

The Game of Chess.

The origin of the game is lost in obscurity, so much so that its invention has been claimed for the Greeks, Romans, Babylonians, Scythians, Egyptians, Jews, Persians, Chinese, Hindus, Castilians, Irish and Welsh, whilst, among a crowd of others, the following individuals have been asserted its inventors: Japhet, Shem, King Solomon, the wife of Ravan, King of Ceylon, the philosopher Xerxes, Aristotle, Semiramis, Zenobia, the Mandarin Hansing, the Brahman Sissa, and Shatrenscha, stated to be a celebrated Persian astronomer.

The above Mandarin, while invading the Shensi country about 174 B.C., is said to have invented the game to amuse his soldiers in winter quarters, so that they might no longer clamor to return home.

The most learned writers find little difficulty in deciding that India is the country where the game originated. Some say the game is 4,000 to 5,000 years old, but it seems at least certain that it existed in Hindustan in the tenth century, which gives it a very respectable degree of antiquity.

There are many interesting legends relating to the game. The poet, Firdusi, gives an account of its introduction into Persia in the reign of Naushirawan, to whom came ambassadors from the sovereign of Hind (India) with a chess-board and men, asking him to solve, if he could, the secrets of the game, and otherwise to pay tribute.

From the Persians the game passed to the Arabians, and from them to Europe.

The chess legends of the seventh and eighth centuries involve the two great characters, Haroun al Rashid and Charlemagne, but there is little evidence to show that either of them understood chess. One story tells how the son of Prince Otkar of Bavaria was killed by a blow on the temple struck by a son of Pepin after a game of chess; another relates that the great Frankish monarch lost his kingdom over a game of chess to Guerin de Montglave.

As to how chess was introduced into Western and Central Europe nothing is really known. The Spaniards probably received it from their Moslem conquerors, the Italians not improbably from the Byzantines, and in either case it would pass northwards to France and thence to England and Scandinavia. Some say that chess was introduced into Europe by the Crusaders, who had learned to play it in Constantinople.

This, however, seems to be negated by a curious letter from Cardinal Damianus, bishop of Ostia, to Pope Alexander II, written about 1016 A.D., which, if the letter is genuine, shows that chess was known in Italy before the date of the crusades. It appears that the Cardinal had imposed a penance upon a Bishop, whom he found diverting himself at chess, and repeats to the Pope the language he addressed to the erring prelate: "Was it right, I say, and consistent with thy holy duty, to sport away the evenings amidst the vanities of chess, and defile the hand which offers up the body of the Lord, the tongue which mediates between God and man, with the pollution of a sacrilegious game?" Following the same idea, the statutes of the Church at Elva, in Spain, say: "Clerks playing at dice or chess shall *ipso facto* be excommunicated." Some authorities, however, maintained that, according to the canon, it was permissible for ecclesiastics to play chess.

John Huss, the great Bohemian religious reformer and martyr (1369-1415) while in prison, deplored his having played at chess, whereby he had lost time, and had risked being subject to violent passions.

Princess Anna Commena relates that her father, the Emperor Alexius, who died in 1118, used to divert his mind from the cares of state by playing chess with his relatives. Canute, William the Conqueror, Henry I, John and Edward I are all said to have played chess, and at the coronation of Richard I, in 1189 six Earls and Barons are said to have carried a chess-board and royal insignia to represent the Court.

According to Edmonson's *Heraldry*, twenty-six English families bore chess rooks in their coats of arms.

The modern game seems to have begun to develop about the middle of the 15th century, in France.

The first important writer on modern chess was the Spaniard, Ruy Lopez (1561), who first mentions castling as an improvement not long before introduced. The middle of the 18th century inaugurates a new era in chess, and there were at this period many real chess players and painstaking analysts. The leading man of the time was Francois Andre Danican Phillidor, who in 1747 visited England and defeated the Arabian player, Phillip Stamma, by 8 games to 1 and 1 draw.

It would be interesting to mention more of the chess masters of the past and present, but space is not available. Probably the