

others. Years ago I had many interesting games here, especially with Mr. C. E. Chittenden, who was a "foeman worthy of your steel." I have not toyed with the game constantly, and have neglected it sometimes for years. It should not be taken so seriously, and I dislike long tedious games.

I hope The Times' enterprise in devoting a corner to the noble game of chess will be appreciated and prove agreeable to all concerned. To many chess amateurs in Scranton and to our friends, "the enemy," in Wilkes-Barre, Tunkhannock and the world at large—as well as in other planets—wherever The Times may circulate, the Scranton Chess Club sends greeting and welcome.

### THE CHESS PRODIGY;

#### A LEGEND OF THE PASSED PAWN CLUB.

The meteoric flight of J. Asbury Smith, better known as the Prodigy, across the firmament of the Passed Pawn Club, will not be forgotten by the older members in a hurry.

He was the nephew and protege of J. Philidor Smith. Not to know J. Philidor Smith was a misfortune. A misfortune, however, as the Major truly remarked, not without compensating advantages, for, between ourselves, there were those who considered J. Philidor an unmitigated bore.

How I wish I could conjure up the image of J. Philidor Smith and represent him to you as he stands bodied forth in my own memory! Here at least is a thumb-nail sketch. A little, wiry man, with tawney hair and mutton-chop whiskers to match, delft-blue eyes, a nose slightly aquiline, complexion of wash-leather and an almost perfectly expressionless face.

Rather negligent in his attire, as having matters of more moment to think of; a man who would never be noticed in a crowd save for his sublime self-assertion and conceit. He would tell you in a burst of confidence—he took the whole world into his confidence, an individual at a time—

how he brought about the great chess match between Jones and Robinson, who never could have gotten together but for his invaluable services as go-between. What the masterly Jones had said to him and how he had controverted and convinced him of his error; and how Robinson had acknowledged that a certain move he, Smith alone, had seen and pointed out after the game, would have won the deciding game instead of losing it. There was not a man in the club but wished he knew as much about chess as J. Philidor Smith thought he knew. A witty Frenchman has divided the chess world into two classes, those who play chess and those who play at chess. J. Philidor Smith was a perfect example of the second class. He knew his openings well enough, up to a certain point, and could tell you the characteristics of each of the great master's styles; but when it came to playing, well, as some one has said, the mark of a true chess player is the feeling of resistance he gives you, of returning your pressure. Viewed from this standpoint the play of J. Philidor Smith was the flabbiest thing imaginable. He rarely made a good move and when he did never followed it up properly. But the pomposity and self-assurance of the man were refreshing;—

"In homeopathic doses," injected the Major.

Some of us were talking about the precocious genius of Morphy and others, who reached a high level of skill at a tender age, when J. Philidor Smith got the floor.

"Speaking of chess precocity, sir, you should see my youthful relative, a mere lad, but I assure you he is a wonder. You might not believe it, gentlemen, but he has coped successfully with the great Jones himself, who pronounces him a coming world-beater. I have seen him announce a mate in nine moves, sir, that was not palpable even to me! And for lightning simultaneous play he already equals a professional. But I am resolved you shall enjoy a rare treat, gentlemen, as I mean to arrange a series of games for him against our

best players. Shall we say the five top players of the club, two games against each, afternoon and evening sittings, winding up with a grand simultaneous exhibition against all comers on the final evening? Very well; then, and you will see the youngster bowl them over in true Morphy style, sir!"

J. Philidor had struck his gait and was in his element. The schedule was duly "arranged" and Smith promised to bring in his Prodigy a day beforehand in order to familiarize him with the surroundings, but we were not to ask him to play until the scheduled games, as he might be bashful or confused. Conjecture was divided, but apathetic, some of the members declaring that no player would be forthcoming. An optimistic minority predicted some pallid undersized boy with the mature ways of a man. We were all wrong.

Prompt to the hour arrived J. Philidor Smith with the Prodigy under his wing. A big-boned, beefy-looking youth of seventeen if he was a day, loud-voiced and flashily dressed. Introductions followed and then the visitor began a circuit of the rooms criticizing as he went.

"What shabby old chessmen!" was his first comment, referring to the sets that had been good enough for Pillsbury's use. "And the boards need a fresh coat of paint." This allusion to our twelve-dollar inlaid boards was a beautiful beginning. The pride of the club, a number of portraits of chess celebrities, were characterized as a "a bum lot" and the championship cup, in its glass case, was likened to a beer mug. The Prodigy was getting into our good graces famously, but the end was not yet. The tour of the rooms finished, the youth deigned to bestow his supercilious attention on the play. It happened Burchfield and I had on a short match of five games up, were at four all and just opening the deciding game. J. Asbury Smith began by expounding the theory of our opening to his sponsor and others who stood by. The familiar chirp of the frog-pond bothered us but little, but when the Prod-

igy continued by indicating in his baseball voice our probable lines of play, it became annoying. Presently Burchfield made a move contrary to the ideas of our incipient Morphy, who blurted out, "Oh, my dear sir, you must not move so, don't you see that he will go here, and then if you play the Bishop away he will pin your Queen, like this, and your game will be lost?" As he spoke he leaned over the table and manipulated the pieces on both sides, to show us his point, knocking a Rook and a few Pawns to the floor in the operation. From a club standpoint this was the unpardonable sin, but the young man was a visitor and Burchfield rose nobly to the occasion.

"That will do, my young friend, your point is quite clear, but I believe we do not play together until to-morrow." With that he got up from the table and left the room, while uncle Philidor drew the Prodigy aside and explained to him the ethics of match play. I wanted to kill him.

The next day opened the famous series of games, with Burchfield scheduled for the afternoon and the Major for the evening. Uncle and nephew arrived promptly and play began without delay, Burchfield drawing the first move. This was the way of it:

BURCHFIELD.	THE PRODIGY.
1. P-K4	1. P-K4
2. Kt-KB3	2. P-KB3

This did not indicate proficiency in the modern theory.

3. B-B4	3. Kt.-K2
4. KtxP	

Burchfield knew that this weak opening justified the sacrifice of a Knight.

4.	4. PxKt
5. Q-B3	5. P-Q4
6. PxP	6. Q-Q3
7. Kt-B3	7. P-QR3
8. Kt-K4	8. Q-KKt3
9. P-Q6	9. B-Kt5
10. B-B7ch	10. QxB
11. QxB	11. KKt-B3
12. Q-B8ch	12. Kt-Q

and the Prodigy, after looking intently at the position, said, "I surrender, but demand my revenge."

"Very well, sir," replied Burchfield grimly and we looked for more fun. This time the move was with the Prodigy and the game ran as follows:

THE PRODIGY.      BURCHFIELD.

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|----------|---------|
| 1. P-K4  | 1. P-K4 |
| 2. P-KB4 |         |

"This time we try a King's Gambit," remarked the Prodigy, but Burchfield was also helping to make the opening.

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|-----------|-----------|
| 2.        | 2. P-Q4   |
| 3. Kt-KB3 | 3. PxKP   |
| 4. KtxP   | 4. B-QB4  |
| 5. Kt-QB3 | 5. Kt-KB3 |
| 6. Q-K2   | 6. Kt-B3  |
| 7. KtxBP  |           |

"Others can also make Knight sacrifices at times," gurgled the Prodigy cheerfully. Burchfield said nothing, but the corners of his mouth twitched as he played

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|------------------------------------|------------|
| 7.                                 | 7. Q-K2    |
| and J. Asbury Smith took the bait. |            |
| 8. KtxR.                           | 8. Kt-Q5   |
| 9. Q-Q                             | 9. Kt-B6ch |
| 10. PxKt                           |            |

Apparently he was after all the material in sight, but if 10. K-K2, B-KKt5 would have been quite deadly.

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| 10. | 10. PxPch |
|-----|-----------|

The Prodigy here studied long and carefully. If he interposed the Knight then, of course, P-B7 mate; so

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|----------|------------|
| 11. B-K2 | 11. P-B7ch |
| 12. K-B  | 12. B-R6   |

"I never saw that move; besides, I was rattled by the outside talk. You will see me do much better this evening," quoth the Prodigy as he left.

I asked the Major what he thought of the new marvel of precocity.

"I think chess begins about where he leaves off," replied the Major.

Interesting developments were expected in the evening session, for the Major is a most puzzling player to most of us. The Wonder came up smiling and invited his adversary to take the move in their first game. This is what happened:

THE MAJOR.      THE PRODIGY.

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|---------|----------|
| 1. P-Q4 | 1. P-KB4 |
|---------|----------|

J. Asbury Smith seemed to have a mania for moving his KBP early.

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|----------|-----------|
| 2. B-Kt5 | 2. P-KR3  |
| 3. B-R4  | 3. P-KKt4 |
| 4. B-Kt3 | 4. P-B5   |

and it looked as though the Major must lose his Bishop.

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|----------|--------------|
| 5. P-K3. | 5. P-KR4     |
| 6. B-Q3  | 6. R-R3, and |

the Major announced mate in two moves.

The Prodigy said nothing, but began replacing the pieces for the next game with a do-or-die air. And the Major seemed to have all he could attend to this time, but after a lot of tedious play he pulled out with an easy win.

The next day Doctor Forsyth and I were booked respectively for afternoon and evening play. The Doctor is a strong and steady opponent, as the following will show:

THE PRODIGY.      THE DOCTOR.

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|------------|------------|
| 1. P-K4    | 1. P-K4    |
| 2. B-B4    | 2. Kt-B3   |
| 3. Kt-QB3  | 3. Kt-B3   |
| 4. Kt-B3   | 4. KtxP    |
| 5. KtxKt   | 5. P-Q4    |
| 6. B-Kt5   | 6. PxKt    |
| 7. KtxP    | 7. Q-Q4    |
| 8. KtxKt   | 8. QxB     |
| 9. Kt-Q4   | 9. Q-KKt4  |
| 10. P-KKt3 | 10. B-KKt5 |

The Doctor's management is beginning to tell.

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|-------------|-------------|
| 11. P-KB3   | 11. PxP     |
| 12. KtxP    | 12. Q-R4    |
| 13. Castles | 13. Castles |
| 14. P-Q3    | 14. B-B4ch  |
| 15. K-R     | 15. KR-K    |
| 16. P-B3    | 16. R-K8!   |
| 17. QxR     | 17. BxKtch  |
| 18. RxB     | 18. QxR     |

mate.

And the return game was worth noticing, although the Prodigy fell into the fault of opening his Rook's file after Castling. Here it is:

THE DOCTOR.      THE PRODIGY.

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|-----------|-----------|
| 1. P-K4   | 1. P-K4   |
| 2. Kt-KB3 | 2. Kt-QB3 |
| 3. P-B3   | 3. Kt-B3  |

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|------------|--------------|
| 4. P-Q4    | 4. P-Q3      |
| 5. B-Q3    | 5. B-Kt5.    |
| 6. B-K3    | 6. Kt-K2     |
| 7. QKt-Q2  | 7. Kt-Kt3.   |
| 8. P-KKt3  | 8. B-K2      |
| 9. P-KR3   | 9. B-Q2.     |
| 10. Q-K2   | 10. Castles. |
| 11. Kt-Kt5 | 11. Q-B.     |
| 12. P-B3   | 12. P-KR3    |

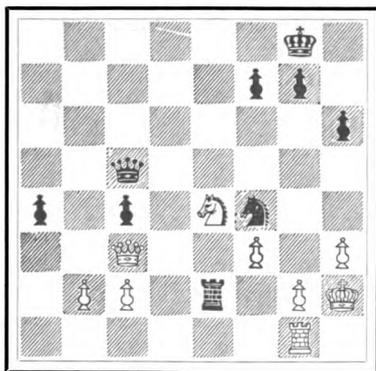
No doubt thinking to gain the Knight, which has no retreat; but the Doctor is a most reliable player.

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|-------------|-----------|
| 13. P-KR4   | 13. PxKt  |
| 14. Pxp     | 14. Kt-K  |
| 15. Q-R2    | 15. P-KB4 |
| 16. Q-R7ch  | 16. K-B2  |
| 17. B-QB4ch | 17. B-K3  |
| 18. PxBP    | 18. BxB   |

The Prodigy seemed to be getting out of his difficulties nicely, with a piece ahead, but at this point the Doctor announced mate in five moves, which proving to be quite correct, the session ended.

The evening games were without special interest; suffice to say that I upheld the prestige of the club by scoring them both, by plain ordinary play. The last to meet the Wonder was Einstein, our endgame sharp, very strong in that branch, but apt to go to pieces in the earlier play. His games were not preserved, but he has supplied the following diagrams of the endings:

Black: J. EINSTEIN.



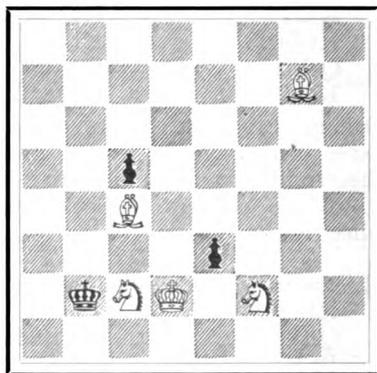
White: THE PRODIGY.

Black won by this pretty play:

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|----------|--------------------|
| 32.      | RxKt               |
| 33. PxR  | 33. QxRch          |
| 34. KxQ  | 34. Kt-K7ch        |
| 35. K-B2 | 35. KtxQ.          |
| 36. PxKt | 36. P-R6 and wins. |

In his final game things went steadily against the Wonder, but he stuck to it desperately, losing piece after piece, possibly hoping for a stalemate, until this funny position came about:

Black: The Prodigy.



White: J. EINSTEIN.

The Prodigy had just moved, saying "check!"

"My vriend," said Einstein, "you haf made an illechitimade moof, your own King is left in cheg; please take it back and moof properly, after vich I shall chegmade in two moofs."

It turned out as our German artist said, Black retracts his last move and moves legally instead, then White mates in two. The Prodigy did not wait for the demonstration, but grabbing his hat he disappeared from the Passed Pawn Club forever. The coming world-beater had lost ten straight games!

The simultaneous exhibition arranged by Uncle Philidor for the final evening never came off, nor has J. Philidor Smith ever again darkened the doors of the club, although he has been heard from, with a vengeance, but that is another story.

J. W. DE A.