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*An ACCOUNT of the GAME of CHESS, as played by the
CHINESE, in a LETTER from EYLES IRWIN, Esq;
to the Right Honourable the EARL of CHARLEMONT,
President of the Royal Irish Academy.*

MY LORD,

I CONSIDER no apology necessary for this intrusion on the public situation in which your talents and reputation have placed you. Whatever tends to the accession of knowledge, or the illustration of antiquity, cannot prove unacceptable to your Lordship, when adding a mite to the Transactions of the Academy which is distinguished by your superintendence.

Read Nov.
16, 1793.

WHY I have addressed a subject of this nature to the Irish Academy, when there is a society existing who seems to have
a title

a title to it from its name—or why the first offering of my researches should proceed from the remote empire of China, are, I trust, ~~questions that are~~ not necessary for me to resolve. If a patriot wish to promote the spirit of investigation in my country, by the exertion of my mean abilities, be not denied me, I am indifferent to censure or praise on this occasion.

I MUST premise to your Lordship, that, during a long residence in the East Indies, where the game of Chess is generally supposed to have originated, I had often heard of its existence in China, though on a different footing, as well in respect to the powers of the King, as to the aspect of the field of battle. The Bramins, who excel in this game, and with whom I used frequently to play for improvement, had a tradition of this nature, which is a further argument in behalf of what I am about to advance. But, with all my enquiries from persons who had been there, and from the publications relative to China, I could never obtain any confirmation of the game being even known in the country, except that Chambers, in his Dictionary, mentions it to be the favourite pastime of the ladies, but quotes no authority for the assertion.

SOME unlooked-for circumstances in the course of the last year at length brought me to the quarter, which I had once wished, but never expected, to visit. I need not say, that
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among other objects of curiosity, I was eager to ascertain the reality of the Bramins story. And if the difficulty of acquiring information here, not more from the want of interpreters, than the jealousy of the government, were not well known in Europe, I should be ashamed to tell your Lordship that I despaired of success for some time. A young Mandarin, however, of the profession of arms, having an inquisitive turn, was my frequent visitor; and, what no questions could have drawn from him, the accidental sight of an English chess-board effected. He told me, that the Chinese had a game of the same nature; and, on his specifying a difference in the pieces and board, I perceived, with joy, that I had discovered the desideratum of which I had been so long in search. The very next day my Mandarin brought me the board and equipage; and I found, that the Bramins were neither mistaken touching the board, which has a river in the middle to divide the contending parties, nor in the powers of the King, who is entrenched in a fort, and moves only in that space, in every direction. But, what I did not before hear, nor do I believe is known out of this country, there are two pieces, whose movements are distinct from any in the Indian or European game. The Mandarin, which answers to our bishop, in his station and sidelong course, cannot, through age, cross the river; and a rocket-boy, still used in the Indian armies, who is stationed between the lines of each party, acts literally with the motion of the rocket, by vaulting over a man, and taking his adversary at the other end of the board. Except that the King has
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his two sons to support him, instead of a Queen, the game, in other respects, is like ours; as will appear in the plan of the board and pieces I have the honour to enclose, together with directions to place the men and play the game.

As the young man who had discovered this to me was of a communicative and obliging disposition, and was at this time pursuing his studies in the college of Canton, I requested the favour of him to consult such ancient books as might give some insight into the period of the introduction of Chess into China; to confirm, if possible, the idea that struck me of its having originated here. The acknowledged antiquity of this empire, the unchangeable state of her customs and manners, beyond that of any other nation in the world; and more especially the simplicity of the game itself, when compared to its compass and variety in other parts, appeared to give a colour to my belief. That I was not disappointed in the event, I have no doubt will be allowed, on the perusal of the translation of a manuscript extract, which my friend Tinquá brought me, in compliance with my desire; and which, accompanied by the Chinese manuscript, goes under cover to your Lordship. As the Mandarin solemnly assured me that he took it from the work quoted, and the translation has been as accurately made as possible, I have no hesitation to deliver the papers as authentic.

IN the pursuit of one curiosity I flatter myself that I have stumbled by accident on another, and have gone some length to restore to the Chinese the invention of gunpowder, so long disputed with them by the Europeans; but which the evidence on their chess-board, in the action of the rocket, seems to establish beyond a doubt. The institution of the game is likewise discovered to form the principal æra in the Chinese history; since, by the conquest of Shenfi, the kingdom was first connected in its present form, and the monarch assumed the title of Emperor, as may be seen in the extract which I have obtained from their annals.

FROM these premises I have therefore ventured to make the following inferences:—That the game of Chess is probably of Chinese origin. That the confined situation and powers of the King, resembling those of a monarch in the earlier parts of the world, countenance this supposition; and that, as it travelled westward, and descended to later times, the sovereign prerogative extended itself, until it became unlimited, as in our state of the game. That the agency of the Princes, in lieu of the Queen, bespeaks forcibly the nature of the Chinese customs, which exclude females from all power or influence whatever; which Princes, in its passage through Persia, were changed into a single Vizier, or minister of state, with the enlarged portion of delegated authority that exists there; instead of whom, the European nations, with their usual

gallantry, adopted a Queen on their board*. That the river between the parties is expressive of the general face of this country, where a battle could hardly be fought without encountering an interruption of this kind, which the foldier was here taught to overcome; but that, on the introduction of the game into Persia, the board changed with the dry nature of the region, and the contest was decided on terra firma. And lastly, that in no account of the origin of Chefs, that I have read, has the tale been so characteristic or consistent as that which I have the honour to offer to the Irish Academy. With the Indians, it was designed by a Bramin to cure the melancholy of the daughter of a Rajah. With the Persians, my memory does not assist me to trace the fable; though, if it were more to the purpose, I think I should have retained it. But, with the Chinese, it was invented by an experienced foldier, on the principles of war. Not to dispel love-sick vapours, or instruct a female in a science that could neither benefit nor inform her; but to quiet the murmurs of a discontented soldiery; to employ their vacant hours in lessons on the military art, and to cherish the spirit of conquest in the bosom of winter quarters. Its age is traced by them on
 record

* That on the acquisition of so strong a piece as the Vizier, the Paö were suppressed, this as possessing powers unintelligible, at that time, to other nations; and three pawns added, in consequence, to make up the number of men; and that as discipline improved, the lines, which are straggling on the Chinese board, might have been closed on ours.

record near two centuries before the Christian æra ; and among the numerous claims for this noble invention, that of the Chinese, who call it, by way of distinction, Chong Kè, or The Royal Game, appears alone to be indisputable.

I have the honour to remain,

MY LORD,

Your Lordship's obedient,

Humble servant,

EYLES IRWIN.

Canton,
14th March 1793.

*Translation of an Extract from the Concum, or Chinese Annals,
respecting the Invention of the Game of Chesh, delivered to me by
Tingqua, a Soldier Mandarin of the Province of Fokien.*

THREE hundred and seventy-nine years after the time of Confucius, or one thousand nine hundred and sixty-five years ago, Hung Cochu, King of Kiangnan, sent an expedition into the Shenfi country, under the command of a Mandarin, called Hanfing, to conquer it. After one successful campaign, the soldiers were put into winter quarters; where, finding the weather much colder than what they had been accustomed to, and being also deprived of their wives and families, the army, in general, became impatient of their situation, and clamorous to return home. Hanfing, upon this, revolved in his mind the bad consequences of complying with their wishes. The necessity of soothing his troops, and reconciling them to their position, appeared urgent, in order to finish his operations in the ensuing year. He was a man of genius, as well as a good foldier; and having contemplated some time on the subject, he invented the game of Chesh, as well for an amusement to his men in their vacant hours, as to inflame their military ardour, the game being wholly founded
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on the principles of war. The stratagem succeeded to his wish. The soldiery were delighted with the game; and forgot, in their daily contests for victory, the inconveniencies of their post. In the spring the general took the field again; and, in a few months, added the rich country of Shenfi to the kingdom of Kiangnan, by the defeat and capture of its King, Choupayuen*, a famous warrior among the Chinese. On this conquest Hung Cochu assumed the title of Emperor, and Choupayuen put an end to his own life in despair.

* The same romantic tales are circulated of the prowess of Choupayuen as of our celebrated Guy Earl of Warwick.

Explanation of the Position, Powers and Moves of the Pieces on the Chinese Chess Board, or Chong Kè (Royal Game).

AS there are nine pieces instead of eight, to occupy the rear rank, they stand on the lines between, and not within, the squares. The game is consequently played on the lines.

THE King, or Chong, stands in the middle line of this row. His moves resemble those of our King, but are confined to the fortrefs marked out for him.

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THE two Princes, or Sou, stand on each side of him, and have equal powers and limits.

The Mandarins, or Tchong, answer to our Bishops, and have the same moves, except that they cannot cross the water or white space in the middle of the board to annoy the enemy, but stand on the defensive.

THE Knights, or rather Horses, called Māā, stand and move like ours in every respect.

THE War-chariots, or Tchè, resemble our Rooks or Castles.

THE Rocket-boys, or Paö, are pieces whose motions and powers were unknown to us. They act with the direction of a rocket, and can take none of their adversary's men that have not a piece or pawn intervening. To defend your men from this attack it is necessary to open the line between, either to take off the check on the King, or to save a man from being captured by the Paö. Their operation is, otherwise, like that of the Rook. Their stations are marked between the Pieces and Pawns.

THE five Pawns, or Ping, make up the number of the men equal to that of our board. Instead of taking sideways, like ours, they have the Rook's motion, except that it is limited to one step, and is not retrograde. Another important point,
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in which the Ping differs from ours, is that they continue in statu quo, after reaching their adversary's head quarters. It will appear, however, that the Chinese pieces far exceed the proportion of ours; which occasions the whole force of the contest to fall on them, and thereby precludes the beauty and variety of our game, when reduced to a struggle between the Pawns, who are capable of the highest promotion, and often change the fortune of the day. The posts of the Ping are marked in front.

EYLES IRWIN.