June 15, 1876

THE HIPPOPOTAMUS OPENING.

A SKETCH FROM LIFE, BEING A FREE TRANSLATION FROM THE GERMAN.*

Upon my arrival in the northern German metropolis, some months ago, I made diligent search for a comfortable restaurant, in which to indulge in my post-prandial cup of coffee, but found none suited to my mind. Chance, however, soon favored me with that which my efforts had sought in vain. I found, accidentally, the Eldorado of my warmest wishes, as I one afternoon entered a coffee-house, which presented, externally, but little promise, but which within showed itself at once to be the very place I had been looking for—a quiet, dimly lighted room, with an atmosphere redolent of fragrant Havanas, and, above all, provided with tables and men for the one noble game.

The room was at once a domino and a chess temple; both games had a numerous crowd of worshippers, and active and passive priests conducted the service of both. At the chess tables were not only the players, moving and checking as monotonously as usual, but a crowd gathered around each, and, like the "gods" in the gallery of a theatre, took part in the game, as they were inclined. Among the high priests of chess, I met there, for the first time, one who was evidently the "big Injin" of the place. He had his crowd of gallery friends, who encouraged and criticised his play, and with them he kept up an interchange of comments on the game. "See there, now; you will lose a piece!" cries one from the crowd. "Who's going to lose a piece? How shall I lose it now? Not a bit of it!" He seldom got vexed, for anger does not become the great, but bore ever in his countenance a beaming, child-like innocence.

I had a desire to play with this "great gun," but my inborn modesty prevented me from making such an audacious proposal. One afternoon, however, I mustered up courage. I was there early, and soon the gentleman entered, when, with beating heart, I stammered out my wish.

"You wish to play a game with me?" was his dubious reply.

"Yes," I said, and turned to the table.

While placing the men he gave me a little discourse:

"Chess is a difficult game. It can not be learned. You can learn anything else — Latin, Greek, medicine, art — but not chess. In that you must have genius; it must be born with you."

His crowd had circled around him and hung upon his ponderous words, while I, in their midst, was evidently looked upon compassionately as a poor victim. We drew for the move and I lost.

"Now, then, we will see how to play chess," he said, as he moved and I replied:

1 P to K 4 — 1 P to K 4

"You shall soon learn my opening," he said, as he played

2 K Kt to K 2d.

"It's in none of your 'Handbuchs,' so far. The knight, the knight is the piece."

I hesitated. Certainly, I had never seen that opening. I was embarrassed. Nevertheless I played—

2 Q to K R 5th

"Oh ho! you are going for my king's pawn, are you? — sly dog! — as though I could not see that! Forward, knight, march!" and again he played—

3 Q Kt to B 3d

Again a knight; and so I played one too:

3 Q Kt to B 3d.

He studied a while, stroked his beard, and played —

4 P to K Kt 3d.

My queen was attacked, and I moved her away, of course:

4 Q to K Kt 4th.

Again he attacked her, with—

5 P to Q 4th,

upon which I rushed with my knight into the middle of the game.

5 Q Kt takes P.

"There you are, now! Every one thinks he can play chess, now-a-days. Don't you see your queen is in take? I'd let you take back the move, but you young fellows are becoming too proud, and would like to brag over the defeat of the old heads. You deserve the lesson!" —

6 Q B takes Q.

I replied —

6 Q Kt to K B 6 mate!

After the uproar of the gallery had subsided, and he was convinced that it was a mate, I said:

"You should call your opening of 2. K Kt to K 2d the

HIPPOPOTAMUS OPENING!"

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