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Weapons Collection Comes to Washington

By James Waldo Fawcett.

One of the most notably valuable collections of edged weapons and firearms ever assembled has been presented to the United States National Museum.

The donor is Ralph G. Packard of Morristown, N. J.

Among the thrusting and striking implements are knights' battle swords, German hand-and-a-half and two-handed swords, Spanish, Italian, Swiss and Scottish swords of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries.

Of special distinction is a knight's battle sword with a straight cross hilt. It was excavated at Cyprus. Another magnificent weapon is a 15th century sword with a gilded wheel pommel and drooping quillons, found at Strasbourg.

Some of the swords are surrounded by a romantic aura of mystery. For example, there is a marvelous Spanish rapier of the 16th century with an exceptionally fine cup hilt of pierced steel with a facelike design of medallions and double eagles. The workmanship is wonderful. Who owned, who fought with this chivalrous blade? Only a man of glorious character would deserve to own or use it.

Mr. Packard knows the name of the one-time possessor of another Spanish rapier dated 1517. Damascened in gold on the instrument is "Horla."

Sturdy and very strong are the Scottish broadswords of the 17th and 18th centuries. A horseman's sword has a Phicavona hilt. Less convincing, but very beautiful, is a dress sword of the palace guard of the doges of Venice, the "sea kings" who disputed with emperors on equal terms.



Problem of Sword's Origin.

Nobody knows who first realized that a pointed stick, a sharpened splinter of stone could be employed as "a lengthened hand" to hurt or fend away a foe. Perhaps one single individual made the discovery, perhaps it was six or a dozen different men in as many parts of the world who grasped the idea and by the exploitation of it rose above their fellows. Mr. Packard's offering is universal in its scope. It includes swords, scimitars, daggers and knives from all European countries, from the Near East and Asia. There are Kurdish, East Indian, Malay, Javanese and Japanese implements. An odd and truly fascinating specimen is an executioner's knife from the Belgian Congo. What dreadful work did it do? Looking at it, the spectator thinks of the tales told about the Dark Continent by Sir H. Rider Haggard and Charles Beadle.

In another, more civilized category are two splendid German crossbows of the 16th century—both of meticulous workmanship; both lovingly inlaid with ivory. One is a windlass type with stirrup and the other a heavy type with a rack or "caniquin" for setting the bow.

The firearms division of Mr. Packard's collection, beginning with weapons of the matchlock type, is enriched by an elaborate Italian piece of the 18th century, a German wallpiece dated 1612 and a Colonial matchlock of about 1635, marked "Newtowne" in burnt letters on both sides of the stock. To read its history it is necessary to know that "Newtowne" was a fortified outpost of Boston, established in 1631 and called Cambridge after the founding of Harvard College in 1636.

Sinister in their implications are a number of Japanese matchlocks, one of which is described as "a three-barrel revolving pistol." The barrels and furniture of these "engines of destruction" are covered with gold work in the shape of dragons and other heathen symbols.

Powder and Ball Devices.

Mr. Packard also collected some rare wheel locks, one of which is of the blunderbuss type with saddle hook, probably French. An "exhibition item" of particular attraction is a German creation entirely covered with ivory plates engraved with camp and battle scenes.

There are several flintlocks, both single and double barrel, an early "Brown Bess," the regular musket of the British service of 1706-1714; Kentucky rifles, a Committee of Safety musket of 1775-1776, a United States musket of the premier type, a British boatgun taken at Lake Champlain, a four-barrel American carbine with the barrel turned by hand, two locks and a separate pan for each barrel; a breech-loading Warsaw rifle, forerunner of the Ferguson, and the rifle designed by Maj. Patrick Ferguson as an improvement on the Warsaw, the rifle of the British during the American Revolution.

The further development of "shooters' irons" is illustrated by a smoothbore sporting piece with a pair of pistols to match by Peter of Carlstadt—gems of the gunmaker's art; pieces of the type made by John Cookson of Boston; a Forsythe rifle with an interchangeable smoothbore barrel—a handsome achievement with trimmings of silver, and a Spanish smoothbore sporting piece with a barrel inlaid with silver scrolls and running feet.

Mr. Packard's pistols and revolvers are a story in themselves. He personally supervised the manufacture of four of the finest modern rifles. The latter group dramatizes the highest technique of modern gun making.

In terms of money invested in it, the collection now the property of the United States Government is a prize probably unequalled anywhere, but Mr. Packard's gift is not significant only for its market worth. It illustrates the science of defense. The component features of it are "cunning things sought out by men that men might die" but—more important—that men may survive.

Capt. Charles Carey is curator of the collection.

