oval in section (Fig. 2). The length of the sheath is $42\frac{1}{2}$ inches. When held by the lower and tapered end, a jerk will cause the cover to open and three blades to start forth. The centre one with diamond section is $32\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, the side blades are 7 inches long, about $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch broad, flattish and without any inscription. The points of the two side blades diverge to about 9 inches apart. No. $\frac{1}{14}$ is similar to the above but has no cover. At the lower end of the 38-inch sheath is a 1-inch spike. The centre blade is $23\frac{1}{2}$ inches, the side blades $8\frac{1}{4}$ inches and their points are $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches apart. On one face of each side blade is the name BATOLAME. On the other faces is BIELLA. According to the late Angelo Angelucci this weapon first appeared at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and he quotes the cost in 1633 as 7 scudi or crowns apiece. He mentions three in the

Fig. 2



FEATHER STAFF IN THE TOWER OF LONDON.

Royal Armoury of Turin, the largest of which has a central blade of 33 inches and side blades of 8 inches.

Meyrick calls his weapon a concealed *ranseur* from Genoa. It has the cap like one of the Tower examples. The total length when extended is 8 feet 4 inches, closed 5 feet 8 inches; the centre blade 31 inches, the side blades $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The lower 30 inches of the staff is studded with nails. Skelton, XCII.

Gay says that about 1690 the word Brandestoc appears to have been applied to a different weapon, for in 1691, Franqueville in his *Mirroir de l'art* says: "le reste des armes sont le pique . . . l'esponçon brandestoc Latin coestus Allemand Faustling." Faustling is certainly used by Flugel in reference to a pocket pistol or a cudgel.

Gay figures a feather staff in the Riggs collection like that in the Tower, but with AL SEGNO DEL GAT on the side blade. This looks like an imitation of the Musée d'Artillerie example.