

## A GAME OF CHESS

FROM DONAHOE'S MAGAZINE.

IN the middle of the row of shops on one side of the square of the little town stood the neat, white-fronted café, with its imposing title, "L'Instar de Paris," or as we might put it, "The Parisian."

Here every evening the shopkeepers turned in to enjoy a little distraction after the monotony of their several occupations. At eight o'clock the game began. The non-players looked on, some sprawling on benches, others sitting cross-legged on their chairs. So deeply interested did these spectators become that they would stretch out their hands blindly for their glasses rather than take their eyes off the cards. Every game had its specialist—its champion. Chicoine, the druggist, was, as everybody knew, invincible at whist; Granet, the pork butcher, could have beaten Piquet himself at his own game; Lardeux, the grocer, owed half his trade to his superiority at écarté; Captain Champion gave points to all comers at draughts; and Chazade, the surveyor, was simply reduced to giving advice, as he could find no one rash enough to tackle him at dominoes. They were looked up to by all, and were the recipients of smiles of special sweetness from the landlady.

For a while Bandru, the butcher, had been a claimant for rival honors at billiards, but his glory did not survive his defeat by a couple of commercial travellers. He alleged that had it not been for his blouse the result would have been very different; but as nobody had hindered him from taking it off if he wanted to, public opinion had declared irrevocably against him.

But M. Poulot, the registrar's clerk, eclipsed all others by a higher glory. M. Poulot played chess. M. Poulot despised the other games; and if he did at times show any interest, everybody felt that it was pure condescension on his part, that he acted out of that spirit of protecting benevolence which expresses incontestable superiority. At his request the Instar had been furnished with a set of chess. Several of the habitués had offered to learn, but to one and all M. Poulot had answered, with a look that sized up his man:—

"Don't dream of it! Why, 'twould take you years, and I should have left the neighborhood before you even knew how to move the pawns."

So they remained silent admirers of the chessman and the champion, and M. Poulot was left to lament the fact that he could not find a partner. He regretted especially that Captain Champion had not learnt the game when he was young. Chess was just the game of war—strategy, tactics, combination of aims, concentration, dislocation, everything, and a lot more of which Captain Champion had no idea. A military man who knew the combinations of chess could never be beaten by the enemy.

"No, sir! Look at Napoleon and the Prussian officers who never entered a café without asking to have the chess-board brought for them. All the world knew that."

To all this the victors of the other games had not a word to say. Lardeux had once tried to disparage chess, but his business began to suffer and he prudently held his tongue. Chicoine after a while gave up boasting of his prowess at whist for fear of hearing Poulot begin his stories—the Regency café when he was in Paris. There was only one there that could stand up against himself, a lawyer called Vermouchet, a big man with a mustache. Oh! to give everyone his due, Vermouchet used to beat him, but Vermouchet was the only one that ever did.

To cut a long story short, the town was proud of M. Poulot. Mothers showed him to their children, invitations were showered upon him, and the registrar himself did not look askance at the clerk's attentions to his daughter Estelle. When a stranger passed through the town M. Poulot's house was pointed out: "The best chess player in the whole country, sir!"

## II.

But of all M. Poulot's admirers the most enthusiastic was the landlady of the Crowned Ox, where the clerk took his meals. M. Barbet freely declared that people were decorated every day who did not deserve it half as well; and as he was a member of the Municipal Council he used to say to the clerk now and then with a knowing, confidential air, and a gesture which simply flattened all obstacles:—

"Just wait till M. Faure comes this way, that's all!"

The president of the republic not coming that way, however, M. Barbet fell back on his customers. They got M. Poulot with all their meals, and were pursued up to their very rooms with the story of the famous Vermouchet—a lawyer, a big man with a mustache, parbleu!

Fancy, then, M. Barbet's indignation one Sunday afternoon when a commercial traveller to whom he had been recounting the exploits of his hero at some length, turned upon him with contemptuous irritation.

"Oh, chess be blowed! What is there in the game? Anybody can play chess."

"Then," retorted the landlady, "you play yourself, of course?"

"I, why, certainly."

M. Barbet was familiar with the boasting of his customers and shook his head incredulously. Still nothing was impossible, and the bare possibility of the traveller's assertion being true put a new aspect on the case. He became polite, almost obsequious.

"Then if monsieur is willing, he might be matched with M. Poulot. It would be a real treat for our little town."

"Why, certainly," said the traveller. "I'll play with any one you like. You're a nice fellow—you and your chess!"

She ran so fast on her errand that when she reached the house she was so out of breath and agitated that the clerk could not at first understand what she was saying.

"A traveller—who plays chess?" he asked at last.

"Yes, sir, at least he says so. He's at the Crowned Ox."

"Well, and what has that got to do with me?"

"Why, it's to have a game this evening. Everybody's talking about it, and I've been sent to tell you."

"Chess?" muttered Poulot. "Are you sure it's chess? You mean draughts, perhaps—you mustn't mix them up."

"No, no. It's Julia of the Ox who came, and she surely said chess."

"And this gentleman wants to play with me?"

"So he says at least."

"Ah! All right, very good, thanks."

Left alone, Poulot remained motionless with surprise. A revelation began to dawn upon him. A game of chess was all very fine and soon said, only did he know how to play? To shut up Chicoine, Lardeux, and the rest of them he had thrown his skill at chess at their heads as the best thing he could think of. Then he had let his reputation take its course until he really came to believe that he could play. Just now for a moment he could hardly determine whether he really did or did not know the game. But there were his contests with Vermouchet? He could actually behold him before his eyes—that grand diable of a Vermouchet with his mustache! Still the evidence grew stronger and stronger. Vermouchet insensibly disappeared in the void from which he had drawn him, and he was obliged to own to himself that he did not and never had known how to play chess—in fact, he had never been to Paris.

A cold sweat ran down his back. He had to sit down. His misfortune was very different from Bandru's fiasco at billiards. It was simply terrible! He could see the scorn of the whole town rising up around him; Estelle denied him, and Granet, Champion and Chazade, the surveyor, all looked at him with eyes of scornful pity—why, he could not dare ever again cross the threshold of the café.

For the first time in his life Poulot knew what remorse was. All sorts of ferocious visions flashed across his mind—the café on fire, the traveller meeting a sudden death, anarchist bombs bursting in the streets. Soon his first fever passed, and ideas of suicide sent in their cards to his whirling brain. He pondered over several methods of self-destruction without finding any of them suitable. Then it struck him that an illness might answer the purpose; he might accidentally cut off a finger or injure himself with his gun.

But all these methods of evasion were more or less painful and, insensibly as it were, a more rational though humiliating alternative presented itself. He settled that he would go and see the traveller and ask him to explain the game so that he might at least make a show of battle.

He brushed his coat, put on his hat, and went out.

"If I can only find him!" he thought.

The news had already gone all around the town. All eyes were fixed on him; Chazade, the surveyor, whom he saw at a street corner, shouted across to him without a trace of jealousy:—

"Hullo! old fellow, it's for this evening!"

"Yes, yes, great!" said Poulot.

But this sympathy weighed on him and troubled him, and he was tortured at the thought that he might not find the traveller acquiescent, might not find him at all before the fatal game.

The traveller was still at the hotel, and Poulot deemed this a good augury. M. Barbet made it a point of honor to show him to the room. He knocked and trembled like an aspen when a gruff voice answered: "Come in."

"Sir," stammered Poulot, "you'll excuse me, I hope. I've heard that you're a first-rate chess player and—"

"Won't you sit down, sir?"

The traveller was smiling in a way that made Poulot squirm, but he went on:—

"The fact is that I myself have the reputation of being very strong."

"I know, and they've got up a match between us at the Instar this evening. It's all that landlord's doing. He worried me for a whole hour."

"Well, sir," Poulot continued, without hearing a word the other uttered, so bent was his mind on what he had to say, "whatever it may cost me I have come to trust to your honor. I'm going to make a confession: I can't play chess."

"What!"

"You will judge me severely, perhaps, and you are right."

"I, not a bit of it," exclaimed the traveller. "I can't play myself!"

They looked at each other for a moment, and then Poulot burst into a wild, inextinguishable peal of laughter, till the traveller had to tap him on the back while he went on with the explanation which Poulot had interrupted.

"It's that idiot of a landlord; he badgered me with his chess talk till I said just anything to vex him."

"Exactly as I did with Chicoine!"

"Of course I never expected to be taken at my word."

Poulot was leaning back in his chair, drawing in long breaths of relief.

"No, really, you can't play? Just say it again."

"Why, I repeat it, all I know is that there are blacks and whites, kings and queens, not a thing more."

"Like myself!" said Poulot. "Just like myself!"

He could have sung, danced and embraced the traveller; but suddenly a cloud crossed his brow.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed. "What about our game this evening? The whole town is talking about it."

"Our game? Ah! yes, you're right."

"What's to be done?"

"Wait a moment; nobody here, you say, understands chess?"

"Not a soul."

"Well, then, let's play."

"Oh!" said Poulot, with a strained smile. "Rather risky that, don't you think?"

"Not a bit of it; they'll never know."

"All right, then, for this evening!"

"This evening. By the way, here's my card. If you should want any champagne—"

"Thanks, thank you very much."

"Don't mention it."

In the street Poulot laughed in spite of himself. The people coming out from vespers turned round to look at him, and his old pride returned. He began to believe in the legitimacy of his reputation once more. Parbleu! the traveller was right. They would move the pieces and take them from each other anyhow, and when only one was left on the board the game would be over. Poulot actually became aggressive when he saw the druggist standing at his shop door.

"Hullo! Coming this evening? You'll see some fine play."

"Pooh!" said the druggist, and he went in.

## III.

The commercial traveller had to visit some customers after dinner, so Poulot was the first to reach the café. An escort attended him from the Crowned Ox, and he met with something like an ovation at the Instar. He showed no vain pride exteriorly, but he was beaming within—the registrar had just given him to understand that he could refuse him nothing in case of victory. There could hardly be any doubt of this, as the traveller, not being a native of the town, had nothing to lose by defeat. The reception he met with banished the last traces of uneasiness from his mind, and he now simply experienced the solemnity which all around him felt to belong to the situation. The room was already crowded, and whenever the door opened a murmur was heard from the crowd which thronged the sidewalk in front of the windows. Chicoine, Lardeux, Granet and Captain Champion were about the only individuals who affected to be oblivious of the great event, and began their game as usual; but they were known to be simply jealous of M. Poulot's enhanced importance, and did not draw a single spectator.

There was a murmur outside the door, and all eyes were turned in that direction. It was the traveller at last. M. Emile went forward to meet him, and the landlady beamed at him from her counter. In spite of a certain amount of hostility prompted by local pride, he met with a cordial greeting from all present. Then M. Emile, who was only waiting for the signal, opened the board in the midst of a deep silence, took out the box (it had been carefully dusted that afternoon), and deposited it, not without some pomp, on the marble table.

Before taking their places the two adversaries courteously shook hands.

They took out the pieces slowly and set them on the board. A different method of arrangement was adopted by each—just as in battle. Those of the spectators who remarked this manoeuvre felt proud of their perspicacity, and signalled it to their neighbors by knowing winks and indicative nudges. M. Emile conceived a good opinion of this beginning, and did not hesitate to affirm with the air of a connoisseur:—

"They're about equally matched. It's going to be a close thing."

The traveller moved a pawn. Poulot, after a moment's pause, did the same. Then both meditated with wrinkled, thoughtful brows. The circle around them, which had at first held at a distance out of respect, grew closer. Lardeux pretended to be playing billiards, but he was openly rebuked by Bandru for disturbing the contest, and the incident afforded Captain Champion an opportunity for rallying to the chess players, and Chazade was heard through the tense silence to remark:—

"No small beer, this!"

As the game went on, however, Poulot began to grow uneasy. He must win. But how was it to be done? Half the pieces had already been taken with equal slaughter on both sides. He thought for a moment of proposing that the game be adjourned till next day on account of the severe strain on the faculties which it involved; but just then the traveller seized another piece, and a murmur arose from the bystanders which frightened him. He kicked the traveller gently and imploringly under the table, but the traveller either could not or would not understand, and on a repetition of the signal answered back with such silent vicious vehemence that Poulot was instantly awakened to the horrors of the situation. The enemy refused to yield the victory.

With the courage of despair he suddenly whisked two pieces, one after another, off the board.

"Oh, no!" the traveller protested, "that's not the game—you can't do that!"

"Why can't I do it?"

"No, no, 't won't do!" and he put back one of the pieces. They looked each other silently in the eyes, Poulot ferociously, the traveller impassively, and then began to meditate again. The people around watched them with the puzzled wonder of calves watching a passing train over a fence. Chazade pursed up his lips and whispered a second time, "No small beer this," and the captain solemnly pronounced, "It's just like manoeuvring. There's strategy in it."

The traveller stretched out his hand and coolly swept off a castle. Poulot, exasperated, did the same. There was a silence big with menaces, and everybody felt that the decisive moment was at hand. In another moment Poulot's jaw dropped, the traveller had calmly taken his queen.

"Oh, come!" he blurted out; "that's too much of a good thing. Why not take the king at once?"

"I beg your pardon," said the traveller; "I was here, wasn't I?"

"No, you weren't; you were there. I ask the bystanders to witness."

The bystanders, however, declared in favor of the traveller; and Captain Champion affirmed that in spite of his feelings honor bade him tell the truth. A deep calm followed. M. Emile thoughtfully held his chin, the landlady seemed hypnotized behind her counter, and the little maid, with great round eyes and open mouth, looked petrified with awe.

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Poulot could not understand the traveller's obstinacy, but suddenly the idea of treason haunted him. Under pretext of getting a breath of air, he requested that the game should be suspended for a few minutes, and his opponent asked for nothing better.

"When they got away from the crowd Poulot began:—

"Do let me win."

"I was just going to ask the same thing," said the traveller.

"But what matter does it make to you?"

"It matters that Lardeux has promised me an order of a dozen of champagne if I do."

"Ah, I thought so," exclaimed Poulot. "Well, if I win I'll give you an order for two dozen."

"Honor bright?"

"Honor bright," affirmed Poulot with his hand on his heart. On their return the buzz of conversation ceased and the circle closed in.

Poulot moved, and the traveller began to show signs of distress.

"Ha! ha! that bothers you," said the clerk.

"The deuce!" muttered the traveller, in visible perplexity.

The faces around them lit up. The traveller moved again, and with an air of triumph asked his adversary, "What have you to say to that?"

All eyes were fixed on Poulot's face. Without the least emotion he took up a knight and swept off all the traveller's pieces, not excepting the king.

"Whew!" whistled the traveller in well simulated amazement. "I'm completely done. By Jove! that was a move—I never saw anything like it before. Yes, you're too good for me altogether."

There was a perfect explosion of joy from the crowd, hands were stretched out to Poulot, innumerable books were ordered to celebrate the victory, and the enthusiasm reached a pitch of frenzy when the landlady sent a rose from her bosom to the victor.

"Hot work," said the captain. "It reminds me of when I was in Africa!"

Chicoine was seen to get up, followed by Lardeux, who banged the door behind him.

Then Barbet broke in: "Ah, but you should have seen him when he was in Paris! At the Regency café! He used to beat all before him, even the Americans, only a man called Vermouchet, a lawyer—a big man with a mustache—but that doesn't matter, you don't know him, neither do I."

"What! Vermouchet!" exclaimed the traveller. "Not know Vermouchet! Why, everybody knows Vermouchet! Ah! Bigre! Vermouchet!"

"There!" said Barbet, turning to the crowd. "What did I tell you! Wait till Monsieur Faure comes this way! Just wait!"

"Yes, three dozen," said Poulot to the commercial traveller when they parted.

## THE IRISH POLICE.

The Irish police force on active service numbers 12,000 men, and is maintained at a cost to the people of Ireland of 6s 4d per head of the population. There is

one policeman to every 257 people. In Scotland there is one policeman to every 1,000 inhabitants, and the force is there maintained at a cost of 2s 3d per head of the population. Statistics, however, show that the Irish crime is less than that of England and Scotland. Of every hundred thousand persons there are 69 in prison in Scotland, 39 in prison in England, and 55 in prisons in Ireland. There is, moreover, a costly system of superannuation of the police in Ireland. At the age 46, about 22 years service, policemen can retire on pensions which range up to £300 per annum. The number of pensioners has reached 6,176, and the heavy burden of their pensions is laid on the shoulders of the Irish farmers and peasants.

## THE TELEPHONE EAR.

HOW IT IS PRODUCED AND WAYS IN WHICH IT MAY BE AVOIDED.

Have you the telephone ear? If you use the telephone three or more times a day the probabilities are you have it, though it may not have occurred to you. But if you be past 30 years of age you have already noticed a difference between the right and the left ear in acuteness of the sense of hearing. There is little doubt, now that your attention is called to it, that you will remember your left ear is a trifle keener in matters of hearing than is your right. Not when you are listening over the wire, but when in an ordinary conversation, with the noises of the street about you or the hum of business in office or shop or the buzz of talk in the parlor, you will bend forward a little and incline the left ear to the speech of your friend. You have the telephone ear, and haven't noticed it.

What is the cause of it? The telephone. Arranged as it is, with the receiver at the left hand, you cannot well use it excepting at the left ear. You press the black muzzle of the receiver close up to the ear, the speech of your correspondent agitates the diaphragm at his end of the line, and the waves of air gently strike upon the drum of your ear, and what one of the aurists of Chicago calls massage takes place. Your ear is subjected to the same kneading process that is so beneficial when wisely applied to the flesh or muscles of any other part of the body. And the effect of it is an increase in the sense of hearing in that ear.

At the telephone exchange the girls are instructed to change the receiver from one ear to the other three or four times a day. For one thing, it is a rest to the operator. If one ear were used exclusively by the operator in time there would be so distinct a difference in the acuteness of the hearing between the left and right sides that the operator would be practically incapacitated for a change. There would be an abnormal development at one side at the expense of the other.

"I do not think the electrical effect is felt," said Dr. Edward T. Dickerman, whose specialty is diseases of the ear. "It is little if anything more than a gentle massage of the membrane of the ear. And in all cases except where the affection is catarrhal in its character

and had affected what is called the interior ear, the use of the telephone will produce a beneficial effect. I never knew a person to be injuriously affected by the use of that instrument, and I certainly have known numerous cases where it had a good effect."

In Germany the telephones are arranged with a double receiver, and each ear of the operator in the stations is provided with one. The sound is delivered equally in each ear. In such case there is no varying result. Both ears become equally acute. If the general pattern of the telephone in America were to use such a contrivance there would be no phenomenon like the "telephone ear."—Chicago Times-Herald.

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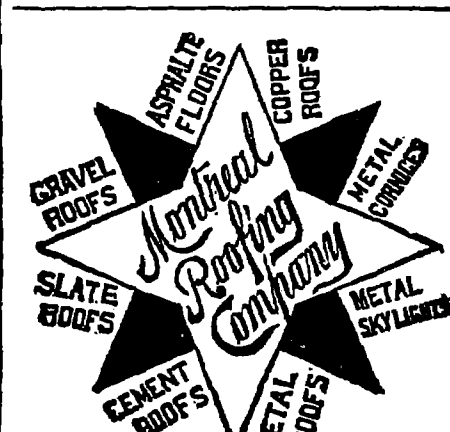
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