AN

ARM-CHAIR IN THE SMOKING-ROOM:

OR

FICTION, ANECDOTE, HUMOUR, AND FANCY

For Dreamy Half-hours.

WITH NOTES ON

Cigars, Meerschaums, and Smoking, from various Pens.

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CHESS GOSSIP.

One of the reputed origins of chess is, that it was expressly invented for the purpose of teaching a youthful despot that a king, after all, although of course the most important personage in the realm, is still able to effect little or nothing without the assistance and support of his subjects. The Indian sage, who thus undertook the joint duties of reformer of royalty and professor of chess, improved the occasion both to convey other truths and to render access to the presence easier.

If chess at the outset served as a lesson, and also as an opportunity of communication between great personages and those below them, it has subsequently not less frequently answered the same purposes of introduction. When noble Ebbeson went to Bohemia to seek a wife for his master, king Valdemar of Denmark, they dressed the princess in blue silk, and led her into the great hall. They then brought the chess-board and the table of massive gold, that the noble Ebbeson might play with the princess and converse with her alone. At the third move they were agreed; noble Ebbeson had won a good wife for his king.

Ferdinand and Miranda's game, in the *Tempest*, had much the same sort of character, with the pleasant difference, however, of love-making in person, instead of by proxy.

MIRANDA. Sweet lord, you play me false.
FERDINAND. No, my dear'st love,
I would not for the world.
MIRANDA. Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle,
And I would call it fair play.

A similar desire for semi-official *tête-à-têtes* with gentlemen attached to her court might be one reason of our queen Elizabeth's fondness for chess. She even flirted by means of chessmen; as when she sent Sir Charles Blount, afterwards Duke of Devonshire, a golden chessman, and that the queen, which he wore with a red favour; and which caused the Earl of Essex to remark, with affected contempt, 'I perceive now that every fool will have his favour.' The consequence was that Sir Charles challenged him. They fought in Marybone-park, where Essex was disarmed, and wounded in the thigh.

In good old times, when Charlemagne was the existing providential man, it was prudent to mind your moves, and what you were about, while playing chess. The *Histoire de Gallien restauré* relates that one day, when the hero was playing with his uncle Tibert, he cried in a loud voice, 'I say "mate;"' and took the king. The uncle, beaten, fell into a rage, pommelled his nephew's head with the chessboard till the blood flowed freely, and called him unpolite names, 'bastard' for instance. Gallien, naturally, went and told his mother, who comforted his sorrows and healed his wounds, but admitted that the title applied to him was true. At which, Gallien philosophically remarked, 'Better to be a bastard and a bold cavalier than a cow-

ardly lout born in lawful wedlock.' O the refinement of the good old times!

In western Europe the game of chess is played by two adversaries only; and never, like dominoes, cribbage, and some other games, by one against one, or by two partners against two, at pleasure. But the Russians have a chessboard for four players at once, who play two against two. The men for this chessboard are also more numerous than ours.

Chess is supposed to be an imitation of war. Phrenologists tell us that the faculty denoted by the organ of locality gives what is called *coup d'œil*, and judgment of the capabilities of ground. It is necessary to the military draughtsman, and is of great importance to a general. Dr. Gall mentions that he had observed the organ large in distinguished chess-players; and he conceived their talent to consist in the faculty of clearly mastering a great number of possible positions of the men.

The chessboard is a square field of battle, subdivided into sixty-four small squares, which gives eight squares along each side. The squares with us are alternately coloured white and black, or white or other uniform light tint and something else readily distinguishable from it. There are luxurious chessboards of white and parti-coloured marbles, of alabaster and mosaic squares, of gold alternating with inlaid jewels, and precious woods in chequered contrast.

Games, generally, resemble plants and flowers in being based on certain numbers. The key number of the lilies is six; of apples, pears, and roses, five.

Cruciferous flowers, as turnip and cabbage, are built on a ground-plan of twos and fours.

And so, at écarté, two players manipulate thirty-two cards; at whist, four players try the changes possible with a pack of fifty-two. There are plants, as the grasses, where three is the dominant figure; but an odd number is difficult to introduce into games between adversaries. As there are a few monandrous, one-stamened flowers, so there are (not very many) solitary monandrous or monogynous games. Round games are the Linnæan Polyandria polygynia of play, sometimes assuming ominous tints, rouge-et-noir—red, or gules, the colour of blood, and black or sable, the emblem of death.

The squares of the chessboard, amounting to sixty-four, constitute a very remarkable number. It is not divisible, in any way, by any odd number; but is divisible by multiples of two, and by two itself, until unity is reached at last. It is both a square number and a cube number; it is also both the square of a cube number and the cube of a square number. For it is the cube of four, which is the square of two; and it is the square of eight, which is the cube of two. Twice two are four, and twice four eight; and four times four are sixteen, and four times sixteen, sixty-four.

Chess has been played, on a regal scale, with living men in appropriate costume, on a natural fighting-ground—a lawn converted into a chessboard by paring the grass for the squares of white, or on a floor prepared for the purpose. Don Juan of Austria used one

of the halls in his palace as a chessboard; the different squares being represented by pavements of black and white marble, while disguised soldiers acted as the men.

At chess, each player has sixteen men, occupying at the outset the two rows of squares nearest to each player, and consequently leaving the four intermediate rows (consisting altogether of thirty-two squares) vacant and open for the conflict. The chessmen are of two classes. Eight pawns, *pions*, pioneers, or common soldiers, alike in form, occupy the second row from the player; while eight principal pieces, of different name, shape, and power, are ranged behind them. The positions of the pieces on the board are noteworthy, because they are not *exactly* the same for both players. It makes *some* difference, in the earliest moves, whether you are in the habit of playing black or white.

The chessboard is placed between the players in such a way that each has a white corner square to his right. The castles occupy the corner squares. The name and signification of the castle has curiously varied. In the middle ages it was *rokh*, from the name of the fabulous Arab bird which fetched Sinbad the sailor his diamonds. The Italians converted this into *rocca*, signifying also a rock, or fortress, whence the French naturally called it a *tour*. But the operation known as 'castling,' in which the rokh passes over the king, is evidently a much more appropriate act to be performed by a bird than by a fortress. On the Chinese chessboard the castles are called *tché*, or chariots of

war. The Icelanders replace the castles by little captains, which the schoolboys name centurions. They have swords by their sides, and their cheeks are swollen, as if they blew in the horn which they hold with both hands. The castle moves perpendicularly and horizontally, up or down, to the right or to the left. Its value is estimated as equal to five pawns. Next to the castles, on the same row, stand the two knights; and after them, in the same way, the two bishops.

Of all the pieces on the chessboard, the knight is the only one whose movements have never been modified; they are also the most singular and original, resembling those of none of the others. He goes from his own square to the second from him of an opposite colour, passing the square directly before, behind, or on either side of him, to the one diagonally situated either to the right or the left of it. In doing this, he only is at liberty to leap over either his own pieces or his adversary's. The sole condition requisite is, that the square to which he moves be vacant or occupied by an enemy's piece.

This peculiarity of the knight's move has given rise to a curious problem, whose origin is lost in that convenient hiding-place, the night of ages. The knight's problem consists in making him move to every one of the squares of the chessboard without alighting on the same square twice. Two thousand years ago the Brahmins had a way of doing it, which they seem to have kept a secret known only to their own caste, transmitting it from generation to generation. Modern travel-

lers in the Indian Peninsula have seen the feat performed by priests, who refused to communicate the clue to their method. About the middle of the last century the question attracted the attention of the learned; and in 1759 the Berlin Academy of Sciences offered a prize of 160*l.* for the best treatise on the subject.

Since that date many have been the solutions given, some even overcoming an increase of the original difficulty; thus the Abbé Durand, and one Solvyns or Slyvons, made the knight start from any indicated square, to finish on any other indicated square of the opposite colour to the first. The latter author demonstrated mathematically that there exist 20,160 different ways of resolving the knight's problem. Troupenas made the knight traverse the chessboard in two series of moves; the first series completely overrunning the thirty-two lower squares; the second series the thirty-two upper ones. Moreover, at the sixty-fourth square, the knight is exactly within a move of the first. Van der Monde also gave a solution with a like termination —an important improvement, for a reason to be mentioned.

We give three clues to this chequered labyrinth, in order somewhat to satisfy our readers' curiosity. In the first, the knight starts from the square numbered 1, then to 2, then to 3, and so on, till he arrives at 64, the square contiguous to that from which he set out on his travels.

42	59	44	9	40	21	46	7
61	10	41	58	45	8	39	20
12	43	60	55	22	57	6	47
53	62	11	30	25	28	19	38
32	13	54	27	56	23	48	5
63	52	31	24	29	26	37	18
14	33	2	51	16	35	4	49
1	64	15	34	3	50	17	36

In the second, Moivre's, he pursues a different course, finishing on a square remote from his starting-point.

34	49	22	11	36	39	24	1
21	10	35	50	23	12	37	40
48	33	62	57	38	25	2	13
9	20	51	54	63	60	41	26
32	47	58	61	56	53	14	3
19	8	55	52	59	64	27	42
46	31	6	17	44	29	4	15
7	18	45	30	5	16	43	28

It is evident that both these solutions can be commenced from any one of the four corner squares of the chessboard.

The third, and the most ingenious, was published by Euler, the celebrated mathematician, in 1766. It is performed as follows :

42	57	44	9	40	21	46	7
55	10	41	58	45	8	39	20
12	43	56	61	22	59	6	47
63	54	11	30	25	28	19	38
32	13	62	27	60	23	48	5
53	64	31	24	29	26	37	18
14	33	2	51	16	35	4	49
1	52	15	34	3	50	17	36

This set of moves has the signal merit of returning on itself, or being endless. At square 64 the knight is within a move of square 1. With the route well impressed on your memory, you may make the knight start from any indicated square on the chessboard. Suppose square 28 to be fixed on; you have only to move to square 29, and so on, till square 27 be reached, when the board will have been completely traversed.

The piece which we call 'bishop' is named by the French *fou*, meaning thereby not 'madman,' but fool, jester, or buffoon; as appears, amongst other proofs, from a chess masquerade danced before Henry IV. in 1607.

'The order thereof was this. Two men, masked, spread a great cloth chessboard, whose squares were red and white, each about a foot and a half in width.

'After that the violins sounded, and two dressed in Spanish costume, each with a long wand in their hand, entered, dancing a ballet of a grave measure, and then

placed themselves each on a camp-stool on opposite sides of the hall. When they were seated, to another *air de ballet* entered the eight carnation-coloured pawns; they were little children, who danced very prettily, and who performed amongst themselves a ballet of sundry and diverse figures. At the last figure each took rank on his square. The eight white pawns had also their own proper ballet, differing in airs, steps, and figures; these took their places straight in front of the others. The four rocs made their entry, and after several figures, stationed themselves behind the pawns, each on his proper square. In like manner, the knights danced their entry, and ranged themselves in their places. Also the *fools*, armed with baubles and bucklers in hand, with a certain form of combats and different figures, betook themselves into their squares.'

The Abbé Romain, in his poem on chess, says:

'Au jeu d'échecs tous les peuples ont mis
Les animaux communs dans leur pays:
L'Arabe y met le léger dromadaire,
Et l'Indien l'éléphant; quant à nous,
Peuple falot, nous y mettons des fous.

'Among their chessmen nations have put the animals common in their country. The Arab takes the light dromedary, and the Indian the elephant; as for us, a comical people, we employ fools.'

Vida, in his Latin poem, *Scacchia Ludus*, which has been greatly admired, calls the bishops *sagittiferi juvenes*, archers; a title very suitable to their diagonal movements. Among Charlemagne's chessmen, preserved

in the Abbey of St. Denis, the bishop was represented as about to let an arrow fly.

Turkish and Arabian chessmen, in obedience to religious scruples, never imitate the forms of men or animals. The Abbé Toderini saw a set made of oriental agate, enriched with gold. In Persia he found a greater tolerance of graven images on chessboards. An elephant (our castle) had two men on his back; and the king was enshrined, as it were, in an elaborate kiosk, belvedere, or bower.

The two middle squares, on the line nearest to each player, are the places of the king and the queen; but the white queen stands on a white square, and the black on a black one. Hence, one king has the queen on his right, while the other has *his* to his left.

Phillidor (the grandfather) called the pawns the soul of chess, asserting that no one could be a good player who did not play his pawns well. If a pawn manages to reach the eighth, or furthest row of the chessboard, it is promoted to the rank of queen, or of whatever other piece its owner chooses to give it. Thus, our James I., though he detested chess, could yet turn it to his own account. In a speech which he made to the Commons in 1609, he told them that kings have the power of abasing or elevating their subjects; just as, in the game of chess, a pawn may be converted into a bishop or a knight.

However popular it may have occasionally become, chess has always maintained for itself a certain aristocratic prestige. It was first introduced into France

during the reign of Charlemagne, who is said by his historians to have been passionately fond of it. As already mentioned, he presented the Abbey of St. Denis with a board and a set of men, 'all of ivory, a palm high, and greatly valued.' The Marquis de Chatre, in his *Jeux d'esprit et de mémoire*, says, 'I am aware that chess has always passed for a royal game, or rather for the king of games.' Charles VIII., by an ordonnance in 1485, forbade the prisoners in the Châtelet to play at dice; he permitted 'persons of quality only,' arrested for slight and purely civil offences, to play at trictrac (a complicated form of backgammon) and chess.

As to the intellectual ability required to make a good chess-player, opinions differ greatly; as well as respecting the value of chess as a means of intellectual training. Labruyère, in his *Caractères*, denies that a capacity for chess is any proof of genius. On the other hand, the Prince de Condé (Louis II. de Bourbon) maintained that learning chess was the first step to becoming a good general. Sundry modern Germans have advocated its compulsory introduction into schools as a branch of elementary education. Denis Diderot, in his *Neveu de Rameau*, has the boldness to say, 'Paris is the place in the world, and the Café de la Régence the place in Paris, where chess is played better than anywhere else. It is there that Légal the profound, Phillidor the subtle, and Mayot the solid, encounter each other; that you see the most surprising moves, and hear the most outrageous speeches. For if it is

possible to be, like Légal, at once a clever fellow and a great chess-player, it is equally possible to be at once a great chess-player and an ass, like Foubert and Mayot.'

Alfred Delvau speaks thus of the Café de la Régence, and of the pursuit to which it is mainly devoted. 'I could not enter this temple of *gambit* without great fear and great respect; respect for those who continue the traditions of Ulysses and Palymedes, of Tamerlane and Alexander the Great; and fear, because the game, in all its forms, and under all its denominations, has always terrified me, as being a sort of deliberate madness, not to employ a harsher term. True,' I continued, addressing my introducer, 'it is better to push little bits of ivory backwards and forwards, without uttering a word or tasting food or drink, for eight hours together by the clock—certainly, that is a hundred times better than to employ the same time in slandering one's neighbour. But, under correction, I believe that a man in his right senses has other functions and duties to perform besides gaming and calumny. The slanderer is a shabby wretch; but the gambler is a useless and unproductive cipher. We have all of us some respectable and decent occupation to employ our time. Those who, for one reason or another, refuse to attend to it, are neither more nor less than deserters; and I do not see any objection to their being shot as such.'

'My dear fellow,' replied his friend, 'you compel me to quote Méry's observations, which I know as thoroughly by heart as if they were my own. "It is desirable that the science of the chessboard should be

cultivated in our public schools; especially as we already learn there many tiresome things which weary the lad and are of no use to the man. There is, at the bottom of the game of chess, a wonderful fund of practical philosophy. Our life is a perpetual duel between ourselves and destiny. The world is a chessboard on which we push our pieces, often at hazard, against a train of circumstances which give us 'mate' at every step. Hence so many faults, so many clumsy combinations, so many wrong moves. He who, in early life, has trained his mind to the calculations of the chessboard, has unconsciously contracted habits of prudence, which will retain their force beyond the horizon of the squares. By keeping on our guard against the harmless stratagems set to entrap us by wooden images, we continue to practise in the world similar tactics of defensive good sense and sharpsightedness. Life thus becomes a grand game of chess, in which you behold, in all who come in contact with you, persons who, sooner or later, will try to make use of you for their own advantage. Every man you meet is either a piece or a pawn; you guess his intended moves, and lay out your own manœuvres accordingly." '

'But what a melancholy view of life and society!'

'If it is the true one, you must accept it all the same. And there is no occasion to be afraid that this continual mental tension will degenerate into a monomania, or keep the mind in perpetual restlessness. Chess-players are (mostly) pleasant and cheerful people. M. de Labourdonnais, for instance, intersperses his play

with many sallies and witticisms, which never prevent his giving checkmate. In this way, thanks to habit, perpetual combinations become a second nature; we are hardly conscious of the working of an intellectual mechanism which never stops; the springs set going by the first impulsion serve their purpose by a simple act of the will. How often have chess-players ameliorated an ugly aspect of their worldly affairs by clever arrangements, without suspecting that they owed their tact to the study of material combinations!'

The *gambit* above alluded to is the opening of a game, in which a pawn, sometimes a piece, is sacrificed, in order to make a good attack on the enemy. The word comes from the Italian 'gambetto,' a tripping-up, a turning-out, a supplanting. There are multitudes of gambits, and of works on gambits. *The Chess World* for April 1865, gives a variation of the 'beautiful Evans gambit.' Muzio's gambit, one of the prettiest known, consists in sacrificing a knight to gain proportionate advantages. It has been analysed, commentated, and varied, by several writers of different nations. In short, there are so many gambits — Cunningham's, Ponziani's, Allgaier's, Bryan's, and others—that the thorough study of gambits alone is a formidable undertaking.

At this same Café de la Régence, Napoleon I., before he became Emperor, very often used to play. He opened his games badly; and if his adversary took too long time for consideration, he grew impatient, pinched his lips, and drummed a tattoo on the edge of the board,

which soon set the men dancing, and so made a mess of the game. If he lost, it was still worse; he thumped the table with his fist, and sent everything flying. Nevertheless, when once the contest was fairly begun, and the strife of battle growing warm, he often made very brilliant moves. He also frequently played chess in the Empress Josephine's apartments. M. Thiers records, on Madame de Remusat's authority, the game he played at Malmaison while the Duke d'Enghien was being tried, or rather sentenced, at Vincennes.

In Egypt he used to play with M. Poussielgue, a superior performer, who sometimes beat the conqueror of the Pyramids. During the Polish campaign, the Persian Ambassador was introduced to the Emperor while he was playing a game of chess with Berthier. Napoleon did not put himself out of his way, but gave the audience while continuing to move his men. Chess beguiled the weariness of his passage on board the Northumberland, and at St. Helena he indulged in his game almost every day. The castle was the piece of which he made the most use. His nephew, Napoleon III., when in England, was considered a very skilful chess-player.

Paul I., Emperor of Russia, travelling as the Comte du Nord, visited the Café de la Régence at the hour of four in the afternoon, when the battles of the chess-board were at their height. Paul went up to a couple of combatants and betted on a difficult move. His stake was a louis. He won, took his money, and retired. Nothing hitherto had betrayed who he was,

until the exclamation of the waiter, to whom he gave all his winnings, attracted the attention of the company. For this, and several other anecdotes, we are indebted to M. Jean Gay's learned and instructive *Bibliographie du Jeu des Echecs*.

The following is stated to be of doubtful authority, which is a pity. One evening, when Robespierre, already surrounded with his halo of terror, was sitting in the Café de la Régence, a young little exquisite entered the saloon, and unceremoniously installing himself at his table, moved a man on the chessboard which stood in front of Robespierre, who responded to the move. The game went on, and was lost by the latter. They began a second game, which he likewise lost. Seeing this, Robespierre felt his honour engaged, and inquired for what stake they were playing. 'For the head of a man,' the lad replied. 'I have won it; give it me.' Robespierre drew from his pocket a sheet of paper, and wrote an order to set at liberty the Comte de R. then imprisoned in the Conciérgerie. The smart little dandy, it seems, was no other than the Comte's affianced bride.

The excitement caused by chess is too much for many people's nerves to support with impunity. The Czar John the Terrible died in 1584, of an apoplectic fit, while playing chess with one of his courtiers. Lord Harvey, in No. 37 of the *Craftsman*, says that, although chess is not usually played for a stake, nobody is indifferent about winning or losing; and that it is very rare for warm-tempered people ever to become good

players. Olaus Magnus, Archbishop of Upsala, died 1560, maintains that hidden tendencies to anger, impatience, vanity, avarice, and other failings, are brought out by the game of chess; and it is for that reason that the nobles of Gothland and Sweden, before bestowing their daughters in marriage, have the custom of trying, principally by chess, the temper of the suitors who present themselves. Some amateurs, of nervous constitution, cannot sleep after a hard-fought game; others, when the decisive move approaches, are seized with feverish agitation. Some are so impressed with the contest that, next day, they could go over every move again. Quintilian relates that Scævola, after losing a game of chess, started for the country. On the way he went over in his head every move that had been made in the game, and so discovered the error which had caused his defeat. He returned and found out his opponent, who acknowledged the perfect accuracy of his memory. As a precautionary measure, to keep their heads clear and their tempers cool, Carrera, in his *Avvertimenti*, recommends chess-players to eat sparingly, and to take aperient medicine before setting to work in a serious contest.

Defeats at chess are not easily either forgotten or forgiven. Leonardo di Cutri was poisoned in Calabria, by a rival, at the age of forty-six, while on a visit to the Prince of Bisignano. A Spanish nobleman, who had for some time been in the habit of playing with Philip II., used to win every game. One day, when their chess-playing had terminated in the customary

result, he perceived that the king was excessively annoyed. If the fact took him by surprise, his stock of common sense must have been but small. On reaching his home, he said to his family, 'My dear children, we may as well pack-up and take ourselves off at once. This is no longer a place for us; for the king has fallen into a violent rage because he could not beat me at chess.'

Richer, monk of Senones, in the History of his Abbey, relates that Ferraud, Count of Flanders, always ill-treated his wife when she played chess with him and won. One sort of beating involved another. The battle of Bouvines (July 12th, 1214) was a consequence of a game thus ungallantly concluded, in which battle the count was made prisoner, brought to Paris ironed hand and foot, and shut up in the tower of the Louvre. The Countess Jeanne (who was daughter of the Emperor of Constantinople, and ward of Philip Augustus) was consequently left to govern his dominions all her own way, and to have her quiet game of chess with a more amiable adversary.

One is unwilling to question King Canute's magnanimity after his famous rebuke of his courtiers; but his mind seems to have been less proof against the excitements of chess than the blandishments of flattery. While playing with the Count Ulf, the king made a great mistake, in consequence of which the count took one of his knights. The king would not allow this, but replaced the piece, insisting that the count should make a different move. The latter got angry, upset the

chessboard, and retired. 'Ulf,' shouted the king after him, 'you are a coward; you run away.'

The count returned to the door, and answered, 'You would have run away into the river Helga, in very different style, if I had not come to your assistance when the Swedes were beating you like a dog. You did not call me coward then.' With these words, he walked off; and the next day the king had him put to death.

An Italian village-priest was in the habit of playing with a neighbour who never would allow himself to be beaten, although he lost five games out of six. To convince him that such was really the case, the priest rang the alarm-bell of his parsonage, summoning in that way his parishioners, to make them umpires of the dispute. As the same trick was frequently repeated, his flock got tired of the proceeding, and took no further notice of the summons.

One day his house did catch fire. The priest rang his alarm-bell in vain. Nobody came; and when he complained, he was told that people could not leave their household affairs for the sake of a trumpery game of chess. 'Alas!' he said, 'this time I played chess with the fire, and the fire has checkmated me.'

The jealousies excited by chess have often been accompanied by mystery. The president Nicolai, who passed for the best chess-player of his time in France, was one day visited by a stranger who had travelled sixty leagues—a considerable distance then—to challenge him. The chessboard was brought, and Nicolai

was beaten. The unknown victor would neither play a second game nor make known who he was.

Finally, monkeys have been trained to play chess—doubtless in the same way as learned pigs have been taught to spell. The creature, obeying an imperceptible signal from his master, made the indicated move. The animal was really no more than what the artificial Turk of the chess automaton was to the human player concealed beneath it.