

CHESS

The Game Offers the Competitive Clash Americans Always Demand

By **GEORGE KOLTANOWSKI**
World's Blindfold Chess Champion

IT HAS BEEN SAID that the American people do not want a game in which luck or chance do not play a part—that chess does not fit into the modern tempo of going forward at greater and greater speed.

Yet, why is chess so popular in other countries? In England it is played in every nook and corner. Latins in both hemispheres still love chess, as they did many years ago, when the professional chess player used to walk down streets with a chess board strapped to his back in a quiet Spanish town singing "Chess. Who wants to play chess?" He would be called to the window of a nearby house and challenged to a game. Setting up his board, he would play the challenger through the window. If he won, he received a small stake. When he lost, he was often invited to dinner or given some recompense for his time.

It is said the Egyptians invented the game of chess. The Pharaoh was so pleased with it that he was eager to reward the inventor, whose seemingly modest request for one grain of wheat for the first square, two for the second and double for each succeeding square, was impossible to fulfill. It was found that there was not that much wheat in the world!

Tartar Diversion

The story probably has more value for mathematicians who wish to impress their students on the astronomical size of the figure one to the sixty-fourth power than it has to students of chess history. Yet there seems to be an indication of an Egyptian origin of chess in the fact that the ominous word "checkmate" comes from the Egyptian words meaning "dead king."

An even older story claims the Tartars discovered chess. They were fighting the Chinese at the time and, being much too blood thirsty about the whole thing, they lost many brave and reckless men who climbed over the wall in search of private battles until the wise Tartar leaders introduced the game of chess to give them a bloodless way of quenching their lust for battle. This story, too, has its bit of evidence in that the Chinese form of chess has in the center of the board a wall which must be crossed.

However the game was evolved, it has been played in its present

form by many illustrious people of the past several centuries. There is a dramatic story about Robespierre, the famous head-chopper of the French revolution. He used to play chess every day between two and four o'clock at the Cafe de la Regence. During one of the guillotine's busiest seasons, a young man went up to Robespierre and challenged him to a game.

Heads You Lose

"I never play with strangers unless I play for a stake," Robespierre said haughtily.

"I wish to play for the stake of a head," said the lad quietly. "If I win you will refrain from taking the head of a man who is scheduled to be guillotined tomorrow. If I lose, you may have mine, too."

Robespierre accepted—for what was one head more or less? To his surprise, he lost to the youngster.

"Whose head will the guillotine be cheated of tomorrow?" he asked.

"That of Count Villaneuve."

"And for whom is he to be saved?"

The young man took off his hat and showed that he was a girl.

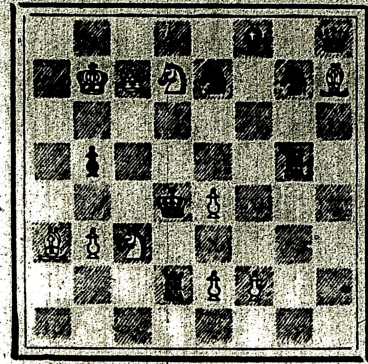
"For his fiancee," she replied.

Diplomatic Moves

Napoleon also was a daily visitor at the Cafe de la Regence. It has been said that he was a good player, but he really played very badly. Most of the generals lost to him when he was emperor, because it was bad policy to win. He had a very bad temper and when he lost he did not forgive easily.

Benjamin Franklin was the first American chess enthusiast—at least the first on record.

Children take to chess just as ducks take to water, which disproves the old fallacy that chess is hard to learn. There are rules governing the moves to the various pieces. These are as easy, if not easier to learn than the rules governing football, which every intelligent spectator learns as a matter of course. The object of the game, as in many other competitive games, is to capture something which the other team is carefully guarding. In chess it is the king. Once he is attacked, so that he cannot escape capture, he is said to be "checkmated" and the game is won. You can begin to enjoy the game immediately upon playing it.



Chess Problem

Problem No. 1, by E. M. Hassberg,
Brooklyn.

Black (8), White (10).

White to play and mate in
two moves.

(Solution will appear next week)