

THE STORY OF THE LOST CHESS KNIGHT.

By J. W. DE A.

"In his methodical way of living Doctor Forsyth resembles Phileas Fogg, the hero of *Around the World in Eighty Days*," remarked Burchfield to young Carson and I, as we three lounged in the smoking room of the Passed Pawn Club.

Carson continued to blow smoke rings at the chandelier. Scenting a story, I murmured "Yes?" with a rising inflexion. Presently Burchfield went on,

"I verily believe the Doctor rises at an exact moment, takes so many minutes to dress and shave, breakfasts systematically on two soft boiled eggs and a slice of toasted whole-wheat bread; spends his days according to schedule, leaving his office for the club on the moment and departing again for home at a stated hour. As you know, he comes regularly in the afternoons, rarely of evenings. His evenings are usually spent in playing over published games or arranging and indexing them in his wonderful collection.

"He and I live in the same suburb, although it is nearly a half-hour's walk between our houses. Every second Wednesday evening the Doctor comes to my house for a game of chess and on the alternate Wednesdays I visit him and we spend the evening in play. The idea of such a man losing anything, like an ordinary person, is hardly conceivable. And yet at this very moment Forsyth is probably worrying over a mysterious and annoying loss; all the more annoying because of its triviality.

"The Doctor lately received from a friend, who is abroad, a valuable new set of chessmen, London made and of the most approved pattern and finish; the sort your true chess epicure dotes on, every piece as perfectly turned, carved and polished as a meerschaum pipe. Being due at my place the following Wednesday, the Doctor resolved that I should share the honor of participating in the first game to be played with them, so he brought the famous set and we

put them through their paces in a long evening's play. The session lasted until nearly midnight and at its conclusion the Doctor counted the pieces carefully into the box, which he tucked lovingly under his arm and carried home. When the Doctor is out late, instead of entering through his office, he lets himself in at a side door which opens into a small hallway. The chessmen were here deposited on a little table and the Doctor passed on upstairs to his sleeping room.

"He lives in a very plain and quiet way. The family consists of three adults, the Doctor, his wife, and a daughter. They keep no servant, Mrs. and Miss Forsyth sharing the simple household duties between them. As a matter of habit articles which the Doctor leaves in the little hall of an evening are commonly conveyed to his office in the front part of the house before noon of the next day, a most handy service for the Doctor, which is performed by Miss Forsyth in the course of her housework. She took the chess box from the table about eleven o'clock Thursday morning and placed it on a book shelf in the office, the Doctor being there present at the time. From that hour until seven-thirty in the evening or thereabouts, he only twice left his office and on both occasions the outer door was locked.

"In placing the pieces on the board last evening with the intention of going over some new games, the Doctor found his set a piece short, one of the white knights was missing. He first looked for it in the chess box of course, then on the floor, then on the book shelf, and after that began a search of all the likely and unlikely hiding-places for a chess knight. The women were called from the sitting room to assist in the hunt. Neither of them knew of any one's having had access to the chess box, as none but themselves had been in the hallway during the entire day.

"The search proving fruitless, the Doctor bethought him of my place as the last in which he had seen the set complete. He came post-haste, arriving almost breathless, to know if I had picked up a white knight in

the room where we had played. Needless to say I had seen nothing of it after he counted the pieces into the box. Reminded of that circumstance the Doctor admitted the enumeration, but thought, as we had been conversing at the time, the count must have been wrong. In fact he was beginning to get nervous over his loss and insisted upon my making a search, even to the pockets of my coat, in case I might in the concentration of play have dropped the piece into one of them.

"Naturally I was somewhat provoked by this persistence in the search at my place, though I sympathized sincerely with him in his loss. The white knight seemed to have utterly vanished. Asked if by any chance he might have dropped it out of the box on his way home, the Doctor was sure he had not. Not being locked, he held the box carefully the whole way. Interrogated as to why it was not locked, being provided with lock and key, he explained that the key was such a tiny affair, for fear of losing it he left it in his desk, never thinking of losing any of the pieces. And that is the present state of the case," concluded Burchfield, "I am sure the knight was not lost at my house; the Doctor cannot find it in his. It is simply another mysterious disappearance."

Knowing what such a loss meant to a chess player, I said it was too bad to have so fine a set spoiled, the loss being a very difficult one to make good. There appeared two ways of doing it, however, although both would be troublesome. One was to send to the London manufacturer for a duplicate piece; the other to have an expert wood-worker make an exact copy from the remaining white knight.

"The set is of boxwood and ebony, I suppose?" mused Carson, after a considerable pause.

"Yes," replied Burchfield, "the regulation pattern, small sized club I think the Doctor called them."

"Well, to my mind," drawled Carson after carefully lighting his cigar and taking several meditative puffs, "the greatest mystery in the matter

is that it should be a white knight. Why not a black pawn, for instance? It might be overlooked pretty easily, being smaller and less conspicuous in color. And then there are eight black pawns, one fourth of the total number of pieces in a set. Now you might compute the odds against losing a black pawn as three to one, but that would be dead wrong. Considering the different sizes of the pieces and the contrasting colors, I should call the chances of its being a black pawn rather more than an even thing."

"I do not see what the doctrine of chances has to do with the case," growled Burchfield, "the fact remains that a white knight was lost and not a black pawn."

"But it ought to have been a black pawn," persisted Carson, "the knight in such a set is over two inches high by about an inch and a quarter across the base. Boxwood is nearly a lemon yellow, so the piece would be quite noticeable against almost any background. "Why," continued the young man, rising and tossing away his cigar, "it is a hundred to one against losing a white knight."

Burchfield, visibly losing his temper, was afraid to trust himself to reply. Carson started towards the playing room, then half turned back to ask,

"Say, you don't happen to know if our friend the Doctor is a somnambulist, or a—dope fiend, do you?"

"Certainly not, sir!" exploded Burchfield indignantly.

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A day or two after we three again happened to be in the smoking room Carson a little apart reading a magazine, when Doctor Forsyth entered briskly. He fairly beamed with elation upon sight of Carson, almost rushed over to the young man and grasped him cordially by the hand, exclaiming,

"Say, Carson, I want to thank you most heartily for the great favor you did me in finding that lost knight! And I must reimburse you somehow for your time and trouble."

You may well imagine Burchfield

and I could scarcely believe our ears and that Carson looked as though caught in the act of robbing an orchard. Turning to us the Doctor continued,

"Look here, gentlemen, this young detective came out and found the lost knight in a jiffy, after we old dunderheads were both at our wits' ends and had never thought of the true solution of the mystery. It was wonderful, wonderfully bright and clever; but here, I have no right to spoil his story, he must tell it himself."

Forsyth was bubbling over with pleasureable excitement and we were filled with lively anticipation.

"Yes, Carson, tell us all about it," chirped Burchfield, completely forgetting his former indignation. Of course I cordially seconded the motion. Carson slowly recovered from his confusion, we drew up our chairs to give him our best attention and this was the substance of the young man's explanation of the riddle:

"There is not much of a story about it, I assure you. Mr. Burchfield told us the story of the loss in a most detailed and circumstantial manner, stating the case beautifully. As I remarked at the time, it was queer the missing piece should be a white knight rather than a smaller and less conspicuous piece. It seemed plain enough the knight was not lost at Burchfield's and was in the box when the Doctor left it on the table in his hallway. It was not in the box at eleven o'clock the next morning when Miss Forsyth carried it from the hallway to the office, as after that hour there was no chance for it to get away. Of course it was not taken out during the hours from midnight until the house was open in the morning, say at eight o'clock. Therefore the knight disappeared between eight and eleven A. M.

"So much for the 'when;' next, for the 'how.' My theory did not at all contemplate a loss, but a theft. If lost in the manner of ordinary small objects it could easily have been found, because of its color and size. Now who would be likely to steal such a trifle, and why? An article of no value to man, woman or chess player,

apart from the set to which it belonged. A child, naturally, would be the one to purloin it and the feat would not be difficult. An uncoked box, with a hinged lid, full of toys both curious and pretty to childish eyes. The table in the hallway probably not visible from any of the rooms and so the women folks could not see it taken.

"So much for theory, which I was as anxious to verify on my own account as on the Doctor's. So after summoning my nerve and buying a pocketful of bonbons I took a run out to the Doctor's yesterday afternoon, while he was in town, and called on his wife and daughter. I made known to them my club fellowship with the Doctor and the deep interest I felt in his loss; inspected and admired the chessmen and with permission silpiped the other white knight into my pocket for possible future use.

"I explained my deductions, much as I have now related them to you. When I reached the child theory, 'Why, Gracie Wilkins, of course, but oh, she never would!' was the exclamation of Miss Forsyth. 'But she probably did,' I remarked. It seemed Gracie, the 'cute little daughter of a neighbor, was in the habit of running in to see her friend Miss Mary, who makes a great pet of her. Miss Forsyth was for going right over to the Wilkins home with inquiries for the lost chess knight. And she did go, but not until we had arranged a complete plan of action.

"If Gracie had stolen the knight and taken it home as a plaything, mother Wilkins would presumably have seen it. But if Gracie had taken it and Mrs. Wilkins had not seen it Gracie might fib about it. The women said 'no' to this, in horror; but we agreed, in case Mrs. Wilkins, upon private inquiry, knew nothing of the knight, then Gracie was to be lured over to Forsyth's, without knowing anything of our quest. I wanted to spring the subject on her so quickly that she would have no chance to lie, if so inclined. It was agreed that Miss Forsyth, if she returned with the child, was to signal me by shaking her head in case Mrs.

Wilkins knew nothing in our interests.

"As it happened, our precautions were well taken. The plan was carried out, Miss Forsyth returning after a short interval with Gracie skipping along by her side, happy in the prospect of coming sweets. Useless to describe my success in ingratiating myself with the child, a bright little thing of six or seven years. Miss Forsyth gave me the prearranged signal, so I knew our only hope lay in getting the truth from this little girl, apparently the one person who could possibly have taken the missing knight. After getting on romping terms with Miss Gracie, while laughing and munching our chocolates, I took from my "candy pocket" the mate to the lost knight, flashed it before her eyes and quickly asked, "Gracie, what did you do with the little horse you took from the Doctor's box?" The laughing eyes were suddenly downcast, but in an instant came the answer, "Gave it to Jimmy Stevens for two pieces of candy."

"After all our trouble it seemed we were still far from the end of our search. But it was corroboration at least and a working clew. It appeared little Gracie had dropped in for a morning call on Miss Mary when, noticing the shiny red box on the table, curiosity asserted itself, and she had softly raised the lid. Among the treasures exposed the image of a pony's head appealed strongly to her fancy, so forgetful of all else she secured and carried it away. Before reaching home she met friend Jimmy, a lad somewhat older than herself, who by good luck had a supply of sweets. Horse heads were good of course, but candy seemed better to Gracie. Jimmy saw the toy in Gracie's hand and it looked better than candy to him. The elements of trade were complete and a bargain was struck then and there.

"In less time than it takes to tell I had learned the usual haunts of the boy and started on his trail. I was fairly on the scent now, at any rate, and had little doubt I would soon run down the elusive knight. And so it proved. Jimmy was not hard to find and I soon discovered him

at play on a vacant lot with others of his kind. Nor was he unapproachable. I had the other white knight with me and calling the lad aside, with an air of the utmost secrecy, I exhibited it to his astonished gaze. I need not repeat to you the little fairy story I put up for Jimmy, but will just say we reached an amicable settlement directly and that when we separated he had a well-earned nickel and I had the stolen knight in my pocket, slightly soiled to be sure, but otherwise in perfect condition.

"That's about all there is to it, gentlemen. I carried the two knights back to Miss Forsyth, who replaced them in the box and who no doubt greatly magnified to her father the little part I had in the transaction."

NAPOLÉON AT CHESS.

A correspondent of the New York Sun revives the following entertaining story concerning Napoleon and his ability as a chess player, which was published in the New York Chess Monthly during the fifties:

"When Napoleon entered Berlin, in 1806, somebody thought of the neglected Turk, and Mr. Maelzel, a clever mechanic, was ordered to in pest and repair the dusty old enigma. From cobwebbed dreams of King Fritz and the brave Empress, the veteran chess player awakened to encounter a greater man, fresh from the field of recent victories. On this remarkable meeting we may dwell for a moment, since its history has been faithfully preserved by an eye witness and has never before met the public view.

"The emperor, on this occasion, signified his wish to do battle with the Turk, and accordingly Maelzel arranged a second table, near that of the Turk, proposing to repeat the moves on both tables. This was Maelzel's usual mode of exhibition. Napoleon, characteristically overstepping the barrier which separated the Turk from the audience, struck his hand on the automaton's chess board and exclaimed "I will not contend at a distance! We fight face to face." A grave nod indicated the Turk's assent, and the game began. The emperor