

# A REMARKABLE COLLECTION OF CHESS-MEN.

By H. J. HOLMES.

*Illustrated by Messrs. Foulsham and Banfield.*

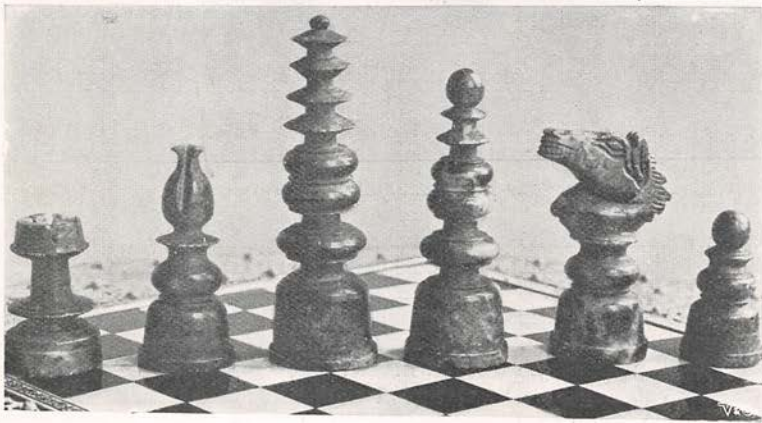
PROBABLY the most unique chess collection in the world is that in the possession of a well known North of England enthusiast who has gathered together from every corner of the globe treasures so rare, so beautiful, as to give delight to the keenest connoisseur. Intrinsically worth a fortune, from an artistic point of view the collection is priceless.

It is due to the courtesy of the gentleman whose treasures represent many years of

figure, hunchbacked, with features not unlike our old friend Punch. The broad-brimmed hat, however, is decidedly clerical in style. The Knight is also very quaint, exhibiting a style of horsemanship rather



I.—AN ENGLISH SET OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.



II.—INDIAN SET CARVED IN SOAPSTONE.

patient curio-seeking, that the writer is enabled to give, in most cases for the first time, photographic illustrations of a few of the gems of the wonderful collection, covering a period of quite four centuries of chess playing.

The first photograph illustrates, from left to right, the Castle, Queen, Bishop, Pawn, and Knight of an old English set from the eighteenth century. The Bishop is a curious

coincidental to that which is not unnoticeable on the racecourses of the present day, a style which is slowly but surely making the modern English jockey "sit up." The features of the Pawns are of Ethiopian cast, more observable in a similar curious set where the faces are black.

The next set (II.) is remarkable chiefly on account of the material from which the figures are carved, being of that magnesian mineral known as "soapstone." European in character, the set is the work of an Indian carver.

The next illustration (III.) is that of an exquisite Japanese or Indian set, very delicately perforated, and in the form of medallions, the sign of each piece being carved on both

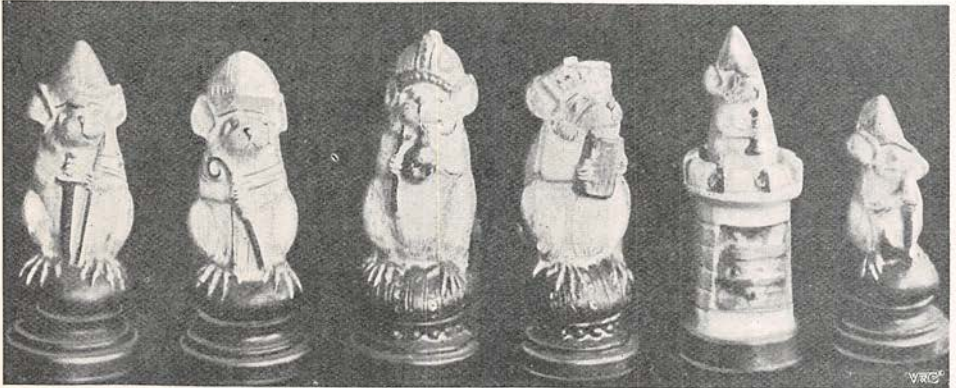


III.—JAPANESE OR INDIAN MEDALLION SET.

sides below the level of the rim. The pieces are red and white ivory. The perforated carving is almost as delicate as gossamer. The collection includes another medallion set brought from China by Sir Rowland Hill. Each piece is most elaborately carved, but the set is unfortunately not suited for illustration.

Photograph IV. illustrates the Knight, Bishop, King, Queen, Castle, and Pawn from

showing, as it does, some of the Oriental sets as used by natives of the Mohammedan faith, which prohibits the use of figures in any form whatever, lest their owners should have the ghost of an opportunity for idolatrous worship! The four larger pieces on the left of the photograph are from a very fine ivory Turkish set. In front are three pieces of Chinese origin, but the reader is warned not to attempt to decipher the signs,



IV.—"MOUSE" SET IN DOULTON CHINA.

a valuable Doulton china set of extreme quaintness and originality. They represent brown and white mice. The detail work is exceptionally good, the expressions of the features being in each case most comical. The little bit of realism shown in the Castle piece is particularly droll, as it depicts a miserable little sinner within the prison bars of a dungeon.

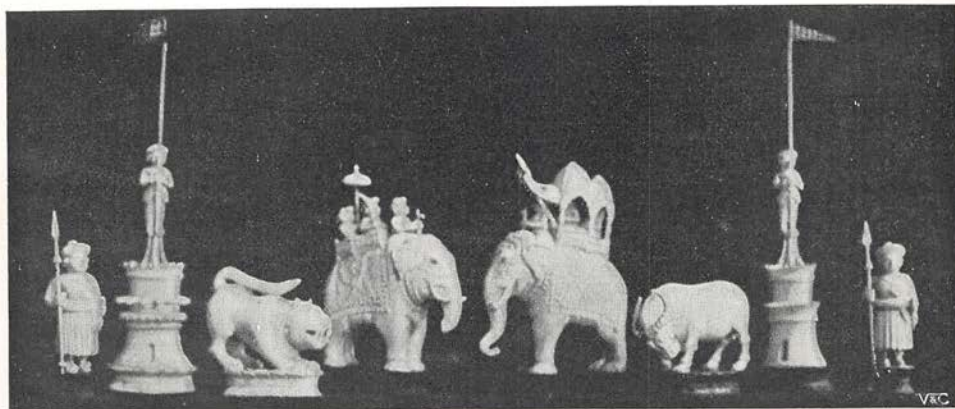
Photograph V. is of exceptional interest,

as, owing to a deplorable ignorance of the Chinese language manfully acknowledged by the photographer, he may have taken them in all sorts of bewildering positions. The four Japanese pieces in the centre, are, however, in their proper upright form, so there is a good chance for any reader learned in that language to "spot the lady" and other pieces. In this set, both players use white ivory Kings, etc., flat, and pointed towards



V.—ORIENTAL SET WITHOUT FIGURES, AS USED BY MOHAMMEDANS.





VI.—THIS FINE SET REPRESENTS—

the opponent. To the right in the same photograph are six Indian pieces carved in ivory and stained red and green.

The next illustrations (VI.) show one of the finest sets in a unique collection. The pieces are very massive, carved in ivory. The Kings measure four and a half inches in height.

The set represents India and the East India ("John") Company as opponents. The Kings and Generals (these latter take the places of Queens, which are unknown in early Eastern sets) are represented by laden elephants, the former being canopied, the latter only boasting of an umbrella apiece. The Bishops take the form of a lion for the "John" Company, and a sacred bull for India; the Knights are riders of a horse or dromedary, the latter being Indian; the Castles are easily recognised; the Pawns are Indian and British

("John" Co.) soldiers. The Indians have black bases.

Another of the gems of the collection (VII.) is a set in wood, early English, forming figures



(VI. a) INDIA AND—



(VI. b) THE EAST INDIA ("JOHN") COMPANY.

of Crusaders and Saracens. The finest minute carving it is possible to imagine is displayed in every figure, the four Knights being most exquisite models. Every piece in the set is different, even the Pawns varying in some way. The

King measures five inches high, the rest of the pieces being in proportion.

The photograph marked VIII. includes part of an Indian set, and some curious pieces from Burmah (on the right). The figures are very crude, but remarkably curious, representing Burmese gods, warriors, elephants and temples, etc.

One of the most beautiful sets (IX.) is made of porcelain, designed by Flaxman. Every piece and pawn is different. The colouring is exquisite—white and gold, and blue and gold for the opposing pieces. The modelling



VII.—EARLY ENGLISH SET, IN WOOD, REPRESENTING—

beautifully carved throughout in ivory, the detail being wonderfully accurate and complete. The set is very valuable indeed. The pieces are represented by monkeys. The difference between the two portions is marked by one-half the number having black eyes and nostrils, the others red. The

Queens are very comical, with their fans and gaudy gowns. The Knights are also extremely quaint, being mounted on donkeys. The Castles in this set are warriors on foot, but the pedestals are ornamented instead of plain. The difference between King's and Queen's Castles—very useful in chess



(VII. a) FIGHTING CRUSADERS AND SARACENS.

is excellent, the eight Pawns being particularly fine. Six are shown in the photograph. The set represents ancient Britons at war. Each figure is armed with some sort of weapon—stones, battle-axes, bows and arrows, etc.

A modern Japanese set (X.) forms another of the quaint things of the collection. It is

—is shown by the varying heights of the bases.

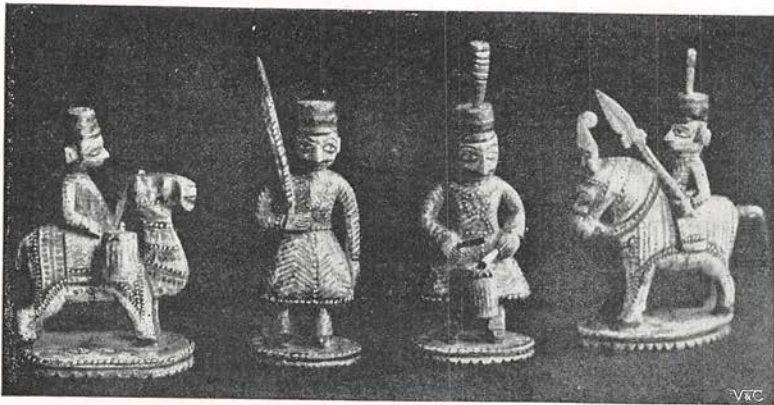
There are two very old and rare sets. The first (XI.) dates back several centuries—four at least. It is of Persian origin, ivory, but painted in all the bright colours of the East instead of being stained, as was afterwards always done. The set represents the



VIII.—MODERN BURMESE AND INDIAN (MOHAMMEDAN) SETS



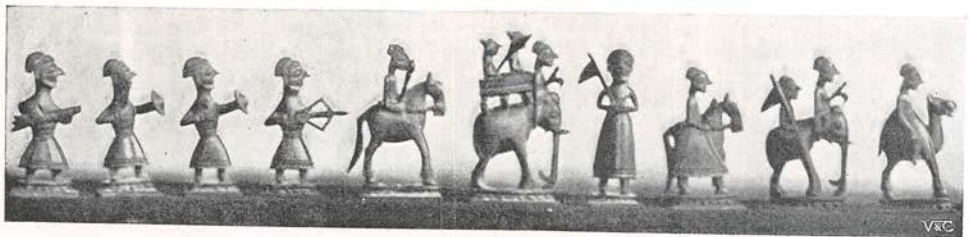




XI. a.—OTHER PIECES OF THE SET.

preliminary! The Chief Man's elephant merely holds a chain. Very crude guns are mounted on the elephants' backs, also ladders to enable the riders to get to their

and includes two extra pieces, or scouts. They look rather like "Beware of the steam roller!" men, with the flag of danger flying! Certainly, some of the quadrupeds and their burdens look as if they needed such a man. It is worth noting that the General of the set is not an elephant like the Rajah, as is usually the case in all Eastern sets. In this he is content with the horse. The Castle is shown as the dromedary; next comes the Bishop on an elephant, which



XII.—ANOTHER ANCIENT PERSIAN SET.

places. What attention to detail! This is a very comical set, although it may be taken for granted that it was quite a swagger affair a few centuries ago.

The other Persian set (XII.) is probably of about the same date, though no cannon is shown, which is likely evidence of the greater antiquity of the pieces. No brilliant colours are in evidence in this case, but the set is painted red and green. There is the same peculiar crude carving, the mounted men disappearing, as it were, into the bodies of their bearers. This set was doubtless made for one of the Eastern variations of the game,

has an atrocious resemblance to the Christmas pantomime article! The Knight on horseback is shown next; then the Scout or man with the red flag. The Rajah in the centre is followed by his faithful General,



XIII.—FRANCO-PRUSSIAN SET.





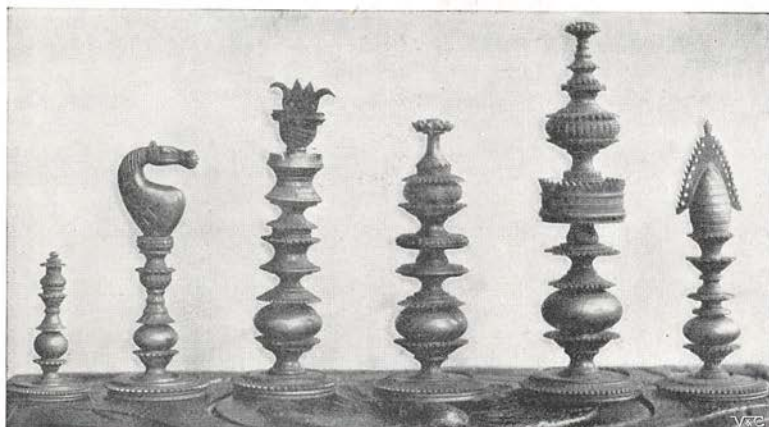
XIV.—SOME QUIANT  
PIECES.

after whom come four Pawns. This set is funnier than the other, but no doubt at one time it was considered quite as dignified.

A Franco-Prussian set (XIII.), reminiscent of a Continental bad time, is interesting.



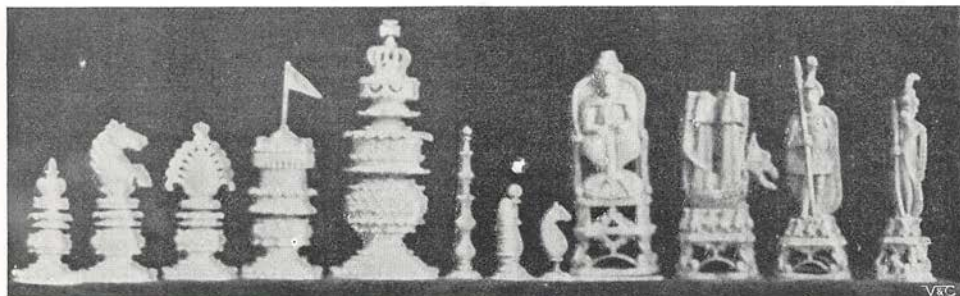
XV.—BISHOPS SHOWN AS MONKS, AND A SQUARE-BASE PIECE.



XVI.—CARVED INDIAN SET.

The pieces were made, about the date of the war, from gun-metal. French and German foot soldiers are the Pawns, the officers Bishops—what irony!—and the respective royalties are shown as the Kings and Queens.

Some further quaint sets are sampled in the next photograph (XIV.),



XVII.—CARVED WHITE IVORY INDIAN SET.



XVIII.—AN EARLY RUSSIAN SET.

including some pieces from an Indian set, which are remarkable for their elaborate wigs; and four pieces from an eighteenth century English set, showing soldiers in old-fashioned uniforms, the Royalties being some of the Georges with their Consorts. Some others, from a set already referred to, show the Pawns as negroes of the correct colour, and our old friend Punch again as Bishop, this time with a mitre. It is said that this is probably the result of confusing the piece with the French Bishop (*Fou*), which is a fool with cap and bells.

The only instance known of Bishops shown as monks is included in the collection. They are illustrated in photograph XV. In this are also seen two very beautiful ivory elephants from an ancient Chataranjah set. The features of the riders are full of expression. Grasped in the trunk of one of the elephants is the form of a fainting woman, with her golden hair hanging down her back. In the centre is the only square-base chess-piece known.

The figure is Chinese, the carving being from soapstone. No trace of the remainder of the set has ever been found.

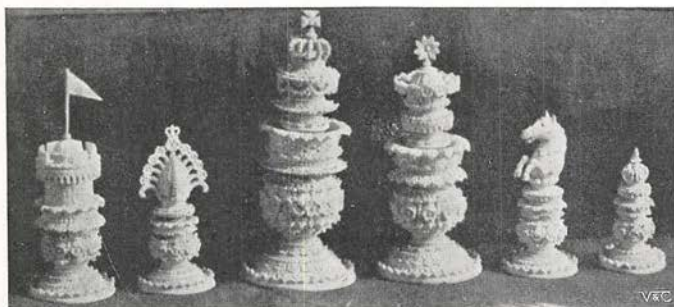
A quaintly carved Indian set in ivory is shown in photograph XVI.

In photograph XVII. are illustrated an exquisite set in white ivory. The work is Indian. A precisely similar set is in the British Museum, which fact is very curious

and puzzling, as Orientals do not, as a rule, make exact duplicates of any of their work.

A most interesting and historical set is photographed with the pieces referred to in the last

paragraph. It, with the set given in the illustration XVIII., has been the subject of much correspondence among chess savants. The two sets are the only ones known in which ships are found as pieces. They are, no doubt, very early Russian—1450–1500, or earlier. Both players use white ivory pieces, thoroughly an early custom, and most exceptional in a European set. Half of the pieces are of Russian character, the remainder are



XVII. a.—CARVED IVORY INDIAN SET.



XIX.—AN ANCIENT INDIAN SET, IN WHICH—





(XIX. a) EVERY PAWN IS DIFFERENT.

doubtful. The Russian Pawn is the figure wearing a quaint hat and wolfskin cloak, the other type of Pawn on the right wearing a helmet. The Bishops are elephants, one with the driver, the other "untamed and uncontrolled"; the Castles are sailing vessels, one a single-masted ship, the other with two masts. The King is seated. There is no Queen, but instead the Eastern General, or Chief Man. The Queen came into vogue in 1500, or a little earlier, which enables connoisseurs to date this set. The bases are most elaborately carved. The really curious part of these two sets are the sailing vessels. In



XXI.—INDIAN IVORY SET, WITH CARVED BASES.

XX.—CHINESE SET ON CONCENTRIC BALL BASES.

some very early Eastern sets a chariot was used, but as a rule it was the dromedary. Here we clearly see the work of some Eastern traveller or refugee adapting the Eastern pieces to Russian ideas about the time that the game came to Europe from the East. In the second set the General is the same as the Pawn, only larger. This fact is very interesting to a chess student,

for in those days, a Pawn on promotion—*i.e.*, when it reached its eighth square—could only be exchanged for a General, which was the next weakest piece on the board. Nowadays, however, it can be exchanged for any piece, whilst the latter, although taking the place of the usurped General, is now, of course, the strongest piece on the board.

Next comes a small but marvellously carved Indian set (XIX.), very old. Here we see the Pawns all differently carved. We have the horses, dromedaries, and elephants, also the Rajah on his tusky steed, with four soldiers (included in the piece) as a royal bodyguard, and the General with his reduced bodyguard of three, all on one side, however. The posing of the various animals in this set is beautifully modelled, and in every way the pieces are striking. Both halves are in white ivory, painted in various tones, one with flat, green bases, the other with red.

A characteristic Chinese set is seen in illustration XX.

They are on concentric ball bases—a thoroughly Chinese plan this—four loose balls being most ingeniously carved *one within the other*, with very delicate workmanship visible on each. The height of most of the pieces already dealt with in this article averages three to three and a half inches for the King, the others proportionately. This set, however, although not the largest in the collection, begins with the kingly figure at eight inches.

Another Chinese set (XXII.), similar in design to Photo XX.,

is one that came from the Palace at Peking—not in the form of loot, however. Its great attraction is its size. It is immense for a chess set. The King has no less a stature than ten and a half inches! It is most elaborately carved. Words fail to describe, and, alas! the photographs only give a very faint idea of the enormous amount of tiny detail work done upon the pieces.

This collection of wonders includes a unique chess-board and pieces. They are the smallest in the world. The table is scarcely two inches in height. The board measures about an inch square.

Illustrations of many of the treasures of this wonderful collection have been given, and yet there are many more. It would be impossible to do justice to the entire contents in the short space granted to a magazine article.



XXII. a.—FURTHER PIECES FROM PEKIN SET.



XXII.—GIANT SET FROM PEKIN PALACE.