

The Half-Swording of Paulus Hector Mair

Paulus Hector Mair was an avid collector of Fechtbuecher/Fencing Manuals. He eventually undertook the task of producing a large Fechtbuch of his own that brought together material from various sources in his collection. Several variations of this work were made. This was an expensive undertaking, since each one was hand-made and heavily illustrated by talented artists of the day. Mair was employed as a government official by the city of Augsburg and was driven to embezzle municipal funds in order to bankroll his projects. He was hung for this in 1579.

The material you see here are my translations from the edition of Mair's Fechtbuch that is in the collection of the Sächsische Landesbibliothek in Dresden Germany. It is dated to 1540 and is in two volumes, labeled as C93 and C94. It is one of the most artistically illustrated Fechtbuecher known. The SLUB has put a scan of C93 on-line here:

<http://digital.slub-dresden.de/sammlungen/titeldaten/275428508/>

Mair has an extensive section on the Longsword consisting of 120 illustrated plates. He concludes this section with eight specially numbered plates containing what he refers to as "Kampfstuck." This translates as "combat device" or "combat technique." It is the term Mair uses for half-swording. Half-swording involves gripping the sword blade with the left hand so that it is wielded somewhat like a short spear. It originated as the primary way of fighting with a Longsword while wearing full plate armour. Strikes with the edge of the sword would have minimal effect against a fully armoured opponent, but holding the sword like a spear allowed one to thrust into the gaps of the armour. Mair's half-swording techniques are an adaptation from armoured combat, but he shows them unarmoured and clearly intends for them to be used that way. They are related to the staff and halberd techniques that Mair covers later in his text. By putting this material at the end of the Longsword section and numbering it individually, the implication is that Mair considered this the culmination or final stage of mastering the Longsword.

Note that Mair makes heavy use of striking with the pommel of the sword while gripping the blade with both hands. Mair does not give this technique a name, but in the earlier German tradition it is known as the "Mordtschlag/Murder stroke" or "Tunrschlag/Thunderclap stroke." Mair also makes heavy use of a defensive technique he refers to as "Kron/Crown." This involves holding the sword horizontally above the head. Mair seems to be unique in how he applies this term, since in the earlier German tradition "Kron" usually referred to a defensive position in which the sword was held vertically to catch a downward stroke on the crossguard.

Some half-swording techniques show up in Mair's Longsword section prior to the final eight plates that feature it specifically. There is a series of four plates that lead into the half-swording section and involve either using the Kron or countering the Kron. There are also random plates that feature a half-sword grip in a grappling situation. To present Mair's overall approach to half-swording, I have included the Kron series leading into the half-swording series and some of the additional plates after the ones dedicated specifically to half-swording.

Of incidental interest is Pg 116. This shows a fighter standing over several objects lying on the floor below him. There appears to be a wooden form representing a human foot, a piece of leather in the shape of the sole of a shoe, and a specialized knife. The fighter himself appears to be wearing a leather apron over his pants. He is clearly a cobbler by trade. The fighting guilds of the period were known to be made up of tradesman and merchants rather than professional fighting men. This fellow must have been particularly proud of his craft, to have the artist include his tools with his picture!

The page numbers reflect the numbering of the plates in the Longsword section of the Dresden version of Mair's Fechtbuch.

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The First Technique in the Kron



It happens hence that you close against the Kron. Strike him with the long edge to the top of his head such that your right foot stands forward. If he displaces this with the Kron, then step in with your left leg, take your strike once again and wind your point to his chest. If he sets your point aside also with the Kron, follow outward with your right foot and grip with your left hand at the mid-point of your blade and thrust powerfully to his face. If he goes on to displace this, then step with your left foot on his right side and thrust to his groin.

If you come to perceive such a groin thrust and stand with your left foot forward in the Kron, then set it aside with the Kron, follow outward with your right foot, and thrust with your point to his face. If he displaces this, then strike him with your crossguard to his head.

The Cut through the Kron



When you come to the closing with the opponent and he stands against you in the Kron, then stand with your left foot forward and strike him with an Underhau from your right side. With that Cut in through the Kron over his chest and over his right arm.

If he cuts you like this and you stand with your right foot forward, then follow outward with the left and set the cut aside with the portion of your blade between your hands. Then immediately wind upward and stab the point to his face or chest. If he displaces the point, then release your right hand from your hilt and grip near your left at your sword's blade. Then immediately strike to his head with the crossguard and with the pommel.

If he strikes you with his pommel like this, then displace him with the Kron, and grip with your left hand at your sword's blade. Thus you can also cut or thrust him.

Blowing through the Kron



It happens hence at the closing on the Kron. Stand with your right foot forward and strike him with an Oberhau to the head. Follow with your left foot after the strike such that your crossguard comes on his blade with the long edge. Then immediately pull downwards so that you cut him through the top of the head.

If he cuts you through the top of the head like this and you stand with your right foot forward, then step with your left leg in front of his left and push upon his sword at his left side such that the pommel comes onto his neck. With that pull to your right side.

If he pulls you like this to his right side, then set this aside with your Schildt (ricasso) and stab your pommel into his face.

If he stabs you to the face like this, then follow outward with the right foot and set aside the stab with your sword's blade between your hands. Then immediately stab with your point to his face or chest.

A Cut with an Uberfallen (dropping/falling over) from the Kron



When you come to the closing with the opponent, set your left foot forward, follow with the right outward and strike with an Unterhau to his left side with crossed arms.

If he strikes like this to your left side and you stand with your right foot forward, then release your left hand from your sword and grab his sword's blade such that you keep his point under your left shoulder. Then immediately shoot your sword over his hilt with your right hand and with your short edge. Thus you displace his cut in the Kron and with that can take his sword.

If he intends to take your sword like this, then step with your left leg in front of his right and release your left hand from your sword's pommel. With that grab your mid blade and cut him hence back away from you.

The First Kampfstick of the Longsword



When you close with the opponent, it happens consequently that you use this Kampfstick. Stand with your right foot forward and grip your sword's blade near the point with your left hand and wind your right extended forward with your pommel opposite his face. Follow with your left leg outward and thrust the pommel into his face. If he displaces this, take your pommel once more and wind back in at your right side. Then immediately stab the point into his face.

If he stabs the point to your face like this and you stand with your left foot forward, then take his point out to your left side with your point, follow with your right foot outward, and thrust your pommel into his face or chest.

If he thrusts his pommel at you like this, then set this aside with the portion of your blade between your hands and work with him nimbly at the Vor (before) and at the Nach (after).

The Second Kampfstick of the Longsword



When you come at the opponent with this Kampfstick, it happens hence as follows. Stand with your left foot forward and hold your sword on your right side. Grip your blade with your left hand with your point wound forward. Follow with your right foot outward and grab your blade with your right hand near to your left. Then immediately strike him with your pommel to his head.

If he strikes like this towards your head and you stand with your right foot forward in the half Kron (crown), then follow with your left foot outward and drive upward well into the complete Kron over your head so that you displace him. Then immediately thrust to his face with your point. If he displaces your point, step with your right foot in front of his right and go with your pommel on his left elbow, step back again with your right foot, and shove upward with your left hand. Yank back towards yourself with the right hand, and thus you lock his arm.

The Third Kampfstick of the Longsword



When you go to close with the opponent such that your right foot stands forward, then wind your hand in front and grasp your sword by the blade. Then immediately strike him with your pommel to his upper opening and follow with your left leg outward so that the blow is struck properly. If you do not do this, the blow will be too short.

If he strikes with his pommel like this at you, then step with your right foot forward and displace him with the half Kron. Then immediately set your sword blade at his crossguard and with that pull his sword out of his hands.

If he pulls your sword away like this, then step with your right foot behind his left, grab with your left hand at his left foot and with the right hand on his left shoulder, and shove him with both swords over and over. Should he perceive the shove, then step with a false step in the triangle. Thus you go from him out of the shove.

The Fourth Kampstuck of the Longsword



When you come together at the closing and both fire the points at each other's chest, then stand with your left foot forward, step with the right outward, and strike with the pommel to his left ear.

If he strikes like this to your left ear, do not displace him, but rather thrust with your point to his face or chest.

If he thrusts like this to your face, then set his point aside with your point and wind your pommel under his left arm. Pull with that towards your right side.

If he pulls you like this towards him, then release your left hand from your blade and wind inside between his arms. Then immediately pull upward at your right side.

If he pulls you like this towards him, then release your left hand from your blade and thrust in with that on his right elbow. Thus you have him locked, and may work with him as you will.

The Fifth Kampfstick of the Longsword



It happens hence that you stand in the Kampfstick with your left foot forward and hold your sword behind your neck such that the point stands against the opponent. Step out with your right leg and grip with our right hand to your left on your sword blade and strike him with the pommel to his neck.

Should you perceive this blow and stand with your left foot forward, then go up with your sword into the Kron and displace him with the portion of your blade between your hands. Follow with the right foot outward and set your pommel behind his neck, and with that pull to your right side.

If he pulls you like this, then grip your hilt once again with your right hand and set your right leg behind your left. Thus you should stop his pulling and cut over both of his arms.

Should you perceive such a cut, then set it aside with the Kron. Then immediately thrust to his face with your point.

The Sixth Kampfstick of the Longsword



It happens hence that you stand with this Kampfstick with your left leg forward and hold your sword at your chest such that the point is directed downwards. Step in with your right foot and wind your point to his face or chest.

If he winds the point to you like this and you stand with your right foot forward, then take his point away with the foremost part of your point. Then immediately drop your crossguard onto the bend of his left elbow and pull towards you with that to your right side.

If he has you locked up like this and intends to pull you, then release your left hand from your blade and grip your pommel. Then immediately step backwards and thrust to his groin.

Should you perceive such a thrust, then displace it with the portion of your blade between your hands, follow with your left leg outward and thrust him also to the groin. If he displaces this, then strike him with your pommel to his head.

The Seventh Kampfstick of the Longsword



It happens hence that you stand in this Kampfstick with your left foot forward and hold the sword in the manner of the Pflug, and grip with your left hand on your blade such that the point stands against the opponent. Step outward with your right foot, lift up powerfully over your head, and with that thrust at him in whatever opening you see.

If he thrusts towards you like this and you are also positioned in the manner of the Pflug with your left foot forward, then follow with your right foot outward and displace his thrust with the portion of your blade between your hands.

If he displaces your thrust like this, then wind with your pommel outward over his right arm and shove him away from you. Thus you lock his arm.

If he shoves you from him like this, then step back with your left leg. If he then travels after you, wind your point double towards his face or chest.

The Eighth Kampfstick of the Longsword



It happens consequently that you stand in the Kampfstick with both feet together and hold your sword with your right hand above your head and the left on your blade such that the point is directed downwards. Step in with your left leg and wind the point to his groin.

If he thrusts at your groin like this, then stand with your right foot forward such that your body hangs back. You then hold your blade with crosswise arms under your left shoulder, then you move your arm up and set the thrust aside. Then immediately follow with the left leg outward and wind the point to his face.

If he thrusts you double at your face like this, then follow with your right foot outward and set the thrust aside with your point. Then immediately strike him with your pommel to his right side.

Two Counters from which two Cuts proceed



When you come to the closing with the opponent, it happens like this: Set your right foot forward and strike him with the Sturzhaus (plunging cut) from above to his left side. Follow outward with your left foot and grip with your right hand on your sword's blade by your Schildt, and then cut inward through the face.

If you then stand with your left foot against him and he intends to cut you, then release your left hand from your pommel and thrust with your sword between his arms directing the point at his face. Then immediately grip with your left hand over his right forearm to your sword's blade, step in with your right leg towards him, and wind your sword on your left side so that your pommel comes upwards. Thus you can cut him over both arms and can thrust the pommel up into his face or chest.

An Armlock with the Sword



When you come together at the closing, step with your left foot at his right side and release your left hand from your sword. Grab over his crossguard to his pommel and pull it upwards on your left side. Follow outward with your right foot and strike him with the long edge to the upper opening.

If you then stand with your right foot forward and he steps towards you with his left and with his left hand grabs your pommel, then grip your blade with your left hand and sweep his arm to the hilt. Then immediately wind his arm up back to the rear on your right side. Thus you lock his arm down.

If he intends to lock your arm like this, then grab his left hand with your right and with your left underneath to his right, and with that shove hard upward. Thus you will be freed from the armlock.

A Counter with a Cut



When you come together at the closing and the other has bound at the sword and your left foot is set forward, then drop out of the bind into the cut from below to his left side.

Should you perceive this cut, then drop with both arms over his sword and immediately release your left hand from your sword, grab him at his left elbow, and set your right foot in front of his left. Then shove him away from you.

If he shoves you away from him like this and you have your left hand on your sword's blade, then step backwards with your left foot and take the sword to his left shoulder. Then immediately strike him from above to the head. If he displaces this, then follow outward with your left foot once again and wind your point double to his face or chest.

An Oberhau with a Groin Thrust



When you come together at the closing and the other strikes strongly with the Zornhau, determine whether he is soft or hard at his sword. If he is soft against you, then cut to his head.

If he intends to cut you like this, then hang on your right side so that his cut is deflected around. Then immediately set your left leg between his feet and release your left hand from your sword. Then thrust between his arms at the chin with your left hand so that he goes into a fall. As he is falling grip with your left hand to your sword's blade and stab with that to his groin or wherever you want.