

DIABOLICAL PROBLEM COMPOSING.—A TALE OF MYSTERY.

BY JACOB ELSON.

"HALLOO, old fellow, I have a piece of news that will please you," exclaimed a friend of mine, bursting into my room; "that composer whose problems have so interested you, is on a visit to this city. I made his acquaintance at the Mercantile Library yesterday, and have invited him to spend to-morrow evening at my house. He has promised to come; so don't fail to call around also, I know you will be pleased to become acquainted with him."

I assured him that I would certainly make my appearance, and my friend pleading great hurry, immediately left me again.

The gentleman spoken of had lately published in the various Chess periodicals some very pretty problems, novel in ideas and pretty in construction. I thought I had detected more than ordinary talent in these compositions, and I was therefore only too glad for an opportunity to form his acquaintance. In my mind I already anticipated the pleasure we should find in showing to each other our latest "stunners," and this and similar ideas occupied me during the day, and indeed more than was exactly wholesome for my business. The next evening I set out to my friend's house—though well knowing my way, it seems that I was so much engrossed with my thoughts that I lost myself, and it was not until I had walked myself pretty tired that I at last found the house. I was admitted by a strange-looking little negro boy, whom I had never seen before, and ushered into a room. My friend, contrary to my expectations, was not present, but a huge individual with an immense head, ornamented with a red turban, and smoking out of a meerschaum pipe of the most immense proportions, was seated in an ungainly arm-chair, before a rickety table, on which was an immense Chess-board, covered all over with dents, which looked as if some "strong players" had shown their powers by pounding the pieces on it. The pieces of a size to correspond with the board, were the strangest I had ever seen, and inspired me with some of the awe that the servant girl in Dickens's "Curiosity Shop" felt for the pipe with the mystic figure which her master had purchased of the German student.

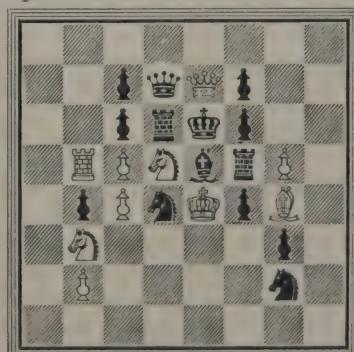
The individual in the arm-chair eyed

me in silence as I entered the room, and the idea struck me for a moment that it might be perhaps Maelzel's Chess Automaton resurrected. But I recollect quickly that the Automaton in question was a gentleman of exemplary habits, who neither drank nor smoked, and also looked grave and thoughtful, whilst the strange devotee of Caissa before me looked like the "strong man" of a traveling show, out on a spree.

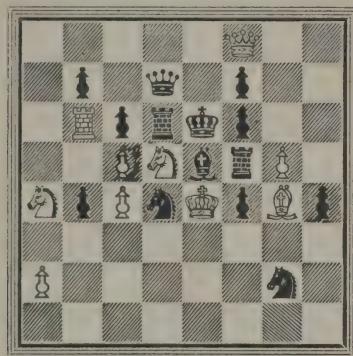
"Sit down, and show me some of your problems," said he at last, in a deep bass voice.

I took a chair, sat down opposite him, and arranged one of my problems. But no sooner had I put it up than he, with a broad grin, showed me the solution of it. The second and third that I showed him speedily met the same fate. Piqued at this, I finally arranged a position on the board, which I considered the best I had ever composed, and which I had reserved for some special occasion.

"Is this the best you can do?" asked he, with a coarse laugh, after looking at the position a moment. "Why, its as easy as lying. This is the solution," and in a moment more he had shown it to me. "I don't think you have much of a head for making problems," he kindly remarked, after a pause, "though I suppose they have cost you a great deal of time and labor, too. I, however, compose very quickly, and by an entirely new process. Look here!" and he pushed together the pieces that were standing on the board, seemingly at hap-hazard, and rounded them off with a swift motion of big hands, until he had formed them into the following shape :



"Now, here is symmetry for you." "Why! what sort of a thing do you call this?" exclaimed I, "this is certainly not a problem." "No" replied he, "not yet, but it soon will be," and striking the table with his clenched fist with a force that made me start, he exclaimed, "Now it is one." The rickety table had swayed to and fro under the force of the blow, and some of the figures had danced out of place until they had assumed the following position :



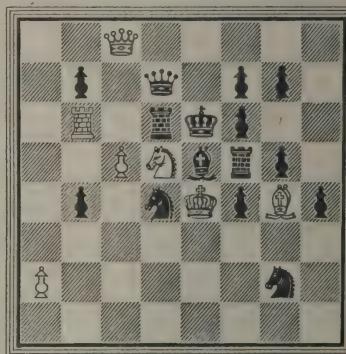
"This is, white to play and mate in 5 moves; I know you will solve it," added he, with a chuckle, "you are such a sharp one; you are!" and leaning back, he resumed his smoking with the utmost complacency.

This unheard of method of composing would, under other circumstances, have left me in doubt, whether it was any more than a sell, had not I seen enough of his powers to convince me that there was no doubt of its correctness. I examined the position for a long time, but was unable to discover the solution. Several times I thought I was on the right track, but the confounded thing seemed to have more twitches and twists to it than any position I had ever seen.

There were also other circumstances that prevented my devoting my full attention to it. The kings and queens had carved faces. The white queen had a jolly looking face, whilst the black queen looked at me in such a woe-begone and crest-fallen countenance, that I caught myself asking her in a private, confidential sort of way, "What's the matter with you?" at which the white queen seemed to me to grin more, and the black one, if possible, to look more dejected than before.

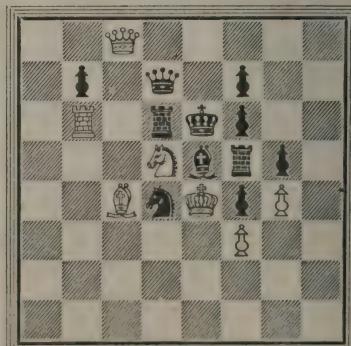
I felt chagrined and enraged almost beyond endurance, and knocking in my im-

patience against the table, I upset some of the pieces. The white queen and a black pawn fell into my lap, and a white knight and pawn rolled off on the floor. Hurriedly taking up the queen and pawn from my lap, I put them unconsciously into a different position, and was just about picking up the pieces from the floor, when my companion stopped me, saying: "Never mind. My positions are not easily disarranged. As it stands now, it is :



White to play and mate in seven moves."

But I was in no more mood for problem solving. I began to feel more and more uneasy, and I was just about giving vent to my impatience, when my amiable companion, stretching his big head forward to such an extent as to make me shrink back, said, with indescribable impudence, "I see these problems are to much for you. Let me give you a nice, soft, easy, two-move problem,"—and in a moment more he had swept off some more pieces, and slightly changed the position of some of the others — "Now, here is



White to play and mate in two moves."

This was a little more than I could stand, and rising from the table, I took the melancholy black queen into my hand as a weapon of defence, and said, "What

an insolent, ugly creature you are." "What!" said he, "do you suppose I'll take any impudence from a fool like you?" and he reached for me. I flung the queen at him with all my force, and with a violent effort I turned around and—awoke!

I visited the celebrated problemist at my friends house next evening and with his aid I even solved the wonderful positions which the turbaned hero of my dream had manufactured in so singular a manner for my especial benefit.

THE SKEPTICAL PAWN.

FROM "*Biblical Expositions*."—BY THE REV. S. COX,



T happened on a time that two friends who had been playing Chess together, quitted the board to talk over their last game at their ease before they parted for the night.—While they were thus occupied the following amazing conversation took place between the Black Bishop's Pawn and the White King, who, by the chances of the game, had been left standing in adjacent squares :

Said the Pawn to the King: "I have heard, sire, and indeed it is the common belief, that we Chessmen are ruled by a Superior Intelligence which controls our movements and directs them to a foreseen end. But that is all nonsense, is it not? and quite incredible to any rational Piece. For, as no doubt your Majesty has observed, we are all of us the mere creatures of law. An iron and inevitable necessity governs all our acts. Though each of us has a movement peculiar to himself, nevertheless that movement is strictly defined, so that we cannot overtop the limits of the rule by which we are severally governed. We Pawns move, and can only move, straight forward, a single square at a time, except to take an opponent, and then we can only move on to the next square on either side. The Rook runs forward, or backward, or sideways at his pleasure, but always on the right lines, from which he cannot deviate. The Bishop sweeps across the board, at times very swiftly, but always and inevitably along the diagonals of his own color. The Knight, indeed, seems more erratic than

most of us, and the Queen more free; but, after all, the Knight can only jump according to the laws of his being, two steps forward and one to either side; and even our lady the Queen is only free to choose between the movements of the Rook and the Bishop; while your Majesty as becomes your dignity, moves but seldom, then slowly, and by single squares. In short, as I said at first, we are all the creatures of definite and invariable laws, and can only move each according to his own law; and it puzzles me, I confess, to understand how any observant Piece, with discourse of reason, should give in to the solemn nonsense one so often hears about a Superior Intelligence that uses us at its pleasure, and freely works out through us its own designs."

Now, the King, who, like many other potentates, was somewhat slow and dull, and who, moreover, had a steady faith in the accepted traditions, was not a little surprised to hear the pert and garrulous Pawn break into a strain so skeptical and upsetting. But he was a King, and held himself bound, therefore, to treat even the humblest mortal with courtesy and consideration. So, after duly pondering what he had heard in his slow brain, he replied to the Pawn. "But what, on your theory, do you make of the strange sounds we sometimes hear from above, 'Ha, the old gambit!' 'Check!' 'Mate!' and so on? And, moreover, have you never felt yourself taken up in a warm, strong grasp, and put where you had no thought of going? And, again, how comes it to pass that every time we play our several parts, although we move according to definite and unchangeable laws, we are variously combined, and run differently through our brief span to unlike ends? And, finally, can you tell me, Pawn, who made us and the board on