

Select Gale.

THE DUEL EXTRAORDINARY.

OR THE FRENCH "CODE OF HONOR" IN 1794.

In the winter of 1794, General Moreau being appointed commander-in-chief of the army of the Rhine, established his head quarters in the city of Strasbourg.

Strasbourg is a pleasant, spirited, and hospitable town, especially to the military stranger, for the Alsacians are all soldiers, and have consequently a brotherly feeling towards those in the profession of arms; almost all the old men are veteran pensioners, and the youths' highest aspirations are for the arrival of their eighteenth year, and their consequent entrance into the service of their country.

When the call is sounded in Alsace, every tradesman who leaves his shop, every peasant who hastens from his cottage, knows how to load a musket, handle a saber, and manage a horse; and their old proverb of *'Autant d'hommes, autant d'soldats'*—As many men so many soldiers have we—is a true one literally, which is more than can be said of most provinces.

Being so warlike, they necessarily have the failings of such a character, and are therefore somewhat hot headed, or rather do not possess eminently the necessary qualification for making the best light cavalry of France; and their proneness to quarrel generally finds proper outlet in this service, or in chastising the vapors of some military bully who may happen to be among their garrison.

At the period of which we write, there was a certain young hussar captain, named Fournier, who figured rather conspicuously in this character, at the head-quarters of General Moreau, having rendered himself peculiarly obnoxious to the Strasburgians by the fiery temper, extraordinary skill with his weapons, and his apparently heartless disregard of taking life upon trivial provocation. He had, moreover, excited an especial hatred against himself by the survivor of a once numerous and wealthy family in the city, whom they said he had challenged without cause, and shot without pity.

The very day of his funeral General Moreau gave a grand *fete*, and the higher class of burghers, to which Blumm was allied, could not well refuse their presence without giving offence; while Fournier, as an officer of the garrison, was of course invited; so that thus the murderer and the friends of his victim would be brought together, and a violent scene might be anticipated. General Moreau knew this, and foresaw that the folly of one man might thus prejudice the character of the whole army.

'A sensible man would stay away,' said he, 'but Fournier will come, if only to defy his enemies.'

'Faith! then, general!' cried Captain Dupont, Moreau's youngest aid-de-camp, 'the simplest way will be to send him away when he presents himself.'

'But,' replied the commander, 'to send Fournier away is to have an affair with him, for I can't dismiss him officially; and who would get himself into such a difficulty by undertaking to order him out?'

'I will!' said Dupont.

The general reflected: 'Well,' said he at length, 'I agree, on condition that you use my name in the business and act only under my authority; in short that you will be simply the organ of my wishes; for I have no desire, my dear Dupont, to embroil you with this fire eater.'

The young man bowed respectfully, and bent his head a little lower than was necessary to conceal a scornful smile, excited by his foresight of the result, in spite of the caution of his general, and his contempt for the danger.

The evening came, the Hotel de Ville was brilliantly lighted; the guests arrived in crowds; Fournier presented himself in his turn; Dupont lay in wait for him in the ante-chamber, and before he could divest himself of his mantle, approached him, demanding—'What do you want here?'

'Ah! is it you, Dupont? good evening! Pardon! you see what I want; I am come to the ball.'

'Are you not ashamed to come here the very day of the funeral of that unfortunate Blumm?'

'No! I'faith!'

'But what will his friends, his kindred, who are in the saloon say?'

'They may say what they please; I care not; and, by the way, what business is it of yours?'

'It is the business of every man of spirit! Every man of spirit is mistaken; I desire no one to meddle with my affair; and now, if you have gotten through with your lecture, let me pass; I want to dance!'

'You cannot.'

'And why not, pray?'

'Because you must leave here immediately.'

'Why I have hardly arrived.'

'And you cannot arrive as far as the saloon; the general orders you to return home.'

'What! he dismisses me?'

'No! he only prevents your being put out.'

'By Heaven! I think you must be joking, with the insult you have charged to put upon me! Do you know what it is to show Fournier the door?'

'Pray suspend your swaggering, and do me the favor to go; I have engaged a partner, and I hear the first bars of the waltz!'

'Listen!' cried Fournier, furiously, 'I cannot avenge myself on the general; he is my superior officer, and has the right of impunity; but you! you who are my equal; you have dared to bear half the insult, and you shall pay the whole penalty; you must fight me.'

'I have given you, as politely as possible, the message I was charged with,' replied Dupont, calmly. 'I have not provoked you idly, but I foresaw how this would act upon such a hector as you are; how hear me! You have annoyed me long enough with your bullying. I am rejoiced at this opportunity, and I shall give you a lesson you will not soon forget!'

Fournier retired, foaming with rage, and, as he slowly left the hall, had the additional mortification of seeing Dupont gaily join the dancers with his partner.

He passed a restless night, and without the hope of killing Dupont in the morning, he would have been most miserable.

But the issue of the combat was not altogether as he had anticipated; Dupont gave him a severe wound.

'You lunge well,' said Fournier as he fell.

'Tolerably, as you see.'

'Very well; but now that I understand your trick, you shall not catch me again; I will prove it to you when I recover.'

'You wish to fight again, then?'

'Of course!'

'As you will; I'll not balk you.'

And, in truth, after a few weeks' care, Fournier was again before his foe; and this time it was he who inflicted a wound on Dupont, saying to him:

'You see you hold your hand too low to recover in time, and parrying your lunge, I take you thus; and he put three inches of steel in the young man's side.

'Game and game!' cried Dupont; 'the rubber next!'

This 'rubber' gave rise to some slight difficulties. Fournier contended that as the two former encounters were held with the sword, the decisive combat ought to be with the pistol. He urged the most plausible reasons, and assumed the most insinuating tone, to accomplish this; but Dupont claimed the privilege of military men to fight with the weapon he usually wore, and it was well he maintained his ground, for Fournier's skill with the pistol had become proverbial. He had taught his servant to hold a small coin between his finger and thumb, which he struck out with his ball at twenty five paces; and frequently some hussar of his regiment, passing his window at a gallop, smoking a pipe, had felt the clay shattered between his lips without knowing to what cause to attribute the accident—it was Fournier, who exercising with his favorite weapon, had chosen the soldier's pipe as his target.

Dupont was wise in adhering to the sword; and this was maintained through the numerous encounters which lengthened this duel to the unheard of period of nineteen years!

The 'rubber,' therefore, as Dupont called it, gave no decisive result, each giving the other a slight wound. Neither had the advantage; and these two belligerents, vexed at this negative termination, agreed to continue their meetings until one should confess himself conquered.

One difficulty seemed about to supervene, the regiment of Fournier was about to enter active service, quit Strasbourg the next day. But such a trifle could not long arrest such ingenious imaginations, and they concocted and entered into the following singular covenant:

1st. That whenever Messrs. Dupont and Fournier should find themselves at the distance of thirty leagues from each other, each should advance one-half the road to encounter the other, sword in hand.

2d. That if the duties of his post should prevent either from absenting himself, the other shall travel the whole distance, thus meeting both the requirements of discipline and the necessities of the contract.

3d. That no excuse, other than military duty, would be taken.

4th. That the present treaty being made in all faith and honor, it could only be altered or annulled by mutual consent.

Thus these two monomaniacs fought from time to time, whenever they could meet, and a most curious correspondence was carried on between them on the subject—for instance:

'I am invited to breakfast with the officers in garrison at Luneville,' wrote Fournier, on occasion, 'and shall accept their kind invitation. As you are on leave at Luneville, this will afford us, if you like, an opportunity for a few passes. Yours sincerely, etc.'

And again, wrote Dupont:

'My dear friend, I shall pass through Stalzburg on 5th of November, wait for me at the

Hotel des Postes; we will fence a little, if you are so inclined.'

Sometimes the promotion of one or the other interfered momentarily with the regularity of their meetings; the third article of their treaty enjoined obedience to military law, and a cessation of hostilities was thus for a time forced upon them from a difference in rank; but grades were speedily won then, and they were soon equal again; thus F. once wrote:

'My dear Dupont, I hear that the Emperor, doing you but justice, has accorded you the rank of General of Brigade. Receive my sincere congratulations upon an advancement your courage and ability well deserve. This affords me a double satisfaction, since it renews our ability to fight at the first opportunity.'

This singular affair at length attracted public attention. Dupont and Fournier ever observed the compact in all strictness, they were covered with the scars of their numerous encounters, and yet they still preserved their old passion for fighting. General Fournier once with great simplicity remarked—'It is very strange that I, who have always killed my man, cannot get rid of this devilish Dupont!'

In the army, where Dupont was much, and Fournier but little liked, they said commonly 'that General D. was the best natured fellow in the world if F. would not annoy him so constantly.'

At length Dupont received orders to join the army of the Grisons; he traversed Switzerland rapidly, and arrived one morning at a small village where the head quarters of his corps were stationed—he was not expected, and no preparation had been made to receive him, there was not even an inn there.

The morning was cold and rainy, and seeing before him a 'chalet,' through whose windows shone a glorious fire, and whose curious external stairway descended even to his feet, as if coquetishly inviting him to share mountain hospitality, Dupont did not hesitate to mount to the door; he found the key in the lock, opened and entered. A man was seated at a desk with his back to the door—at the noise of its opening, he turned his head, and recognizing the intruder, cried joyously—

'Ah! it is you Dupont! we will take a turn immediately!' It was Fournier who thus spoke.

'Faith, I am ready!' said Dupont.

Fournier took his sword from the corner of the room, they fell into position—they crossed weapons. All this passed in a moment—to see, recognize, provoke and attack each other was as natural and spontaneous as to breathe.

It was only between the passes that they conversed.

'I thought you were employed in the interior,' said Fournier.

'The minister gives me the fourth division.'

'Indeed, how fortunate! I command the cavalry there. So you have just arrived?'

'This instant.'

'And thought of me the first thing, how amiable of you!'

'No, really! I did not know you were here; seeing a fire through these windows, as I was about to pass, I stopped to warm myself.'

'This exercise will warm you sufficiently.'

The fight became fiercer; Fournier hazarded a pass which Dupont taking advantage of, pushed him so vigorously that he was forced to give back step by step.

Dupont advanced, steadily within distance, crying, 'Aha! you run! you run!'

'Not at all! I only retreat. Do you think I am going to let you spit me like a sparrow?'

'The room is small, I shall drive you to the wall!'

'We shall see!'

'See then! and as Dupont said this, he pressed Fournier literally into the corner, and his sword, piercing the muscles of F's neck, pinned him to the wooden wall like a family portrait badly hung.

'The devil!' cried the spitted general.

'You did not expect this!' said Dupont.

'On the contrary, it is you who do not expect what will happen!'

'Indeed! what is about to happen, then?'

'Why, the moment you draw out your sword, I shall thrust mine into your stomach, and you will fall.'

'True!' replied Dupont, pressing his sword with great force into the logs of the cottage wall.

'Dupont, what the deuce are you piercing the wood for?'

'I am taking precautions against your lunge in my stomach.'

'You cannot avoid it; the moment you withdraw you die.'

'I shall not withdraw till you throw down your sword.'

'It is impossible for you to keep your arm thus strained for ten minutes; it must drop and you must receive my thrust.'

'You are unreasonable; your blood is flowing; in ten minutes your eyes will close.'

'We shall see.'

'Very well; I am not impatient!'

'Nor I; we will abide the result!'

This contest would probably have been prolonged to a fatal termination, had not the noise of their dispute at length been heard by some

officers in another part of the house, who coming hastily upon the scene, separated with much difficulty the obstinate combatants.

When parted, they each claimed the victory, and finally demanded with grate gravity to be replaced exactly as they were when separated—Dupont promising to refix his sword through Fournier's throat without increasing the wound!

They were finally obliged to force the latter to bed and the former out of the chalet.

Such a result was not calculated to cool their ardor for fighting, and they continued from time to time to give each other fresh scars; they crossed swords in Germany, in Poland, in Spain, in Russia, and in Italy. Time progressed; meanwhile they became generals of division. Grand crosses of all the orders, dignitaries of state, rich and ennobled by the Emperor, they were called Count F. and Count D., and they had both grown fat.

Dupont, the most reasonable of the two, often reflected upon the absurdity of so ancient a quarrel, and doubted if it were not better to kill Fournier at once, if possible—and settle their feud forever. This became his fixed determination at the beginning of the year 1815, and he made the acquaintance of a charming young lady whom he resolved to marry; he was convinced that once a husband and a father he could not risk, upon so many foolish hazards, a life which would no longer belong to him alone.

After obtaining the promise of the lady's hand, he waited upon Count Fournier.

'You are come for a bout?' said the latter.

'Perhaps, but I wish first to talk with you.'

'Do me the honor to be seated then.'

'Listen, my friend—I am going to be married.'

'What stupidity!' cried F.

'Hun!' said D., musing, 'nevertheless I am going to be married.'

'Allow me to congratulate you!'

'Before consummating this serious step, I wish to finish with you. We have now fought through a period of nineteen years.'

'It is true, 1794 to 1815—how time flies.'

'We have fought, indeed, too often.'

'It does not appear so to me!'

'As I cannot continue a life which would grieve my poor little wife, I come to propose—in virtue of article fourth of our treaty—to change the mode of combat, and take to the pistol.'

'The pistol!' cried Fournier, astonished.—

'With the sword you can defend yourself, but with the pistol—'

'I know your wonderful skill,' replied Dupont, 'but I propose to equalize the chances a little, thus; a friend of mine possesses—at Neully—a small enclosed park—a mimic vine forest—surrounded by a high stone wall, with two gates of entrance, one on the side toward the village, the other on the river bank. We will repair thither—at an hour agreed upon—armed with our horseman's pistols; we will enter, each by a separate gate and fire at will, whenever one sees the other. I did not know the ground any better than you. We shall neither have any advantage.'

'I declare! it is a droll idea.'

'Does it suit you?'

'Yes! if only for its originality—a sort of little Indian warfare, in fact—without witnesses, of course?'

'Of course.'

'At what day and hour, then, shall we enact this little melo drama?'

'To-morrow, at ten, if you like.'

'Impossible! I see my tailor specially, to-morrow—but Thursday, if you are at liberty.'

'Thursday be it then—at ten! There is the key of the gate on the village side.'

'No! give me the other—I adore the river side!'

'Adieu, then! and do not, I pray, give yourself the trouble to conduct me!'

Three days after this interview, just as the church-clock of Neully struck ten, two men entered the park of M. Dufraise, by separate gates, one on the other side toward the village, the other at the opposite extremity on the river; and closing them swiftly, each one drew two long pistols from his riding coat, and cast a keen rapid gaze around him.—

These two men were Fournier and Dupont. After assuring themselves that neither was seen by the other, they began to step cautiously along under the shadows of the trees.

Slowly they proceeded along the dark arched avenues, stopping at every step to listen if the crackling gravel should betoken an approaching footstep, or betray their own, measuring the length of each path they entered, fixing a suspicious eye upon every waving bough and trembling leaf. Slowly and warily they thus continued to advance, their pistols in hand, and at full cock, till, at the two intersecting avenues, they came suddenly in full view of each other. By a spontaneous impulse, each sprang to cover—Fournier behind a giant oak, and Dupont to the protecting bulk of a hoary chestnut—like sharpshooters at the moment of engaging, or per-

haps more like two aboriginal warriors of the wilds of the western continent. Scarce thirty paces separated them, but they ran no risk, save by attempting to leave their cover.

What curious reflections they must have made behind these mighty wooden bulwarks, a step from which might have cost them their lives.

They remained thus a long time immovable, neither daring to afford the other the advantage of the first fire, till at last Dupont, stimulated by the remembrance of his lady-love, decided to begin the battle; but he lost nothing of his caution, and resorted to a ruse to deliver himself from his ennui. First he shook slightly the laple of his riding-coat beyond the projecting circle of his chestnut, to let his foe know he was about to make a move. When he thought this observed, he advanced his left shoulder a little beyond the trunk where his coat had been, and drew it back swiftly. It was just in time; for on the instant, a ball stripped a large fragment of bark from the tree exactly where the shoulder had appeared. Fournier had lost one shot!

After a few moments, Dupont began the same manoeuvre on the opposite side of the tree; but Fournier was too old a fox to be caught twice in the same trap, and Dupont changed his design to a better semblance of reality. He showed the barrel of his pistol, as if waiting a chance to fire, and taking his hat in his right hand advanced it just to the edge of the left side of his dear chestnut.—

The hat was held between the fingers of Dupont like the pipe in the mouth of the galloping hussar: most fortunately his head was not in it, for Fournier's second ball would assuredly have shattered it. The stratagem succeeded perfectly. The pistols of Fournier were now but harmless tubes, innocent of defence. Dupont stalked forth from his cover, and marched up to the discomfited general, who prepared to meet him with brave composure.

Standing calmly with his head erect, his eyes firm, his arms crossed upon his breast, he remained motionless before the advancing weapons of Dupont.

The laws of dueling are implicable, there can be but one interpretation of their meaning. One is master of his enemy's life with certain restrictions, but one owes his own within the same limits. Fournier awaited, therefore, the fate of the conquered; he looked upon death calmly, as a dangerous acquaintance whom he had too often braved to fear.

Dupont halted two paces from him.

'I have a perfect right to kill you!'

Fournier bowed affirmatively.

'But I cannot draw a trigger in cold blood upon the life of a fellow-creature. I give you yours!'

'As you please.'

'Understand me! I give you to-day's grace only. I wish to be master of the property I loan you; it is but a temporary use I yield you—nothing more. If you ever annoy me—if you ever seek to renew this quarrel—if, in short, I have ever cause to complain of you, I shall remind you that I am the legitimate possessor of two balls specially destined to be lodged in your cranium, and we will resume this affair where we now leave off; that is to say, at my first summons, you will come to offer your head for my target.'

'That would be annoying!'

'Faith! I can do no better for you. But we shall not see each other again. I am going to enter domestic life, and shall dispense with the acquaintance of such scape-graces as yourself. You will travel your road, and I mine; I shall never trouble you if you let me alone; but at the first trick of yours, I will pay you the two balls, of which you shall come to give me the receipt. Does this not suit you?'

'None too well!'

'Well, then, we will finish at once!' said Dupont, sternly, raising his pistol at the same time. 'Decide!'

'Do you think such a decision can be made in a minute?'

'I prefer, however, your deciding at once, otherwise I shall have to return here, and the road is somewhat long.'

'Well! I must accept then, as I have no alternative, and—'

'I care not to hear your motives; they only concern yourself. Remember, only that we quarrel no more; that we meet no more, and that in case you rebel, I have two balls in my pistols at your service. Farewell! I hope you may never see me again!'

Putting up his pistols, Dupont walked off, and a few minutes afterward, Fournier left the enclosure, laughing heartily at his misadventure, and returned to Paris to tell his friends the singular termination of the famous duel of nineteen years duration. But he spoke cautiously of his ancient enemy, and avoided his presence, for he knew Dupont would surely claim and fulfil the terms of the compact; and he preserved through life the superstitious belief that Dupont was of different mould from other mortals, and the only man in the world it was impossible to kill!