

Chess-humanics

A Philosophy of Chess, A Sociological Allegory

by Wallace E. Nevill (1905)

Section III: Power and Value of Little Things

So, then, our Pawns are ahead, but may it please your majesty, the King, whereas you must ever fear and avoid the vulgar attack of the enemies' Pawns. You must preserve and nurture your own. For, lo, we see in Chess that when the Queen is dead and the Bishops have gone to their reward, and the Knights have fallen in a sea of gore, and the Castles are in ruins, and the King is left alone in solitary state, sighing, "Alas, for all my greatness." Behold, a Pawn, reaches the eighth square and becomes a Queen.

Let us not say the King has "Hobson's choice"¹, he will marry her; but let us consider how speedily the enemy is vanquished and by what means. We must not despise the day of small things. "He who can take no interest in what is small will take false interest in what is great." It is the close observation of little things which is the secret of success in Chess, in business, in art, in science, and in every pursuit of life. Human knowledge is but an accumulation of small facts, made by successive generations of men, the little bits of knowledge and experience carefully treasured up by them growing at length into a mighty pyramid. Though many of these facts and observations seemed in the first instance to have but slight significance, they are all found to have their eventual uses, and

¹ A Hobson's choice is a free choice in which only one option is offered. As a person may refuse to take that option, the choice is therefore between taking the option or not; "take it or leave it".

to fit into their proper places. Even many speculations, seemingly remote, turn out to be the basis of results the most obviously practicable. (*Smiles' Self Help*, p. 122.)

When Franklin made his discovery of the identity of lightning and electricity, it was sneered at, and people asked, "Of what use is it?" To which his reply was, "What is the use of a child? 20 It may become a man."

I am very far from contending that great events spring from little causes. I do not thus confuse causes with conditions. But I am insisting that we must not despise the day of small things. Those things which seem at first insignificant may ultimately prove all important. A little key will open a very large door. A little leak, will sink a very large ship. It is the little drops of water that make the mighty ocean, and the little grains of sand keep it in bounds upon the shore. The intelligent eye of the careful observer will be ever ready to give apparently trivial phenomena their value. So trifling a matter as a piece of seaweed floating past his ship enabled Columbus to quell the mutiny which arose amongst his sailors at not discovering land, and to assure them that the eagerly sought new world was not far off.

There is nothing so small that it should remain forgotten, and no fact, however trivial, but may prove useful in some way or other if carefully interpreted.

It may seem like a trivial fact that many a good end game in Chess is won by a solitary little Pawn; because it is one of the laws of the game that a Pawn, upon reaching the eighth square, may become a Queen. But the wise will be admonished by such an example — how weak things of the world are sometimes chosen, and things that are despised to confound and bring to nought things that are mighty. And the mightiest cannot say unto the weakest, "I have no need of you."

Of course all the King's subjects are not his champions. Is it meet to think that a little child should handle Goliath as David did, or that there should be the strength of an ox in a wren? (*Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.*)

Pawns are feather-weight fighters. Yet a feather-weight may turn the balance of tons as a foot-fall on the mountains may start an avalanche, so the grand crisis of the world may come and go and the occasion be none other than a little thing. (*Fergusson, Religion of Democracy.*)

"It is the little rent within the lute
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening, slowly silence all;
Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit, Which, rotting inwards, slowly moulders all."
(*Creighton, Thoughts on Education, p. 171.*)

Courtesy of Wikipedia