

THE CHESS-PLAYER, THE FINANCIER, AND ANOTHER

"I KNEW a case," said the financier, "of a man with the most brilliant brains, who had finance at his finger-tips. He was a man called Smoggs, utterly unknown of course. And I say 'of course' because he never used his brains, or rather I should say he never made any use of them, which can be quite a different thing. He just side-tracked them, ran them down a siding that led nowhere; and he might have been as big a financier as any of us. Do you know what he did? Sit down and I'll tell you.

"He went and played chess. All the intellect that might have controlled, well, more than I can tell you, he wasted over a chess-board. It came gradually at first: he used to play chess with a man during the luncheon hour, when he and I both worked for the same firm. And after a while he began to beat the fellow, which he never could do at first. And then he joined a chess club, and some kind of fascination seemed to come over him; something like drink, or more like poetry or music; but, as I was never addicted to any of the three, I can't say.

"Anyway, it completely got hold of him, and he began to lose interest in things. He became a good player, there was no doubt of that, and he won a good many prizes. And the value

of all the prizes he won in his life would have added up to about twenty-five pounds. I've made a thousand times as much in an hour. And more than once. But that is all he ever got out of playing chess.

"Why! That man could have handled millions. He did dabble a bit in finance, as I dabbled a bit in chess; in fact we started together in the same firm, as I told you; but we both left our dabblings and went our different ways. And his way led nowhere. He could have done it though; he could have been a financier. They say it's no harder than chess, though chess leads to nothing. I never saw such brains so wasted."

"Well," said the warder, "I can't sit listening to you all day; but I see your point and I agree with it. There are men like that. It's a pity, but there are men just like it."

And he locked the financier up for the night and hurried back to his work.