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HOW I PLAYED A MATCH AT CHESS WITH MYNHEER
SPRINGBOK AND LOST IT.

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Why does not some one write a stirring three volume Chess novel? Of histories, disquisitions and learned treatises on the noble game there are no lack, and two of the last published, of this kind, Professor FORBES' "History of Chess," and Mr. FISKE'S "Book of the Chess Congress," is each admirable in its way, and deserving of the highest commendation. In the lighter department again the tales, essays and poems of Messrs. G. WALKER, TOMLINSON and others, leave little to be denied. To my thinking, "The Professor's Daughter," by the last named gentleman, is one of the most graceful little stories extant. But I repeat we want a good, bouncing, exciting, three-decker fiction, begun, continued and ended in Chess. Of the raw material for such a work, there is surely enough, and to spare. A practised hand, possessing the requisite ability, would have little difficulty in culling from the records and annals of Chess, scenes of incident and adventure, of pathos and humor, of virtue and its opposite, and the course of true love that never yet ran smooth in this best of all possible worlds—in obtaining, in short, from a repertory so varied, an ample supply of the "mingled yarn of good and ill together," that makes up our common nature, and which, colored by a poetic imagination, and welded deftly and skilfully together, would form, I humbly conceive, a book of no ordinary interest.

As for the tender passion, that indispensable adjunct of the novelist, why the little rogue Cupid peeps slyly up at you from every

square of the board. What glorious opportunities does the game afford for making way in the good graces of the dear creatures ! There are few Chess players, I will venture to assert, of even short standing, whose own experience will not enable them to assent at once to the truth of what I say.

I also, my friends, have had my little chess-born romances, and there are moments when my thoughts will escape from this weary work-a-day world, and fly away to brood over the spring time of existence,

“ When Hope enchanted, smiled and waved her golden hair.”

Then the ghosts of buried memories come trooping around me, and there rises from the unforgotten Past, thy form my lost Ianthe ! whom but for my devotion to Chess, I never should have known. Woe is me !—

“ The tomb received her charms
In their perfection, with no trace of time
Nor stain of sin upon them, only Death
Had turned them pale.”*

Our hearts may be grey while the dark locks of youth still o’er-shadow our foreheads, but amidst this desolation, if there be one spot intact by the blight that has fallen elsewhere, that spot will be the recollection of a youthful love.

Being now somewhat overcome by my feelings, I put the end of my pen into my mouth and leaning my elbow on the table, fell a chewing the end of sweet and bitter fancy, from which reverie I was awakened by a noise exclaiming sharply over my left shoulder : “ What is all this nonsense you have been writing Mr. FITZSNOB, and pray who was Ianthe Sir ?”

MR. FITZ.—*Shuffling up his MS. with a start.*—Nobody, my dear, only a slight platonic.

MRS. FITZ.—Very platonic, I dare say. I always thought you had some love entanglement before you married me. “ Dark locks of youth ” indeed, why you silly fellow, you are as grey as my chinchilla muff, as bald as the ostrich egg in the dining room. I think it would be much more to your credit, Augustus, if, instead of wasting your time over stuff like that, you were to employ it in giving

* Taylor's *Philip Van Artevelde*.

some useful instruction to your two sons, Gustavus Selenus and Peter Carrera, who are at this moment quarrelling and fighting among my flower beds. I'm sure I abominate that horrid Chess, which only induces a neglect of all duties, indeed I never could bear the sight of a Chess board.

MR. FITZ.—*Teneramente*.—Nay my love, don't say that ; there was a time when you thought otherwise of my favorite pursuit. And I—can I ever forget that it is to Chess I owe the happiness I now enjoy of calling you my own.

A short silence over head ! Presently I felt an arm passed round the ostrich egg, on which two or three drops fell, and a light kiss was pressed, then a rustle as of crinoline, and I was left alone.

CHOLERIC READER.—*Quid hoc ad Iphyli boves ?* What the deuce has all this snivelling prate to do with your Chess match Mr. FITZSNOB ? The fact is, you are sneaking about the bush, and afraid to give us the account of your overthrow, Mr. FITZSNOB. Had it been a match you had won now, we should have heard it all long ago, I warrant me.

MR. FITZ.—Patience, worthy Sir, I am just coming to the match.

CHOLERIC READER.—As Tweed comes to Melrose I think. Prythee, pull the string of thy shower bath without more ado.

MR. FITZ.—Here goes then.

When I contested my famous match with the world-renowned Dutch professor, Mynheer SIGISMOND CORNELIUS SPRINGBOK, the British Chess circles were on the tip toe of expectation, anticipating, as they had a right to do, some of the finest play that ever was seen. My health was then but very indifferent, my biliary ducts being in bad working trim, and I labored also under some remarkable symptoms, which my physician assured me could only proceed from a virulent disorder called "the hockogrockles." What of that ! A. FITZSNOB was never known to forfeit his word, I had given mine to play, and, come what might, was resolved to go through with it. The match, as I have said, excited the greatest possible interest, which was not confined to the United Kingdom alone, but extended to every part of the Continent of Europe where Chess was known and practiced. The stake was one thousand pounds a side, the winner of the first eleven to be victor, and an incredible sum of

money in bets depended on the event, the odds being almost invariably laid in my favor. It was, I should say, the most important match at Chess that ever took place.

SPRINGBOK was very bumptious about winning, and gave out as I was told, that he might die before the board, but would not be beaten. I myself, though full of my usual modest self-confidence, and reliance on my own powers, felt, I know not wherefore, something of disquiet to shake and unsettle my nerves. Could it have been an unconscious anticipation of the terrible future that was thus casting its shade over my resolute spirit.

One of my chief backers and supporters in this momentous business was Major FREDERICK GAHAGAN of the Madras Catamaran Native Infantry, an old friend and brother officer of mine, and a nephew, by the way, of the redoubtable GOLIATH O'GRADY GAHAGAN, whose tremendous adventures have been so graphically described by the author of "Vanity Fair." When GAHAGAN commanded the Catamaran Grenadiers, I was his "ancient," and a very pleasant, jovial time we passed together in these respective capacities. In garrison we inhabited one bungalow, dwelt in the same tent when in the field, rode each other's horses, drank each other's beer and brandy, smoked each other's cheroots, and were afflicted alike with impecuniosity and debts; that is to say, FRED being a Captain, generally owed a great deal more money than I, a simple standard bearer, could presume to do. GAHAGAN was as fine a soldier as ever stepped in shoe leather, full of pluck, and happy as a schoolboy at the least scent of danger. He overtopped by a couple of inches the tallest man in his company, and had a breadth of shoulder and powerful symmetry of limb corresponding to his height. He was in one respect a very remarkable man, being the only person I ever heard of who actually had an account for the manufacture of his own coffin presented to him for payment. This circumstance which I believe to be unique in the annals of mankind, is nevertheless strictly true: it is not, however, my end to do more than mention it here.*

* This singular passage in the life of my friend will be found, if any one cares to look for it, in the second volume of a publication called "Punch or the London Charivari," where, in the pseudonym of "Peter Wilmot," I narrated its details many years ago, under the title, "Fred Gahagan and his Coffin."

Major GAHAGAN had just then arrived in England on furlough after an absence of twenty-five years, the whole of which time had been spent in hard military service under the late Honorable JOHN COMPANY, than whom, take him all in all, a better master, or a better *paymaster* never existed. His long residence in the East, whither he went when quite an unfledged stripling, had tinged many of his ideas with Orientalism, and the daily habit of conversing with the natives made it difficult for him to abandon altogether the use of their language, even when he was no longer in the country. Not long after his return home I made a trip with him to Paris, and his French being something of the rustiest, whenever he found himself in talk, at a loss for a word or even a sentence of that tongue, he would supply it from the Hindostani, to the no small bewilderment of his Gallic interlocutor.

CHOLERIC READER.—Pooh ! Pish ! Pshaw ! What do you suppose we care about this blundering hulking Major of yours ; tell us about the match, Sir, the match !

MR. FITZ.—Hurry no man's cattle in the heat of the weather, my estimable Sir, you shall hear of it anon.

Having not much else to occupy his spare time, which hung rather weightily on his hands, the Major was pleased to interest himself vastly in the forthcoming match. As for Chess itself, he knew as little about the game as the respectable Sphynx on the cover of this Magazine ; but having frequently seen me victorious against opponents in India, his faith in my prowess was unbounded, in fact he believed me to be invincible. Many were the visits made by him to my quarters in Jermyn street, when he would discourse with enthusiasm on the great approaching fight, consuming weed after weed from a box of first chop number two Manillas, which I had purveyed for his especial behoof. He swore by Brahma, Vishnu and Seeva, that I must utterly smash “the thief of a Dutchman,” as he irreverently designated my adversary, and declared that he would with his own eyes, see every game played from beginning to end.

And he was as good as his word. Punctually each morning while the contest lasted, GAHAGAN's tall upright figure strode into the room before play commenced, when he would deliberately post himself sentry on my left hand, and silently watch the progress of the encounter with the gravity and all the apparent interest of a

veteran amateur, although, as before stated, he was innocent of any knowledge of Chess as the man in the moon. On one occasion only did he volunteer to take any active part in the proceedings. A sitting having been prolonged to a very late hour, it was proposed to adjourn it till the succeeding day, but a difference of opinion arose as to which combatant the move should remain with when we left off, a point of some importance, as the position of a game temporarily abandoned in this way is always analysed by the players and their friends before the next meeting. There was a considerable clamor of tongues, and SPRINGBOK began to expatiate vehemently, in Dutch, on the subject to some of his compatriots who were present. After regarding the hubbub for some time with a puzzled air, FRED turned to me and said in the Hindostani—“*Kya bolla hye woh burrawa?*”* “Oh,” answered I, “we can’t quite settle which of us is to carry the move.” “By the powers, then,” cried this zealous adherent, thinking “the move” was something to be taken away bodily, and at the same time coming down on the board with his fist in a manner that caused all the pieces to spring into the air, “you shall have it, Firz my boy, if I carry it myself!”

As SPRINGBOK was known to be a genius of rather slippery cast, it was necessary to be very stringent in forming conditions, and some weeks were spent in protocolling before the matter could be definitely arranged. First, we, the principals, tried our hands at diplomacy, but this irregular course did not prove at all successful; indeed it will be seen that the negotiation had assumed a personal sort of character when MYNHEER wrote to me, “It is only over the Chess board that I desire to engage myself against you.” Our seconds then took the affair into their hands, which they ought to have been requested to do at first, and after numerous meetings, and a lengthy correspondence, the terms of battle were finally settled. On one point only, and that as it turned, a fatal one for me, was SPRINGBOK found to be wholly impracticable. There had been lately gaining ground amongst some Chess players, a habit,

* What is he saying that —? I must really decline translating the uncivil epithet of the Major’s, and I hereby request my friend Professor Forbes, should it happen to meet his eye, by no means to divulge the meaning to a living soul.

especially in match games, of protracting the time of moving beyond all rational limit. I have absolutely seen a player take two hours to a move that did not require the consideration of as many minutes. In order, therefore, to prevent any abuse of the use of the game of this nature, should such be attempted, it was proposed to inflict a heavy pecuniary penalty on either player who should exceed thirty minutes on any one move. SPRINGBOK positively refused to accede to this condition, and declared that if it was insisted on, the match would be off; so in an unlucky hour it was determined to yield to him.

A suggestion of FRED GAHAGAN's relative to the above difficulty was practical enough at all events. This bright idea, conceived I am bound to say, by the gallant field officer, after sundry noggins of whisky punch, was to stipulate that, on either combatant, on any occasion, taking a palpably unreasonably time to play, it should be lawful to expedite him by the argument *a posteriori*, videlicet, by touching him up in the rear with a sword, penknife, or other pointed instrument. This method, FRED reminded me, had been used with singular good effect in the case of a lazy horsekeeper of his, MOOROOSAWMY by name, who was given to lagging behind on the line of march.

At last we sat face to face, I and the Dutch champion. The move fell to me, and I opened with a Bishop's Gambit, which without vanity, I think was handled by me in a way that would have elicited approbation from JALENSCH, the ablest analyser of that fine *début*. Long and fierce was the struggle, but my conquering spear at length pierced my enemy's armour of proof, and bore him to the ground. As with a calm smile of triumph I unsheathed my "dagger of mercy" to give him his *coup de grâce* (a profoundly conceived mate) I saw his fat, yellow countenance, through the clouds of tobacco smoke, turn of a malachite green; he shot at me a glance of bitter enmity, and muttered something unintelligible in his guttural native language. My friends were delighted, and said, in this great combat AUGUSTUS FITZSNOB is even surpassing his old reputation, and more than justifying the hopes of his countrymen. The elation of FRED GAHAGAN knew no bounds. He spent that evening in Jermyn street, in the course of which he made huge inroads on the box of number twos, and nearly drove the breath out of my body by repeated whacks of joy on my spinal column.

I acquired a winning position early in the second *partie*, which I maintained till nearly the end, when the game having lasted thirteen hours, exhausted by illness and fatigue, I threw away my advantage and lost. In the third game it was the same thing, I made the most heroic efforts, and some magnificent play, but after being tied to my chain for fifteen consecutive hours, tortured by spasms of the "hockogrocles," I was compelled to give in. You now begin to perceive the tactics of the abominable SPRINGBOK. This unprincipled foreigner, to whom in my usual health I could easily have given pawn and move—seeing clearly from the result of the first game, that he was outplayed at every point, and could no more contend against me on fair terms, than he could bolt a door with a boiled carrot—resolved, I say, to take a base advantage of my feeble condition, *and win by outsitting me*. He effected his purpose but too well, as I did not score another game during the match, the final computation giving

SPRINGBOK 11—FITZNOB 1—Drawn 0.

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Thus ended this memorable, and thus on me wretched, as Hamlet says, "a damned defeat was made." Sing *pillalu!* and *ochone a rie!* The glory of FITZNOB had departed

"Like some frail exhalation, which the dawn
Robes in its golden beams."

and the laurel of a hundred victories was snatched from his brow in a moment as it were, by a paltry pawn and move Dutchman of evil fortune. Gracious heaven! shall I ever forget the torments of shame and humiliation, the anguish that racked my soul, as I tossed on my sleepless couch, through the watches of the long, long night that followed the black day of my disaster? *Wallah, billah, tallah!* I felt as if it would be indeed good for me then to die. I have experienced the pangs of despised love—I have been the possessor of a Calcutta lottery ticket, which I sold the day before the drawing, when it came up the great prize of a lack of rupees—yea, much dirt of all kinds have I eaten in my pilgrimage through life, to say nothing that in my youth I suffered much extremity from sheriffs'

officers, and was once quodded by a schelm of a Madras tailor, for a debt of fifteen hundred rupees which I no more owed him than my grand mother did.* But all my previous misfortunes put together, I swear it, were tarts and cheese-cakes compared with the intolerable ashes which the Springbokian catastrophe scattered on my head.

Against your friendly breast, kind reader, I have leaned my aching head, while disclosing this glimpse of my secret woes; but to the general public nothing of the sort was revealed. Many there are, who, in similar circumstances to mine, would probably have sat upon their haunches, like the bear in Hiawatha, pitifully whining out the story of their injuries to every passer by. So did not I; like Cæsar at the base of Pompey's statue, covering my wounds with my mantle, I laid me down to die in majestic silence. But others were not equally reticent. The press took up the tale of my wrongs, and my friend Mr. BOPPERY BOPP, who edits the Chess column of the *Saturday Squirt*, gave Mynheer SPRINGBOK his deserts, in good style. BOPPERY has a number of correspondents on the other side of the Styx, the shades of defunct amateurs, who still take an interest in mundane chess, and wrote to him on this occasion from the Plutonian shore, for news of my match. To some of these he replied, "*Acheronta movebo—Minos—Proserpine—Habitan in Orco.*—The match between Mr. FIRZSNOB and Mynheer SPRINGBOK, has, to the surprise of every one, terminated in favor of the Dutchman. The fact is, Mr. FIRZSNOB was in a totally unfit state of health to undertake a contest of such importance, but having promised to play, he chivalrously determined to keep faith at all risks. Even invalid as he was, he would unquestionably have won, had not his opponent resorted to the unworthy artifice of spinning out the time of every game, until on more than one occasion Mr. FIRZSNOB, we are credibly informed, was carried from the board in a fainting condition. We should grossly fail in our duty did we omit to hold up this execrable manœuvre of the foreigner to public reprobation."

I will not attempt to describe the amazement and disgust of my *fidus Achates*, FRED. GAHAGAN, at the melancholy issue of the fight.

* It was an obligation of the unsainted Frederick Gabagan's for which I had become security.

He could hardly persuade himself at first that I was indeed beaten; but having realized the disastrous fact, he swore great oaths in Hindoostani, and made some pretty strong remarks to my victor on his dilatory strategy; to which the other snappishly replied, that it was no business of his (GAHAGAN'S) and that he considered him as little better than a meddling intruder. On hearing this, the good Major uprose, and with a wrathful visage and distended beard, thrust an arm capable of felling a bullock towards the collar of SPRINGBOK, who, rightly conceiving that something unpleasant was about to befall him, hopped over a table with the agility of the animal whose name he bore, and opening the door of the room, disappeared from our wondering sight in a twinkling. Fred burst into a roar of laughter and called out, "Gad Fitz., if I had caught hold of the *pidder soohkta*,* I'd have cracked him up like a flea."

Shortly after this untoward event, having a little recovered my health and spirits, I made a tour of visits to various provincial chess clubs, and was everywhere received with the most flattering marks of sympathy and respect. Many dinners were given to me at which toasts were drunk and speeches made in my honor. "Notwithstanding what has occurred," spoke the eloquent President of the Salina Chess Club, "our faith is still strong in our illustrious guest, Mr. FITZSNOB. He is the first Chess player in England—he is the first Chess player in Europe—and I question much if the world has ever before seen such an accomplished master of our divine recreation." It will scarcely be believed that SPRINGBOK had the effrontery to present himself at one of these festivities. This, however, was more than even my severely tried patience could stand, so when dinner was over I rose and uttered a few words of indignant scorn, which speedily made him slink from the room in dismay. The fellow soon afterwards left England covered with deserved contempt, and will never, I fancy, venture to set foot in this island again.

* Son of a burnt father—a term of reproach used by Musselmans to Hindoos, who burn their dead.