

UNCLE TOD'S THEORY OF CHESS.*

By A. C. W.

MY hobby among Chess problems has long been Pawn Promotion. I have studied the subject extensively; I have collected Pawn Promotion Problems, classified them, composed them, translated them, edited them, nay, even occasionally solved them. And when the holidays began, I determined to devote myself entirely to the subject. There was a particular theme I meant to try my hand at: you place the eight White Pawns on the seventh row, and the eight Black Pawns on the second row—but I mustn't give it away, as I still hope to master the theme myself when I get time.† I should have done so then and there, had it not been for the telegram. It was noon on Christmas Eve when the telegram arrived and, of course, I had to start at once, and my longed-for holiday had to be interrupted. Now, I lead a very quiet life, just about divided between the office and my Chess-board (I joke the landlady often, because about all she rents me is "board" and lodging), and a telegram is quite an event. So is news from Uncle Tod, but I confess that it is my fault, as I have long treated him rather cavalierly. He is such a curious old cock-a-lorum that I always hated the bother of going way down into a wild corner of the New Forest to see him, so half the time when he invited me I made excuses and stayed by my board. I wouldn't exactly call Uncle Tod a revolutionary, for in his actions and appearance there was never a milder man; face all lost in a white beard, and you couldn't just tell where the beard ended and the smile began. But in his opinions he was an absolute iconoclast. Nothing Man had ever thought, or decided, or produced, was right. It should all have been precisely another way. I remember once listening for two hours to his demolition of the system of Evolution: Convolution was for him the only right philosophy; I remember, also, the headache which followed my efforts to convolve with the old gentleman.

All this rushed to my mind as I read the telegram: "Your Uncle died suddenly last night; reading of will at eight to-night. Skinner and Foolscapp." My first thought was: "What an absurd name for a firm of lawyers; all the vividness of Dickens at his worst." My second thought concerned Bradshaw, and the question whether I could arrive in time. Poor old gentleman! I had treated him badly after all, and I owed him this last attention at least. It was seven months since my last letter to him—how lonesome he must have been. Perhaps, too, there would be some mention of my name in the will—I was named after him, though they always called me

* The four problems printed below have been specially composed for this sketch by T. R. Dawson. The writer is confident in hoping that even playing them over with the solutions will convert the worst enemy of Zig-zags to the admiration they deserve.

† See "Infantry Practice" in this book, p. 25.

Ted to make a distinction in the family. A hundred thoughts like these chased one another through my head on the journey down. I saw in anticipation the low, thatched roof, in its setting of veteran beeches, on the outskirts of the little town ; the evening lights would have faded from the highest west window in the broad street, and the brook would only be faintly audible as it ran towards the commons. I knew so well its winter sound, sometimes lost in a high wind when the last dead leaves of the beeches rustled noisily on the branches they clung to. All would be dark to-night, except, perhaps, for a single lamp in the study, where the oddly-named lawyers and one or two others would be sitting. You never saw another such study. Art, according to Uncle Tod, had been perverted by mankind. To present an artistic conception of What Is, as Painting and Literature do conventionally, was for him wanton blasphemy, a sheer waste of the artist's gifts. "What Is exists all about us," he would say ; why reproduce it ? Can Art do no better than paint a dish of bananas, or write a realistic novel ? Give me What Isn't ! " And I confess his walls and shelves came as near this novel ideal as its very novelty would permit. He was never satisfied, however, and if he came across some wild conception, he would keep it hung only until he found a wilder one.

When I arrived the lights were shining brightly in every window, and a strange melody (which I later discovered to be a Russian duet—trombone and balalaika, recorded on a graphophone) was issuing from the dining room pantry. It was obviously not into the presence of death that I entered. Uncle Tod stood in his shirt sleeves in his study. An enormous fire was emitting multi-coloured flames at the end of the room—presumably the wood had been treated to a soaking in chemicals in my honour. All the pictures of "What Wasn't" had been stripped from the east wall of the room, and a huge Chess-board, with eight-inch squares, substituted in their place.

"You are the soul of punctuality, Ted, with five minutes to spare for manners," he cried ; "the eggs will be ready instanter," and he disappeared once more in the direction of the bleak Russian melody. His head would pop into the room occasionally, with : "I feared Foolscapp was too obvious, after all, and that you'd smell a rat ;" or, "I knew you wouldn't come to your country uncle otherwise, Ted ;" or, "We'll have some Chess later ; isn't my board an inspiration in itself ?"

Well, to make a long story a little shorter, I must skip the eggs, and the graphophone, and the new theory of Hydraulics, and come at once to the Chess. It was in the nature of a lecture, and I listened at first without much interest. My mind was peopling the east wall with huge Pawns.

The whole theory of Chess, it appeared, was from the problemist's point of view absurd. The equality in conditions governing the moves of White and Black forbade, *a priori*, all possibility of strategy in problems. "A two-mover," continued my Uncle, "and still more a three-mover or four-mover, can only be conceived by giving White

a tremendous preponderance of force or an enormous advantage of position. You may be blind to this fact in your narrow enthusiasm as a composer, but no Chess-player fails to see it. That is the only reason players pooh-pooh your problems. I have erected this board with the sole purpose of deducing satisfactory substitute Rules of Chess which will make problems attractive to players, and I shall begin by converting you. Obviously you are prejudiced as a problemist against my theory, just as the players have always been prejudiced against your theory.

"The thing is simplicity itself. Make your conditions for White and Black totally distinct, and the trouble is at an end. It hardly matters what conditions you impose, so long as they differ. I confess I have only tried one system as yet; I saw it in a Christmas column last year, and it works all right."

"What do you mean by inequality, Uncle Tod," I asked.

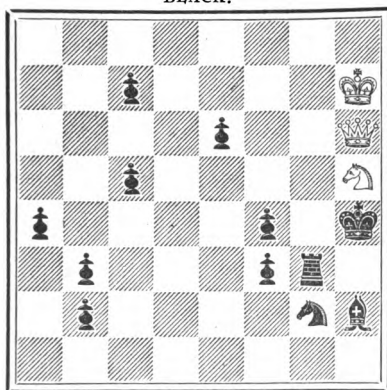
"Well, first of all, for instance, get different conditions of motion. Black mustn't move unless he can capture, but then he *must* move; White can move as often as he wishes to, save that he mustn't check, nor move into check, nor capture. Then you fire away; that is all there is to it!"

"I should say it was quite enough!" I ejaculated, my interest mildly aroused. "Let us see how it works. Do you intend to announce mate?"

"No, no," answered my Uncle; "look here!" He sat down at a form of type-writer and, as he pressed the keys, the board on the wall became singularly animated. Doors on many of the squares flew open, and men and Pawns, red and black, stepped out, giving the most lively representation of a Chess position I have ever seen. As his exposition continued, Uncle Tod occasionally touched his instrument, whereupon some given man would disappear from the board, to re-appear in facsimile on another square.

The first position he set up was the following:—

No. VIII.
BLACK.



WHITE.

"White engages to play K b 2 in twenty-five moves," he announced calmly.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "you are pretty pretentious, are you not?"

"Why not, Ted?" he answered. "Any player can solve it as quickly as you."

"But how can you play K b 2 when that square is occupied and White cannot capture?"

"London isn't making you very bright, Ted. You first entice the Black Pawn away, don't you see?"

"But if you do, he will reach

ar, or cr, and be promoted," I objected.

"I should think you would be the last person to take exception to that," he said, blandly.

"What I mean is, he could claim four different pieces and thwart your intended strategy."

"Those would be variations, Ted."

"Well, Uncle Tod, you have got me guessing. Show me how you do it," I cried, now awakened to a very real curiosity.

"All right, Ted, here goes: 1 K h8; 2 Q h7; 3 Q f7; 4 K h7; 5 K h6; 6 Q d7."

"Wait a bit, you make me dizzy opening and shutting those little doors. Why can't you invert those last two moves?"

"Because then Black could, and must, play K×S;" and the typewriter keys began to click again: "7 Q d2; 8 Q f2; 9 S g7 (Black cannot capture, now); 10 K h7; 11 K g8; 12 K f7; 13 S e8; 14 S f6; 15 S d7; 16 S e5; 17 S d3; 18 S cr."

"Now comes the tug-of-war, Uncle. I'll play P×S and claim a Knight."

"You couldn't have made it very much simpler. I answer with straight moves of the King. 19 K e7; 20 K d7; 21 K c6; 22 K b5; 23 K c4; 24 K c3; 25 K b2. *Voila!*"

"That's because I claimed a Knight. You couldn't have done it if I'd taken a Bishop instead."

"I'd have gone around the other way. 19 K f6; 20 K e5; 21 K e4; 22 K d3; 23 K c3."

"Now you are stuck," I cried confidently.

"Not yet: 24 Q d2!"

"Well?"

"You must take it. 24... B×Q."

"But that gives check." I confess I was looking for a technical loophole.

"Nothing was said about Black's not checking. You remember we agreed to have the conditions thoroughly unequal. Let me ask you a question: What is there which is really more blessed to give than to receive?"

"I never was good at conundrums, Uncle; what is there?"

"Why, check and checkmate, of course. So then I play 25 K b2 again."

"And how if I had claimed a Rook or a Queen?"

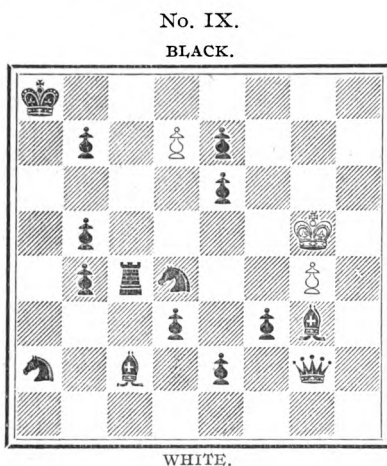
"That would have been very similar: 19 K f6; 20 K e5; 21 K e4; 22 K d3; then, however, I play 23 Q fr, and make you capture; 24 K c3; 25 K b2."

I confess I was more pleased than I would ever have thought possible when Uncle Tod began his lecture. There might be something in this New Chess after all. The Pawn Promotions, of course, were what won me over. Uncle Tod was bright enough to know where to touch me.

"Would it be possible to introduce White promotions in this Chess of yours, Uncle?" I asked.

"Why, yes; I was just coming to that, as I have a little *crescendo* I thought might be in your line."

Tick, tick, tick, went the keys, and Uncle Tod rapidly set up this diagram:—



"This time we'll alter the specifications," he commented; "the problem is to entice the Black Pawn to a3 in eighteen moves."

"You are still beyond my depths," said I. "Go ahead!"

"Well: 1 K h5! You didn't expect that, eh? 2 P g5; 3 P g6; 4 P g7; 5 P g8=S."

"Good," I interjected, "but this time there is no variety in the promotions."

"Wait awhile. 6 S h6; 7 S f7; 8 S g5; 9 S e4; 10 S d2; 11 S b3!"

"Why, I can capture with two pieces now. Where are your rules in such a case, Uncle?"

"Do it with either!"

"I'll play B×S."

"All right. 12 P=S; 13 S f7; 14 S g5; 15 S e4; 16 S d2; 17 S b1; 18 S a3, and there you are: 18. ., P×S!"

I admit this struck me as pretty. "But how if I had answered 11. ., S×S?"

"Oh, then," said my Uncle, nonchalantly, "the solution would be: 12, Pawn becomes Bishop—that's the first time I've seen you smile to-night; 13 B b6; 14 B e3; 15 B h6; 16 B g7; 17 B b2."

"And 18 B a3!" I ejaculated. "Uncle Tod, you're a wizard." I could see he was pleased. I certainly was happy. The Christmas spirit warmed us both, thanks to the good old gentleman's Excentric Chess. He ran out of the room, and the sound of his foraging in the pantry added to the cheer. He came back with some wonderful hot-house grapes. "I have some good friends left still, Ted," he said, handing me a bunch. "By the bye, Ted, I haven't told you my system of Chess abbreviations. A beginner opens a book and sees K, Q. It conveys nothing to him as to their possible motion. I would describe the whole thing in the abbreviation. Thus R for rectilinear, instead of for Rook; B for bias, instead of for Bishop; what do you think of it?"

"But, Uncle, what is the advantage, as you don't change the initial, and the book would be printed just the same as it ever was?"

He looked so disappointed that I was sorry I had spoken. "I hadn't thought of that," he said, "perhaps we could change the others. How would O be for Queen?"

"What would it signify?" I asked, as I could think of nothing but Odd, which certainly was not appropriate to the Queen.

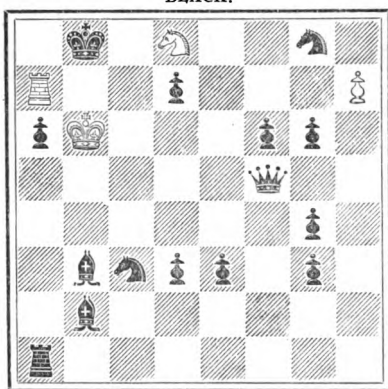
"Why, place her on d5, and she can go in eight directions, and if you draw in the paths, they look for all the world like an Octopus!"

"Come, come, Uncle, show me another problem."

He turned rather sadly to his instrument, and set up this position:—

No. X.

BLACK.



WHITE.

"Entice the Black Pawn to d2 in fifteen moves," he announced.

"Go ahead."

"1 S b7; 2 S d6; 3 S e8; 4 S c7; 5 S a8; 6 R c7."

"I play 6.., K x S," I interposed, for I was catching on to this New Chess now and beginning to like it.

"You're waking up, Ted! 7 R b7; 8 K c7; 9 R b4; 10 R a4!"

"Ah! three ways to capture. I choose R x R."

"11 P=R; 12 R h1; 13 R g1; 14 R g2; 15 R d2, and the Pawn must capture."

"Very good; but how if 10.., S x R?"

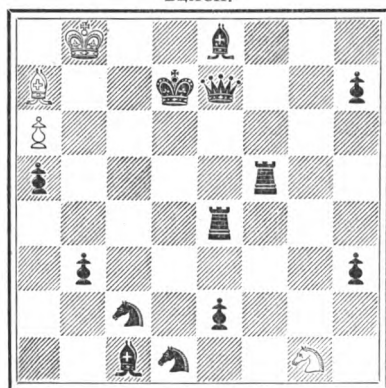
"11 P=B; 12 B g7; 13 B f8; 14 B b4; and 15 B d2."

"Excellent, Uncle Tod, excellent; there still remains the choice of 10.., B x R."

"Then comes 11 P=S; 12 S f7; 13 S d6; 14 S c4; and 15 S d2."

No. XI.

BLACK.



WHITE.

"Uncle Tod, you're a topper! I could sit watching that board of yours till morning. It looks like a lot of cuckoo-clocks gone mad. Have you any more of these problems of yours?"

"Yes, indeed; here's the last of my *crescendo*: force the Black Pawn to a2 in nine moves."

"Why do you call them a *crescendo*? Each one is in less moves than its predecessor."

"That's not the reason. You'll see in a minute. It's a simple one. Can't you do it?"

"I ought to be able to. A2 is a White square, so the Bishop cannot go there as a decoy. How

about 1 B c5, R×B; 2 S f3? No, the Knight is hemmed in, too. It must be another Pawn Promotion, though I don't see how to go about it."

"Here it is, then. 1 B b6; 2 P a7; 3 B e3!!"

"I can take it in four ways. You are a wonder, Uncle Tod!" The old boy had quite regained his good humour by this time.

"Well, there are four kinds of Promotion also," he commented, and I began to suspect what was coming, though the manner in which it could be brought about remained a mystery.

"Well, B takes B," I began; "only then I must play B takes S, too, I suppose."

"Yes; but we take turn, you know, even in my New Chess! I'll move my Pawn, which otherwise you might take with a check: 4 P=Q, B×S; 5 Q a6; 6 Q h6; did you expect that move? 7 Q c1; 8 Q b1; 9 Q a2."

"And 9... P×Q. Very clever indeed. Now, how about 3... R×B?"

"That is easy: 4 P=R; 5 K b7; 6 R c8; 7 R c4; 8 R a4; 9 R a2."

"It works like a charm. I'll try 3... Q S×B instead."

"Then I'll claim a Bishop: 4 P=B; 5 B b7; 6 B a6; 7 B d3; 8 B b1; and 9 B a2."

"There's only one left, and though I suppose you answer 3... K S×B with 4 P=S, I don't for the life of me see what you do next. If 5 S c7, the Knight can't get any further?"

"You must decoy the Black Rook away. 6 S f3, R×S; 7 S b5; 8 S c3; 9 S a2. Q.E.D."

I sprang to my feet, and threw my arms around my Uncle as though I had been a Frenchman. He seemed a little taken aback.

"You're not altogether sorry, then, about my trick telegram?"

"I wish you could send me such a summons every day, Uncle." Then, with a twinge of conscience as I remembered that I had received other invitations from him and had scorned them, I added: "This has, indeed, been a best day in my Chess experience. Show me some more!"

"Do you know what time it is?"

"Why, it must be after eleven."

"It is, Ted. It's a quarter to two—and I am to be Santa Claus at the Sunday School at nine. We must turn in."

"Well, I hate to go; you must show me the others to-morrow. Your New Chess is wonderful and worth a very long journey to learn. Good-night!"

"And a Merry Christmas!"