

**CAISSA**  
**or**  
**The Game at Chess; a Poem.**

(written in the year 1763, by Sir William Jones)

(pronounced ky-eé-sah)

---

Of armies on the chequer'd field array'd,  
And guiltless war in pleasing form display'd;  
When two bold kings contend with vain alarms,  
In ivory this, and that in ebon arms;  
Sing, sportive maids, that haunt the sacred hill  
Of Pindus, and the fam'd Pierian rill.  
Thou, joy of all below, and all above,  
Mild Venus, queen of laughter, queen of love;  
Leave thy bright island, where on many a rose  
And many a pink thy blooming train repose:  
Assist me, goddess! since a lovely pair  
Command my song, like thee divinely fair.  
Near yon cool stream, whose living waters play,  
And rise translucent in the solar ray;  
Beneath the covert of a fragrant bower,  
Where spring's nymphs reclin'd in calm retreat,  
And envying blossoms crowded round their seat;  
Here Delia was enthron'd, and by her side  
The sweet Sirena, both in beauty's pride:  
Thus shine two roses, fresh with early bloom,  
That from their native stalk dispense perfume;  
Their leaves unfolding to the dawning day  
Gems of the glowing mead, and eyes of May.  
A band of youths and damsels sat around,  
Their flowing locks with braided myrtle bound;  
Agatis, in the graceful dance admir'd,  
And gentle Thyrsis, by the muse inspir'd;

With Sylvia, fairest of the mirthful train;  
And Daphnis, doom'd to love, yet love in vain.  
Now, whilst a purer blush o'erspreads her cheeks,  
With soothing accents thus Sirena speaks:  
"The meads and lawns are ting'd with beamy light,  
And wakeful larks begin their vocal flight;  
Whilst on each bank the dewdrops sweetly smile;  
What sport, my Delia, shall the hours beguile?  
Whall heavenly notes, prolong'd with various art,  
Charm the fond ear, and warm the rapturous heart?  
At distance shall we view the sylvan chace?  
Or catch with silken lines the finny race?"  
Then Delia thus: "Or rather, since we meet  
By chance assembled in this cool retreat,  
In artful contest let our warlike train  
Move well-directed o'er the field preside:  
No prize we need, our ardour to inflame;  
We fight with pleasure, if we fight for fame."  
The nymph consents: the maids and youths prepare  
To view the combat, and the sport to share:  
But Daphnis most approv'd the bold design,  
Whom Love instructed, and the tuneful Nine.  
He rose, and on the cedar table plac'd  
A polish'd board, with differing colours grac'd;  
Squares eight times eight in equal order lie;  
These bright as snow, those dark with sable dye;  
Like the broad target by the tortoise born,  
Or like the hide by spotted panthers worn.  
Then from a chest, with harmless heroes stor'd,  
O'er the smooth plain two well-wrought hosts he pour'd;  
The champions burn'd their rivals to assail,  
Twice eight in black, twice eight in milkwhite mail;  
In shape and station different, as in name,  
Their motions various, not their power the same.

Say, muse! (for Jove has nought from thee conceal'd)

Who form'd the legions on the level field?

High in the midst the reverend kings appear,

And o'er the rest their pearly scepters rear:

One solemn step, majestically slow,

They gravely move, and shun the dangerous foe;

If e'er they call, the watchful subjects spring,

And die with rapture if they save their king;

On him the glory of the day depends,

He once imprison'd, all the conflict ends.

The queens exulting near their consorts stand;

Each bears a deadly falchion in her hand;

Now here, now there, they bound with furious pride,

And thin the trembling ranks from side to side;

Swift as Camilla flying o'er the main,

Or lightly skimming o'er the dewy plain:

Fierce as they seem, some bold Plebeian spear

May pierce their shield, or stop their full career.

The valiant guards, their minds on havock bent,

Fill the next squares, and watch the royal tent;

Tho' weak their spears, tho' dwarfish be their height,

Compact they move, the bulwark of the fight,

To right and left the martial wings display

Their shining arms, and stand in close array.

Behold, four archers, eager to advance,

Send the light reed, and rush with sidelong glance;

Through angles ever they assault the foes,

True to the colour, which at first they chose.

Then four bold knights for courage-fam'd and speed,

Each knight exalted on a prancing steed:

Their arching course no vulgar limit knows,

Tranverse they leap, and aim insidious blows:

Nor friends, nor foes, their rapid force restrain,

By on quick bound two changing squares they gain;

From varying hues renew the fierce attack,  
And rush from black to white, from white to black.  
Four solemn elephants the sides defend;  
Beneath the load of ponderous towers they bend:  
In on unalter'd line they tempt the fight;  
Now crush the left, and now o'erwhelm the right.  
Bright in the front the dauntless soldiers raise  
Their polish'd spears; their steely helmets blaze:  
Prepar'd they stand the daring foe to strike,  
Direct their progress, but their wounds oblique.  
Now swell th' embattled troupes with hostile rage,  
And clang their shields, impatient to engage;  
When Daphnis thus: A varied plain behold,  
Where fairy kings their mimick tents unfold,  
As Oberon, and Mab, his wayward queen,  
Lead forth their armies on the daisied green.  
No mortal hand the wond'rous sport contriv'd,  
By gods invents, and from gods deriv'd;  
From them the British nymphs receiv'd the game,  
And play each morn beneath the crystal Thame;  
Hear then the tale, which they to Colin sung,  
As idling o'er the lucid wave he hung.  
A lovely dryad rang'd the Thracian wild,  
Her air enchanting, and her aspect mild:  
To chase the bounding hart was all her joy,  
Averse from Hymen, and the Cyprian boy;  
O'er hills and valleys was her beauty fam'd,  
And fair Caissa was the damsel nam'd.  
Mars saw the maid; with deep surprize he gaz'd,  
Admir'd her shape, and every gesture prais'd:  
His golden bow the child of Venus bent,  
And through his breast a piecing arrow sent.  
The reed was hope; the feathers, keen desire;  
The point, her eyes; the barbs, ethereal fire.

Soon to the nymph he pour'd his tender strain;  
The haughtly dryad scorn'd his amorous pain:  
He told his woes, where'er the maid he found,  
And still he press'd, yet still Caissa frown'd;  
But ev'n her frowns (ah, what might smiles have done!)

Fir'd all his soul, and all his senses won.  
He left his car, by raging tigers drawn,  
And lonely wander'd o'er the dusky lawn;  
Then lay desponding near a murmuring stream,  
And fair Caissa was his plaintive theme.

A naiad heard him from her mossy bed,  
And through the crystal rais'd her placid head;  
Then mildly spake: "O thou, whom love inspires,  
Thy tears will nourish, not allay thy fires.

The smiling blossoms drink the pearly dew;  
And ripening fruit the feather'd race pursue;  
The scaly shoals devour the silken weeds;  
Love on our sighs, and on our sorrow feeds.

Then weep no more; but, ere thou canst obtain  
Balm to thy wounds, and solace to thy pain,  
With gentle art thy martial look beguile;  
Be mild, and teach thy rugged brow to smile.  
Canst thou no play, no soothing game devise;  
To make thee lovely in the damsel's eyes?

So may thy prayers assuage the scornful dame,  
And ev'n Caissa own a mutual frame."

Kind nymph, said Mars, thy counsel I approve;  
Art, only art, her ruthless breast can move.

but when? or how? They dark discourse explain:  
So may thy stream ne'er swell with gushing rain;  
So may thy waves in one pure current flow,  
And flowers eternal on thy border blow!"

To whom the maid replied with smiling mien:  
"Above the palace of the Paphian queen

Love's brother dwells, a boy of graceful port,  
By gods nam'd Euphron, and by mortals Sport:  
    Seek him; to faithful ears unfold thy grief,  
    And hope, ere morn return, a sweet relief.  
    His temple hangs below the azure skies;  
Seest thou yon argent cloud? 'Tis there it lies."  
This said, she sunk beneath the liquid plain,  
And sought the mansion of her blue-hair'd train.  
    Meantime the god, elate with heart-felt joy,  
    Had reach'd the temple of the sportful boy;  
    He told Caissa's charms, his kindled fire,  
    The naiad's counsel, and his warm desire.  
    "Be swift, he added, give my passion aid;  
A god requests." - He spake, and Sport obey'd.  
    He fram'd a tablet of celestial mold,  
    Inlay'd with squares of silver and of gold;  
    Then of two metals form'd the warlike band,  
    That here compact in show of battle stand;  
He taught the rules that guide the pensive game,  
    And call'd it Caissa from the dryad's name:  
(Whence Albion's sons, who most its praise confess,  
Approv'd the play, and nam'd it thoughtful Chess.)  
    The god delighted thank'd indulgent Sport;  
    Then grasp'd the board, and left his airy court.  
With radiant feet he pierc'd the clouds; nor stay'd,  
Till in the woods he saw the beauteous maid:  
    Tir'd with the chase the damsel set reclin'd,  
    Her girdle loose, her bosom unconfin'd.  
    He took the figure of a wanton faun,  
    And stood before her on the flowery lawn;  
Then show'd his tablet: pleas'd the nymph survey'd  
    The lifeless troops in glittering ranks display'd;  
    She ask'd the wily sylvan to explain  
    The various motions of the splendid train;

With eager heart she caught the winning lore,  
And thought ev'n Mars less hateful than before;  
"What spell," said she, "deceiv'd my careless mind?

The god was fair, and I was most unkind."  
She spoke, and saw the changing faun assume  
A milder aspect, and a fairer bloom;  
His wreathing horns, that from his temples grew,  
Flow'd down in curls of bright celestial hue;  
The dappled hairs, that veil'd his loveless face,  
Blaz'd into beams, and show'd a heavenly grace;  
The shaggy hide, that mantled o'er his breast,  
Was soften'd to a smooth transparent vest,  
That through its folds his vigorous bosom show'd,  
And nervous limbs, where youthful ardour glow'd:  
(Had Venus view'd him in those blooming charms,  
Not Vulcan's net had forc'd her from his arms.)  
With goatlike feet no more he mark'd the ground,  
But braided flowers his silken sandals bound.  
The dryad blush'd; and, as he press'd her, smil'd,  
Whilst all his cares one tender glance beguil'd.  
He ends: To arms, the maids and striplings cry;  
To arms, the groves and sounding vales reply.

Sirena led to war the swarthy crew,  
And Delia those that bore the lily's hue.  
Who first, O muse, began the bold attack;  
The white refulgent, or the mournful black?  
Fair Delia first, as favoring lots ordain,  
Moves her pale legions tow'rd the sable train:  
From thought to thought her lively fancy flies,  
Whilst o'er the board she darts her sparkling eyes.  
At length the warrior moves with haughty strides;  
Who from the plain the snowy king divides:  
With equal haste his swarthy rival bounds;  
His quiver rattles, and his buckler sounds:

Ah! hapless youths, with fatal warmth you burn;  
Laws, ever fix'd, forbid you to return.  
then from the wing a short-liv'd spearman flies,  
Unsafely bold, and see! he dies, he dies:  
The dark-brow'd hero, with one vengeful blow  
Of life and place deprives his ivory foe.  
Now rush both armies o'er the burnish'd field,  
Hurl the swift dart, and rend the bursting shield.  
Here furious knights on fiery coursers prance,  
but see! the white-rob'd Amazon beholds  
Where the dark host its opening van unfolds:  
Soon as her eye discerns the hostile maid,  
By ebon shield, and ebon helm betray'd;  
Seven squares she passed with majestic mien,  
And stands triumphant o'er the falling queen.  
Perplex'd, and sorrowing at his consort's fate,  
The monarch burn'd with rage, despair, and hate:  
Swift from his zone th' avenging blade he drew,  
And, mad with ire, the proud virago slew.  
Meanwhile sweet smiling Delia's wary king  
Retir'd from fight behind the circling wing.  
Long time the war in equal balance hung;  
Till, unforeseen, an ivory courser sprung,  
And, wildly prancing in an evil hour,  
Attack'd at once the monarch and the tower:  
Sirena blush'd; for, as the rules requir'd,  
Her injur'd sovereign to his tent retir'd;  
Whilst her lost castle leaves his threatening height,  
And adds new glory to th' exulting knight.  
At this, pale fear oppress'd the drooping maid,  
And on her cheek the rose began to fade:  
A crystal tear, that stood prepar'd to fall,  
She wip'd in silence, and conceal'd from all;  
From all but Daphnis; He remark'd her pain,

And saw the weakness of her ebon train;  
Then gently spoke: "Let me your loss supply,  
And either nobly win, or nobly die;  
Me oft has fortune crown'd with fair success,  
And led to triumph in the fields of Chess."  
He said: the willing nymph her place resign'd,  
And sat at distance on the bank reclin'd.  
Thus when Minerva call'd her chief to arms,  
And Troy's high turret shook with dire alarms,  
The Cyprian goddess wounded left the plain,  
And Mars engag'd a mightier force in vain.  
Strait Daphnis leads his squadron to the field;  
(To Delia's arms 'tis ev'n a joy to yield.)  
Each guileful snare, and subtle art he tries,  
But finds his heart less powerful than her eyes:  
Wisdom and strength superior charms obey;  
And beauty, beauty, wins the long-fought day.  
By this a hoary chief, on slaughter bent,  
Approach'd the gloomy king's unguarded tent;  
Where, late, his consort spread dismay around,  
Now her dark corpse lies bleeding on the ground.  
Hail, happy youth! they glories not unsung  
Shall live eternal on the poet's tongue;  
For thou shalt soon receive a splendid change,  
And o'er the plain with nobler fury range.  
The swarthy leaders saw the storm impend,  
And strove in vain their sovereign to defend:  
Th' invader wav'd his silver lance in air,  
And flew like lightning to the fatal square;  
His limbs dilated in a moment grew  
To stately height, and widen'd to the view;  
More fierce his look, more lion-like his mien,  
Sublime he mov'd, and seem'd a warrior queen.  
As when the sage on some unfolding plant

Has caught a wandering fly, or frugal ant,  
His hand the microscopic frame applies,  
And lo! a bright hair'd monster meets his eyes;  
He sees new plumes in slender cases roll'd;  
Here stain'd with azure, there bedropp'd with gold;  
Thus, on the alter'd chief both armies gaze,  
And both the kings are fix'd with deep amaze.  
The sword, which arm'd the snow-white maid before,  
He noew assumes, and hurls the spear no more;  
Then springs indignant on the dark-rob'd band,  
And knights and archers feel his deadly hand.  
Now flies the monarch of the sable shield,  
His legions vanquish'd, o'er the lonely field:  
So when the morn, by rosy coursers drawn,  
With pearls and rubies sows the verdant lawn,  
Whilst each pale star from heaven's blue vault retires,  
Still Venus gleams, and last of all expires.  
He hears, where'er he moves, the dreadful sound;  
Check the deep vales, and Check the woods rebound.  
No place remains: he sees the certain fate,  
And yields his throne to ruin, and Checkmate.  
A brighter blush o'erspreads the damsel's cheeks,  
And mildly thus the conquer'd stripling speaks:  
"A double triumph, Delia, hast thou won,  
By Mars protected, and by Venus' son;  
The first with conquest crowns thy matchless art,  
The second points those eyes at Daphnis' heart."  
She smil'd; the nymphs and amorous youths arise,  
And own that beauty gain'd the nobler prize.  
Low in their chest the mimic troops were lay'd,  
And peaceful slept the sable hero's shade.