

# AN OLD LATIN CHESSE POEM.

"We are indebted to *Nordisk Skaktidende* for the following Latin Chess Poem, which was originally published by Prof. Hagen, at Berne, in the Swiss newspaper *Der Bund*, with a German translation. It was taken from a collection of hitherto unprinted Latin poems, found in MS. in the library of the convent at Einsiedeln, and supposed by the Professor to date from the 10th or 11th century. It appears, however, to be extremely doubtful whether so high an antiquity can really be claimed for it, since, on its being submitted by Lieutenant Sörensen, the editor of the Danish Chess Magazine, to the criticism of such excellent authorities as Dr. Van der Linde and Herr Von der Lasa, both were of opinion that it could not be of so ancient an origin, the latter giving the following reasons in support of his view from internal evidence in the poem itself. He observes, first, that the Knight is called "eques," whereas the oldest hitherto known expression was "miles." Secondly, that the Bishop is designated as "comes," whilst all the old writings and poems always say "alfinus," after the Oriental appellation "alfil," elephant. Thirdly, that the Pawn can only become a Piece (Queen) when such piece is wanting, whereas, according to all hitherto known writings, whether from the East or West, this restriction found no place, since in the old MSS. on end-games one often meets with several Queens of the same colour. Further confirmation of his opinion was obtained by Herr Von der Lasa from Prof. Hagen in the fact that the poem is bound up in a Codex with other pieces of various dates, which may perhaps have suggested the idea, but of course could afford no proof of its age. The poem, however, both as regards its classic form and the unusual accuracy with which the board and men are described, is remarkable and interesting, and as the Danish magazine in publishing it appended an able translation in that language, we have now much pleasure in giving a no less able one in English, which has been kindly made expressly for our own Magazine, and that of *Huddersfield College*, by Dr. Howe, of Montreal, and which we owe to the courtesy of J. Watkinson, Esq., Chess Editor of the latter periodical, who sent the poem to Dr. Howe more than a year ago for the purpose of translation." The above is from the *October Chess Player's Chronicle*, of London, just received, and we hasten to offer the *primitia* thereof to all our chess and classical readers.

## VERSUS DE SCHACHIS.

1. Si fas est ludos abiectione ducere curis  
Est aliquis, mentem quo recreare queas.  
Quem si scire uelle, huc cordis dirige gressum.  
Inter complacitos hic tibi prima erit.
5. Non dolus ullus inest, non sunt periuria fraudis,  
Non laceras corpus membra uel ulla tui.  
Non solus quicquam nec quemquam soluere cogis  
Certator nullus insidiosis erit.
10. Quicquid dauno-o perfecit alea ludo,  
Hic refugit totum simplicitate sua.  
Tetrastichum primo certaminis aequor habetur  
Multiplicis tabule per sua damna ferax.
15. Mox cernes tabulas aequo discrimine octo.  
Otties ut repleas aequoris omne solum.  
Sunt quibus has placuit duplici luere colore.  
Grata sit ut species et magis apta duplex.
20. Dum color unus erit, non sic rationis imago  
Discolor: alternus omne repandit iter.  
Illic digeritur populus regumque duorum  
Agmina: partitur singula quisque loca.
25. Quorum quo numerus ludenti rite pateat,  
Post bis quindenos nouerit esse duos.
30. Non species eadem, nomen non omnibus unum:  
Quam ratio uaria, sic neque nomen idem.  
Nec color unus erit diuisis partibus aequis:  
Pars haec si candet, illa rubore nitet.
35. Non diuersa tamen populorum caua duorum:  
Certamen semper par in utroque manet.  
Sufficit unus partis dinoscere causas:  
Ambarum species, cursus et unus erit.
40. Ordo quidem primis tabulas diuisus in octo  
Praefati rursus agmina prima tenet.
45. In quorum medio rex et regina locantur,  
Consimiles specie, non ratione tamen.  
Post hos acclini comites, hinc inde locati.  
Auribus ut dominum consola uerba ferant.
50. Tertius a primis eques est hinc inde, paratus  
Debita transuerso corpore calle loca.
55. Extremos retinet fines innectus uterque  
Bis seu rochus, marchio siue magis.  
Hos qui praecedunt (retinetque est ordo secundus  
Aequoris), effigies omnes una manet.
60. Et ratione pari pedes armantur in hostem  
Proceduntque prius bella gerenda priore.  
Liquet istorum tabulam dum quisque priorem.  
Recta, quae sequitur, mox erit hospes in  
Impediat cursum ueniens ex hostibus alter:
65. Obuius ipse pedes praefata prima gerit.  
Nam dum sic uni ueniens sit proximus alter.  
Disimiles capiat ut color unus octo,  
Figendi fuerit cui primum oblata facultas.
70. Mittit in obliquum uulnera saepe parum.  
Obuius ex reliquis dum sic fit qui-que, ruina  
Hac preter regem praecipitatus erit.
75. Quilibet hic ruerit, non ultra fugere fas est:  
Tollitur e medio, uulnera dum cecidit.
80. Solus rex capitur nec ab acquire tollitur ictus.  
Irruit, ut sternat, nec tamen ipse ruit.
85. Hic quia prima tenens consistit in aequore semper,  
Circum se est eurusque quaeque tabella sibi.
90. At ubi reginae scilicet ratione pateat:  
Obliquus cursus huc color unus erit.
95. Candida si sedes fuerit sibi prima tabella,  
Non color alterius hanc aliquando capit.
100. Hoc iter est pedis, si quando pergit in hostem,  
Ordinis ad finem cumque meare potest.
105. Nam sic concordant: obliquum tramite, desit  
Ut si regina, hic quod et illa queat.
110. Ast quos uicinos dominis curioque notant,  
Transuerso cursu sat loca pauca petunt.
115. Istorum fuerit positus quo quisque colore,  
Primo dissimilem non aliquando pete.
120. Post primam tabulam mox fit tibi tertia sedes,  
Qua fit reginae, dissimilem ille uia.
125. Praeterea cursus equitum quoque facessunt,  
Sunt quibus obliqui multiplicesque gradus:
130. Dum primam societatem quisque contemnit eorum.
135. Discolor a prima tertia cepit eum.
140. Sic alternatim tenet hunc illumque colorem,  
Quilibet ut cursus esse tabella queat.
145. At rochus semper procedit tramite recto  
Utque datur ratio, porrigit ille gradum.
150. Quatuor in partes gressum distendere fas est  
Ique uno cursu tota meare loca.
155. Hi certamen habent equitumque per horrida bella,  
Ut, si defuerit, praelia paene cadant.
160. In quibus et reliquis extat custodia sollers:  
Inconuulsi enim praelia nemo petit.
165. Cuique datur custos, ne incautum uulnera sternant.  
Solus, heu, facile, si petat arua, ruit.
170. Cum uero enuicti certant praelia densant,  
Hostis in hostem fit celer ire neom.
175. Hanc rex deuita, hac nunquam sternitur ille,  
Dum fato reli quis amplius ipse potest.
180. Dum tamen hunc hostis cogit protendere gressum,  
Si conclusus erit, praelia tota ruunt.

## NOTES BY THE TRANSLATOR.

- Line 3. Huc cordis dirige gressum. The metaphor is harsh.
8. Certator nullus. There are many instances in the poem of this metrical licence—one avoided by the *Classico Poets*.
- See lines 20, 26, 28, 34, 64, 66, 82, 92.
- 11 & 12. A good dithich, the poetry of which I have endeavoured to preserve in the translation. Although the *Latinity* and *metre* are occasionally faulty, there is much spirit in the poem.
43. Secundus—so. tabulas.
64. The moves as described belong to some centuries back. Originally the Queen moved only one square at a time diagonally; subsequently over the whole diagonal; and more recently the move of the Rook was conceded to her.
- The Bishop (line 75) was limited in range to the third square, but could pass over the intervening square, like the Knight. The Knight and Rook were anciently the most powerful pieces (line 87), and have retained their move unaltered. So also the King and Pawn, except the innovation in the case of the latter of a double first move.
70. The metre of this line is very faulty.
71. The word *curros* bears no reference to anything in lines 37 and 38. Possibly it should be *comites*, but if *curros* is the true text, the allusion must be to the shape of the Bishop, or rather of the piece now so called. Anciently it was a ship, for which we know that *curros* was an epitheton perpetuum.

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## ECHOES FROM LONDON.

It is freely stated Mr. Gladstone is about to buy a mansion in the Isle of Man and settle there for the rest of his days. It is also stated that the right hon. gentleman has given up his Hawarden residence, and that he has seen the last of his parliamentary days.

THE chess-loving public will learn with satisfaction that a project is on foot for establishing a chess club in connection with the reading-room of the Royal Aquarium at Westminster, provided a sufficient number of gentlemen signify their intention of joining. Names will be received by the Secretary of the Aquarium; and if the proposition be adequately supported, a preliminary meeting will be called at an early date, to take the necessary measure for establishing such an association.

A CORRESPONDENT complains that he has lately been subjected to a novel and somewhat irritating form of annoyance. An envelope was lately delivered to him bearing the St. John's-wood postmark, and on the other side was written, "J. A., fondest love." The contents of the envelope were some evangelistic mission tracts. It is obvious that this mode of transmitting warnings to sinners might give rise to much misconception, if a jealous wife or intended didn't get a sight of the interior.

QUITE a crowd gathered to see the Ministers arrive for the late Cabinet Council, and altogether intense interest was exhibited at the gathering. The punctuality observed by Ministers in attending such meetings has often been remarked upon. Saturday on the whole was no exception. First came Colonel Stanley, making an appropriate "first arrival." Then followed Lord Beaconsfield, who arrived ten minutes before the appointed hour. Close after him were all the rest, with the exception of Lord John Manners, who has got a touch of the gout, and Sir Michael Hicks Beach, but about ten minutes after the time the latter made his appearance. "Here's Sir Michael," remarked a bystander. "He's late." "Oh, he's always late," retorted another, who seemed to be an authority, and took upon himself to sum up.

A WELL-KNOWN writer has concluded a somewhat curious investigation. Being struck with the vast number of novels issued from the English press and sent to the circulating libraries, he has endeavoured to trace the authors. He has discovered that they are for the most part young ladies, a good many of them with means. It is computed that the number of lady novelists is past finding out, but that they make up the large majority of novel writers is without doubt. One curious thing about this investigation is the fact that in some cases the female authors belong to the poorer orders. There is a species of religious novel that has lately obtained a large circulation, and it is in this sphere that the latter are found. But the success of the works depends not upon their intrinsic merits, but upon the benevolence of rich gentlemen who guarantee to pay the publisher for so many hundred copies. Some works of this class are sent out to the extent of ten thousand in this particular way, gratuitously to Sunday-schools and similar institutions.

The ceremony of freeing Waterloo Bridge was ludicrously unceremonious. It was an utter fiasco. Mr. Cecil Rogers, Deputy Chairman of the Board of Works, at the time appointed, in the midst of a huge crowd of people and cabs and carriages, with which the road from the Strand to the gates was crammed, mounted a sort of stool with an handrail and commenced an address. As many of the people were making their way to the trains at Waterloo Station, and the heat and dust were unbearable, they soon became impatient, and raised shouts of "Time! time!" At this moment an altercation arose between two cantankerous hackney cabmen, which effectually rendered Mr. Rogers' voice inaudible, but unwilling to have his oration so soon cut short, the deputy chairman, with violent head gesticulation, continued in a louder voice. Finding, however, that the uproar increased, and his vocal efforts were of no avail, he suddenly ducked his head and disappeared, waving in his right hand a dusty key. The crowd raised three lusty cheers, and the ceremony was over. The gates of the bridge were unhinged, and in a struggle to be first the people and carriages passed over and dispersed.

MORE ABOUT THE MYSTERIOUS TIE.—"Marriage," says a cynic, "is like putting your hand into a bag containing ninety-nine snakes and one eel. You may get the eel, but the chances are against you."

ARTICLES DE PARIS.—In Paris a certain Monsieur Kenard announces himself as "a public scribe who digests accounts, explains the language of flowers, and sells fried potatoes."

NOT SKULLS AND CROSSED BONES SURELY!—A writer in a South-African contemporary, in describing a ball-room, says, "The dreary old building was prettily decorated with the youth and beauty of Humansdorp and a few supplementary flags."

"HIP, HIP, HURRAH!"—"Hip, hip, hurrah!" was originally a war-cry adopted by the stormers of a German town where a great many Jews had taken refuge. The place being sacked, they were all put to death amid shouts of "*Hierosolyma est perdita*." From the first letters of these words (*H. c. p.*) an exclamation was contrived. Few of those who raise the English cheer in festivity or battle are aware that they use a cry associated with the fall of Jerusalem, and those bloodthirsty persecutions of Jews by so-called Christians which so foul a stain upon the page of history.

PRIVATE LETTER-BOX.—It has been proposed to the authorities of the General Post Office that, at first in London, and then, if the system be found to answer, in large provincial towns, any one should, upon payment of a moderate sum—say, two guineas a year—to the Post-Office, be entitled to have a private letter-box for posting letters within his own premises and for his exclusive use, and that the letters should be collected regularly hour by hour by the postman, just as they are now from the pillar letter-boxes in the streets. By this plan the loss of time, together with the chance of delay, miscarriage, or loss attending the present system of sending letters to post, would be obviated.

HALCYON DAYS.—The expression "halcyon days," so frequently employed to denote a season of special security and joyousness, is derived from an old fable that the halcyon, or king-fisher, made its nest on the surface of the seas, and possesses some innate power of charming the waves and winds to rest during the time of its incubation. Fourteen days of calm weather were in the power of the king-fisher, or alcyon, the fabled daughter of *Aeolus*, wearing a feathered form in token of grief for the loss of *Ceyx*, her husband, and deriving her authority from her father, the lord of winds. There is a singular idea concerning the king-fisher which seems to have its origin in the same mythical history. In the rural districts a king-fisher is sometimes seen suspended by the point of the beak from the beams of the ceiling, the notion being that the bird turns its breast towards the quarter from which the wind is blowing.

ITS EFFECT.—A month before the bombardment of Fort Fisher, in the last American war, began, the celebrated powder explosion occurred which was intended to blow down this solid earth-work, a mile in extent, with forty-foot traverses every few yards. Its failure was ridiculous. That night, after the explosion of the powder-ship, some pickets on the beach were captured and carried on board the Admiral's ship. Among them was a very solemn-looking soldier, who sat silently and sadly chewing tobacco. As there was intense curiosity among the officers of the fleet to know the result of the remarkable experiment, one of them asked the solemn-looking "Reb" if he was in the fort when the powder-ship exploded; to which he replied in the affirmative, but without exhibiting the least interest in the matter; whereupon the officers gathered around him and began to ask questions. "You say you were inside the fort?" "Yas, I was ther." "What was the effect of the explosion?" "Mighty bad, sir—powerful bad!" "Well, what was it?" "Why, stranger, it waked up pretty nigh every man in the fort."

THE MUSK-OX.—The musk-ox measures only about five and a half feet from the tip of the nose to the root of the tail, closely approaching in size the smallest of Highland cattle, but is much stouter in proportion and more compactly built, its structure differing in the shortness and strength of the bones of the neck and length of the dorsal processes which support the ponderous head. Its weight is usually greatly over-estimated by travellers and writers, being placed approximately at seven hundred pounds. Three hundred pounds would probably be nearer the weight of the largest. This error is doubtless due to the apparent size of the animal, which owing to the huge mass of woolly hair with which it is covered, has given rise to the common statement that it rivals in size the largest of English bullocks. The outer hair or fleece is long and thick, brown or black in colour, frequently decidedly grizzled, and prolonged to the knees, hanging far below the middle of the leg. Underneath this shaggy coat, and covering all parts of the animal, though much the heaviest upon the neck and shoulders, is found a fine soft wool of exquisite texture, of a bluish drab or cinerous hue, capable of being used in the arts and of forming the most beautiful fabrics.

REFORM THE BALLET.—Can anything be worse, or in worse taste, than the prevalence and popularity of what managers call "the leg element" on the stage? It does not require very wide open eyes to see that the hideous and ungraceful posturing, which managers are pleased to designate a "*ballet*," has no element of beauty—is, in fact, nothing but a means of exhibiting female figures for the benefit of certain sitters in the stalls and high-priced parts of the theatre. Modest women turn away their heads, and others gaze with a sort of petrified horror of attraction, wondering whether these sprawling creatures are indeed women with feelings like themselves. They shiver with pity for those who seem to have no sense of the degradation to which a prevalent fashion has condemned them. We do not say that the "*ladies of the ballet*," as they are called, may not be as good, as pure, and as right-minded as the most carefully guarded of the women who are sitting while they turn from them; we only say that a taste which encourages such exhibitions is one that calls loudly for reform.