

MY GAME WITH STRANGER.

BY JAMES PIERCE, M.A.

“Now, Samuel, it is high time you dressed for dinner.”

“My dear, it is only six o’clock, and the carriage is not ordered before five minutes to seven. I can easily dress in twenty minutes.”

“Twenty fiddlesticks! You talked the same nonsense the other evening, and the result was that several of the people arrived before you were down to receive them, and they were asking if you were suffering from your usual toothache, &c., &c. Now, put up those wooden push pins at once, and come and dress.”

“Rebecca, this is a very critical position, and I *must* give it a little longer examination. If I leave it now, the flow of my ideas will”—

Crash! Over went the men, with a laugh of scorn from my better half.

“Call yourself a man? You are little better than a Chess block. If you would consider your position as my husband a little more, it would be better for you. Do you know your wretched figure is getting quite bent through your always poring over that board?”

It was useless to argue with Beck when she was in one of these moods, so I put my scattered men in the box. The study in question was an end game I was playing with my friend Brown, by correspondence. Of course, I had a diagram of it, so no harm was done. I resolved to comply with the wish of my fiery better half—dress quickly—and I should still have time to complete my analysis before we had to depart. I was soon duly equipped, and was once more in my study, while Rebecca was still titivating, when suddenly the servant announced a visitor of the name of Graddle. I could not remember any one of this name, so I concluded that he must be a charity-collector or subscription-author, or one of some such depressing function. I hastened to confront him, and get the business over. A tall, sandy-haired man, with projecting eyes and a very long nose, came forward. His voice was harsh, with an American twang in it.

“I have taken the liberty of calling on you, Mr. Dummon, as I was passing through your town, thinking we might have a friendly game of Chess together. I have seen some of your games in the Chess Journal, and you probably have heard something of me, though none of my games have been published. I have played several of the best living players—not unsuccessfully.”

“Really! I have not the pleasure of knowing your name. Are you acquainted with Shagger or the great Blogg?”

“Oh, yes. Played them both: the former gave me Pawn and two, and I beat him; Blogg I beat easily. Met Skatkreuntz at our club the other day, and managed to draw on even terms.”

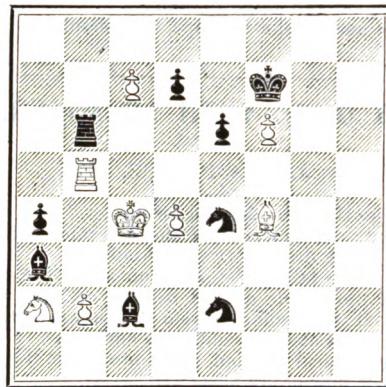
So he went on, and the more he boasted, the less I believed him. I *longed* to have a game with him, to try his mettle, but now it wanted but twenty minutes to the time for departure. If I could prove that he was a quack, how delightful, after these full-blown wind-bags; and if he beat me—well, it would be no disgrace, after his victories over Blogg and Co. He had mentioned, incidentally, that he was a quick player. Some games *have* been played in less than twenty minutes—good ones, too. So I said—

"Mr. Graddle, unfortunately I am engaged out to dinner to-night, otherwise I should have had great pleasure in playing a few games with you. In twenty minutes I have to leave, but I dare say in that time you will be able to polish me off."

He smiled, as much as to say, "I have no doubt of it." and to it we fell straight-way.

It was hammer and tongs at first, as the first eight moves were book ones on both sides. He opened with an Evans, and, of course, secured a hot attack. I am not going to give the game, as after-events drove it out of my mind. Suffice it that I found him a fair third-rate player; that is, one about my equal. I had managed to ward off the attack: we had changed several pieces. He had sacrificed a piece in order to get his Q B P safe to Queen. The following was the critical position:—

Black.—DUMMON (self).



White.—GRADDLE.

To say the least, it looked very parlous for Black; at the same time, White's King was unpleasantly situated for him. Suddenly a brilliant idea occurred to me—"How would it be to sacrifice the Kt by placing it at Q B 4? Certainly he need not take it; but, if not, what can he do, as I threaten mate with the B at Q Kt 6 and Q 6? He may take the K B with his Pawn, or move his Kt to Q Kt 4, or take the Kt with Pawn or Rook." Here were four modes of play to be considered. I was deep in the study of this, and had settled R takes Kt by 2 R to Q Kt 6, mate following next move; also P takes Kt could be met by 2 P to Q 4 (ch), P takes P, followed by R checks at Q B 3, &c. But how if 1 Kt Q Kt 4? I was bothering over this, and getting, truth to tell, a little excited, or else of course I should have seen it at once, when a thundering knock and ring announced, I knew, the arrival of the carriage. Immediately I heard Mrs. Dummon's voice.

"Now, Samuel, where are you? Where are you? Quick! quick! the carriage is here, and I am waiting."

"Coming, my dear, immediately.—(Confound it!" I exclaimed, *sotto voce*.—"Mrs. D. will pounce upon me in a minute, if I can't clinch this business at once;") so I played Kt to Q B 4 at a venture. He at once played Kt to Q Kt 4. I saw my way clearly to mating after a few moments' reflection, and was just moving B to Q 6, when in came Mrs. Dummon, full plumaged, and her eyes afire as the eagle's. But she saw the stranger and forebore. I knew, however, that I was in for it later on.

"Samuel, I am sure the gentleman will excuse you when he knows we are engaged to dinner."

"Certainly, madam," said Mr. Graddle, rising with a bow.

But I, knowing battle impended anyhow, and seeing that the game was won, begged Mrs. D. to wait only one minute, and seat herself by the fire. "We shall be in plenty of time, Rebecca."

"I shall seat myself in the carriage, Mr. Dummon," she replied, and flounced out with all her furbelows, flashing and waving fearful things.

I was so agitated that I played P to Q 4 (ch), instead of B to Q 6, thinking, I suppose, that this latter move had been played. He at once took the Kt with his King, and rose, saying,

"The game is mine, I think."

"Oh ! yes," I moaned. "I resign, of course, but if you will just look at the position again"—

"I am afraid," said he, "we ought not to keep Mrs. Dummon waiting. I hope, some day, to give you your revenge. I have passed a very pleasant half-hour. Good evening."

"*Good* evening."

He went his way. I got into the coach. I will not relate what monologue ensued there. Suffice it that I emerged a sadder, if not a wiser, man.
