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## THE ORIGIN OF CHESS.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE PUNDIT'S STORY.

Long hath it been an unverified tradition in the annals of Chess, that our glorious and historic pastime was cradled, mayhap even first saw the light, in the fervid and fruitful domain of Brahma. Certain it is that Hindostan in its vigorous prime was the paradise of Sages and men of subtle understanding in all the metaphysical arts; therefore, gazing down the resplendent but narrow vista of Chess lore, we naturally expect to find the star of Caïssa hovering steadily over that favored land. Among the wealth of legends which a prehistoric people preserve from the ruins of centuries, it would be indeed strange if the goddess Caïssa was utterly ignored in their folk lore, seeing that she is the sole surviving deity of the echoing past from whose altars the sacred fire hath not been quenched; often, alas! hath the last spark smouldered in the ashes, awaiting the devout worshipper to fan into serene brilliancy its dying scintillations. Now the precious ward is handed to a Greco, now to a Palamède, again to a Philidor; the fire *never fades out entirely*. Caïssa has been lost for ages to the peasantry of India, it is true, but among the higher hierarchy of Buddhism her laws are a power still; yea! one has only to seek in order to find priceless scraps of knowledge concerning her vast empire among the intellectual races of southern Asia. 'Twas from the secret archives of a Buddhistic Monastery in Bejapoor, that I was fortunate enough to unearth the following remarkable legend, for which I must thank the learned pundits of the Convent, who helped me to decipher the misty old Sanskrit signs of the parchment.

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Back and away back in the elder time, before Brahma blessed and fructified the womb of earth by each imprint of his sacred feet, there did flourish a pious Priest and Pundit, whose wondrous wisdom, even as life-giving zephyrs spread abroad over the whole province of Khandesh; from the

towering Ghauts even to the central Hill Country, Jubbo Sen was the ultimate resource in the solution of crafty questions; truly he was the spokesman of the Immortals. Rice was his food, the milk of goats his drink, and his young disciples were his heart's delight.

Often he called his dear students the living-strings of his mind's harp, so clearly and purely did they respond to the music of his eloquence. From the stately and introspective Ramao, to the merry and ardent Sippo, all revered him as a father, and treated him with the respectful liberty of a friend.

Often as evening shed her soft dews, and the day star rolled majestically over the proudest peaks of the Ghauts, the good old Sage would wend his way to the mango groves on the eastern slopes with a single pupil as his companion; there amid the perfumed coolness of those luxuriant copices the pair would meander with dilatory steps, and their eyes inspired with the mutual appreciation of lofty themes.

Often had the youthful Ramao besought his elder to relate to him the history of the immortal gods—but especially to entrust him with the secret of the singular garment that descended with stately grace from the shoulders of the Pundit. At the instances of the youth, respecting mythology the good man would open a mine of wisdom, albeit he was deaf to all appeals concerning the story of his coat. The mantle was indeed peculiar, inasmuch as the pattern of its texture was partitioned into a number of squares, colored alternately white and black, giving the wearer a mystical and occult appearance. Furthermore it was observed that Jubbo Sen never doffed it; neither would he reveal the story of its origin.

As time passed on the Pundit and Ramao were welded into more intimate and inseparable relations; youth in this case was the staff for old age to lean upon. The end came at last, however, as urgent and louder pitched came the sweet-toned and luring death-songs of the Immortals in

the ears of the Sage; warned in time by the vision of a beauteous female, whose radiant form was clasped by a girdle of thirty-two stars, of his approaching transition, the patient old man beckoned Ramao to his side for the last time. Lying upon a couch of palm leaves, in his nichy dwelling among granite rocks, the Pundit related in quavering accents the story of the chequered cloak.

"Ramao, my son, as I pass to the unknown shades of the other life, I deposit to thy faithful keeping this robe which, once thou wearest, thou must never dare to doff, lest thou wouldest have ill befall thee. It was given into my trust fifty seasons agone, when I was lithe and springy with the vim of youth even as thyself. In those enchanted days the gods were very near to us mortals, sometimes we might e'en touch the fringe of their garments, or list to their melodious whispers as they swept among the sacred groves; oh! how yearningly I mused over the writings of the Magi! How often I conjured the cloud-like forms as they floated shade-like in the mystic gloaming!"

"Among the records of the Temple at which I offered meats to the deities, was an old scroll which had mocked the efforts of all the subtlest scribes to decipher; none could trace the faded lineaments of the Stylist's scrawl; oft had I pored in vain over the dumb mystery to no purpose, until I bethought myself of the virtues of an alchymic acid known only to few men. I tried it; as the potent solution spread gradually over the venerable script, the following lines written in the grand old Palitext greeted mine eyes:

"To thee, oh, Caïssa, goddess of most thoughtful brow but most forlorn following, do I offer the only token of thy sway among ungrateful men; none are left alive who are worthy to clothe themselves with the emblematic robe of thy worship; thus then I lay it down upon thy last remaining altar in the holy city of Chandoor. Alas, poor deity! men have forsaken thee, and thine own thirty-two children have betrayed thee—save one only—to seek the treacherous dominion of the demon Stalmatos, who lords it in the Glen of Bassa: well know I the penalty of unloosing this mystic cloak, dear goddess, as it falls from my shoulders, the throne of my reason must needs fall with it, and none may help me, except perchance thy last devoted servitor, the Gambit Pawn. Take, then, my reason and my very life with it, if need be, oh solitary Muse!"

"Thus Ramao," continued the dying Pundit, "was made known to me the existence of a long-forgotten goddess, the muse of a lost art. Many days I pondered over the curious wording of the ancient parchment, till the unrest of curiosity moved my dormant energies. Taking up my staff and wallet I started to seek out the site of Chandoor; after winding among the lesser steeps of our mighty Ghauts for many a long league, seeking in vain the city of my quest, I met at last an aged crone, who, in reply to my anxious questioning, told me in saddening tones that for hundreds of seasons past Chandoor had been a fable only among the people of those parts. Pointing to a relic of crumbling masonry on the plain beyond, quoth she: 'Wouldst see the wreck of proud Chandoor? go thither to the place where men and gods are buried for aye.' Leaving the sorry-faced dame, I wended my way to the ruins, only to find it to be the edge stones of a long dried up well. My soul fainted within me, for oh! Ramao, how truly did I desire to find some token of the enchanted mantle once worn by Caïssa's High Priest!

"In my despair I called to memory the concluding phrases of the script and called aloud: 'Good Gambit Pawn, let not my travail be in vain!' The notes of my supplication boomed hollow and echoing down the old well. I imagined a thousand weird voices repeating in its murky depths: 'Good Gambit Pawn! Good Gambit Pawn!'

"Shudderingly I bent over the parapet. Conceive, Ramao, my shocked amazement when I saw a clear star, shiny as a steel blade, away down the pit; as I gazed under a spell, the bright point rose gradually to the surface, with a wavy motion; nearer it came until at last I discerned a tiny figure, whose head was jeweled by the star. 'Mortal! why didst call me, what seekest thou?' were the words like tinkling bells, of the advancing fairy.

"I stammered out my longing to devote myself to the service of the goddess Caïssa, even to be found worthy to bear her mantle of priesthood.

"'Art patient, of fine judgment, temperate, keen of discernment, pliant of mind? Thou needst have all these gifts to carry thyself becomingly in Caïssa's mantle. I must needs try thee; prove thyself of good report; but first follow me!'

"So saying, the fairy undulated gracefully into the gloom of the well until only

the star was in sight. I feared to follow, when in tones of gentle raillery the cry arose 'Jubbo where is thy courage? where thy inventive powers?' Stung by this taunt I glanced all around me eagerly, and lo! in a tree near by was an ape sucking its young one; shaking the branch rudely on which the beast was sitting, I contrived to bring both animals to the ground; quickly I seized the young monkey and cast it into the well. Seeing what I had done, the mother ape cried piteously, ran round the opening a little while, and then prepared to go to the succor of her progeny. As the old one planted her hands and feet in the crevices at the sides, and slowly descended, I did likewise, following carefully in her stepping places. When I reached bottom, the soft little voice of the fairy sang out, 'Well done for the first ordeal!' The young ape was unhurt on a bed of dried leaves; its mother ascended with it to the upper air, chattering spitefully to me on the way. Not seeing the fairy, I scanned closely the sides of the well, and presently found a loose rock; on moving it, an aperture large enough to pass my body through disclosed itself. In the darkness beyond shone the beacon star. Thankful for its guidance I followed into the narrow passage. In and out, hither and thither, weaving our way through the most tortuous pathways, we spent hours in this endless labyrinth. Footsore and impatient, I complained at last. The Pawn fairy replied thus to my repinings: 'Dost think thou art fitted to become a disciple of the long suffering Caissa, when thus thou lackest both patience and fortitude?' At this reproof the star vanished to leave me alone in the deadly darkness.

"Bethinking to prove myself more worthy, I plucked up a little late courage. So upon hands and knees I groped blindly for hours; no help came, no hope cheered me. I laid me down to die of despair and weakness; as I did so my hand encountered a slender silken filament; snatching at it too roughly it snapped in twain; my heart shrank again with a vague terror; a weary time did I seek for the broken clue in the solid darkness. Oh! joy, I once more felt the severed strands in my fingers! This blessed line would surely lead me to the object of my quest; I would possess myself of the mantle and all would be well! Tottering along the thread for hours, I refused to give in; I nursed the last shadow

of hope in my bosom. What was it that glowed faintly far ahead? It must be the object I long have sought: an enchanted hall, perhaps. Hurrying forward with the supreme strength of joyous frenzy, I finally emerged—*into the well again!* It was too much for my bruised spirit; I fell sobbing on the bed of dry leaves. Had I only grasped the other strand of the broken line all might have been different! Overcome with weariness, I passed into a deep sleep. On awaking, behold! the sun was shining at the mouth of the pit, and over his face, 'twixt me and the luminary, floated indolently a bird of rare plumage. As I opened my eyes, the bright fowl began a most thrilling warble that moved my soul strangely; higher, still higher, rose the strain, until the living notes transformed themselves into words of poesy which sounded like:

Check! check! oft'times mate,  
Pluck again the thread of fate!

"The bird flew away, but I was not slow to discern his meaning; searching hastily I found again the end of the line where I had dropped it at the opening of the labyrinth; I hastened to grasp it; as I bent forward, it receded swiftly from me; I pursued and caught it, as it was vanishing into the gloom; I felt the enigma could be solved if I only held on to the clue; as I grasped it, it was changed by magic into a serpent! I snapped it angrily like a whip thong; again it was transformed into a hot bar of metal! Stamping my heavy sandals upon it, behold! it budded forth sharp spikes which pierced my feet! I rolled a ponderous rock over it. Now to my wondering vision the rock began to spin around, drawing the line from the cavity beyond with inconceivable rapidity!

"Length after length came the flying filament, until it covered the whole face of the rock. A new wonder now revealed itself; the silken lines, as they came forth, interwove themselves around the magic stone into the semblance of a garment! Warp after warp it grew in beauty, until at the last end of the thread was borne a rich gold clasp formed in the fashion of a Queen's coronet. When all was complete the robe shed itself gently from the rock and lay before me in all its glory! How lovely were its rich folds of chequered brightness! The encircling girdle had Caissa's dear name, worked in mystic opals. Knowing it to be the lost insignia of the lost goddess, with a boldness that I have since often wondered at, I cast it over my

shoulders. From that day until these my last hours, it has never left my body; my understanding has been intensified, wisdom has poured her treasures at my feet; not the most subtle calculation has baffled my intellect.

"After possessing myself of the mantle, which you now behold, I chanced to look upon the magic stone; to my alarm it increased in size rapidly, threatening to close me up in a living tomb; I leaped upon it barely in time; filling the bottom of the pit it grew steadily upwards, bearing me to the well's mouth! As I leaped upon the plain, the coping of the pit fell in, and thus the last sign of Chandoor vanished forever! I am failing, Ramao, my son! When I go, take the mantle with my blessing; never part from it, or thy doom is certain and terrible. Above all, never seek the Glen of Bassa, the abode of Caissa's reprobate children; be content with the abiding state of exaltation the robe confers. Adieu, my child, the benign Caissa comes to me!"

These were the final words of the faithful old man as he completed the problem of life and passed to the solution beyond!

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#### CHAPTER II.

##### THE GLEN OF BASSA.

THE dying admonition of the worthy Pundit to Ramao, warning him to stay all curiosity concerning the Glen of Bassa, was but a passing restraint upon the energetic temperament of the youth, who, after many explorations among the hidden nooks and corners of the Ghauts, found himself early one morning before the hut of a soothsayer, famed for leagues around as a cunning astrologer, a great hunter of herbs and simples, but especially unequalled in the concoction of witch-broth in its double qualities of strength and variety.

This learned man admitted Ramao to his rude hospitalities, and listened with a dubious countenance to the young man's story. At mention of the Glen of Bassa the magician frowned, then smiled with a most ominous meaning. Opening upon Ramao with a few pointed remarks concerning the danger of his pursuit, he tried in a mild way to deter him, remarking, by the way, that the victims of Stalmatos were fortunate to escape hopelessly idiotic only. Seeing the utter uselessness of his advice he scanned Ramao's parti-colored coat with

much keenness and speculation in his eyes, offered to take it in exchange for a cap embellished with the pin-feathers of the giant roc (a sure cure for headaches), but upon a sign in the negative he deigned to direct his young guest upon his foolish journey.

After several hours spent in the toilsome climbing of a succession of foot hills, Ramao at length reached the borders of a strange valley; the forests around it seemed to shrink back, the grassy carpet of nature even grew scant and spiky at the edges. It was a singular vale indeed; shaped like the mouth of a volcano. It was devoid of all vegetation down its steep sides. As arid and bare as an elephant's poll, it had all the appearance of a water vortex petrified, which similarity was heightened by a spiral foot-path that wound around the rocks, gradually trending downwards towards an abyss yawning in the exact centre of the glen. I said that no sign of vegetable life cheered and adorned this sinister cone, but I must except a giant sycamore near the centre spreading its bare and mighty limbs clear over the yawning pit. As Ramao peered over the sides of the glen, he could hardly resist the premonition that he was dallying at the confines of a huge spider's nest, and hesitated to advance further; his courage reviving, however, he folded the magic cloak tightly around him and prepared to descend, come what would. At this moment a most superb bird skimmed gracefully over the edge of the chasm; its sheeny feathering caught the sun's rays, to toss them out again in rainbows of every hue; from its beak depended a small image of ivory; this was dropped at Ramao's feet as the fowl passed over him; picking it up hastily, the bold adventurer found it to be a droll dwarfish carving of a foot soldier cleverly wrought.

While he was yet wondering and turning over the little figure, to his further surprise the bird gave note to the following ditty in trills of lengthened sadness:

Pause proud youth, ere you descend!  
Home again thy journey wend!  
Stalmatos still lurks in wait,  
Dooming fools to folly's fate.

Wouldst press on? the image guard!  
Twist the head when harried hard,  
When in peril all forlorn,  
Don't forget the Gambit Pawn!

Whilst the cadences of this warning were still mellow in the air, a jet black Vulture of

enormous size darkened the light with the spread of his wings; at this apparition the song-bird fled shrieking, closely pursued by the monster; having driven the only brilliant and cheerful creature within sight, from his dominion, King Vulture flapped lazily down the valley, like a brooding horror, and settled himself on the blasted sycamore. Adjuring the powerful aid of Caissa, whilst hiding the precious amulet in his bosom, Ramao commenced his descent in earnest. At the first round of the spiral, the vulture who had been ogling him from afar with a covetous glare, shook out his wings and croaked with malicious triumph. This unsettled the youth's purposes to such a degree, that he turned to escape from the vale; too late! The whole pathway behind him had slid into the abyss, leaving a sheer slope of smooth, shining rock! At each step he now took, the shelving in the rear crumbled and dashed below, and still he neared the hideous fowl of carrion; about this time the withered tree waved its arms around wierdly, smiting them together although no breeze gave a soul to the deadly torpor of the atmosphere. At a bow shot from the sycamore, Ramao paused again; the very nightmare of horror clutched his heart and nailed him to the spot; the Vulture gloated over him with eye-balls of fire, the strange tree beckoned him; instinctively he curled himself closer in his mantle, even using it as a hood. Casting his dread expectant eyes upward a new menace overwhelmed him; for, behold! a boulder had broken loose from the rim of the infernal basin, and with frightful bounds was flying towards the spot where he was now cowering with mortal terror; mad with despair, he leaped to the tree, hoping as a last chance to find shelter behind its massive trunk; as he passed under the shadow of the Vulture, his cloak, now streaming from his shoulders, two mighty branches clapped together, caught the saving mantle in their grasp and tore it from his body. The next instant he was hurled headlong down the central chasm, the derisive chuckling of the demon Vulture insulting his ears, and the boulder sealing up the mouth of the gulf.

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### CHAPTER III. THE THIRTY-ONE PRODIGALS.

OPENING his eyes as he revived from the stunning effects of his late fall, Ramao, in the expectation of finding himself in a narrow rift of midnight gloom, was surprised

beyond measure at the roseate enchantments and fairy splendors that dazzled his vision. 'Twas in sooth a cave; but a cave wainscoted with ivory many colored; from the roof depended stalactites of flashing diamonds and iridescent pearls, globes of thinnest ivory hung in mid-air, glowing with an amber light, soothing to the eyes. At the far end of the grotto from where he reclined, welled up a marvelous fountain, whose waters were vari-colored white and red, each shining globule of the liquid that splashed over the fountain's edge upon the pavement was transmuted into either a ruby or a crystal, which rolled along the floor a little space, to then burst with a musical click which sounded like "Check!" emitting at the same time a delicate fragrance; near the cascade wondrous ferns and singing flowers grew with tropical exuberance. Casting his eyes round the walls, Ramao noted thirty-one miniature wickets alternately colored black and white. Whilst torturing his mind as to the meaning of all this, his attention wandered to the centre of the floor. Did his eyesight play him false? No, surely there lay his much loved mantle, so ruthlessly snatched from him but a few moments agone!

He counted anew the sixty-four squares! He noticed the gold clasp! His very spirit yearned towards it. He made an effort to rise, but as he did so: Check! check! check! popped out all around the hall, the thirty-one small doors snapped open like magic, and out gamboled the queerest little troupe of goblins imaginable, some of them white, some black, some afoot, some mounted; all of them quaintly clad in robes of leaf ivory; the fifteen white fays were headed by a King and Queen, so were the sixteen dark ones. The wee sprites were scarcely taller than a banana. Their eyes winked mischievously as they perceived the intruder; soon their glances fell upon the mantle, and then they gave vent to shrill, piping cries of exultation and desire. "Our kingdom at last!" was the chorus that pealed up. With madcap frolics they tumbled pell-mell on to the chequered field, some on tiny elephants, some with leaping poles, some winged their way, and as for the two stout Kings they puffed along last of all, dragging their thrones after them in a most ludicrous and undignified way. No sooner had they all assembled on the cloak than a most furious combat commenced between the goblins of opposite hues, for possession. The Whites were

compelled to leave the field, the poor King last of all, who waddled off hugging his cherished throne in both arms and exclaiming with mournful bitterness: "It would not have fared us so ill, had we only our Gambit Pawn!" At this complaint the sable prince laughed good naturally, deigned to leave the mantle, and promising better humored jousts in the future, patted his rival consolingly on the back.

The captive was now the centre of attention, and they flitted and buzzed round him till his head grew dizzy. Walking up until he was on a line with Ramao's face, the White King dumped down his chair with much consequence, settled himself therein and gave speech as follows: "Miserable spy! thou hast sought our domain, and looked upon our dwelling place with a rash curiosity! Our dread lord Stalmatos hath given thee into our hands: our power may crush thee, or set thee free a brainless fool! Thy magic cloak was once our glory and our field of sports, until we strove against the decrees of our former ruler, the goddess Caissa; one of our number with childish fealty turned his back upon us, to reveal our designs to the mistress. Ah! how she whipped us from her presence with the mantle lying yonder! Along with us, her power and renown among mortals vanished, also the laws of our sport are well nigh lost to ourselves." The monarch sighed deeply; rubbing his chin judicially he looked up under his lowering eye brows at the victim, whilst he inwardly matured his verdict. His face cleared a little as he continued: "I would not have thee killed, for unknown to thyself, thou hast haply borne to us our whilom treasure. For the present drink to the goblins' mystic warfare! Ho! you mad revelers, bring forth the horn of wisdom!"

This latter mandate was shouted at a circlet of white fairies who were spinning in a merry reel around one of Ramao's sandals, which had broken its fastenings during its owner's descent.

Away tripped the eager sprites, darting behind the cascade to presently emerge with a superb elephant's tusk, hollowed out as a drinking vessel. They then filled it to the brim with the enchanted waters, and essayed to haul it over the floor to their uneasy guest; like diminutive ants with a captive beetle, they pushed and strove, their ebon brothers and sisters coming to their assistance. Bye-and-bye they reached Ramao, when he was again called to attention by the old King. "Drink deep! thou

guest of fate, of the waters of clear understanding, so thy wits shall be keener and more eager than the eyes of the stalking tiger!"

At this, Ramao, who was sore athirst, took a filling draught, and straightway his mind was illuminated; with ease he performed the most abstruse mental calculations; ideas germinated, ripened, and chased each other like clouds before a storm; but most marvelous was his ability to unravel the mystical gyrations of the goblins, who had returned to the mantle and were interweaving again like water beetles; anon one of their number dropped out of the galaxy, again one would halt midway of his destination, and appeared at fault. With silvery chirrups the dark Queen would remind the Ruler of the White Chair, "that since leaving old Caissa, they had forgotten some of their steps." Whereat the royal goblin would reply, "That as for me, I am perfect; the fault must be with my captains." Smiling archly at this the shady beauty would skim round to the rear of his throne, and rattle him up vigorously, twitting his majesty with "Check!" "Check!" until he was all colors with rage. Thus the midgets sported and railed at each other, the Whites fronting the Blacks in a double row. First in the gay battle, the little common sprites of both sexes would clatter into the centre of the combat, striking right and left; but, on meeting a foe breast to breast, they would lock in fierce wrestling, neither side budging a span's length; the rotund Kings would look upon the fray with placid content, rarely joining in except at a crisis; their spouses, on the other hand, were finished warriors, fleet as flying roes afoot, and winged withal; they sped like shooting stars; like to the dragonfly they skimmed over the chequered mantle with a peculiar halt and away again manner. The priest fairies flanked the throne and were barefoot; they picked their way with sidling, insidious steps, preferring squares of one color only, for they seemed to scorch their feet if by chance they stumbled from their appointed pathways. Most curious were the captains; their squinting little eyes avoided the gaze of their brethren, leaping hither and thither over the heads of friends or foemen, or running in one direction to wheel round suddenly in another; they were the craftsmen of ever present mischief. In the corners of the field were goblin elephants to

the full as well versed in cunning as the rest of the company, who hied themselves along with mimic majesty, neither looking to the right or left.

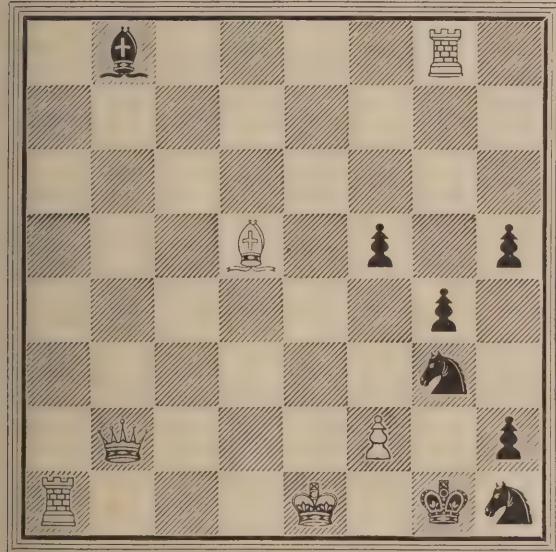
Ramao watched the fantasia of these strange beings with the most absorbed attention and delight; they wrought out for him a living poem of symmetric motion, and captured each the other by the subtlest devices. In spite of the absence of the Gambit Pawn, the White fairies had driven the greater part of the enemy from the cloak, in their battle game, until finally, with a wicked chuckle in his voice, the order came from the occupant of the white throne: "How soon may I win, oh, Stylist?" and Ramao, finding his perceptions as clear as crystal, answered him tri-

bled a gigantic tadpole. At last the colossal skull, over-balancing the rest, rolled away over the pavement in piteous helplessness; whereat the sprites screeching with glee, danced round and round it fantastically, and even dragged the magic cloak over the smooth and massive brow, where it branded its pattern as would a marking iron glowing hot. Then was the cruel dance continued on the living Chess-board; the little feet trotting over the skull, causing the acute agony of red hot needles. Unfortunate Ramao! thy eyes wax dim, thy senses reel! But what is this? He remembers, with a great start that nearly overturns his jailers, the song of the mysterious bird and the advice therein contained. Loudly he cries: "Come to my succor, dear Gambit Pawn!" The image in his bosom rubs hard against him, the midgets cease their maddening frolics to scream wrathfully; not losing a moment, Ramao seized the ivory talisman and twisted the head. It was but a box after all, out of which sprang forth a fairy youth of winsome countenance, and graceful manner. A new-born hope was he to Ramao, a ray of truest intelligence.

With a pitying glance at the forlorn creature who had released him, the Gambit Pawn (for such he was) hastened to drive the affrighted goblins from their possession. Scampering over Ramao's face like hot streaks, the defeated sprites fled to their respective cells, the little doors snapped to like traps, and Ramao was alone with the Gambit Pawn. The latter, using his wand as a lever, grad-

ually urged the wearied head over the floor of the cavern until the fountain was reached, into which it plunged with a heavy splash. In the soothing waters the skull diminished in size rapidly, and in a little while Ramao stepped out of the basin handsomer than ever, with one fatal exception: The imprint of the final goblin dance was indelibly impressed upon his brow; plain were the squares to be seen; plain the pictured figures.

At the sight, the gambit Pawn stepped back in great fear, crying reproachfully to Ramao: "Unhappy youth, why hast thou not called me sooner? That mark upon thy forehead may seal thy fate and mine; for, until some mortal even as thyself doth



White mates in two.

umphantly: "Two motions giveth thee the victory!" Alas! for the captive; he never forgot the position of the opposing forces, nor the sequence of his reply.

Immediately after solving the riddle, his head swelled visibly to double its usual proportions. Away the goblins went again with another contest, and yet another; towards the close of each the dark or light tormentors called to their prisoner for solutions. Ramao never failed to answer aright; but oh, malice augmented! his head increased visibly in size, and still it grew, and yet the goblins danced their weird jigs over the enchanted mantle.

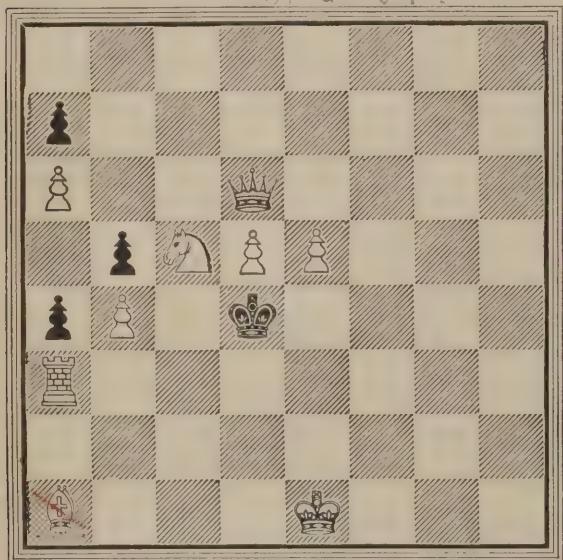
As the victim's head enlarged, his body became attenuated until he closely resem-

discover its meaning, thou wilt never lose it from thy visage, nor shall I ever escape the cave of Stalmatos. Oh, perverse brethren to make so false a riddle! You have forgotten the just laws of Caissa. Go hence, Ramao! The mad phantasy on thy brow hath two solutions; at the discovery of the first one, the brand will disappear; at the unloosing of the second mystery, I shall be free again, and will not fail to reward thee. Farewell, and forget me not!"

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE CAP STONE OF THE AGES.

Like a giant sentinel guarding the confines of mighty Ethiopia, uprose humanity's most titanic achievement. Block, after



White checkmates in two moves, in two different ways.

block, a man's life for each dead slab, was Pharaoh's great pyramid slowly upreared. Naught was wanting now but the crowning stone, which lay on the plain below, awaiting the sun-burst of another day ere it was hoisted to its dizzy and eternal resting place. Its chiseled and polished flanks gleamed now in the yellow moonlight. The hieroglyphs that adorned its top and sides, started out into deep relief. Near the stone stood the master builder all alone, his hand resting with lingering fondness on the completion of his life's work, his regard bent inquiringly upon a new hieroglyph cut upon the upper face of the slab; it had but lately been added by the command of great Pharaoh. Well did Gersam the

builder knew the interpretation of all the other language—pictures on the glorious pile; this one alone defied all his speculations. Still musing deeply, he was abruptly startled by the sound of a hollow voice at his side, an appealing voice withal, which besought immediate succor; turning about, half in affright, Gersam beheld the tall, slim figure of a man still youthful, but upon whose visage was stamped the cruel marks of long privation endured, and aching travails under hot suns.

His staff was smooth with wear, his scrip was shrunken with poverty's void, his sandals very thin. "Who art thou?" quoth the builder, reassured by the downcast air of the man. "I am known in my land as Ramao the Stylist. For many a bitter day have I wandered over the cheerless plains of strange regions in search of a sage man whose long gathered wisdom would trace aright the brand writing of the vexing battle gods of Caissa. Alas! no man of subtle insight and patient wit, in all the countries betwixt the Nile and Ganges hath as yet unriddled the meaning of the burning torture on my brows. If so be the Egyptian Magi help me not, I must surely perish of my great tribulation, for lo! my feet find no rest by day or night. Perchance good man, thou mightest lead me to the high priest of thy King; he whose communings with the immortal oracles would gird him with the withholden secrets of earth and heaven." Whilst speaking thus, the master architect had regarded the weary pilgrim with

profound attention, and slight perplexity even. In the half light of the brilliant evening, the cabalistic signs on Ramao's forehead flushed but faintly; as he poured out the tale of his fruitless peregrinations he marched to and fro with the nervous unrest of an over-tired brain, and presently entered the shadow of the Pyramid. As he did so the scars on his brows started out with phosphorescent light; the figured goblins seemed alive again, the fairy dance glared with a ghostly radiance. Drawing his hood over his face in terrified haste, Gersam started back for a moment; on recovering himself he alternately scanned Ramao and the cap-stone of the Pyramid. Bursting out with a cry of "Mighty Osiris!" he grasped

the arm of the stranger and led him forcibly towards the prostrate slab. "Behold! strange man, the image of a dream graven on the crown rock, a dream dreamed by the daughter of Egypt's High Priest!"

"The virgin Samala hath had much favor of an unworshipped goddess, hath even been initiated into a mystic science unknown to men, but which doth fill her days with thoughtfulness and reverie. Thy glowing scar and Samala's dream are of a likeness. I must e'en lead thee to her on the morrow. I pray thee to tarry at my house near at hand, so thou mays't wash thy feet and gladden thy stomach with my fattest meats and stoutest drinks. Samala is sick unto death on account of her vision, in which appeared a youth of rare grace of feature; if so be as thou couldst drive the apparition from her heart, Phthamis, her father, would of a surety have thy name graven in refined gold and buried in the heart of yon Pyramid, for the delight of all posterity."

Complying with the hospitable request of the architect, Ramao with newer faith in his eyes and better pith in his bones followed his lately found friend into the heart of the renowned city of Memphis.

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#### CHAPTER V.

##### THE MYSTERY UNLOCKED.

SOME few weeks after the meeting at the Pyramid, there was given in the palace of the High Priest Phthamis, a great feast in honor of a double event; one dear to his own heart; the other dear to the hearts of all Egyptians.

What so cheering to himself as to view his only daughter snatched from the very grasp of the death-god, and about to marry her deliverer? What stimulus to his patriotism and generosity could be greater, and what event could he celebrate more fittingly than the completion of the new Pyramid where he trusted some day to be buried beside his master, Pharaoh? His old face beamed again with the overflowing goodness of his young heart; had he not just freed fifty of his slaves? 'Twas but an hour agoe that he had united in wedlock his beloved Samala to the intellectual and comely youth, who had chanced from the East, with strange knowledge, but poor and foot-sore and marred. How luxurious were the old man's sighs of satiety as he now with patriarchal pride bent his gaze upon the pair of happy faces fronting him

at the well spread feast! His head fairly swam with the joy of the occasion! What a mingling of blushing womanhood and gentle manhood the young couple presented! Then again the appetizing perspective of dainty dishes betwixt the long rows of guests, the merry, social clatter, the flowers, fruits, the harmonies of color, the suggestions of sweet music, in fine, the glamor of enchantment created by and for the favored ones of earth alone, all these conspired to elate the High Priest. Still in the midst of his smiling demeanor, a something pleasantly secretive seemed to lurk; his bushy white eyebrows did not fully conceal the premonitory twinkling of his keen, black eyes. However, towards the close of the feasting he could contain his secret no longer. Addressing the favored youth aforesaid, who was no other than Ramao, he queried as follows:

"How long since, oh, my son, did Samala unravel the meaning of the mysterious mark upon thy face, and cause it to straightway fade from our sight?" "Tis ten days agone that thy dear daughter did deliver me from the thralldom of the wicked Stalmatos, partly through the revealings of the benign Caissa and somewhat from the words of my mouth concerning the windings and pathways of the goblins' dances at Bassa. Thanks to Caissa, thy Samala hath found in me the similitude of the hero man of her dream, whereby her bodily weal was assured, and her heart eased; likewise was my happiness made as lasting as an ever-flowing spring. My only grief is at the dire fate of the faithful Gambit Pawn! Would that some one might release him, so he might bless our feast!" Phthamis was now at his moment of triumph:

"Son, be at thine ease; be comforted, for yesternight it was taught to me by the divine oracles the *whole* truth of the riddle; I was given the close-veiled and deeper meaning thereof; at the time of my perception the Temple was filled with a strange light, whilst a voice proclaimed that Caissa had routed her ancient enemy and would henceforth delight the children of men for all coming generations with her wondrous and beautiful mysteries; therefore, my children," continued Phthamis, "I know inwardly that the self-sacrificing fairy hath been delivered out of the bonds of Stalmatos. Ho! my steward, bring forth yet another bottle skin of wine!" Before the mandate could be obeyed, behold! a huge

negro porter bears on his shoulders a swelling skin-bottle of the ambrosial liquor, and depositing it at the feet of Phthamis with a reverential bow, disappears from the company behind the tapestried hangings. Phthamis, with a curious air, unloosens the corner of the skin, whereat of itself the membranous envelope unfolded like an opening lily and disclosed to view—oh, marvel of marvels!—the lost mantle of Caissa! Upon the mantle reposed an ivory coffer of unequaled oriental carved-work, the lid of which sprang open, and with the airy grace of a humming-bird out flew the Gambit Pawn! Saluting the assemblage with a quaint little bow, he advanced to Ramao, addressing him as follows in the most melodious accents: “My tireless helper in the hours of my need, I salute thee on thy wedding day, and thank thee, moreover, for thy patience and loyalty to the cause of Caissa, and likewise for being the means of rescuing me from the remorseless claws of Stalmatos, which demon hath been lately subjugated to the immortal Caissa. I have brought thee anew the mantle of her priesthood, enjoining thee to return with thy wife to thine own country, after the gods have called the worthy Phthamis to his final recompense.

“There, thou wilt teach Caissa’s gentle arts to mortals again. And now for thy wedding gift from myself, who will be henceforth thy friend and instructor!” As the fairy concluded, he pointed to the curious box from which he had emerged.

Ramao, who shivered with expectation took up the casket carefully, but upon opening the lid (which had snapped to after the fairy Pawn escaped,) and seeing the contents, he was near letting it fall from his hands with horror and surprise. For, lo! he beheld once more the thirty-one goblins who had seared their fatal imprint upon his forehead!

In this state of hesitation the benevolent fairy hastened to reassure him. “Fear nothing, Ramao, my brethren are punished for their frailties; they can harm thee no more; their spirits will flit forever in the delusive shades of dreamland; their forms are transmuted into solid ivory by Caissa’s decree, as thou seest before thee.

“I will henceforth fill the desolate place of the White warriors, to teach thee the laws and stratagems of our god-like pastime. Thou wilt always find the battle slothful and soulless without the presence of the Gambit Pawn! Farewell! for the present time, my children; I foresee that thy first son will be mighty in the new science; he shall be born in India. I myself will watch over his nativity and be his god-father, for his name shall be Sissa!”

Here ended the tangled calligraphy of the venerable MS.

I must apologize to the patient reader for the poverty and insufficiency of my translation, at the same time reminding him that all mythologies are poems, spoiled in their modern rendition.

THE secret of blindfold play, in fact, has been discovered. Since blindfold play became a familiar phenomenon, no Chess-player, at all events, whatever may be the case with outsiders, has been astonished that any player could play a single game without sight of the board. Most Chess-players have memory enough to recollect a single game, and all that is needed further to constitute a capacity for blindfold play is a habit of vivid mental representation of physical forms, which is as natural to the mode of thinking of some men as it is foreign to that of others, but which is capable of being acquired, and which possibly any one having a fair capacity for Chess might, with a certain amount of pains, acquire

sufficiently for a moderate effort of single blindfold play. But what has astonished not only the outside public, but the most experienced players, is the faculty of playing ten, twelve, sixteen or an indefinite number of simultaneous games blindfold. Surely here at least is something superhuman.

Those whose judgment is founded upon general observation, knowing that this feat has been accomplished by various players, and that extraordinary powers cannot, in the nature of things, be ordinary attributes, have been satisfied that, as in the case of spiritualism, there was an explanation; but hitherto, I believe, the explanation has not been given.

By ROBERT BRAUNE.



•CHECKMATE IN FOUR MOVES•

— C. H. HALM. — DEL.