

# The Challenge

An illustrated story of Paul Morphy and Howard Staunton

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<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/illustrated-london-news>

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**T H A N K Y O U**



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“Chess is not only the most delightful and scientific, but the most moral of amusements”

-Paul Morphy

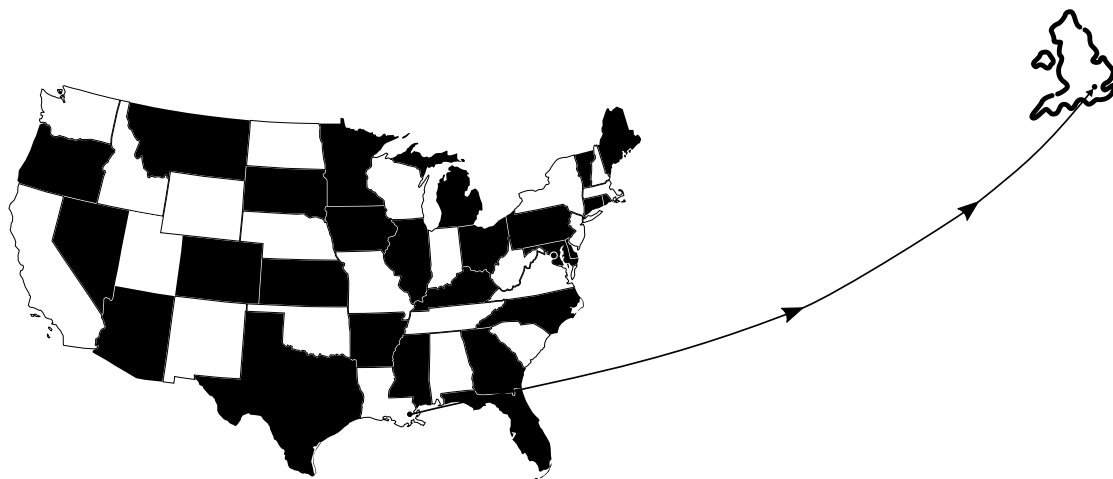


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# The Challenge

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On Feb. 4, 1858 the New Orleans Chess Club sent a letter to Howard Staunton challenging him to a match with Paul Morphy.



*Sir,—On behalf of the New Orleans Chess Club, and in compliance with the instructions of that body, we, the undersigned committee, have the honor to invite you to visit our city, and there meet Mr. Paul Morphy in a chess match. In transmitting this invitation, permit us to observe, that we are prompted no less by the desire to become personally acquainted with one whom we have so long admired, than by the very natural anxiety to ascertain the strength of our American players by the decisive criterion of actual conflict over the board.*

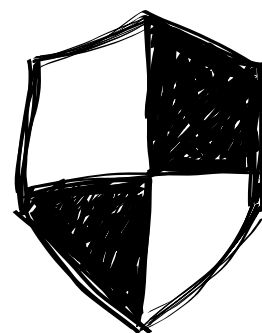


A response to the challenge was published in Howard Staunton's chess column in the Illustrated London News.

**PROPOSED CHESS MATCH BETWEEN ENGLAND AND AMERICA  
FOR ONE THOUSAND POUNDS A SIDE.**

-- We have been favoured with a copy of the defi which the friends of Mr. Paul Morphy, the Chess champion of the United States, have transmitted to Mr. Staunton. The terms of this cartel are distinguished by extreme courtesy, and with one notable exception, by extreme liberality also. The exception in question, however, (we refer to the clause which stipulates that the combat shall take place in New Orleans!) appears to us utterly fatal to the match; and we must confess our astonishment, that the intelligent gentlemen who drew up the conditions did not themselves discover this. Could it possibly escape their penetration, that if Mr. Paul Morphy, a young gentleman without family ties or professional claims upon his attention, finds it inconvenient to anticipate, by a few months, an intended voyage to Europe, his proposed antagonist, who is well known for years to have been compelled, by laborious literary occupation, to abandon the practice of Chess beyond the indulgence of an occasional game, must find it not merely inconvenient, but positively impracticable, to cast aside all engagements, and undertake a journey of many thousand miles for the sake of a Chess-encounter? Surely the idea of such, a sacrifice is not admissible for a single moment. If Mr. Morphy for whose skill we entertain the liveliest admiration be desirous to win his spurs among the Chess chivalry of Europe, he must take advantage of his purposed visit, next year; he will then meet in this country, in France, and Germany, and in Russia, many champions whose names must be as household words to him, ready to test and do honour to his prowess.

*April 3, 1858*



*London, England*

Staunton also replied personally to the challenge sending a letter to the New Orleans Chess Club.



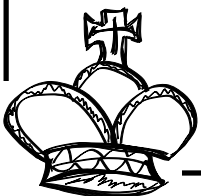
*Gentlemen:*

*In reply to your very courteous proposal for me to visit New Orleans for the purpose of encountering Mr. Paul Morphy at Chess, permit me to mention that for many years professional duties have compelled me to abandon the practice of the game almost entirely except in the most desultory manner, and that at the present time these duties are so exacting that it is with difficulty I am enabled to snatch one day out of seven for exercise and relaxation.*

*Under such circumstances you will at once perceive that a long and arduous chess contest, even in this Metropolis, would be an enterprise too formidable for me to embark in without ample opportunity for the recovery of my old strength in play, together with such arrangements as would prevent the sacrifice of my professional engagements for the sake of a match at chess, and that the idea of undertaking one in a foreign country, many thousand miles from here, is admissible only in a dream.*

*With friendly greetings to my proposed antagonist, whose talent and enthusiasm no one can more highly estimate, and with compliments to you for the honor implied in your selection of me as the opponent of such a champion, I beg to subscribe myself, with every consideration.*

*Yours obediently,  
H. Staunton*



After Staunton's reply, Morphy decided to travel to England and renew the challenge personally.

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**THE**  
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**EDITED BY**

**PAUL MORPHY & DANIEL W. FISKE**

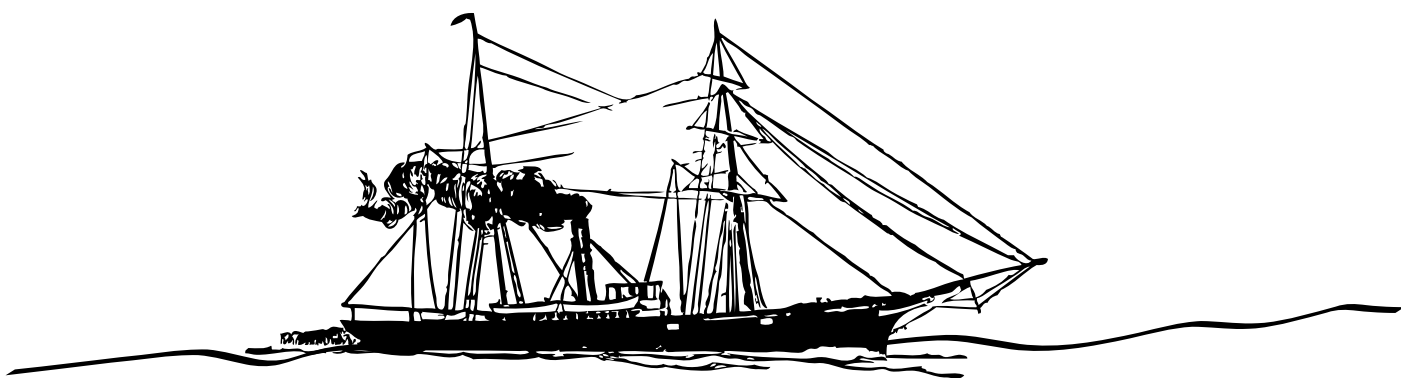
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**JULY, 1858.**

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Mr. Morphy reached New York on the morning of June 8th, and left the next day in the Arabia for Liverpool, to be present at the Birmingham festival. After the close of the meeting of the British Association, he will proceed to London, where he will remain several weeks, for the purpose, if it be agreeable to Mr. Staunton, of contesting a grand match with the distinguished English player, in accordance with the terms of the challenge of the New Orleans Club. As the chief obstacle to the acceptance was the great distance of New Orleans from England, it is hoped that every impediment will be removed by Mr. Morphy's presence in London.





On the morning of June 20, 1858, Morphy arrived in Liverpool, and the next morning he proceeded to London. A few days later, Morphy met Staunton, and he renewed the challenge of the New Orleans Chess Club, which Staunton conditionally accepted, requesting a month to brush up on his chess openings and endings.



Although Morphy and Staunton met frequently at the St. George's Chess Club, they never sat down together. Morphy, having made the first move, now awaited Staunton's approach. It would appear that the reason for their having no friendly game in public was that Staunton desired first to observe Morphy's strength and manner of play against other opponents.

Very soon after their first meeting, Staunton asked that their match be postponed until after the Birmingham meeting in August. Morphy agreed to this second postponement, and Staunton affirmed the agreement in the Illustrated London News.

July 10 -- Mr. Morphy has proffered to play Mr. Staunton a match of 21 games for a stake of 500 pounds a side, and the latter has accepted the challenge, conditionally that the terms of play are such as he can agree to without infraction of his present literary engagements. As there appears every disposition on the part of his opponent to meet his wishes in this respect the match will probably take place in London shortly after the Birmingham Chess Meeting.



# August 14, 1858



Dear Sir,

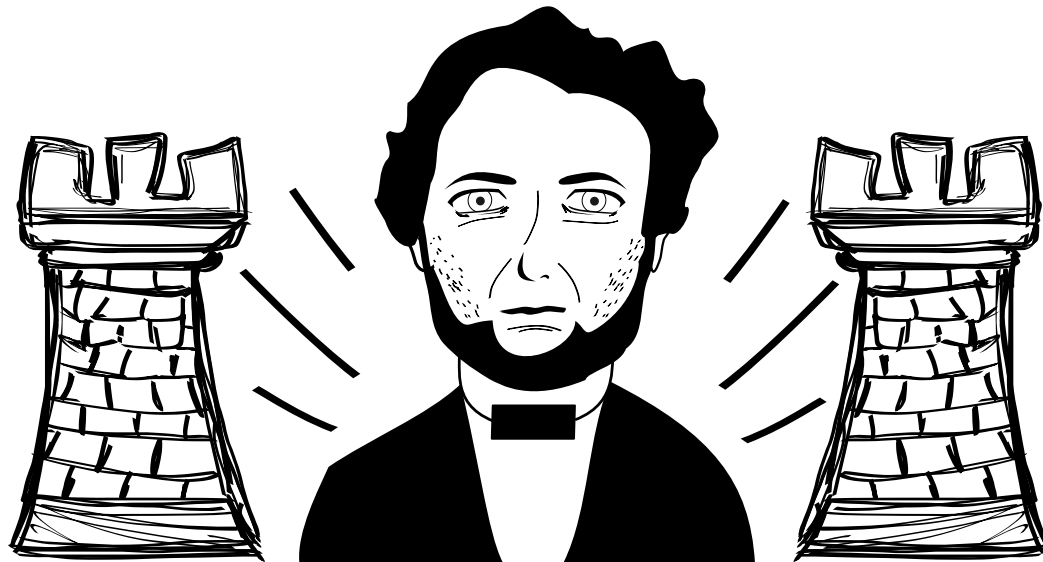
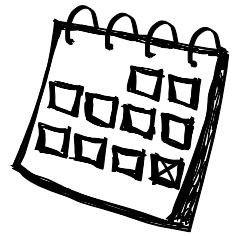
As we are now approaching the Birmingham meeting, at the termination of which you have fixed our match to commence, I think it would be advisable to settle the preliminaries during this week. Would you be good enough to state some early period when your seconds could meet mine, so that a contest which I have so much at heart, and which from your eminent position excites so much interest in the chess world, may be looked upon as a *fait accompli*.

I am dear sir, yours very respectfully,

Paul Morphy



To his letter of August 14, Morphy received a somewhat lengthy reply from Staunton, its main thrust being that the latter still required a few weeks for preparation.



Not considering this a satisfactory reply, Morphy wrote again a few days later.



Dear Sir.—I must first apologize for not replying to your previous communication. As you observe, my numerous contests must be the excuse for my remissness. It is certainly a high compliment to so young a player as myself that you, whose reputation in the chess arena has been unapproached during so many long years, should require any preparation for our match. Immediately on my arrival in England, some two months since, I spoke to you in reference to our contest, and, in accepting the challenge, you stated that you should require some time to prepare, and you proposed a period for commencing which I accepted. I am well aware that your many engagements in the literary world must put you to some inconvenience in meeting me, and I am therefore desirous to consult your wishes in every respect. Would you please state the earliest opportunity when those engagements will permit the match coming off, such time being consistent with your previous preparation. The few weeks referred to in your favor seem to be rather vague, and I shall feel highly gratified by your fixing a definite period for the contest. I leave the terms entirely to yourself. I remain  
dear sir,

Yours very respectfully,  
Paul Morphy

August 21, 1858



Staunton had publicly committed himself to play a match although the exact date had not yet been set. Now Morphy had time to visit Paris, but upon his return to London the next day, August 28, he read the following statement in Staunton's chess column, presumably in reply to a correspondent. It was said that Staunton often used imaginary correspondents in his column and "Anti-book" and others were thought to be such.

## THE ILLUSTRATED

# LONDON

# NEWS



No. 933.—VOL. XXXIII.]

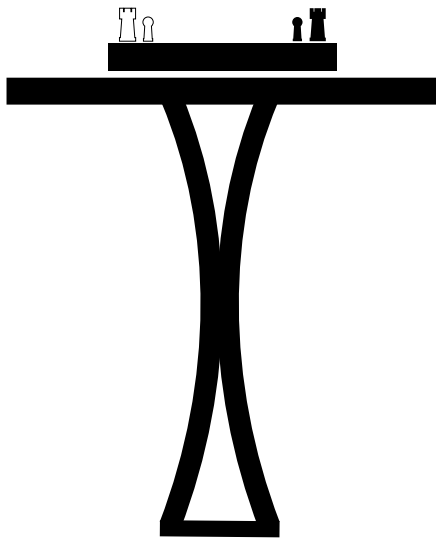
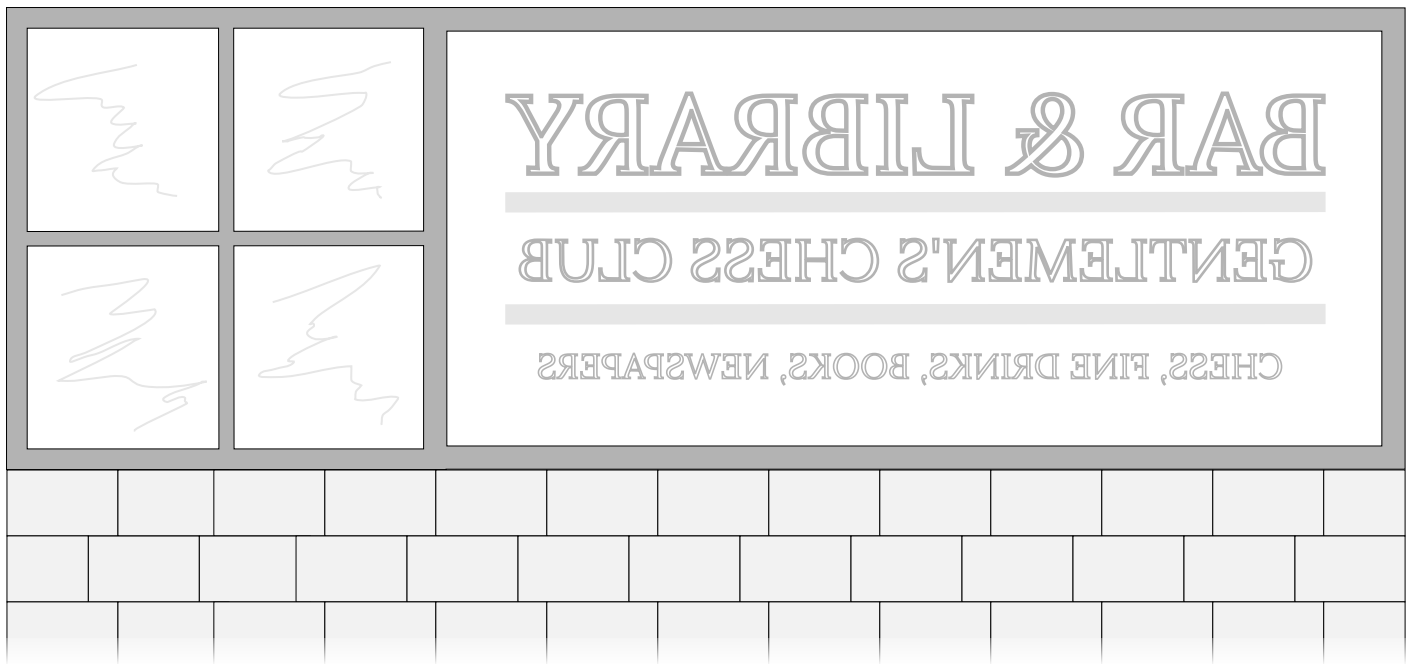
SATURDAY, AUGUST 28, 1858.

[WITH A SUPPLEMENT, FIVEPENCE

ANTI-BOOK.—As you surmise, "knowing the authority," the slang of the sporting paper in question regarding the proposed encounter between Mr. Staunton and the young American is "bunkum." In matches of importance it is the invariable practice in this country, before anything definite is settled, for each party to be provided with representatives to arrange the terms and money for the stakes. Mr. Morphy has come here unfurnished in both respects; and, although both will no doubt be forthcoming in due time, it is clearly impossible, until they are, that any determinate arrangement can be made. 2. The statement of another contemporary that the reduction in the amount of stakes from £1000 a side to £500 was made at the suggestion of the English amateur is equally devoid of truth; the proposal to reduce the amount having been made by Mr. Morphy.



**KEEP  
CALM  
AND  
STAUNTON**



Morphy took no public notice of the “Anti-book” statement. He was determined not to do anything that might adversely affect the Staunton match. Instead, he patiently awaited Staunton’s naming “the exact date” of the match, as promised.

October arrived, but Staunton did not set a date for the match, so Morphy addressed another letter to Staunton. Skeptical that the letter would go further than Staunton and desiring that his position in the matter be made known to the public, which knew only the “Anti-book” version, Morphy sent copies of the letter with a short note to the chess editors of the *Era*, *Bell’s Life in London*, the *Field*, and the *Sunday Times*.







# CAFÉ DE LA RÉGENCE



October 6, 1858  
Paris, France

Sir,—On my arrival in England, three months since, I renewed the challenge to you personally which the New Orleans Chess Club had given some months previously. You immediately accepted, but demanded a month's delay, in order to prepare yourself for the contest. Subsequently, you proposed that the time should be postponed until after the Birmingham meeting, to which I assented. On the approach of the period you had fixed, I addressed you a communication, requesting that the necessary preliminaries might be immediately settled, but you left London without replying to it.

I went to Birmingham for the express purpose of asking you to put a stop to further delay, by fixing a date for the opening of our match; but before the opportunity presented itself, you came to me, and, in the presence of Lord Lyttelton, Mr. Avery, and other gentlemen, you stated that your time was much occupied in editing a new edition of Shakespeare, and that you were under heavy bonds to your publishers accordingly. But you reiterated your intention to play me, and said that if I would consent to a further postponement until the first week in November,







# CAFÉ DE LA RÉGENCE



you would, within a few days, communicate with me and fix the exact date. I have not heard further from you, either privately, by letter, or through the columns of the *Illustrated London News*.

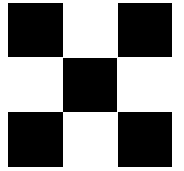
A statement appeared in the Chess department of that *Journal* a few weeks since, that "Mr. Morphy had come to Europe unprovided with backers or seconds;" the inference being obvious that my want of funds was the reason of our match not taking place. As you are the editor of that department of the *Illustrated London News*, I felt hurt that a gentleman who had always received me at his club, and elsewhere, with great kindness and courtesy, should allow so prejudicial a statement to be made in reference to me—one, too, which is not strictly in accordance with fact.

Permit me to repeat what I have invariably declared in every Chess community I have had the honor of entering, that I am not a professional player—that I never wished to make any skill I possess the means of pecuniary advancement—and that my earnest desire is never to play for any stake but honor. My friends in New Orleans, however, subscribed

October 6, 1858  
Paris, France



# CAFÉ DE LA RÉGENCE



a certain sum, without any countenance from me, and that sum has been ready for you to meet a considerable time past. Since my arrival in Paris I have been assured by numerous gentlemen, that the value of those stakes can be immediately increased to any amount; but, for myself, personally, reputation is the only incentive I recognize.

The matter of seconds cannot, certainly, offer any difficulty. I had the pleasure of being first received in London by the St. George's Chess Club, of which you are so distinguished a member; and of those gentlemen I request the honor of appointing my seconds, to whom I give full authority in settling all preliminaries.

In conclusion, I beg leave to state that I have addressed a copy of this letter to several editors, being most desirous that our true position should no longer be misunderstood by the community at large.

Again requesting you to fix the date for commencing our match.

I have the honor to remain, Sir,  
Your very humble servant,

Paul Morphy

October 6, 1858  
Paris, France





October 9, 1858  
London, England



*Sir, — In reply to your letter, I have to observe that you must be perfectly conscious that the difficulty in the way of my engaging in a chess-match is one over which I have no control. You were distinctly appraised, in answer to the extraordinary proposal of your friends that I should leave my home, family and avocations, to proceed to New Orleans for the purpose of playing chess with you, that a long and arduous contest, even in London, would be an undertaking too formidable for me to embark in without ample opportunity for the recovery of my old strength in play, together with such arrangements as would prevent the sacrifice of my professional engagements. Upon your unexpected arrival here, the same thing was repeated to you, and my acceptance of your challenge was entirely conditional on my being able to gain time for practice.*

*The experience, however, of some weeks, during which I have labored unceasingly, to the serious injury of my health, shows that not only is it impracticable for me to save time for that purpose, but that by no means short of giving up a great work on which I am engaged, subjecting the publishers to the loss of thousands, and myself to an action for breach of contract, could I obtain time even for the match itself. Such a sacrifice is, of course, out of all question.*

*A match at chess or cricket may be a good thing in its way, but none but a madman would for either forfeit his engagements and*

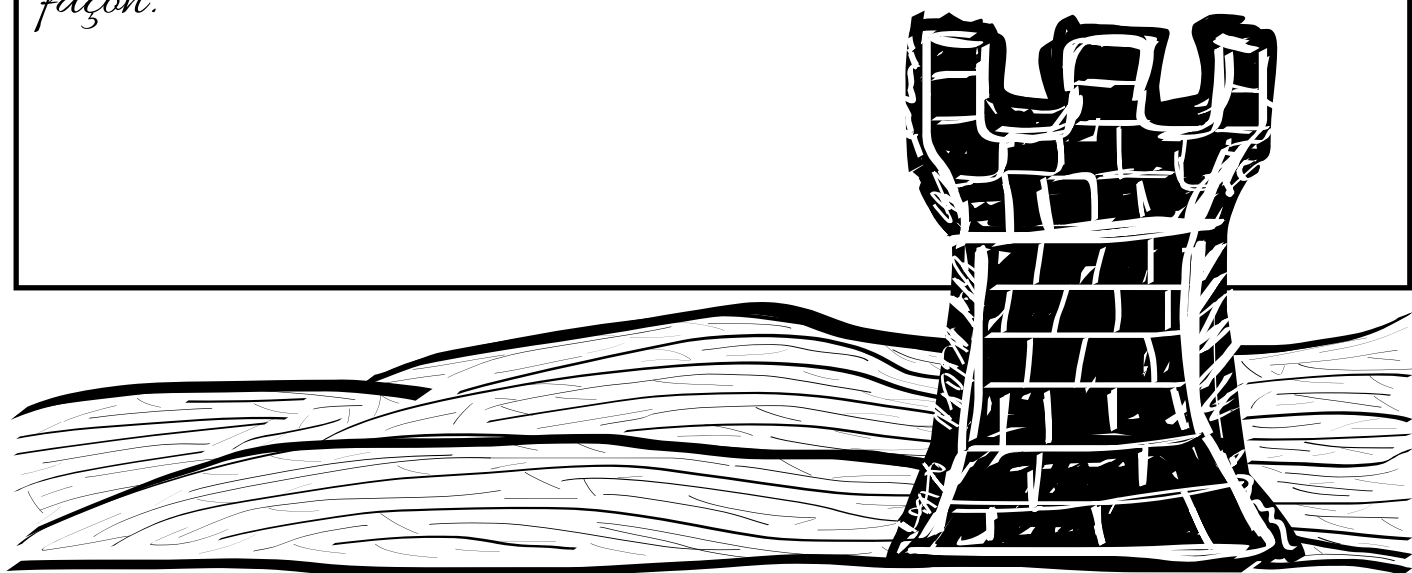
imperil his professional reputation. Under these circumstances, I waited only the termination of your late struggle with Mr. Harrwitz, to explain that, fettered as I am at this moment, it is impossible for me to undertake any enterprise which would have the effect of withdrawing me from duties I am pledged to fulfil. The result is not, perhaps, what either you or I desired, as it will occasion disappointment to many; but it is unavoidable, and the less to be regretted, since a contest, wherein one of the combatants must fight under disadvantages so manifest as those I should have to contend against, after many years retirement from practical chess, with my attention absorbed and my brain overtaxed by more important pursuits, could never be accounted a fair trial of skill.

I have the honor to be,

Yours, &c.

H. Staunton

P.S. I may add that, although denied the satisfaction of a set encounter with you at this period, I shall have much pleasure, if you will again become my guest, in playing you a few games sans façon.



On October 23, Staunton published his entire reply of October 9 along with a partial copy of Morphy's open letter of October 6, omitting the reference to the "Anti-book" letter about Morphy's lack of funds and seconds. Various chess columns then printed anonymous and acrimonious letters. Morphy took no part in any of this, but wrote to Lord Lyttelton, the president of the British Chess Association, explaining his own efforts to bring about the match and Staunton's efforts to avoid the match with everything short of admitting he didn't wish to play.

*is not strictly in accordance with fact.*

*On my first arriving in England, I informed Mr. Staunton that my stakes would be forthcoming the moment he desired, and I was therefore utterly at a loss to account for so unwarrantable a statement being made in reference to me, unless with the intention of compromising my position before the public. And I would ask your lordship's attention to the terms of the suppressed paragraph, couched in such language as to avoid all insinuation of animus, and affording Mr. Staunton the amplest opportunity for explaining away the difficulty. The course pursued by that gentleman cannot do otherwise than justify me in ascribing to him the very worst of motives in publishing what he knew to be incorrect, in denying me common justice, and in giving as the whole of*

*October 26, 1858*

*Paris, France*



Café  
de  
la  
Régence

my letter what he knew to be only a part of it.

From Mr. Staunton I now appeal to the great body of English Chess players, I appeal to the British Chess Association, I appeal to yourself, my lord, as the Maecenas of English Chess. And, as I visited your country for the purpose of challenging Mr. Staunton, which challenge he has repeatedly accepted, I now demand of you that you shall declare to the world it is through no fault of mine that this match has not taken place.

I have the honour to remain, my lord,  
yours very respectfully,

Paul Morphy

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# LORD LYTTELTON'S REPLY TO MORPHY'S LETTER OF APPEAL

*November 3, 1858*

*Cornwall, England*



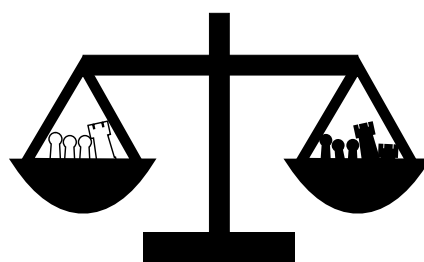
*Dear Sir, — I much regret that I have been unable till to-day to reply to your letter of the 26th October, which only reached me on the 1st inst. With regard to the appeal which you have made to the British Chess Association, I may perhaps be allowed to say, as its President, that I fear nothing can be done about the matter in question by that body. It is one of recent and rather imperfect organization; its influence is not yet fully established. It is practically impossible to procure any effective meeting of its members at present, and it is doubtful whether it could take any step in the matter if it were to meet. I must therefore be understood as writing in my private character alone, but, at the same time, you are welcome, should you think it worth while (which I can hardly think it can be), to make further use of this letter, in any manner you may wish.*

*Your letter has but one professed object; that we should declare that it is not your fault that the match between yourself and Mr. Staunton has not taken place. To this the reply might be made in two words. I cannot conceive it possible that any one should impute that failure to you, nor am I aware that any one has done so. But, in the circumstances, I shall not perhaps be blamed, if I go somewhat further into the matter. In the general circumstances of the case, I conceive that Mr. Staunton was quite justified in declining the match. The fact is understood, that he has for years been engaged in labours which must, whatever arrangements might be made, greatly*

interfere with his entering into a serious contest with a player of the highest force and in constant practice, and so far, the failure of the match is the less to be regretted. Nor can I doubt the correctness of his recent statement, that the time barely necessary for the match itself could not be spared, without serious loss and inconvenience both to others and to himself.

But I cannot but think that in all fairness and considerateness, Mr. Staunton might have told you of this long before he did. I know no reason why he might not have ascertained it, and informed you of it in answer to your first letter from America. Instead of this, it seems to me plain, both as to the interview at which I myself was present, and as to all the other communications which have passed, that Mr. Staunton gave you every reason to suppose that he would be ready to play the match within no long time. I am not aware, indeed (nor do I perceive that you said it), that you left America solely with the view of playing Mr. Staunton. It would, no doubt, make the case stronger, but it seems to me as unlikely as that you should have come, as has been already stated (anonymously, and certainly not with Mr. Staunton's concurrence), in order to attend the Birmingham Tournament.

With regard to the suppression of part of your last letter, I must observe, that I am not aware how far Mr. Staunton is responsible for what appears in the *Illustrated London News*. But whoever is responsible





for that suppression, I must say, that I cannot see how it is possible to justify or excuse it.

I greatly regret the failure of a contest which would have been of much interest, and the only one, as I believe, which could have taken place with you, with any chance of its redounding to the credit of this country.

I still more regret that any annoyance or disappointment should have been undergone by one, who—as a foreigner—from his age, his ability, and his conduct and character, is eminently entitled to the utmost consideration in the European countries which he may visit.

I am, dear sir, yours truly,  
Lyttelton



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# Resolutions

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Lord Lyttelton's letter almost but not quite closed the public discussion of the Morphy-Staunton match, the match for which England, Europe, and America had been waiting for Staunton to set the date. It would appear that Lord Lyttelton had expressed the general sentiment in the country, as did the following resolution of the Manchester Chess Club.

## November 17, 1858

Resolved; That this meeting, while recognizing Mr. Staunton's right to decline any chess challenge which he might find inconvenient and incompatible with his other engagements, deems it proper (inasmuch as Lord Lyttelton has only felt himself at liberty to answer, in his private capacity, Mr. Morphy's appeal to him as President of the British Chess Association) to declare its full concurrence in the opinion expressed by Lord Lyttelton in his letter to Mr. Morphy, of the 3d inst., that in all fairness and considerateness Mr. Staunton should have told Mr. Morphy long before he did, that he declined the proposed match.

That copies of this resolution be sent to Mr. Morphy, Mr. Staunton, and the editor of the Illustrated London News.

Of all the English clubs, only one accepted and approved Staunton's tactics and explanations.

## November 26, 1858

Resolved: That the Cambridge University Chess Club, recognizing the important services rendered by Mr. Staunton to the cause of chess, and seeing with regret the ungenerous attacks which have for some time past been directed against him by a certain section of the press, notorious for its anti-English tendencies, are of opinion

1. That under the peculiar circumstances in which Mr. Staunton found himself placed, it was scarcely possible for him to do otherwise than decline the proposed match with Mr. Morphy.

2. That his allowing the challenge to remain open so long as there appeared the slightest hope of his being able to play, was, beyond all question, the proper course to be adopted by one really anxious for the encounter.



The *Era* of December 12, 1858, took strong exception to the Cambridge resolutions.

## December 12, 1858

The intention, of course, was to justify Mr. Staunton in taking the course he has adopted, but it does not do so. It says he was right in allowing the challenge to remain open till the last moment. If, indeed, Mr. Staunton had kept the challenge open as long as possible, no one would have blamed him, but that was precisely what he did not do. He accepted the challenge, and thereby closed with it, and his friends subscribed funds for the stakes. What Mr. Staunton did allow to remain open was the day; and after repeated promises to name it, that has been postponed to -- never.

NEVER  
**END**

