A DUEL ROCHEFORT DID NOT FIGHT.

Why he Called on M. Rochette, Newspaper Publisher, and What Came of it.

The sword-thrust which laid Rochefort on his back upon his bed of exile has called public attention anew to the once famous Paris journalist. It has also had the unexpected result of demonstrating the fond indulgence of the French press for this spoiled child of journalism. Neither the intemperate violence of his writings nor his political adventures have succeeded in wholly alienating the affection of the French public.

The first cause of this indulgence is the admiration always felt in France for wit and talent. Fifteen years ago Rochefort was the *chroniqueur* of the *Figaro*. Some one introduced him to the author of "La Dame aux Camelias." "Ah! monsieur," cried Alexander Dumas, "I have just been reading your *chroniques*. What a talent you have!" After such a commendation from such a mouth, a French writer can commit a great many follies without losing favor.

Another excuse for the indulgence of the French where Rochefort is concerned is his hot-headedness, his chivalrous, blind courage, a quality which will always command Gallic sympathy. In fine, the good nature of the man, his sweetness and obligingness with his friends, his madcap behavior, have always made and kept him popular.

Cham, the caricaturist, who had a great admiration for Rochefort's wit, could never understand his friend's violence and exaggerations. "No one," he said in the *Lanterne* days, "will ever be able to convince me that Rochefort is not every night carried off by masked bandits, who force him to write these dreadful things, pistol at throat."

There is one other peculiarity of Rochefort's character of which the French people give him the benefit as an extenuating circumstance. In the midst of a universal skepticism he has always been a fanatical believer in the family, showing a passionate tenderness for his children, which gave him a unique place among Paris newspaper men. It is a queer fact that all his serious duels, like the one to which he owes his latest wound, and, perhaps, a prolongation of exile, have grown out of this exalted sentiment of fatherly devotion. When, in 1869, he had to take refuge in Belgium, afar from that Boulevard which was his life, it was his love for his daughter that made him an exile.

The story is a forgotten one, and was very badly told at the time. Of the four persons who knew the truth, Rochefort has never deigned to open his lips; Victor Noir was murdered soon after by Prince Pierre Bonaparte; Rochette, the printer, in prosecuting Rochefort in the courts of the empire, gave a version of the facts that was favorable to himself, and the fourth, M. Blavet, a Paris journalist, was not allowed to testify on the trial. But he has told the story since, and here it is as we have it from his lips:

At that time the first nine numbers of the *Lanterne* had appeared. Its astonishing success had brought into the field a hundred would-be rivals that lacked nothing save Rochefort's sovereign popularity and nerve to achieve a like fortune. One of these ephemeral publications was the *Inflexible*, in which men of the *passe police* abused Rochefort as the worst of malefactors. One of the writers was Marchal, called De Bussy, who died drunk in an alleyway. Villemessant, who had at one time employed him as a collecting agent, pronounced over him this characteristic funeral oration: "To-morrow they are going to plant him." The other writer was a Pole, a Count de Stamirowski, known as Stamir. Dingy fellows, the pair of them.

One morning Victor Noir and Blavet, who were then writing for *Figaro*, were eating breakfast together at a restaurant. Suddenly, his face pallid, his eyes starting out of his head, Rochefort burst into the room. In his hand he held the last number of the *Inflexible*.

"Read it!" he said to his two friends in a sharp, curiously jerky voice.

As they read, the blood mounted to their foreheads and disgust to their lips. The paper was one long, villainous diatribe against Rochefort's daughter, a child of twelve years.

"When I raised my eyes," says Blavet, "to the face of the father stricken by so cowardly a blow, I was frightened. His eyes glared like those of a maniac."

"'What are you going to do?'" "we asked Noir and I, in a breath.

"'What am I going to do? *Parbleu*, I am going to kill Rochette."

"Kill Rochette! You are not in earnest? He is only the ignorant publisher of these infamies. It is the authors who deserve an exemplary punishment—not their tool."

"'I!" cried Rochefort, "*I* compromise myself with these policemen, these escaped convicts! *I* cross my sword with their poniards! *I* sign for them, even in their own blood, a certificate of respectability! Never! I am going to kill Rochette.'"

Say what they could, they could not budge him from this resolution. When his rage was a little calmed, they said: "You want to kill Rochette; but kill him with all the forms and ceremonies, so as not to expose yourself to the enemies who spy your every action. We will be your seconds."

Rochefort consented, on condition that the duel should be an immediate on. The three men jumped into a carriage, and were landed at the publisher's, Boulevard Mont Parnesse Rochefort by this time had recovered his sang-froid, and almost smiled as he climbed the stairs.

After some minutes the printer, who had been notified by his foreman of the visit, made his appearance—a tough looking fellow, solid as a Hercules, six feet high. Victor Noir was no baby, but he looked like one by the side of him. The Colossus came in smiling obsequiously.

"Monsieur," said Rochefort, without any preamble, "my name is Henri Rochefort. I need not explain my errand." His voice was clear and firm.

"I confess," stammered Rochette, "that I do not comprehend——"

"You are going to comprehend," interrupted Rochefort, turning pale. "Do you acknowledge having printed in the journal, the *Inflexible*, of which you are the responsible conductor, an article insulting to Mlle. Rochefort?"

"Certainly. What of it?"

"What of it? Mlle. Rochefort is my daughter. Do you accept the responsibility for these infamous calumnies?"

"I accept the responsibility for everything I print."

"In that case," went on Rochefort, who was making a terrible effort to restrain himself, "if you are a man of honor, and I hope you are, things will go smoothly. Your place, your hour, your weapons?"

Rochette gave a great laugh.

"Oh! it's a duel you're after, is it?"

"Unless it is a contre-danse." Rochefort began to look dangerous again.

"But, my dear sir, you overlook a detail, which I hasten to bring to your notice. I am a Spaniard, and in my country we do not understand the duel except body to body, knife in right hand, mantle on left."

"That's all one to me—knife, dagger, poniard, cannon,—I'm your man. Let us go down to the street and have it out without any more delay."

Rochette did not laugh any longer. He stammered some unintelligible words.

"Yes or no?" shouted Rochefort, "Will you give me satisfaction for these lies printed by you about my daughter?"

A timid "No" was the response of the demoralized Hercules. It had barely been uttered when a vigorous slap fell on Rochette's mouth.

"Ah! Monsieur Rochfort," said the giant, supporting himself against the wall," that was not right."

The three journalists laughed. Rochefort quietly drew out a card.

"If that slap of mine hurts you, Monsieur, you can come for a plaster whenever you please."

Eight days later, Rochefort was condemned, on the unsupported testimony of Rochette, to a four months' imprisonment. He fled to Brussels and the house of Victor Hugo.

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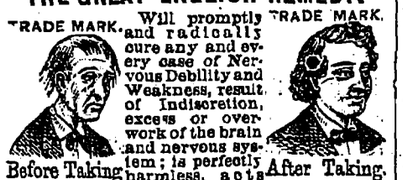

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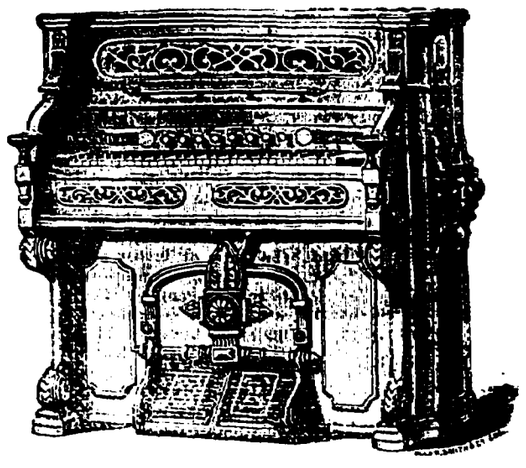

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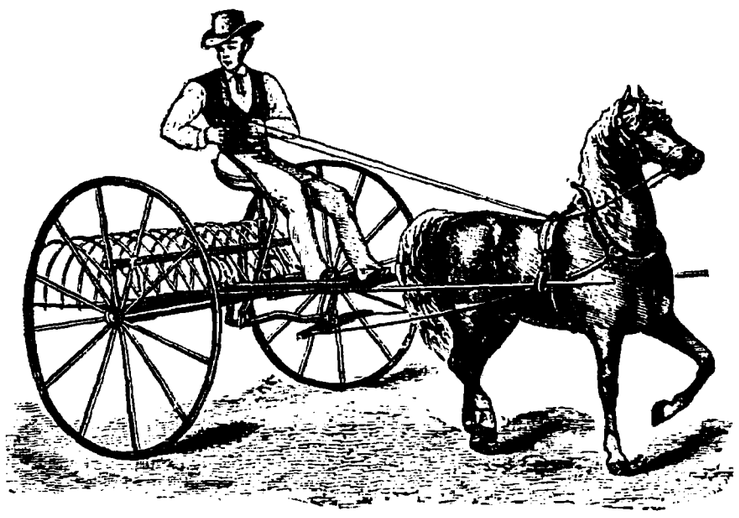

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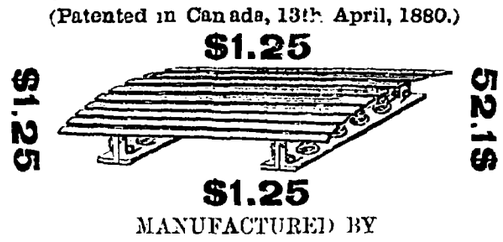

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