

THE WHITE CHEST.

It was just the house I wanted. In size and situation it suited me exactly, as the phrase goes, literally down to the ground. Facing the park and placed back from the high road, with nothing in front of it but the broad strip of garden belonging to the terrace in which it stood, and the open stretch of turf and trees, it was the very abode for a London season. Its rent, too, was extremely moderate: it was in sound repair; drainage without a flaw; fixtures, furniture and decorations in the best taste; the owner only desiring to let it occasionally, because he went away from town each spring. Why, then, did I hesitate to take it? Why did everybody hesitate to take it? For the last seven years and more it never had been let. All the house agents at that end of town had had it in hand one after another. The terms had been reduced each season that it came into the market, and still there was no finding a tenant for it. Everybody who went over the house was charmed with it. The entrance being in the rear, all the best rooms had a delightful southern aspect, and going up from floor to floor on their first visit of inspection, everybody grew more delighted the higher they got. The apartments increased in cheerfulness, if not in size, the outlook from the windows became more extensive and airy, while, when one reached the top story, and ascended by a narrow stair on to the leaded flat roof, with a high balustrade running around it, the view was, as the house-agents expressed it, "very unique."

I had heard the rumours about the house often when I had been in town, and my curiosity had always been piqued, so that now, when I wanted just such a house for the season, I determined to go and look at it for myself.

Finding all satisfactory and just as I expected from bottom to top, I was stepping out on to the roof with Mr. Crumble, the agent, and was saying to him:

"Well, I can't conceive why people won't live here," when my eye fell upon a curious object erected upon the leads at the rear, and surrounded by a high railing. It looked like a huge skylight or glass lantern, about ten feet long, three high and three broad. But instead of forming a light for a staircase or room beneath, it seemed to have been built for the purpose of covering another curious object, which, occupying nearly the whole of the space under the glass, was plainly visible through it. This was a long white box resembling a seaman's chest more than anything, only much larger. It rested upon four legs or feet, which raised it about a foot from the flat surface of the roof. It was painted a creamy white and varnished, and apparently not being intended to open, any more than its glass covering, had no hinges or lock to its top or lid.

"What the deuce is that?" said I to Mr. Crumble.

"Ah!" replied that functionary, with an odd expression of the face, "that's it, sir."

"What's it, pray?"

"Why, the secret, sir."

"The secret? How is it a secret? What do you mean?"

"Well, sir, what is it, what's it meant for, what's inside of it?"

"Don't you know?"

"No, sir."

"Doesn't any one know?"

"I suppose somebody does, sir, but we don't; we are forbidden to inquire or to attempt to find out; if we knew we should be able to let the house, perhaps."

"How long has it been there?"

"A long while, I believe, sir—ten or twelve years. Before my time."

"But who put it up?"

"Well, Mr. Gayling, we suppose; nobody seems to know exactly when it first appeared there."

"But the servants," I protested, "they must know."

"Oh! I have heard there were none in the house at the time; they were all dismissed just before it was put up. Mr. Gayling never keeps many servants; sometimes he has only one, sometimes none. Nobody lives in the house when he's away, but he always leaves the keys with us. He is always changing his servants, Mr. Gayling is; I have always heard him say that he likes new brooms."

"What is he, or what was he?"

"A gentleman in the naval line, I believe, sir—they're rather rum 'uns, I'm told."

"Humph!" I said, "very odd. But do you mean, to tell me that nobody will live here because they don't know what's in that box?"

"That's partly the reason, sir."

"Absurd!" I was going on when the man continued:

"But there's a clause in the agreement about it; that's what does it, sir."

"Explain," I said.

"Well, sir, here is the clause," and he produced the document; "perhaps you would like to read it yourself?"

Thus it ran:

"And in taking the house at the rental and for the term specified as above, I hereby solemnly pledge my oath never directly or indirectly, through my own agency or that of others, to attempt to meddle with, to disturb the white chest under the glass case on the roof, or to seek in any way to discover for what purpose it has been placed there, or what it contains; and I further guarantee that no person in my employ, nor anyone entering the house during my

tenancy thereof, shall make any such attempt, and I hereby undertake that in the event of their being detected in doing so, or of my doing so, to forfeit the sum of £1,000, and in accordance with the agreement, have, in the proper legal form, lodged the said sum with the bankers of Thomas Gayling, Esq., the lessor, as a guarantee of my good faith."

"But for that clause," went on the agent, as I finished reading it with surprise, "we should have no difficulty in letting the house."

"Pray, is the owner out of his mind?" I asked in a minute.

"Not that I am aware of, sir; he is a very pleasant, affable gentleman, Mr. Gayling is; only, as I say, a little rum on some points; nothing would induce him to strike out that clause, for instance. Lor' bless you, sir, parties never entertain it for a moment when they come to that part of the business, they drop it like a hot potato."

"Humph!" said I again, "it's queer certainly, but I don't see why one shouldn't acquiesce; it doesn't matter a rap to me what's inside the chest. I should never want to meddle with or disturb it, and I'd take very good care no one else did; I would padlock the trap-door on the roof, and that would settle that. Ah!" I continued, after walking round the structure and looking about me a bit—"ah! see; precautions have been taken to prevent any access to this roof from the others on either side, by this iron chevaux-de-frise; yes, no one can get over this. Well, it's an odd freak, but I am not sure that I am going to be talked by it; I'll think about it, Mr. Crumble."

And the result of my thinking was, that I signed the agreement two days afterwards, having conformed to the peculiar stipulation regarding the deposit. I had no fear of losing the thousand pounds; the interest on it was a mere addition to the rent, and the house was so exactly what I wanted, that it would even then be cheap to me, with my large family of motherless children.

Nevertheless, I do not deny that after all was signed, sealed and settled, I was conscious of a lurking curiosity and suspicion regarding that mysterious erection. What could it be? What could it contain? I was constantly saying to myself:

Before I had been in the house a month, it began to act as a nightmare on me, an incubus I could not shake off. I was oppressed and depressed by it in a way quite unaccountable.

Another month passed, during which, more than once, I was tempted to go secretly on to the roof and to look at the thing again; there was no harm in that; that was not forbidden in the bond, and, I need hardly say, I saw nothing to provoke any new comment.

About a week after my last visit to the roof a lengthy debate kept me late at the society, and walking home for the sake of fresh air, I found the mid-summer dawn breaking as I struck into Park Lane. Reaching Oxford street I was startled by observing in the western sky a strong light, not due to reflected sunrise. At the moment I saw it a fire-engine passed me at full speed, and presently the first signs of the commotion which a conflagration causes in the streets became evident. No man undergoes this experience when he has been away from home many hours, and sees the red glare rising in the direction of his own house, without a pang of anxiety, if not of terror. How well founded was this sensation in the present case was made evident ere I had walked 200 yards; yes, merciful power! it was my house that was on fire!

I can scarcely record what followed; I only know that somehow I found myself in the midst of the police and firemen. That I explained to the superintendent who I was, and that, under his escort, I soon ascertained that all the inmates of my house, my children, the governess and the servants were in safety, and had been taken into a neighbour's at the rear; that, as soon as I found this to be the case, I accompanied still by the superintendent, mounted to the top of the adjacent residence, whence the firemen were directing the hose upon the flames.

Once on this vantage-point, my mind reverted to the white chest. Was it still there? Yes; the flames, though bursting out from all the windows of the upper stories, back and front, had not yet done more than wrench and crack portions of the glass-case. For a time it seemed as if this would be the most that might happen. The water seemed to be getting the upper-hand, and as it fell in torrents on the hot roof such clouds of steam were thrown up with the smoke as would have completely hidden everything from view, but that our position had been skillfully selected, and was well to windward of the burning mass.

But presently, amid the roar of flames, there came a dull, heavy rumble for a moment, and then with a tremendous crash the roof fell in. With it, of course, went the fragments and framework of the glass case and the now charred and blackened chest itself. I had my eyes upon it at the moment, and down it went deep into the utter obscurity of the dense smoke and steam which always succeeds to this climax of a conflagration. For several minutes nothing was to be discerned through the overwhelming wreaths of black-gray fumes. But presently, though the light from the fire had been quenched, there began to be visible by the aid of the increased light of the morning, the depths of this pit of Acheron. Yet it was not so very deep after all, for the fire having originated on the second floor, the falling roof

had only crashed down as yet as far as the drawing-room, and there, when my eyes had become accustomed to the spectacle of the indescribable debris, I plainly beheld resting slantways across a stubborn remnant of wall what had been the white chest; it was now split and smashed, and its contents were revealed.

Good heavens! What was it that I looked down upon? I turned my face away for a moment with a shudder, for there, protruding through the splintered fragments of its once creamy-white wooden case, was a huge leaden coffin, which, in its turn melting and bursting with the heat, displayed within the unmistakable form of a shrouded corpse. I was in the act of drawing my companion's attention to it in horror, when suddenly there flew up around it with redoubled fury, such a mass of flame and smoke that it was entirely hidden, and soon the fire had so spread and burst out again that the horrible spectacle of this unintentional incineration was shut from sight and the house was finally burned to the ground.

I pass over what immediately followed after I had made my way back to the friendly abode where the members of my family were sheltered. In a few days they were snugly settled again in another home, fortunately not very much the worse for the terrible scare.

In due course the time arrived for looking into my losses, and while I was doing so I received a letter from Mr. Gayling, who had come to town requesting an interview. I was glad of this, for I foresaw that it must lead to some explanation of the strange circumstances surrounding the agreement I had signed. My curiosity as to the contents of the white chest had been rudely satisfied, it was true, but what had been the reason for placing such an object in such a place? and this I was determined to find out. Unexpectedly Mr. Gayling disclosed to me immediately we met.

"I have asked for this interview, sir," he said abruptly, "because I am a ruined man."

"But," I interposed, "I am told you were fully insured."

"That has nothing to do with it," he answered; "no insurance can restore the three thousand a year which I lose by what has happened. I am simply going to tell you certain facts, because, when you have heard them, I shall put it to you whether you will not out of your ample means feel that some compensation is due to me. The fact is that it has been during your tenancy of my house, and through accident or negligence on the part of some one for whom you are responsible, that my ruin has been brought about."

"I don't understand you."

"Listen, sir," he went on, "and you will. I was brought up to the sea and followed it till mid-life, for I was entirely dependent on my own earnings. My only relative at this time was an old uncle, also a sailor, and a most eccentric man, as you will presently see. Fifteen years ago he suddenly came into a large sum of money; I never knew how, but he retired and took that house. He had only been in it three years when a mortal sickness overtook him; he sent for me."

"Tom," said he, "I am dying, and I don't like it; I am terrified, not so much at the thought of death as at the thought of burial; a sailor's grave I would not mind, but to be boxed up and thrust into the earth—no, Tom, I won't stand it. I look to you to see that it doesn't happen. I've made my will, Tom—I've left you all I possess—but on one condition, and it is that you are my heir so long as I am well above ground, and no longer—mark the words, well above ground. Directly I am buried, or my remains are allowed to mingle with mother earth, as she is called—she was no mother to me, the sea was my mother, for I was born at sea—all my money, mind, goes straight to the Seaman's Hospital, every penny of it."

"But what am I to do?" I asked of my uncle; "how shall I be able to carry out such a strange condition? Have you so expressed it in your will?"

"Yes, indeed I have," he answered, "and legal and binding you'll find it, as expressed in the words, 'so long as I am well above ground.'"

"But what am I to do with you?" I again asked.

"Oh, run me up aloft, masthead me, anything you like, but don't bury me."

"Well," went on Mr. Gayling, "to make a long story short, I found that the conditions of the old man's will were binding, and his executors and myself hit upon the plan of hoisting the coffin upon the roof of his house. Under certain conditions we found that it was possible for us legally to do this. So I dismissed my three servants, and employed a country undertaker, my old ship's carpenter, for the purpose."

The French Army has just been supplied with new colours and standards. A wreath of laurel traversed by a golden dart takes the place of the old Imperial Eagle, and the letters "R.F." together with the regimental number, cast in bronze, add to the ornamentation. The flag itself bears the inscription, "République Française, honneur et patrie," in the middle, whilst each of the four corners is filled with large golden wreaths, having the regimental number in the centre. On the other side of the colours the name of the regiment is inscribed, and a list of battles, drawn up by a special commission. They will likewise be decorated with wreaths at the corners.

OUR CHESS COLUMN.

Solutions to Problems sent in by Correspondent will be duly acknowledged.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. W. S., Montreal.—Thanks for several communications.

A. C. Wolfhill, N. S.—Your letter just received. Will answer in next Column.

R. F. M., Sherbrooke, P. Q.—Correct solution received of Problem for Young Players, No. 207.

S. R.—The position is a drawn game.

E. H.—Solution of Problem for Young Players No. 207 received. Correct.

We see it stated in the chess columns of the United States that the friends of Mr. Max Judd are desirous of bringing about a match between him and Captain MacKenzie, for the championship of America and a large sum of money. We are convinced that this contest, should it come off, will be most interesting to the lovers of the game in all parts of the world. The successful play of the Captain at Paris during the late Tournament has called special attention to his skill in all chess circles, and of this we are sure, that whoever may undertake to deprive him of his present proud position, will find that he has no easy task to accomplish. Contests of this nature, however, are at all times necessary and useful. They afford excitement to those who have a thorough knowledge and appreciation of the game, and they also increase the ranks of those who are to be in the future the leading players of this and other countries.

Captain MacKenzie returned to New York on Wednesday last. His visit to Boston was of a more private nature than some others, and but little public chess playing was indulged in. A few games with Mr. Hammond and Mr. Ware comprising about all that was done. He speaks enthusiastically of his reception everywhere, and especially so of his experiences in Montreal.—*Turf, Field and Farm.*

We learn from *La Revue des Jeunes*, etc., that the Tourney which is going to take place at St. Petersburg will be the most brilliant which has as yet been in Russia. Messieurs Winawer, who will go express from Warsaw, Telegorine, the editor of the Russian chess journal, A. Charline, Mapine, Schiffer, and Schenckoff will take part in it. The first prize will likely be 1,000 francs.—*Argus and Express.*

Paul Morphy has petitioned a court to eject from the house he occupies in New Orleans some tenants whom he accuses of coming into his room at night and tearing his clothes, hats and cravats. Poor Paul!—*Hartford, Conn. Times.*

Another game of chess with living chessmen will be played in Pittsburgh, Pa., on the 26th of February: two spectators will be presented at the Local Exhibition for the benefit of the Mercantile Library Chess Room. A tourney is now in progress between ten representatives of the chess clubs of that city; the two leading players are to conduct the public game. The pieces and pawns will be represented by some of the handiwork of Pittsburgh in brilliant costumes, and the event is looked forward to with great interest.

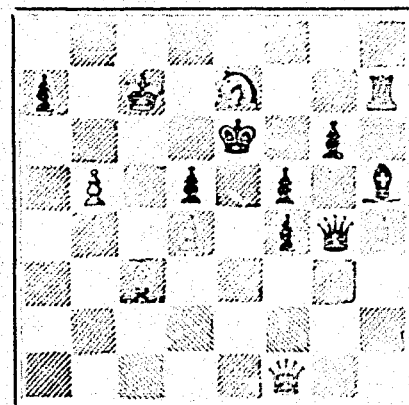
SCORE OF THE INTERNATIONAL TOURNEY.

WON. | WON. | DR.
America..... 16 | Great Britain..... 15 | 3

PROBLEM No. 212.

By M. J. Murphy, Quebec

BLACK.



WHITE.

White to play and mate in two moves.

CANADIAN CHESS CORRESPONDENCE TOURNEY.

NEY.

GAME 339TH.

Played between Mr. Joshua Clawson, of St. John N.B. and Mr. W. W. Braithwaite, of Unionville, Ont.

(Scottish Gambit)

WHITE.—(Mr. Clawson.) BLACK.—(Mr. Braithwaite.)

1. P to K4
2. K Kt to B3
3. P to Q4
4. B to Q4
5. Kt to K Kt5
6. Kt takes K B P
7. B takes Kt (ch)
8. Q to K5 (ch)
9. Q takes B
10. Q takes P (ch) (b)
11. P takes Q
12. R to R3
13. Kt to Q5
14. B to Q2
15. R to K5
16. P to K4
17. B to R4
18. B to Kt3
19. K to Q2
20. P to K B4
21. P takes P
1. P to K4
2. Q Kt to B3
3. P takes P
4. B to B1
5. Kt to R3
6. Kt takes Kt
7. K takes B
8. P to K Kt3
9. P to Q4 (ch)
10. Q takes Q
11. Kt to Q Kt5 (ch)
12. R to K5 (ch)
13. B to K B4
14. Kt takes Q P
15. P to Q R3
16. P to K R3
17. P to K Kt4
18. Q R to Q Kt4
19. P to Q Kt1
20. P takes P on pass (ch)
21. Kt to B5 (ch)

and White resigned.

NOTES.

- (a) So far all is according to the book.
- (b) Castling is recommended at this point.
- (c) The beginning of a strong attack, resulting from White's tenth move, which led to an exchange of Queens.
- (d) A fatal move, which loses the game at once. He should have exchanged off the Rook, &c.