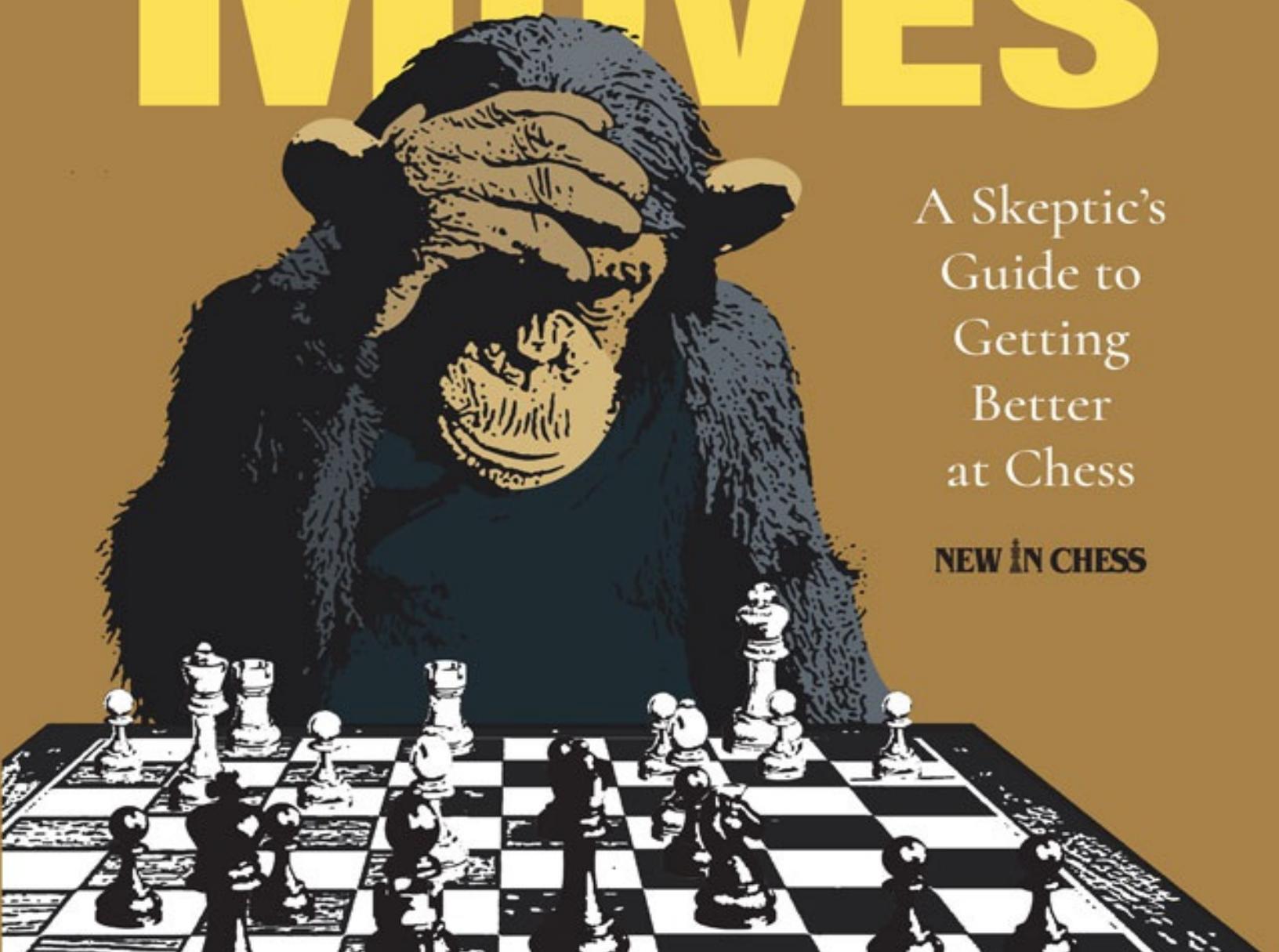


WILLY HENDRIKS

ON THE ORIGIN OF GOOD MOVES

A Skeptic's
Guide to
Getting
Better
at Chess

NEW IN CHESS



Contents

Title page 3

Explanation of symbols 7

Preface 9

1

Exercises for Chapter 1 15

Footnotes to Greco 16

2

Exercises for Chapter 2 25

The Nimzowitsch of the 17th century 27

3

Exercises for Chapter 3 39

With a little help from the opponent 40

4

Exercises for Chapter 4 56

First discussions: Philidor versus the Modenese masters 58

5

Exercises for Chapter 5 67

The start of serious competition 68

6

Exercises for Chapter 6 76

Staunton and the chess column as a second front 77

7

Exercises for Chapter 7 89

London 1851 90

8

Exercises for Chapter 8 105

Williams and the Wyvill formation 106

9

Exercises for Chapter 9 115

Murder at the seventh attempt 116

10

Questions for Chapter 10 130

Meanwhile in India 132

11

Exercises for Chapter 11 136

Blitzkrieg chess 137

12

Exercises for Chapter 12 144

A chivalrous battle in the open field 145

13

Exercises for Chapter 13 155

Anderssen versus Morphy: stereotypes upside down 156

14

Exercises for Chapter 14 163

The father of modern chess 164

15

Exercises for Chapter 15 174

From the coffeehouse to the arena 175

16

Attack at all costs 183

17

Exercises for Chapter 17 192

The art of positional play before Steinitz 194

18

Exercises for Chapter 18 208

The sword in one hand and the olive branch in the other 209

19

The Great Steinitz Hoax 217

20

The concept of balance 219

21

Exercises for Chapter 21 228

The elements of positional play 229

22

Exercises for Chapter 22 242

Of the dead, nothing but good 243

23

Exercises for Chapter 23 253

Before the endgame, the Gods have placed the middlegame 254

24

Exercises for Chapter 24 263

A pawn is worth a little trouble 264

25

Exercises for Chapter 25 272

The king can take care of itself 273

26

Lasker making history 284

27

Exercises for Chapter 27 293

Tarrasch versus Chigorin: the dialectic of theory and praxis 295

28

Exercises for Chapter 28 309

Back to the future 310

29

Exercises for Chapter 29 322

The test of time 323

30

Exercises for Chapter 30 334

Accumulating tactical ideas 335

31

Exercises for Chapter 31 346

The best plan is the absence of it 347

32

Exercises for Chapter 32 358

Study openings 359

33

Exercises for Chapter 33 369

A few bits of endgame knowledge 371

34

Exercises for Chapter 34 380

Revolution or evolution 381

35

Exercises for Chapter 35 396

Bottom-up development 397

36

Exercises for Chapter 36 410

On the origin of good moves 411

Endnotes 419

Index of names 423

Selected bibliography 427

Willy Hendriks

**On the Origin of Good Moves
A Skeptic's Guide to Getting Better at Chess**

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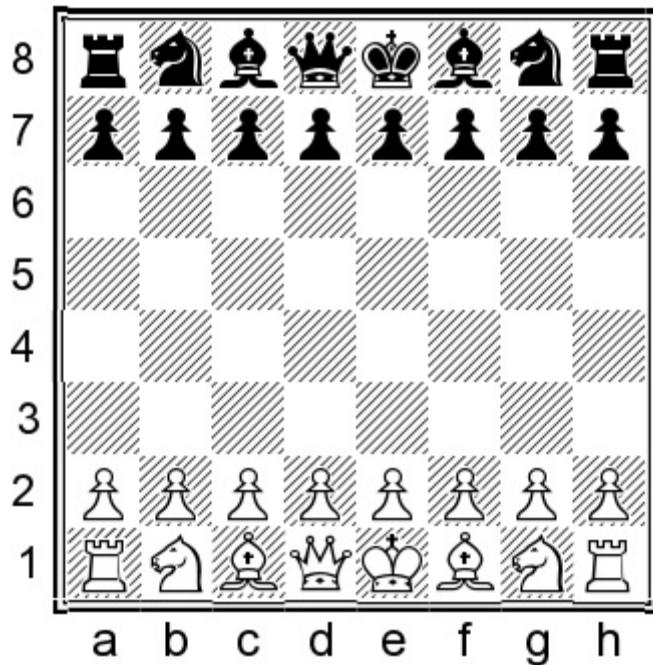
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Explanation of Symbols

The chessboard with its coordinates:



♔ King

♕ Queen

♖ Rook

♗ Bishop

♘ Knight

± White stands slightly better

∓ Black stands slightly better

⊕ White stands better

⊖ Black stands better

+- White has a decisive advantage

-+ Black has a decisive advantage

= balanced position

! good move

!! excellent move

? bad move

?? blunder

!? interesting move

?! dubious move

Preface

A small quiz to begin with

Let's throw you in at the deep end: play over the following game and try to figure out:

- How strong are these players?
- Where did Black go wrong?
- Approximately when was this game played?
- Who might be the players?

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♗c4 ♘c5 5.c3 ♘f6 6.e5 d5 7.♗b5 ♘e4 8.cxd4 ♘b4+ 9.♗d2 ♘xd2+
10.♗bx2 0-0 11.♘xc6 bxc6 12.0-0 f5 13.♗c1 ♗e8 14.♗c2 ♗b8 15.♗b3 ♗b6 16.♗fd2 ♗h5 17.f3
♘xd2 18.♗xd2 f4 19.♗c5 ♗g6 20.♗fe1 ♘e6 21.♗c3 ♗e8 22.♗a3 ♘f5 23.b3 a6 24.♗xa6 ♗xa6 25.♗xa6
♗c8 26.♗c5 ♘e6 27.a4 g5 28.a5 ♗e8 29.a6 ♗b8 30.♗a1 ♗a7 31.♗b4 ♔f7 32.♗b7 ♗b6 33.a7 ♗xb7
34.♗xb7 ♗a8 35.♗d8+ ♔e7 36.♗xe6 ♔xe6 37.b4 1-0

The game of chess has a rich history. Of all the different interesting aspects of this history, this book will focus on the development of our knowledge of the game and our capability to play it well.

This is a book about the history of improvement in chess – about the improvement of the chess-playing species as it were – but I hope it might contribute to the improvement of the chess-playing individual (i.e. you, the reader). In biology there is a theory summarized as ‘ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny’, meaning that the development of the individual resembles the development of the species. Today this old theory has few adherents left in the science of biology and I am not so sure about its worth for chess, but it is an interesting starting point. For one thing Garry Kasparov opens the first chapter of his major work *My Great Predecessors* with this perspective: ‘The stages in the development of chess resemble the path taken by everyone who proceeds from a beginner to a player of high standard.’¹ Kasparov stands in a tradition at this point. For example, his predecessor Max Euwe wrote: ‘The development of a player runs parallel with the development of the game of chess itself, and that’s why the study of the history of the game of chess has great practical value.’² And, to add one more version of this idea, Richard Réti wrote: ‘We perceive after a careful consideration of the evolution of the chess mind that such evolution has gone on, in general, in a way quite similar to that in which it goes on with the individual chess player, only with the latter more rapidly.’³

The above seems to suggest that there is agreement on what ‘the stages in the development of chess’ consist of, and indeed, there is a view that almost all those writing about the history of our game adhere to.

In this generally approved view, William Steinitz plays a central role. He is supposed to have been the first to understand the laws of positional chess and also the first to present this knowledge in his writings. The period before Steinitz is often described as ‘romantic’, with ‘attacking at all costs’ as its main characteristic. With his concepts of balance and of making plans based on the elements of the position, Steinitz more or less brought science and enlightenment into chess thinking.

There were players and writers in the romantic period already anticipating a more positional approach. Often mentioned is François-André Danican Philidor, and sometimes Howard Staunton and Paul Morphy are added to this list. As typical representatives of the romantic school we have Gioacchino Greco and his Italian compatriots. Later on, Adolf Anderssen and Mikhail Chigorin are supposed to stand for the Romantic ideals.

However, I believe that if you take a closer look at this history, it seems rather strange that we have ended up with this ‘official’ version of how chess developed. The story of what *did* happen is a fascinating one and at first it was my intention to shape this book as a whodunnit. While describing all the battles that have been fought in the history of chess between different schools of thinking and styles of playing, and all the discussions and controversies that went along with it, somewhere near the end it should become clear how the crime was committed. Unfortunately, this asks too much of my writing abilities. So I may just as well give it away right here: Emanuel Lasker did it!

I hope that after this journey we can end up with some alternative points of view and some different heroes. But I would also like to take on a new perspective, concentrating not solely on the great players and the big ideas, but also on the small innovations and pieces of new knowledge that, in my opinion, form the real motor of improvement – to give away the second part of the plot.

Finally – if I manage to make a case for this evolutionary point of view – the question arises again as to what this means for the individual, aspiring to master our game.

This perspective connects the present book to my first one, *Move First, Think Later*, subtitled ‘Sense and Nonsense in Improving Your Chess’. That book dealt with the nature of improvement in chess, and some of its main themes and questions will return from a more historical point of view.

Exercises

In my first book I used a set-up with exercises at the start of each chapter. Those positions then returned in the actual chapter. This structure is used again in this book. It is my conviction that, if you want to learn something from a position, you first have to think about it for yourself and decide upon your move, preferably without any clues. Also, to be able to form an idea of how chess was played in the past and how they handled different positions, it is essential to think about these positions yourself, to see how you relate to their way of thinking and their playing strength.

I hope that every so often you will be surprised and add some new bits to your knowledge of chess.

The exercises range from very easy to very difficult. I guess the stronger club player won’t have an easy time solving them. They are a mix of strategy and tactics. Mostly, but not always, there is a clear best move. And usually you are just asked to give a move – hopefully you can back it up by some variation or idea. Sometimes a different question is asked – for example, your opinion on who is better.

The exercises follow the line of the story, which means that simple ones can be followed by difficult ones, without any warning. Just as in your own games.

The minimum I hope for you to do is to take a good look at the position and decide on the move you want to play.

An anachronistic game!?

Years ago in my chess club's magazine there was a regular quiz that looked a bit like the one I presented to you at the start. This was in the pre-computer era. Of course, I hope you tried my quiz without computer help. Nowadays we are used to having engines running almost all the time. That makes it easy to forget how difficult chess is.

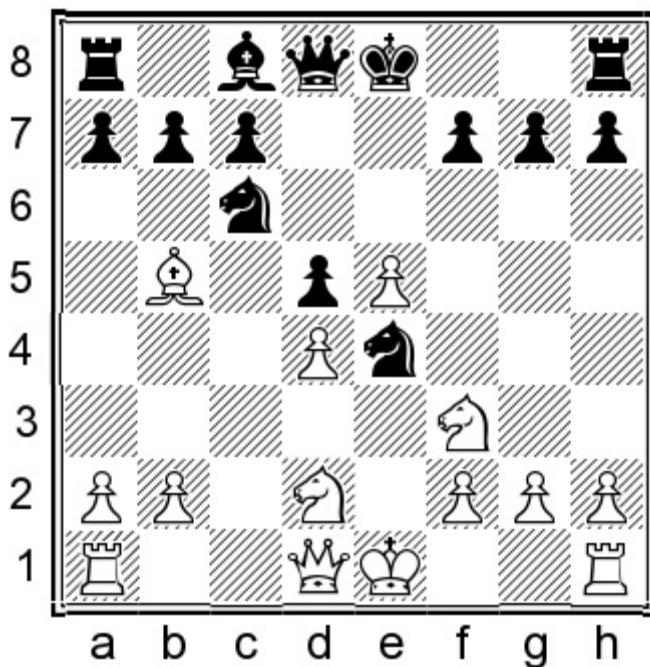
While I was writing this, the World Championship match between Carlsen and Caruana was going on. I read the following witty comment on Twitter: 'In my opinion, computers didn't ruin the game of chess, but they did ruin the spectators.' It is indeed difficult to escape: if you tune in to the live broadcast of any match or tournament today, in most places you get the actual position presented together with a computer evaluation of the position. This already spoils half of the fun. It's not the same as presenting the score during a soccer match.

Let's have a look at the questions I posed. Your first impression might well be that they are at least decent players. They play opening theory for some time and don't blunder material. The opening itself doesn't give much of a clue. This line was already played long ago and is still played today, though maybe not at the highest levels.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♗c4 ♗c5 5.c3 ♘f6 6.e5 d5 7.♗b5 ♘e4 8.cxd4 ♗b4+ 9.♗d2 ♘xd2+

More often 9...♝xd2 is played.

10.♗bx d2

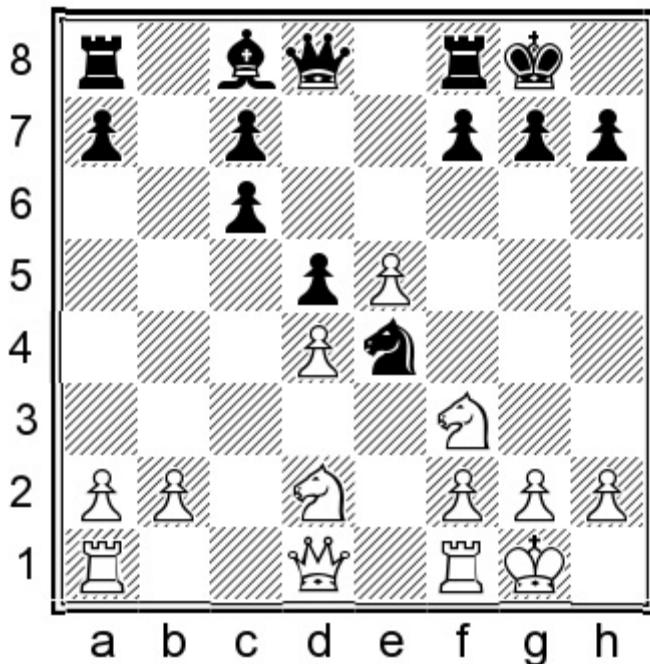


10....0-0

If Black wants to avoid getting his pawn structure damaged he can play 10...♝d7.

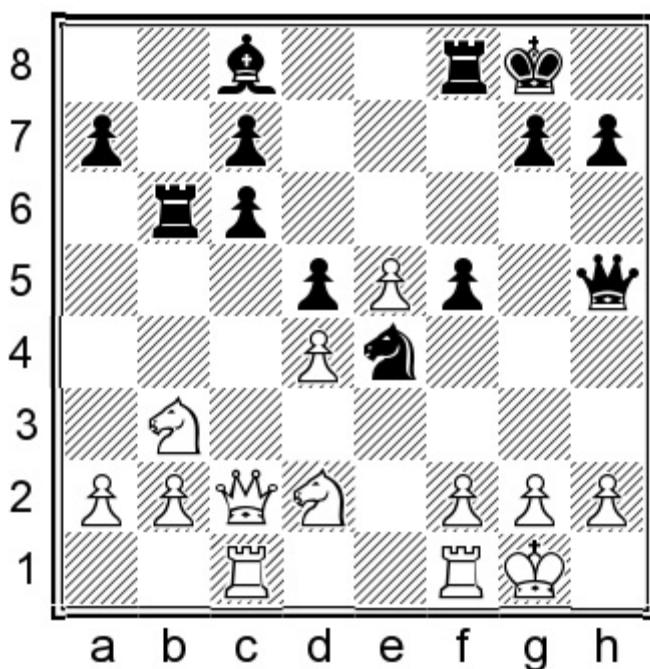
11.♗xc6 bxc6 12.0-0

If 12. $\mathbb{E}c1$ White has to reckon with the ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$ idea, either directly or after 12...c5 13. $dxc5$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$. Later in this book we will see some more examples of this idea, aiming to keep the king stuck in the centre.



The weaknesses on the c-file are Black's major problem and now is his last chance to address this with 12...c5!, after which White is only slightly better. Black's next move not only doesn't help with his problems on the c-file, but also gives White a protected passed pawn and blocks his bishop on c8. Surely, White is not going to help Black by taking on e4. So Black's only big mistake in this game is already the decisive one. Well done if you noticed this.

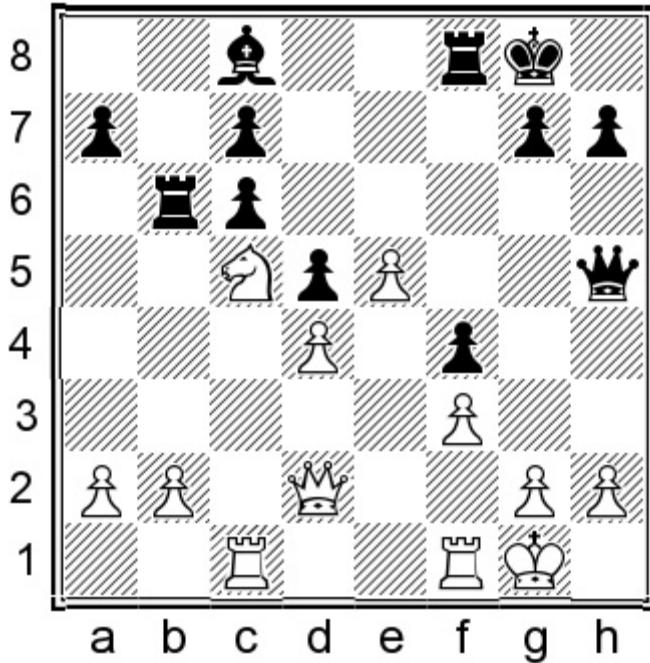
12...f5? 13. $\mathbb{E}c1$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 14. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{B}b8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{B}b6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}fd2$ $\mathbb{W}h5$



17.f3!

Much better than 17.♘xe4 fxe4, which would greatly improve Black's possibilities on the kingside.

17...♝xd2 18.♛xd2 f4 19.♞c5



The good knight versus bad bishop dream position has been reached. In the rest of the game White cashes in on his advantage in an exemplary way.

19...♝g6 20.♝fe1 ♕e6 21.♝c3 ♜e8 22.♝a3 ♜f5 23.b3 a6 24.♝xa6 ♜xa6 25.♞xa6 ♜c8 26.♞c5 ♜e6 27.a4 g5 28.a5 ♜e8 29.a6 ♜b8 30.♝a1 ♜a7 31.♝b4 ♜f7 32.♝b7 ♜b6 33.a7 ♜xb7 34.♝xb7 ♜a8 35.♞d8+ ♜e7 36.♞xe6 ♜xe6 37.b4 1-0

On closer consideration of this game you might come to the conclusion that it looks like a typical example of 'master beats amateur'. It could have been played long ago, but also very recently. White seems to be a reasonably strong player. He outplays his opponent in a purely positional manner – a model game on the theme of weaknesses in the pawn structure and a good knight on a strong square versus a (rather) bad bishop.

Since the laws of positional chess were discovered, as the story goes, by Steinitz, around the 1880s, this game must have been played after that. Maybe it was even Steinitz himself, you might think, playing with white.

Although this game was given to you without any information, the fact that it is in this book probably gave you a clue that it is not a very recent game. And indeed it isn't. It is a game by Adolf Anderssen against Daniel Harrwitz, the first of their match played in Breslau in 1848. Harrwitz was at the time considered to be one of the world's top players, and drawing this match 4-4 was Anderssen's first notable result.

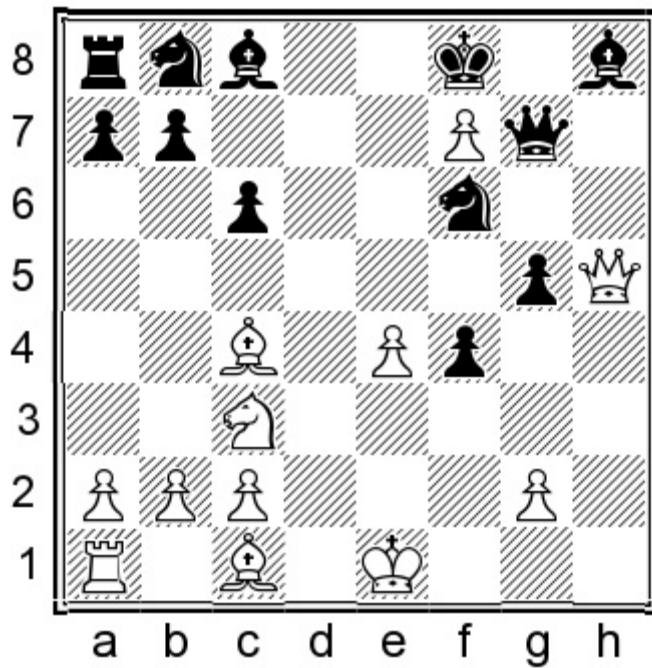
Adolf Anderssen (1818-1879), the great protagonist of the so-called Romantic chess era, playing purely positional chess years before this was invented? That raises a few questions. Is this game some sort of anachronism, an occasional lucky shot? Or is there more to be found in the history of chess that challenges conventional views?

Years ago I stumbled upon this game by accident and it was an inspiration for further investigations of games from the past – and not only the small number that recur in every textbook.

So let's start our journey into the forgotten days. At our first stop we will meet a player who has much more to offer than his reputation as a primitive tactician would suggest.

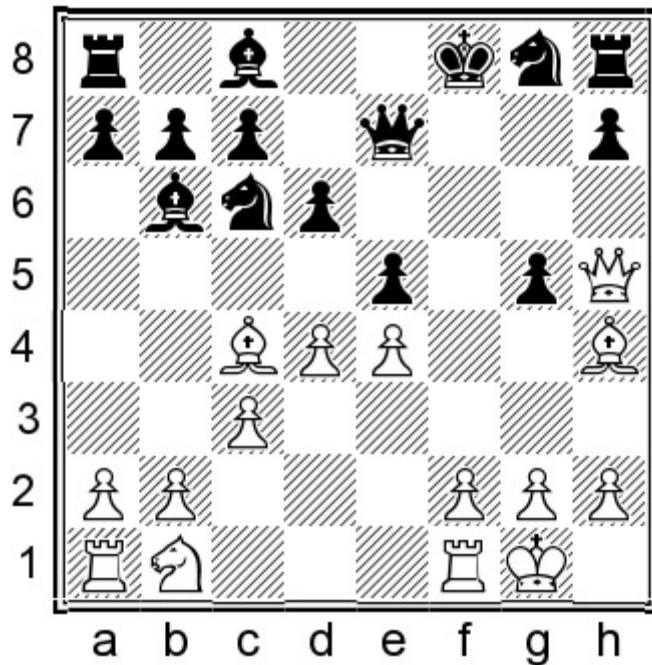
Exercises for Chapter 1

1 (go to the solution)



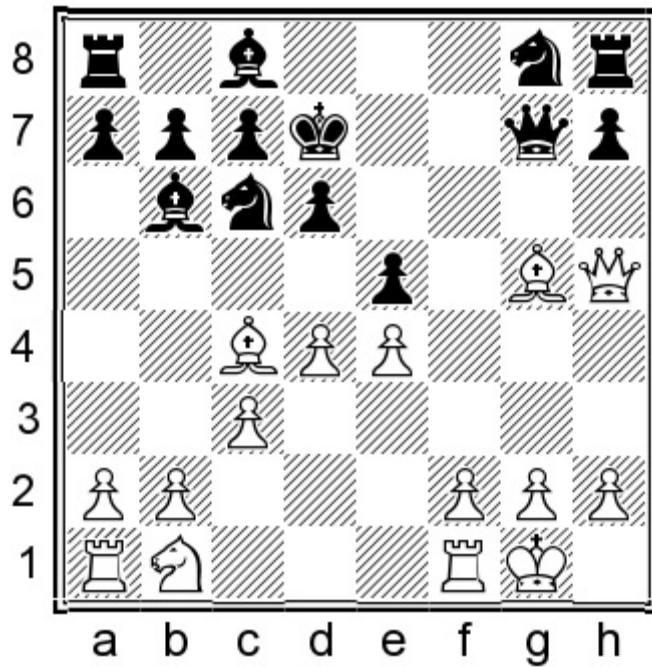
White to move

2 (go to the solution)



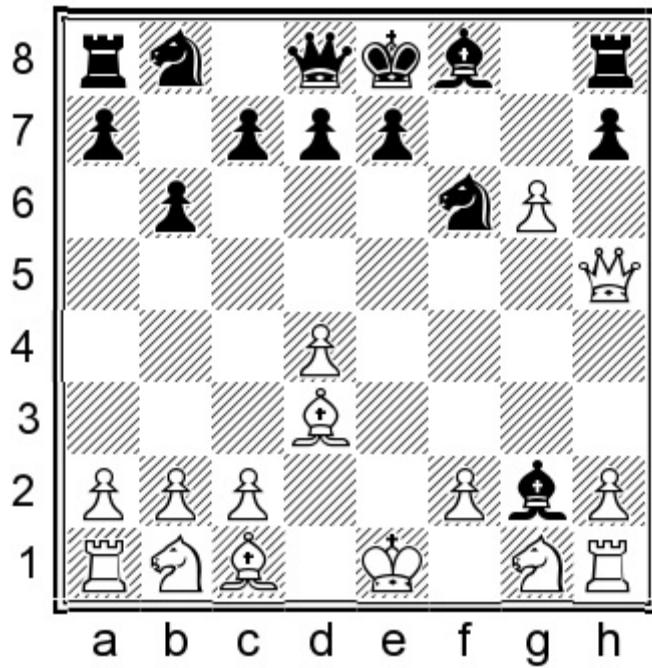
White to move

3 (go to the solution)



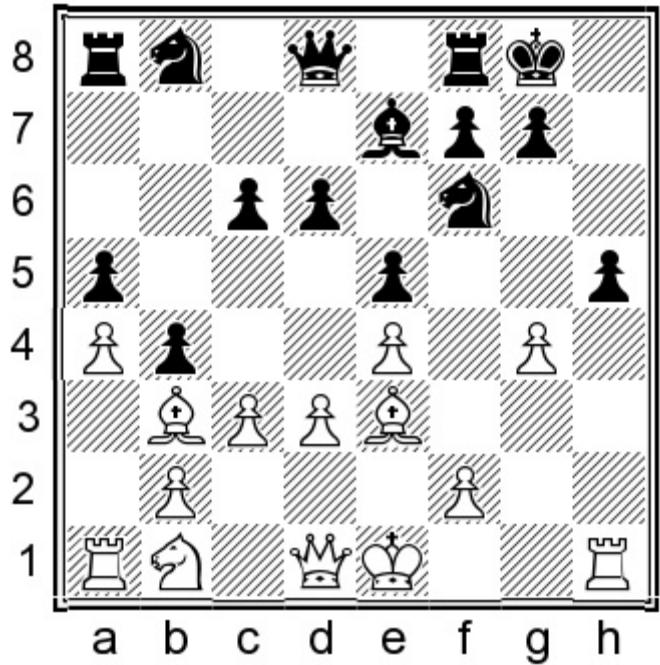
White to move

4 (go to the solution)



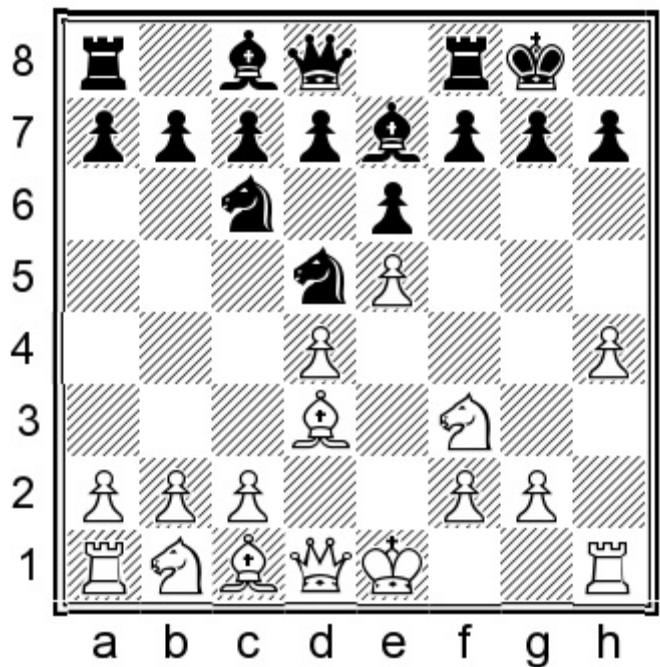
White to move

5 (go to the solution)



White to move

6 (go to the solution)



White to move

1

Footnotes to Greco

Admirers of the Greek philosopher Plato somewhat jokingly like to describe the complete history of philosophy that followed as footnotes to Plato. All major themes had supposedly been dealt with already, or even handled sufficiently, in Plato's work.

As far as I know nobody has paid this honour to Gioacchino Greco, one of the earliest players in the history of chess to have left behind a collection of games. Does he stand comparison with Plato, or are we witnessing just the first small steps on a long and winding road?

Not much is known for sure about Greco (1600?–1634?). He was born in southern Italy and travelled a lot, beating the strongest players from Italy, France, England and Spain.

Greco wrote several manuscripts that were later collected and republished. They contained complete games, which was a novelty, though it is not sure if they were really played or were partly, or completely, constructed. Some of them he probably ‘borrowed’ from others: in his day, Italy was the centre of the chess-playing world and Greco built on the knowledge of earlier and contemporary players like Boi, Leonardo, Polerio and Salvio. They found fame as the Italian school, which later was opposed to the Philidorian school, to which the 16th century Spanish player and writer Ruy Lopez might be seen as a forerunner.

On looking at Kasparov's *My Great Predecessors*, the first player on the list is of course Steinitz, but Part I starts with an overview of chess before Steinitz. Kasparov does pay attention to Greco and values his contributions, but also characterizes him as a representative of ‘the manner of play in the 16th and 17th centuries: never missing a chance to give check, bring the queen immediately into play and, not thinking about the development of all the pieces, launch a dashing attack on the king. The combination either succeeds, or suddenly turns out to be completely incorrect. The level of defense is terrible and there is a complete absence of any deep plan. This style, inspired by the talent and imagination of the performers, became known in chess as the “Italian School”.’ After giving some examples of Greco's fine miniatures, Kasparov quickly proceeds to Philidor as the first theoretician to lay out some of the positional fundamentals of chess.

Kasparov follows other writers in this view on Greco. Often his great combinational play gets praise, but sometimes his games are characterized as just a useful collection of opening traps. Euwe uses the phrase ‘toying with pieces’ to summarize Greco's play.⁴ And Vladimir Vukovic in his classic *Art of Attack in Chess* speaks about ‘some combinations, though new then, now strike modern minds as nothing more than elementary tricks.’ Vukovic gives one fragment of Greco, and tries to correct Greco here and there, but the editor of the reissue of this classic, John Nunn, points out that more often than not Greco had it right, noticing ‘Perhaps those old analysts knew a thing or two after all!’⁵



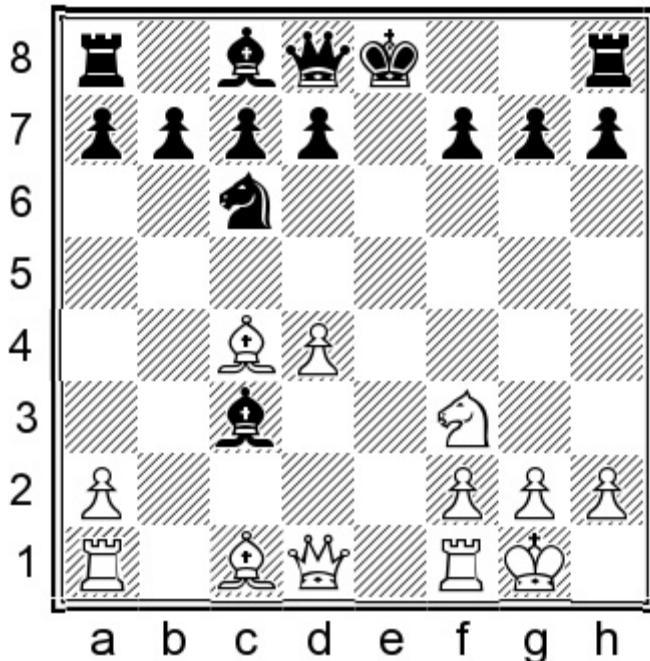
If you play over all the games by Greco you cannot but be amazed by the enormous strength of this

player and by the importance and variety of his ideas. These games were played around 1620, in the early days of chess as we know it, with not much existing knowledge to build on.

Most of Greco's games are King's Gambits and Italian Games, often short struggles ending with a deadly attack on the king in the middle of the board. The struggle in the centre, rapid development of the pieces and all kinds of tactics directed at the enemy king are the central themes. A few examples:

Gioacchino Greco – NN

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 4.c3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 8.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 9.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$

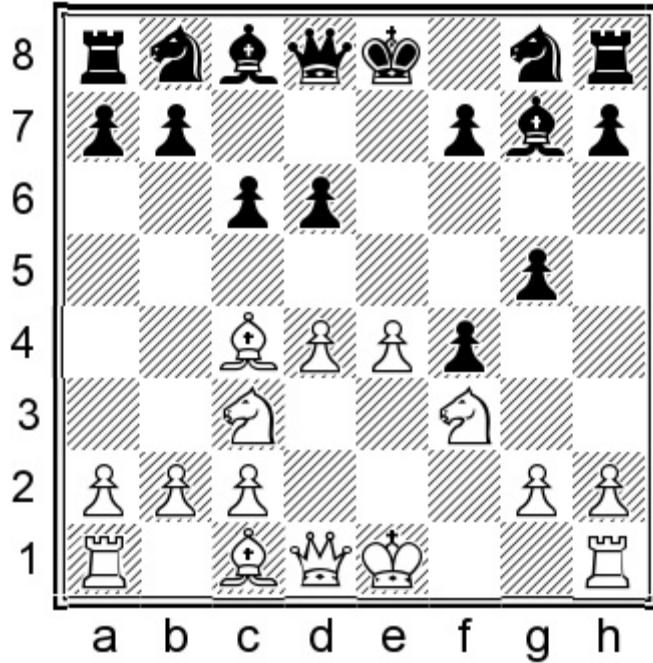


10. $\mathbb{W}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ d5 15. $\mathbb{W}f3+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg7$ 1-0

This line is Greco's most important contribution to theory. Also notable is the fact that White plays perfectly from beginning to end. Quite a few other games by Greco do withstand the scrutiny of today's engines, which is a clear indication of the strength of his play:

Gioacchino Greco – NN

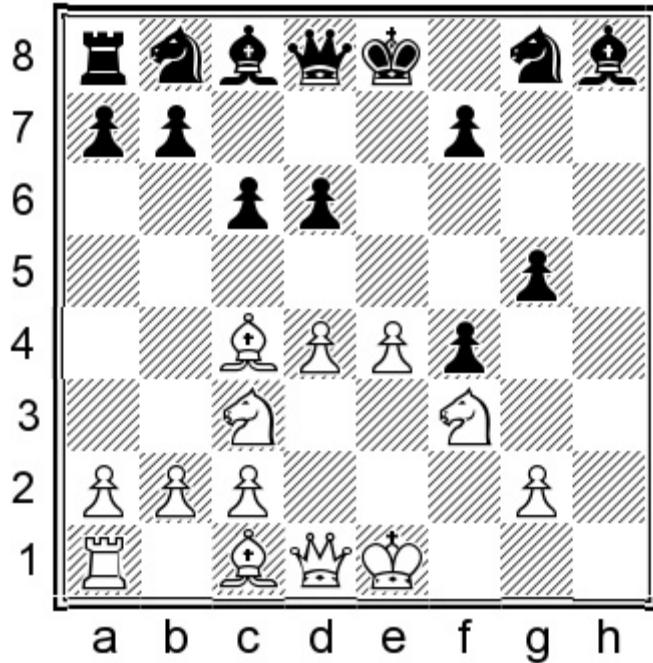
1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ g5 4. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 5.d4 d6 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c6



7.h4

Attacking pawn chains was a main weapon in Greco's repertoire.

7...h6 8.hxg5 hxg5 9.♕xh8 ♕xh8

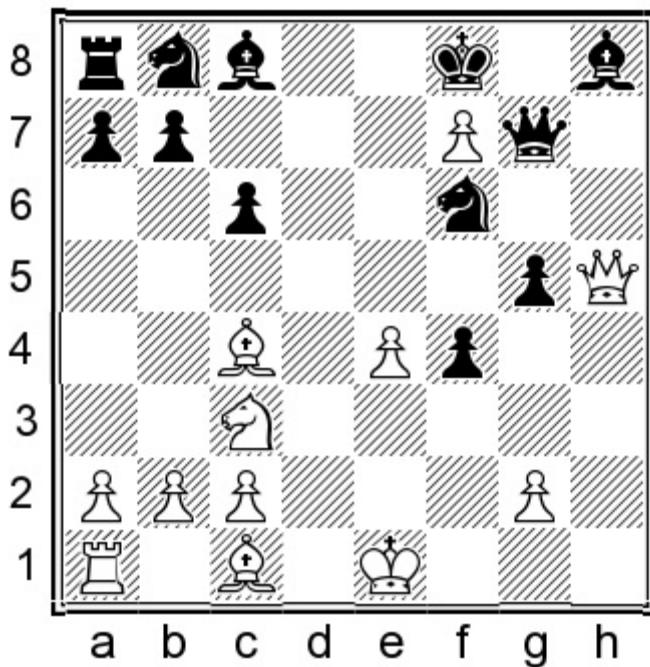


10.♗e5?!

Typical of Greco's sacrificial style, but this one is rather dubious.

10...dxe5 11.♕h5 ♕f6 12.dxe5 ♕g7 13.e6 ♔f6 14.exf7+ ♔f8?

After 14...♔e7 White's attack runs out of steam. But now his audacity gets rewarded with a brilliant finish, quite understandably missed by Black.



(Exercise no 1)

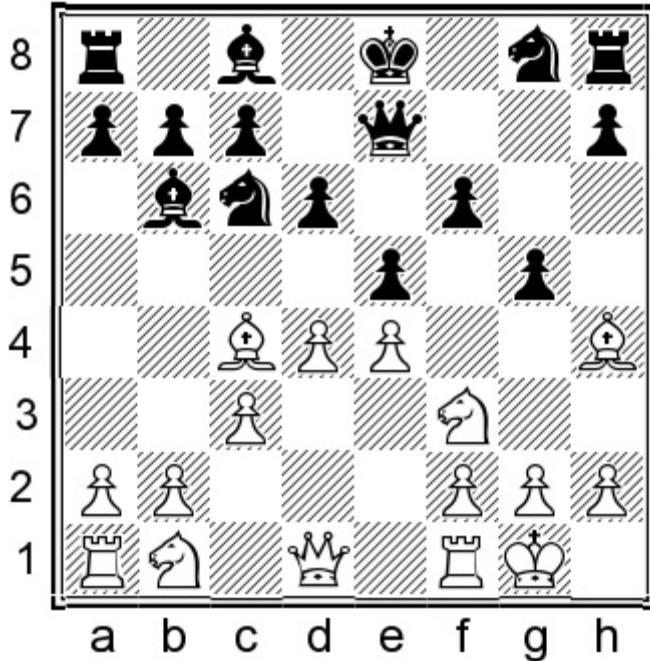
15.♕xf4! ♔xh5

Or 15...gxf4 16.♕c5 mate.

16.♕d6 mate.

Gioacchino Greco – NN

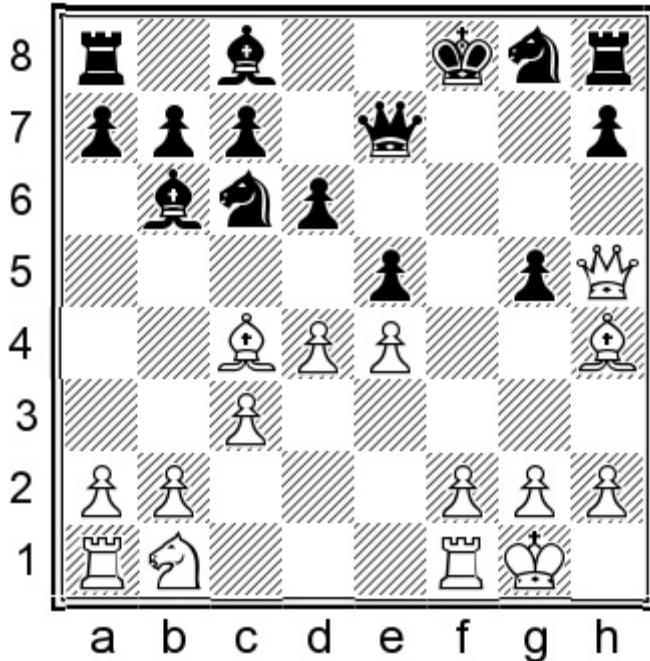
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♘c5 4.c3 ♖e7 5.0-0 d6 6.d4 ♗b6 7.♗g5 f6 8.♗h4 g5



Again Greco takes up the gauntlet, this time more justified than in the previous game, although the quiet continuation 9.Qg3 was not bad at all.

9.Qxg5! fxg5 10.Wh5+ ♕d7

There is one more game in Greco's collection with this position in which Black decided on 10...Qf8 (*analysis diagram*):



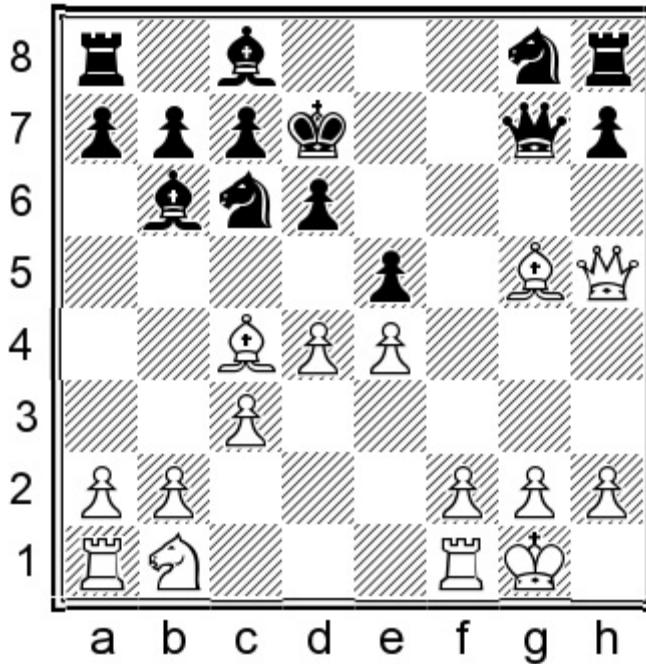
(Exercise no 2)

Greco continued with 11.Qxg5, missing a nice killer blow. After 11.f4!! the f-file will be opened with

devastating effect.

11.♕xg5 ♕g7?

After the only move 11...♝f6 White is winning as well, but the position is a bit messy with ample opportunity to go wrong. Now White decides the game with a nice mating combination.



White to move

(Exercise no 3)

12.♕e6+! ♘xe6 13.♕e8+ ♘ge7 14.d5 mate.

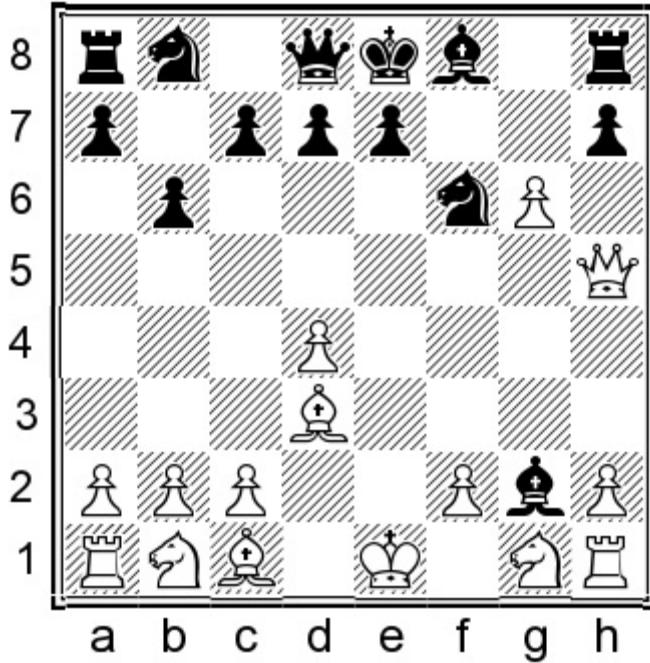
Many of these Italian Games and King's Gambits were important contributions to theory or even the starting point of theory, and these lines and the ideas in them remained influential for centuries to come. But I think the games in Greco's collection with other openings are even better evidence of his strength and inventiveness.

There are a few games with 1.e4 b6. Today this is known as Owen's Defence, but the English vicar John Owen lived more than two centuries later, so he was not the first to use this opening. However, he did play it regularly and once managed to beat Morphy with it.

Gioacchino Greco – NN

1.e4 b6 2.d4 ♘b7 3.♘d3 f5? 4.exf5 ♘xg2 5.♗h5+ g6 6.fxg6 ♘f6?

With 6...♞g7 Black can still pose some tricky problems.



(Exercise no 4)

7.gxh7+! ♜xh5 8.♗g6 mate.

There is a fair chance you have seen this game before. But it is very relevant for this line, so discovering this at a moment when the opening had only just come into existence is a feat that can easily be underestimated.

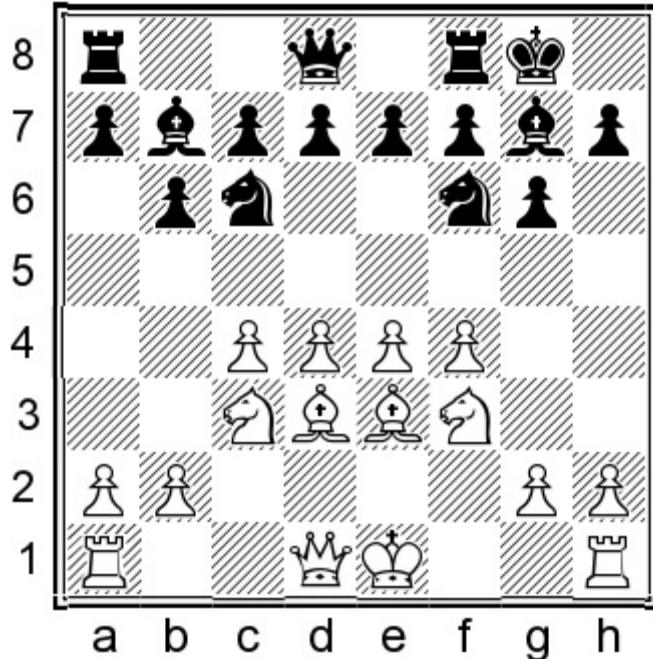
The other game with this opening is also noteworthy:

Gioacchino Greco – NN

1.e4 b6 2.d4 ♜b7 3.♗d3 g6 4.f4 ♜g7

A hypermodern set-up *avant la lettre* by Black.

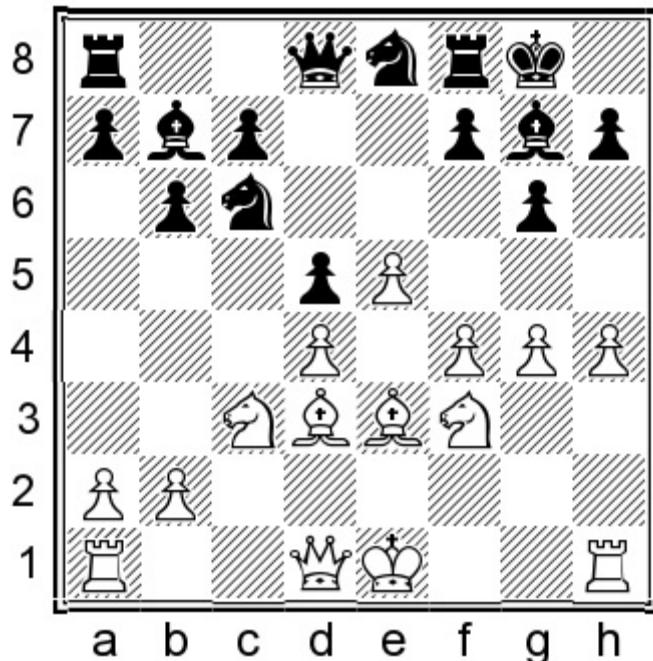
5.♗e3 ♜c6 6.♗f3 ♜f6 7.c4 0-0 8.♗c3



In a subsequent chapter we will take a closer look at Philidor's ideas. 'Move your pawns before your pieces, and afterwards bring out the pieces to support them' can be considered to be his central axiom.⁶ If you look at the white position you might think Philidor was strongly inspired by Greco at this point. There are other games of Greco that show a similar preference.

One difference might be that Greco played this way only when given the opportunity, whereas Philidor tried to enforce this ideal, no matter where or how.

8...e6 9.e5 ♖e8 10.g4 d5 11.cxd5 exd5 12.h4



White's h-file mating attack on this kingside fianchetto will not shock any present reader, but very likely this was the first one in history.

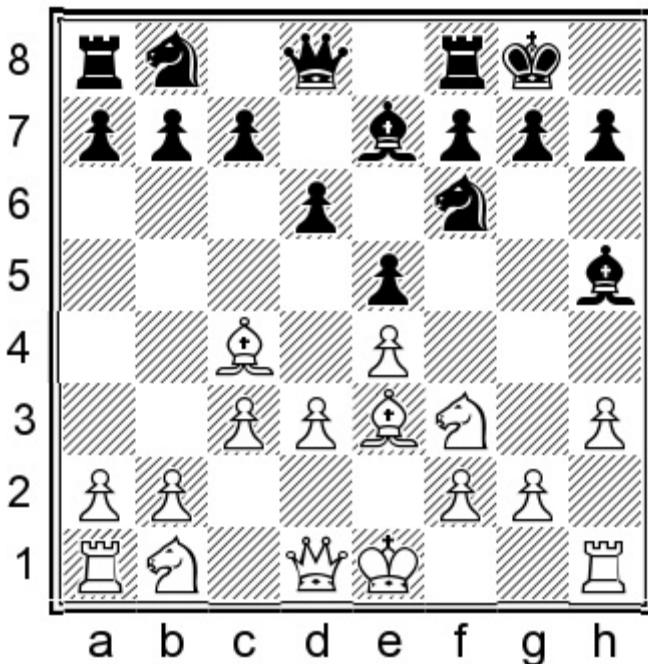
12...a6 13.h5 b5 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.♔e2 b4 16.♔h2 bxc3 17.♔h7 mate.

Regarding the absence of deep plans in this period: the attack starting with 10.g4 and culminating in 17.♔h7 mate seems to be a rather deep plan.

To modern eyes this was a fairly standard kingside attack, so let's proceed to a more sophisticated example.

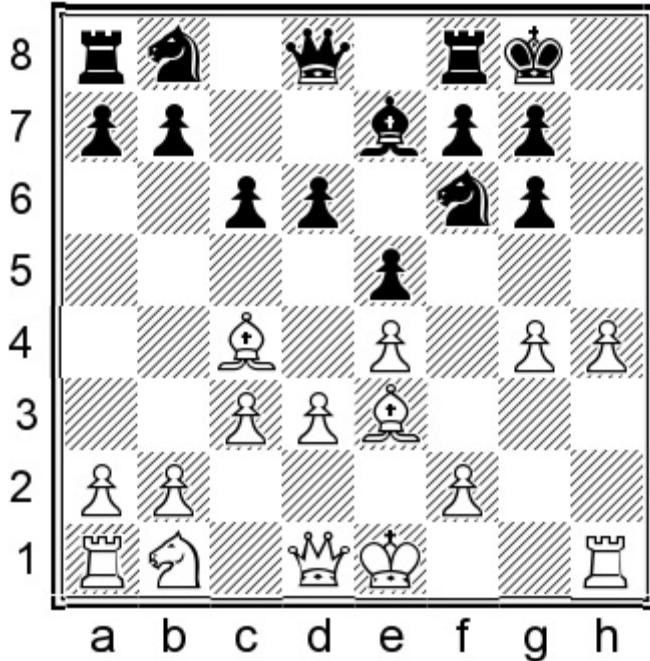
Gioacchino Greco – NN

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗c4 ♗g4 4.h3 ♗h5 5.c3 ♘f6 6.d3 ♗e7 7.♗e3 0-0



Not having castled kingside himself yet, the following attacking plan makes sense.

8.g4!? ♗g6 9.♘h4 c6 10.♘xg6 hxg6 11.h4



Black should seek counterplay and he does so on the opposite wing. However, in this case counterattacking in the centre seems a more appropriate answer to White's aggression on the flank. There is an old proverb promoting this, which, strangely enough, some author dared to discuss a few years ago.⁷ How old exactly is this wisdom is not clear, but probably it did not exist in Greco's day.

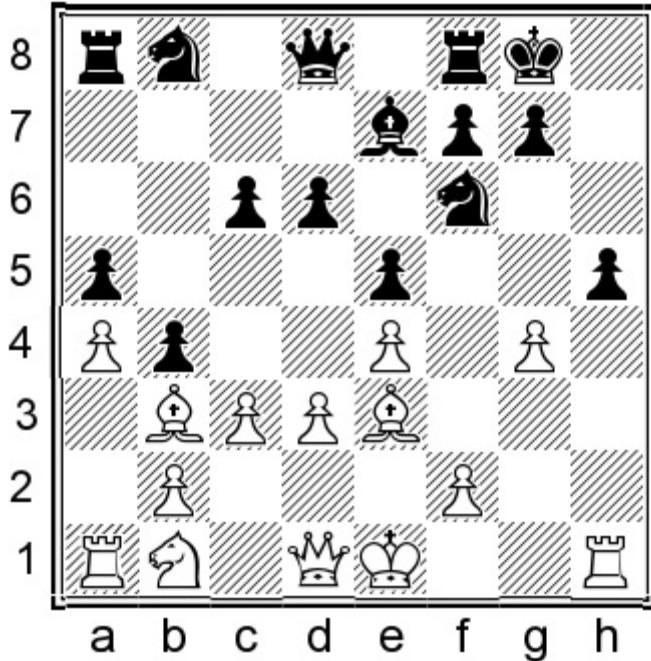
After the better 11...d5 things remain unclear. For example after 12.♗b3 dxе4 White has 13.h5!, still posing Black some problems. White threatens 14.hxg6 and after 13...gxh5 14.g5 is strong.

Apart from Black's action being a bit too slow, this whole game makes a modern impression regarding pawn play.

11...b5?! 12.♗b3 a5 13.a4 b4 14.h5!

Advancing the h-pawn starts a tactical operation that had to be calculated well.

14...gxh5



(Exercise no 5)

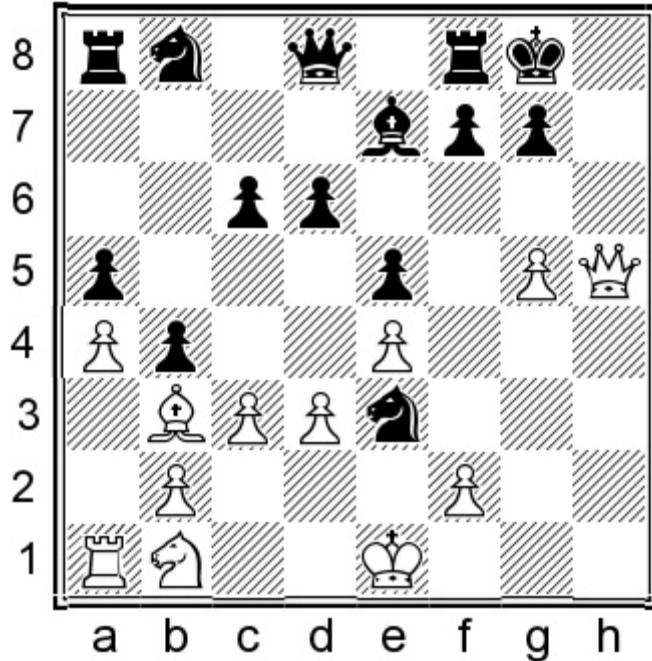
15.g5!

Capturing the h-pawn with 15.gxh5 is not bad, but after 15...d5 Black is still in the game.

15...♝g4 16.♜xh5 ♝xe3 17.♜h8+!

The point, which had to be foreseen at move 15. If White first takes back with 17.fxe3, Black is perfectly safe after 17...g6 followed by ...♜xg5 and/or ...♚g7.

17...♚xh8 18.♛h5+ ♚g8



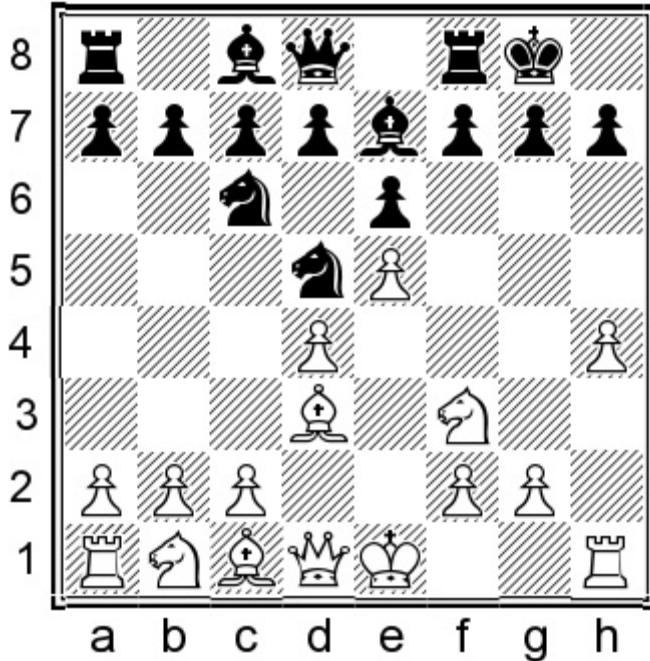
19.g6!

To be the first person to discover this mating combination is undoubtedly a real accomplishment, and any modern-day chess player would be justifiably proud to play the combination starting with 14.h5. I know that I would.

19... $\mathbb{E}e8$ 20. $\mathbb{W}h7+$ $\mathbb{K}f8$ 21. $\mathbb{W}h8$ mate.

The next mating attack will be more familiar to the reader, to use an understatement, but again – someone had to be first. I know I’m becoming a bit repetitive, but Greco’s legacy is really impressive.

Gioacchino Greco – NN



White to move

(Exercise no 6)

7. $\mathbb{Q}xh7+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 9. $hxg5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$

Or 9... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 10. $\mathbb{W}h5$ f5 11. g6.

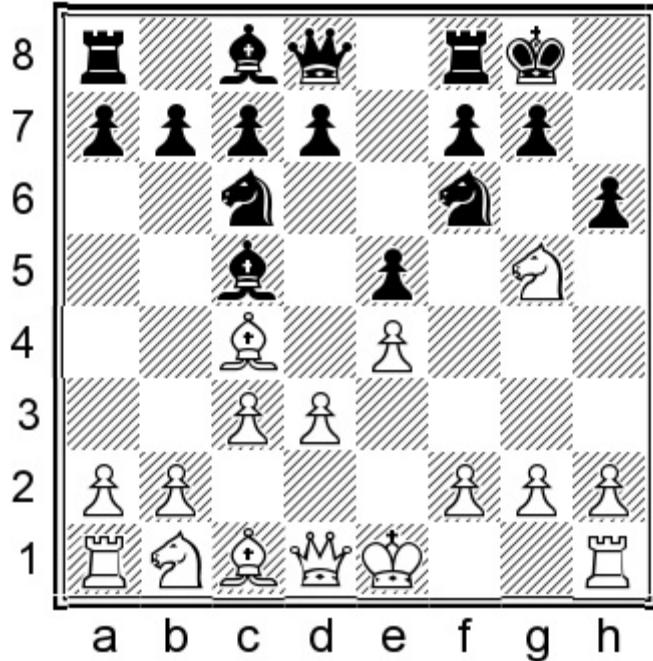
10. $\mathbb{W}h5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 11. $\mathbb{W}h7+$ g6 12. $\mathbb{W}h3+$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 13. $\mathbb{W}d3$ mate.

The bishop sacrifice is called the ‘Greek Gift’ and that (probably) refers to Greco, although the other explanation, linking this name to the Trojan Horse, looks quite plausible as well. Had it been $\mathbb{Q}xh7$, I would be inclined to favour the second idea.

The next attacking mechanism is again an original; the game, though, looks a bit like a construction. It’s an important line-opening device, to be found in numerous openings and games since. Later on we will see some of these more refined applications.

Gioacchino Greco – NN

1. e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 4. c3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 0-0 6. d3 h6



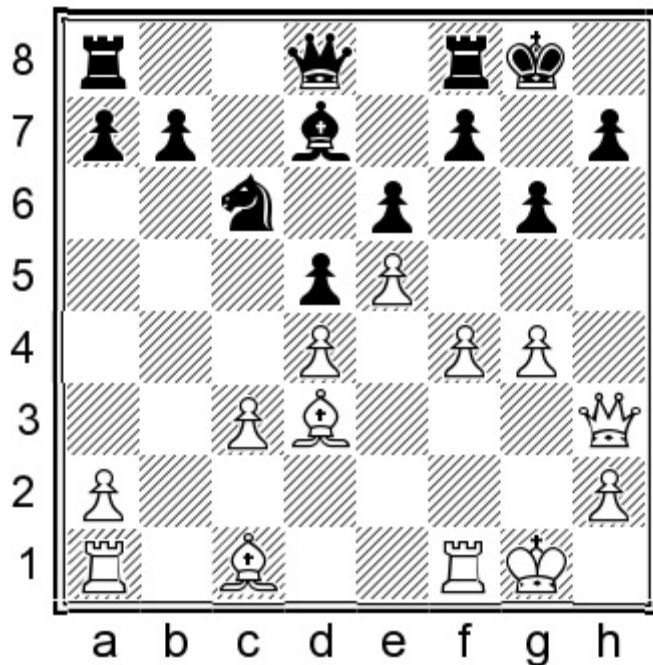
7.h4!?

The applause is for the idea, since if Black doesn't take the bait but plays something else, 7...d5 for example, he is doing fine. But this black NN is very cooperative:

7...hxg5? 8.hxg5 ♔h7 9.♔h5 1-0

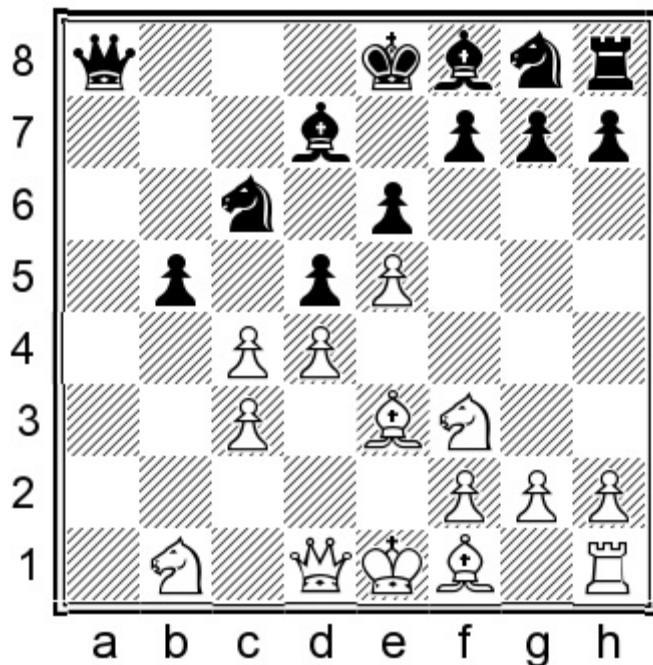
Exercises for Chapter 2

7 (go to the solution)



White to move

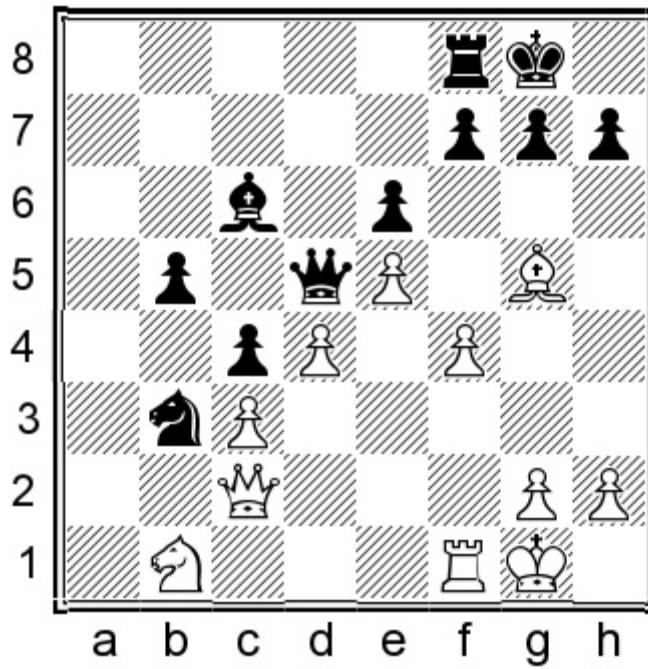
8 (go to the solution)



Black to move

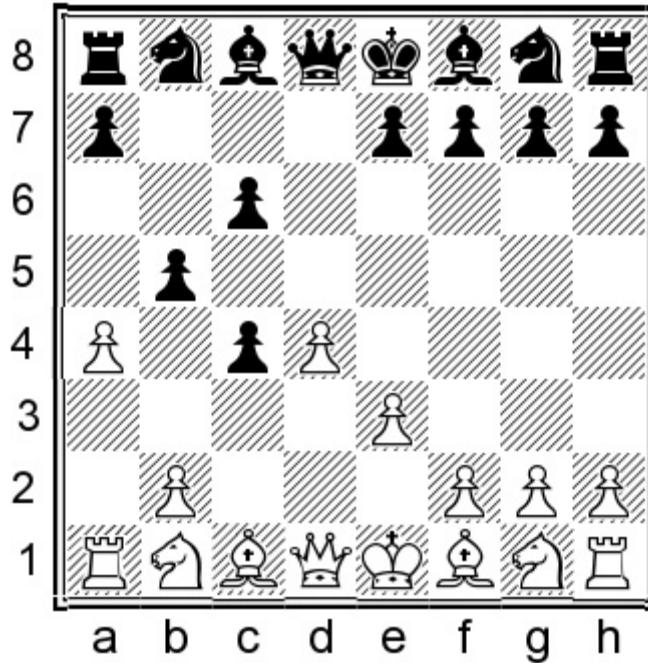
White has just played 11.bxc4 and Black now has to make a principled decision: 11...bxc4 or 11...dxc4?

9 (go to the solution)



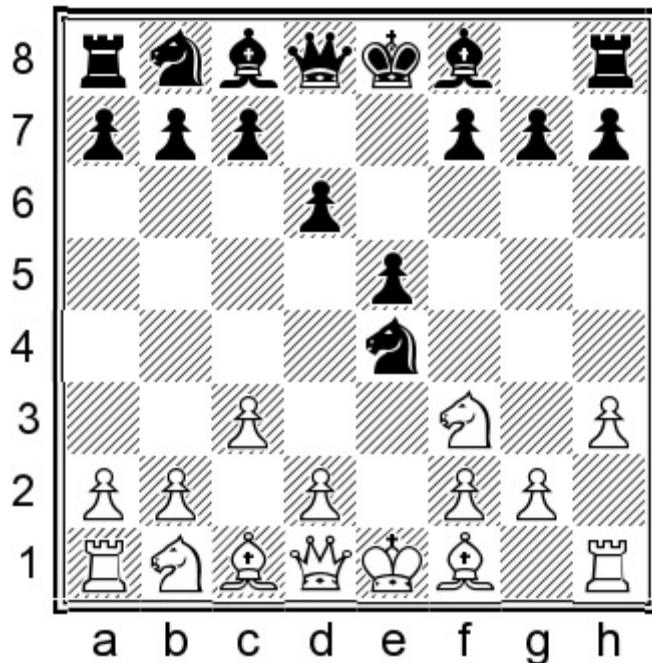
Black to move

10 (go to the solution)



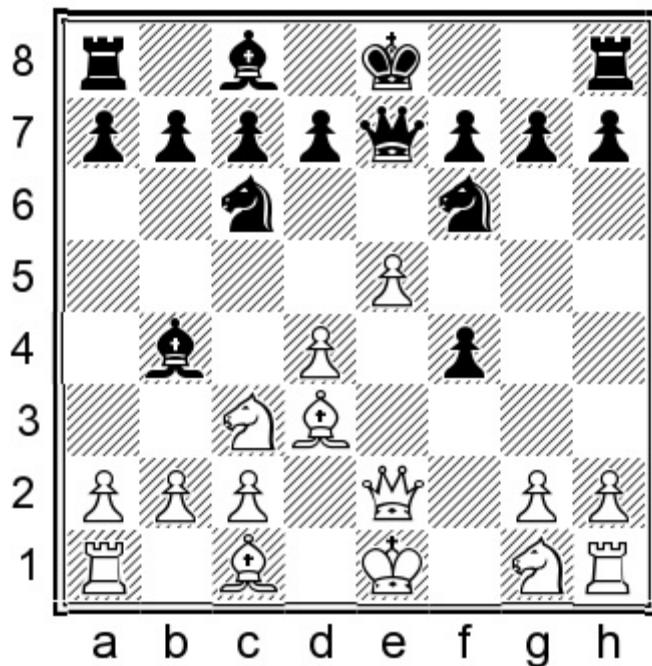
White to move

11 (go to the solution)



White to move

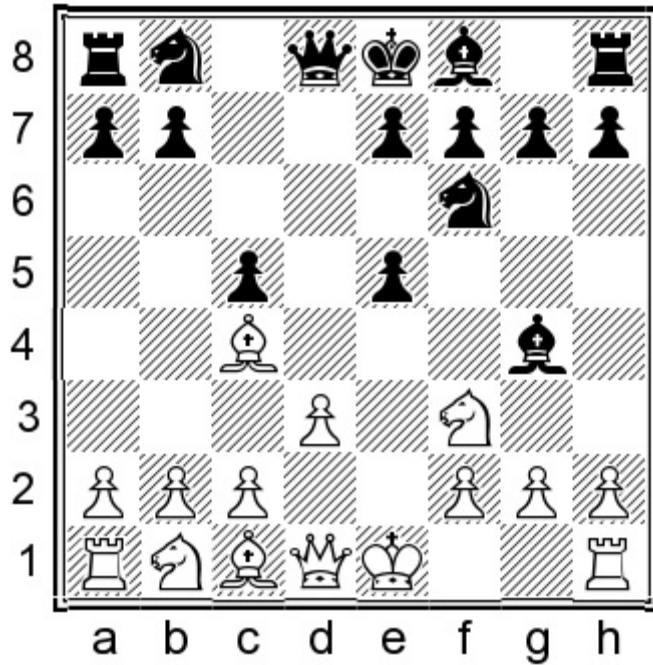
12 (go to the solution)



Black to move

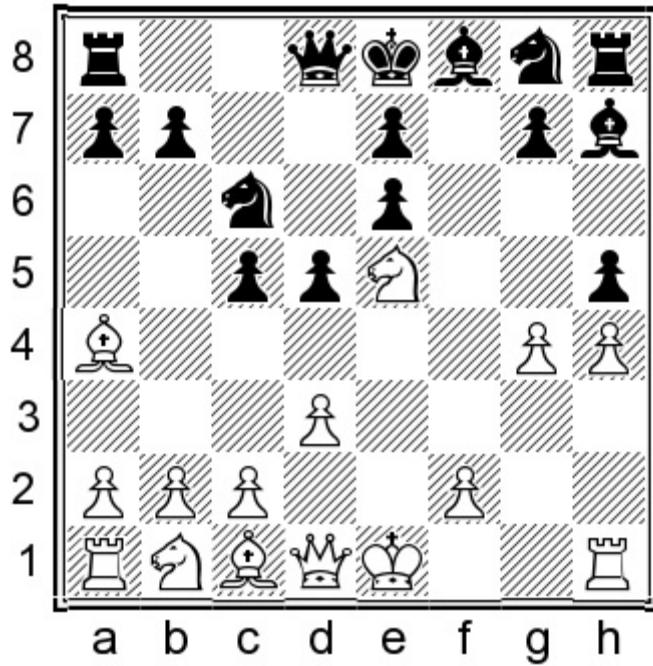
Choose between 7... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ and 7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$.

13 (go to the solution)



White to move

14 (go to the solution)



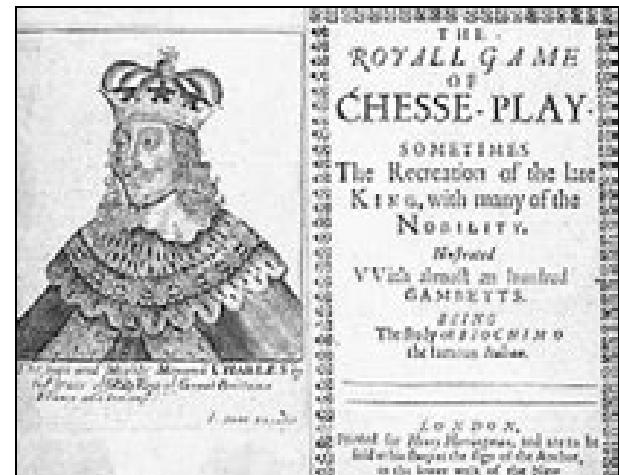
White to move

2

The Nimzowitsch of the 17th century

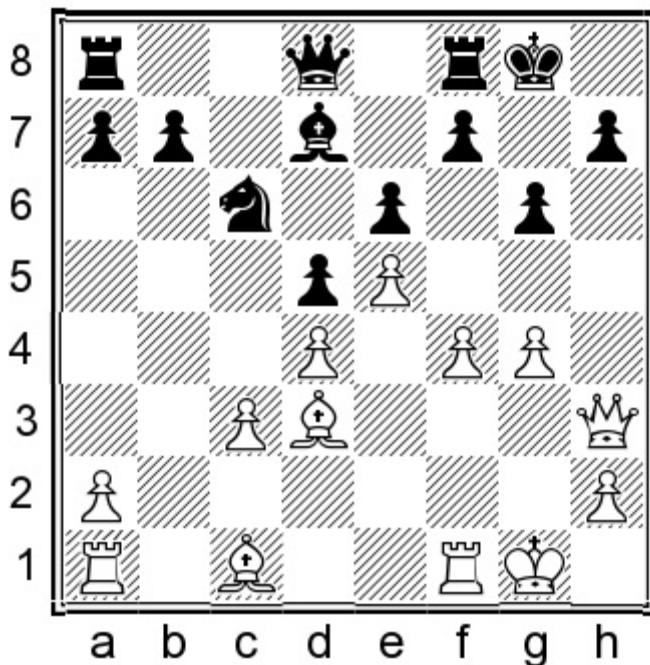
After our small digression on kingside attacking mechanisms, let us return to the openings that were not mainstream in Greco's day. There are some French Defence games in his manuscripts, and Greco preferred the Advance Variation.

Taking into account that there was no theory on this opening whatsoever, the next game is a remarkable positional walkover. It is true that Black should not exchange his dark-squared bishop on c3, but apart from that White's play is very convincing. And, as in the earlier game with Owen's Defence, Greco's pawn play essentially shows what was later claimed by Philidor as his own novelty.



Gioacchino Greco – NN

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 cxd4 5.cxd4 ♜b4+ 6.♗c3 ♜xc3+ 7.bxc3 ♜c6 8.♗d3 ♜ge7 9.f4 ♜f5
10.♗f3 0-0 11.g4 ♜h4 12.0-0 ♜xf3+ 13.♘xf3 ♜d7 14.♘h3 g6



(Exercise no 7)

15.f5!

Simple and strong; other ideas like 15.♗a3 or a combination of ♘f3 and ♘h6 make sense as well, but they are not as straightforward as the text move.

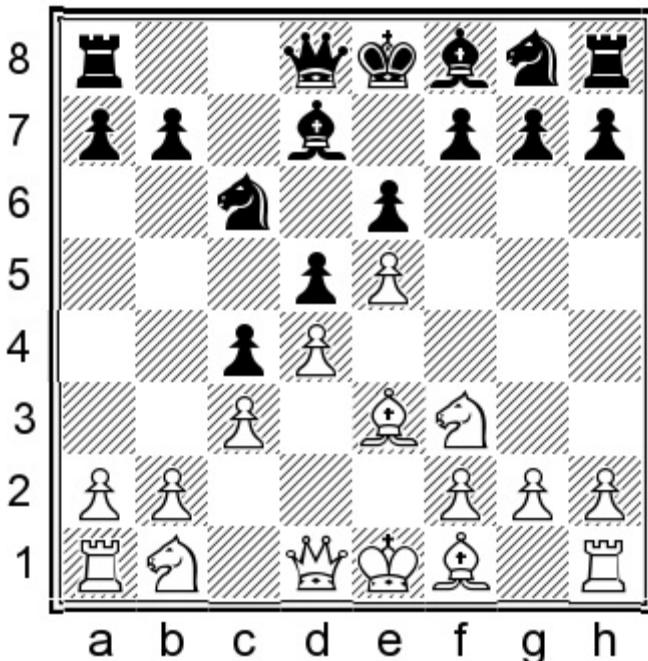
15...exf5 16.gxf5 gxf5 17.Qxf5 Qxf5 18.Qxf5 1-0

The other game with the French Defence sees Greco playing Black. It is by far the longest game (most of the games recorded by Greco are miniatures). It also looks like a real game, not a constructed one, although you do get the feeling in the opening that White as well as Black is playing in ‘Greco style’.

There is a lot happening in this game, I’m not going to analyse everything in detail, but I’ll pick out just some moments of special interest.

NN – Gioacchino Greco

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 c5 4.c3 ♜c6 5.♗f3 ♜d7 6.♗e3 c4



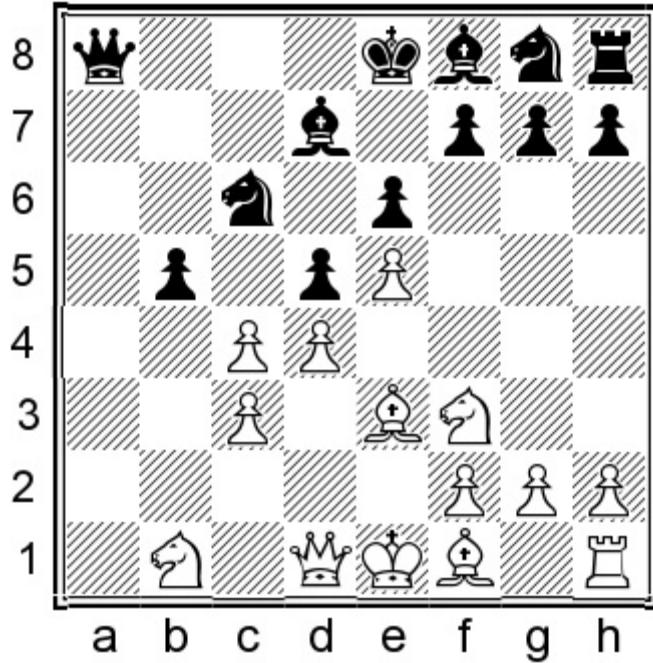
An early ...c5-c4 is still a major idea in today’s handling of the Advance Variation, most often played after 5...♝b6 6.a3. This last move makes 6...c4 a little better than in the present game because of the weakness of the b3-square.

White’s next two moves, attacking Black’s pawn chain, look very modern and propel us three centuries forward into Nimzowitsch’s day. Also, Black’s answers, keeping his pawn chain intact, are completely sound.

7.b3!? b5 8.a4!? a6 9.axb5

Maintaining the tension with 9.♗e2 looks better.

9...axb5 10.♗xa8 ♛xa8 11.bxc4



(Exercise no 8)

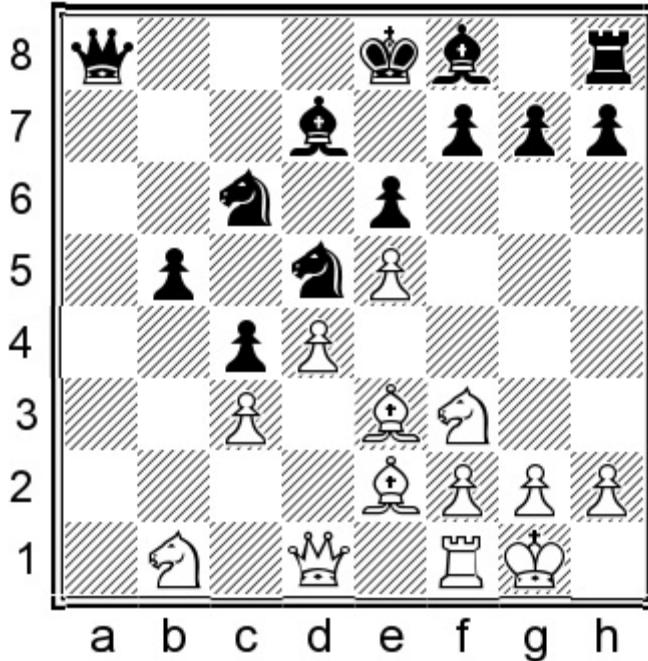
11...dxc4!?

The other option, 11...bxc4, is a more solid choice and is certainly not worse (*1 point* for everyone), but on this occasion Black is more ambitious.

12.♘e2??!

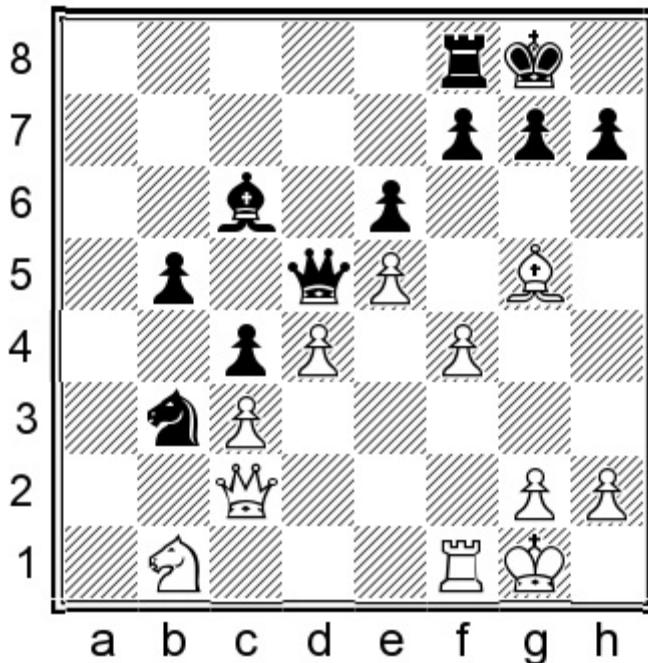
12.d5! was the only move to avoid the looming positional disaster, leading to a complicated position.

12...♗ge7 13.0-0 ♗d5



Black now has a beautiful knight on a strong square, blockading White's central pawn majority. This diagram would not have been at all out of place in *My System*. Later on in the game Black's queen and bishop will take over the blockading duties on d5, forming a powerful battery on the long diagonal. This is also in line with the ideas set forth by Nimzowitsch in the 20th century.

14.♕d2 ♕e7 15.♗g5 ♕xg5 16.♕xg5 0-0 17.♕f3 ♗a5 18.♕xd5 ♖xd5 19.f4 ♕c6 20.♖d2 ♗b3 21.♖c2



(Exercise no 9)

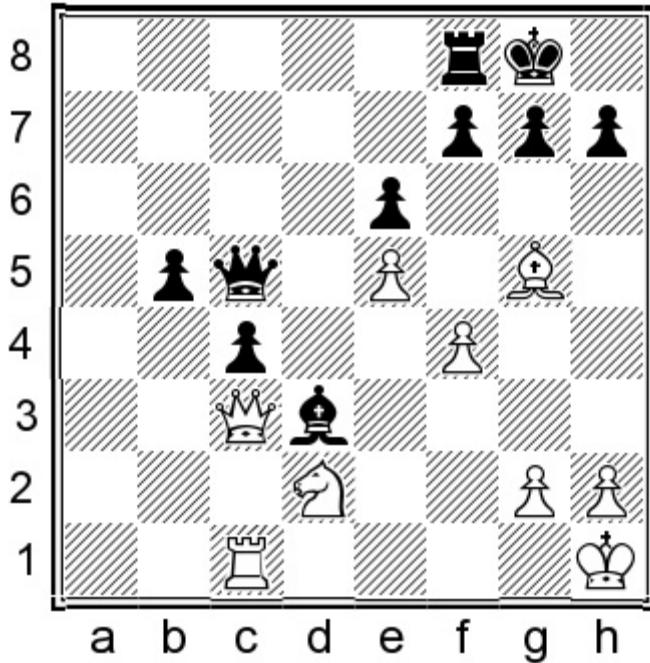
In the previous phase, a few dubious things happened, but by now Black is firmly in control again. I gave this position as an exercise, although there is no clear best move (and a lot of attractive ones). The

engine likes the odd-looking 21... $\mathbb{E}e8$ best, which incidentally might have been Nimzowitsch's choice, as a prophylactic measure against White's manoeuvre $\mathbb{L}g5-e7-b4$ to blockade Black's majority. That would have been very sophisticated.

The most obvious move is taking control of the only open file with 21... $\mathbb{E}a8$, maybe followed by ... $\mathbb{E}a1$. Black is much better, although he has to keep an eye on White's attacking chances on the kingside. Greco must have contemplated this last possibility, but he chose adventure by sacrificing a piece for two far-advanced and well-supported passed pawns. Did you consider this option?

As we will see in the next chapter, Philidor is commonly identified as the one 'who taught us the power of passed pawns', but evidently Greco was well aware of this already. Some more of his games show him advancing two passed pawns towards promotion.

21... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!?$ 22.cxd4 $\mathbb{W}xd4+$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{E}e4$ 24. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 26. $\mathbb{E}c1$



26... $\mathbb{E}c8$

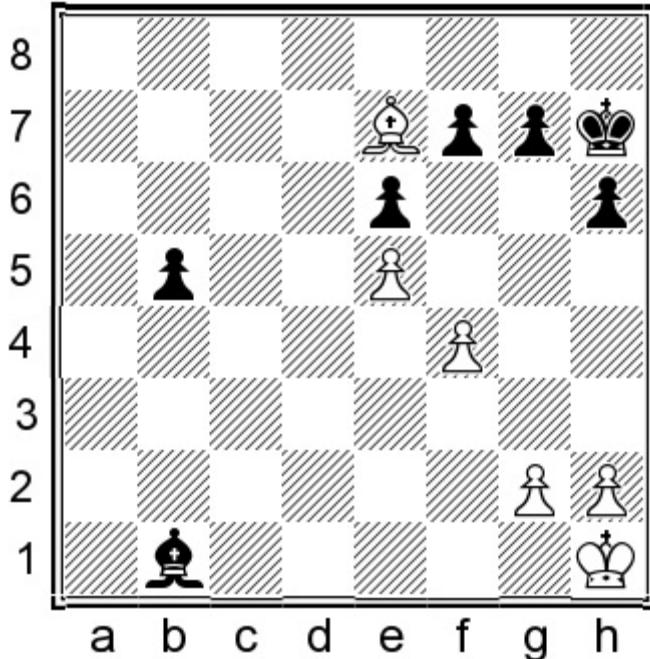
Both sides have back-rank issues, but 26... $\mathbb{E}a8$ would have given Black good winning chances; 27. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ fails to 27... $cxd3$ 28. $\mathbb{E}xc5$ $\mathbb{E}a1+$.

After the move played, White might have saved himself by blockading the black pawns with another tricky move, 27. $\mathbb{E}e7!$.

27. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $cxb3!?$

Deep tactics, but 27... $\mathbb{W}a3$ might have been a bit better.

28. $\mathbb{W}xc5$ $\mathbb{E}xc5$ 29. $\mathbb{E}xc5$ h6 30. $\mathbb{E}c3$ b2 31. $\mathbb{E}b3$ b1= $\mathbb{W}+$ 32. $\mathbb{E}xb1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb1$ 33. $\mathbb{E}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$



The smoke has cleared and the resulting opposite-coloured bishops endgame should be a draw, but Greco finally manages to outplay his opponent with some fine manoeuvres. Considering that this is the first endgame (of this type) from practical play ever to be recorded, the level of Black's play is impressive.

34.g4 ♜e4+ 35.♗g1 ♜f3 36.h3 h5 37.g5 ♜g6 38.♗f2 ♜d5 39.♗e3 h4 40.♗f2 ♜f5 41.♗e3 ♜g2 42.♗f8 g6 43.♗b4 ♜xh3 44.♗e1 ♜g4 45.♗d2 ♜g2 46.♗f2 h3 47.♗c1 ♜d5 48.♗g1 ♜g3 49.♗e3 h2+ 50.♗f1 h1=♛+ 0-1

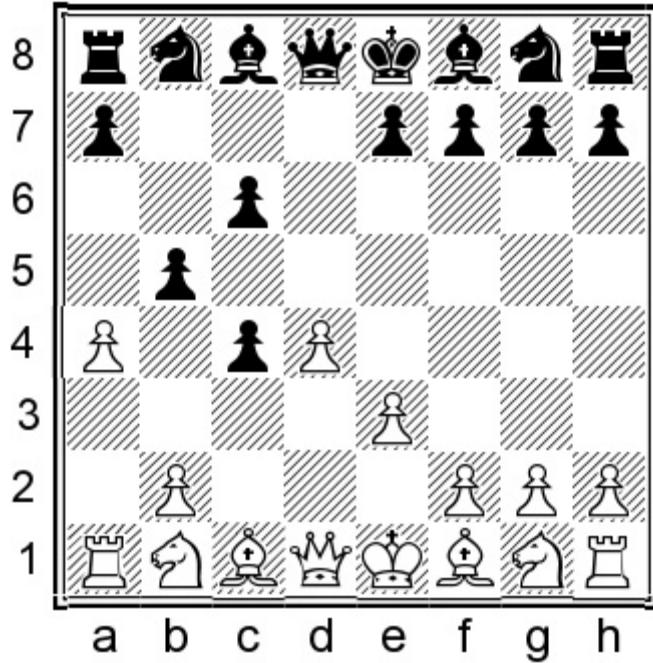
It has been said about various different players in the history of chess that they were well ahead of their time: it was said about Philidor and Morphy, and even about Chigorin, although he was often characterized as a Romantic player (meaning someone from the past), and of course about Steinitz. Actually, Steinitz himself, not awaiting the verdict of chess historians, at the end of his career claimed to have been twenty years ahead of his time.

Looking at the remarkable game above, I'd like to add Greco to this list, being some three centuries (!) ahead of his time.

There are only a few Queen's Pawn games in this collection, but how relevant they are.

Gioacchino Greco – NN

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 b5? 4.a4! c6



(Exercise no 10)

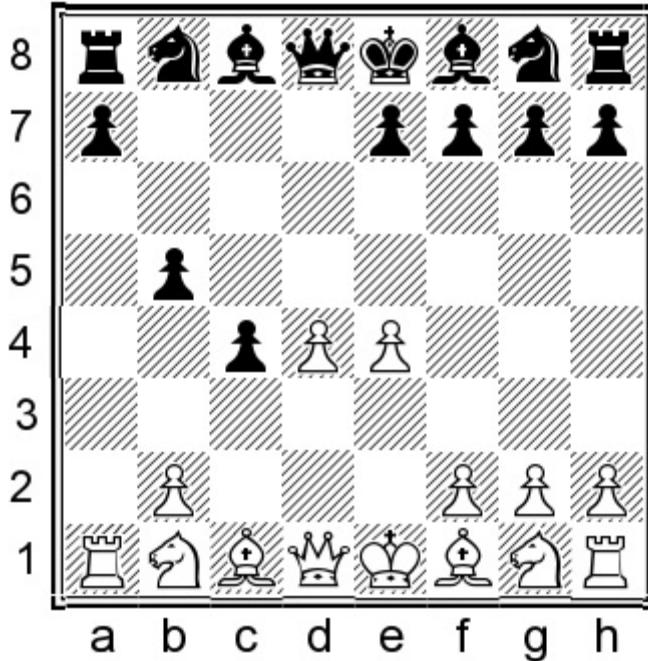
5.axb5 cxb5 6.Wf3 1-0

In my database no fewer than 251 players have followed in the footsteps of NN's 3...b5?, and 83 of them failed to see 6.Wf3 coming until it was too late.

The next Queen's Gambit sees Greco, despite his quick success in the previous game, varying with another important move.

Gioacchino Greco – NN

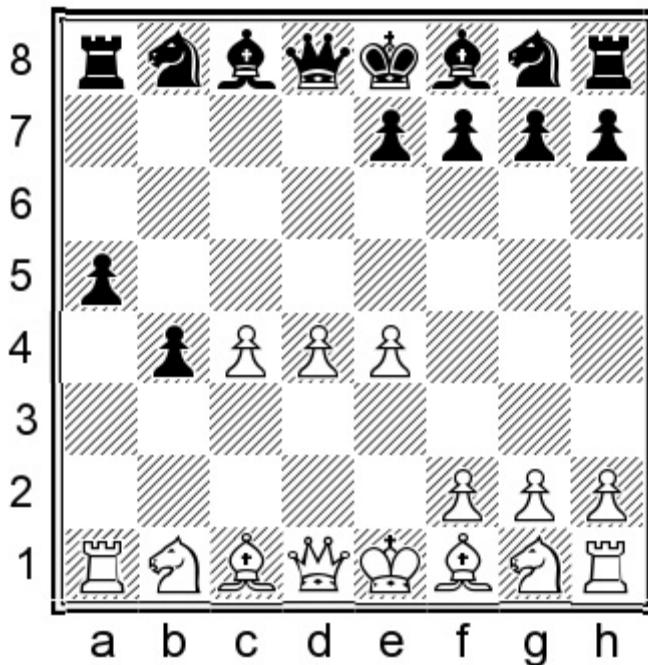
1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e4 b5 4.a4 c6 5.axb5 cxb5



This position is still played in today's practice, with 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ as the main move. Greco's next move is probably not the best, but is again his trademark way of attacking a pawn chain.

A typical modern response for Black would be to play (6.b3) 6...e5 and, after White's 7.d5, quick development with 7... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, maybe followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ or ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$.

6.b3 a5 7.bxc4 b4



White's central pawn majority outweighs Black's queenside passed pawns and he went on to win this game.

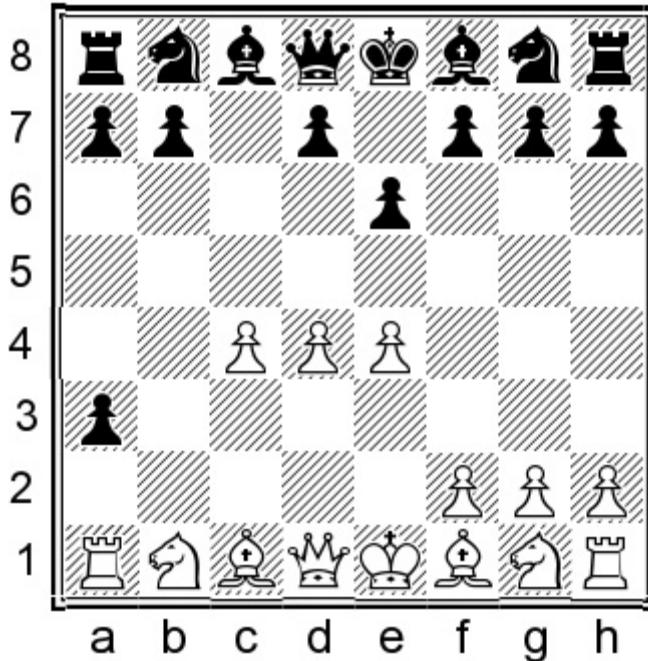
One of the clichés regarding the Italian school tells us that those players didn't care for control of the centre, only for rapid development of their pieces. This position is just one of many in Greco's

collection that prove the opposite.

Greco was also confronted with the Sicilian Defence, and his weapon of choice was the Wing Gambit.

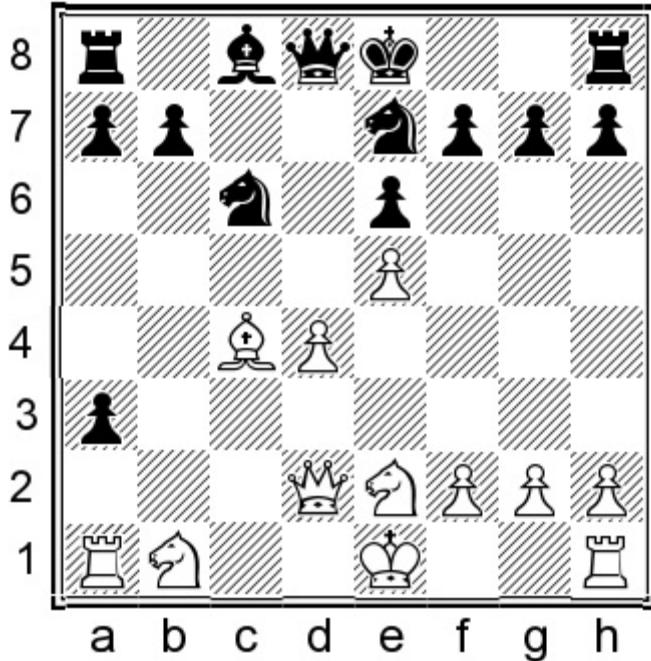
Gioacchino Greco – NN

1.e4 c5 2.b4 cxb4 3.d4 e6 4.a3 bxa3 5.c4



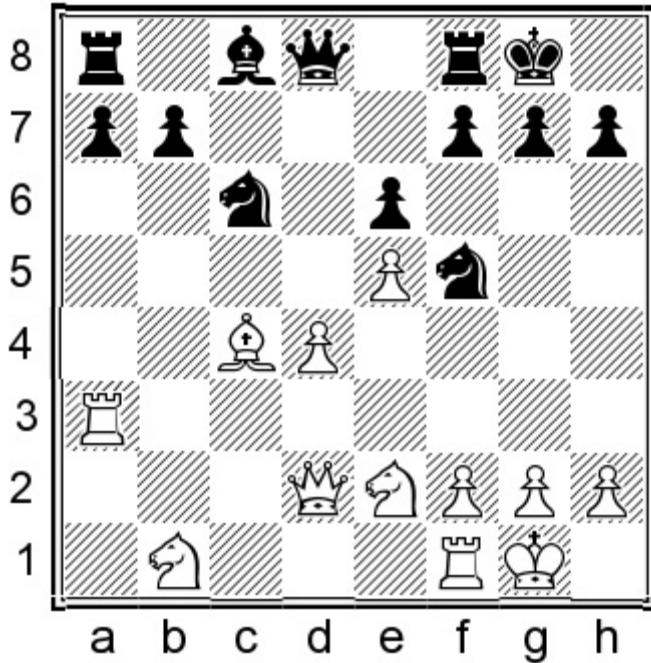
Given a free hand, Greco likes to build up a big centre, as we have seen before. However, on this occasion quick piece development might have been better.

5... $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 7. $\mathbb{W}xd2$ d5 8.e5 dx c 4 9. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$



And here we have the first rook lift in chess history!

11.♖xa3 0-0 12.0-0 ♜f5



13.♖d3

And it has become a defensive rook lift. Another idea for White was to play 13.♖fd1, keeping the option of employing the a3-rook on the kingside instead.

Black is doing okay at this point, but lost eventually after a complicated struggle.

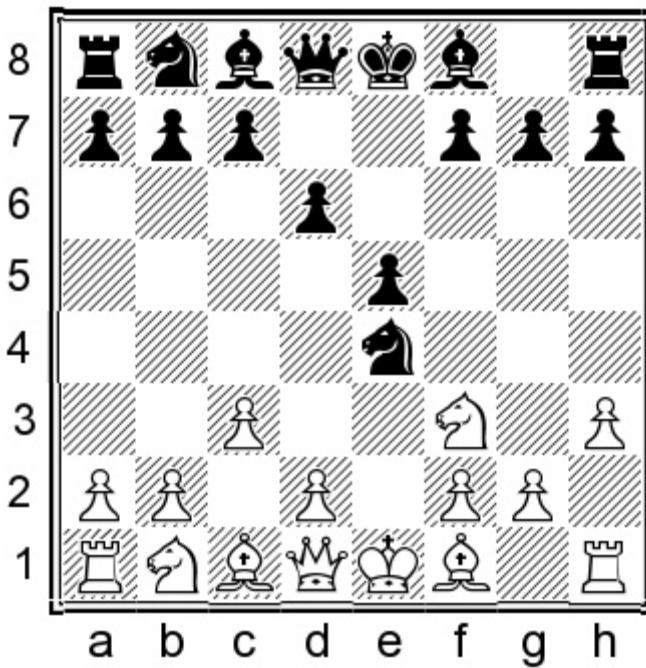
The number of games with openings other than the Italian Game and the King's Gambit in Greco's

collection is very limited, but all of them are relevant, even today, and they offer a lot of interesting tactical *and* positional ideas.

I will end this tribute to Greco with two tactical ideas, one very easy and one rather difficult.

Gioacchino Greco – NN

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.h3 ♘f6 4.c3 ♘xe4?

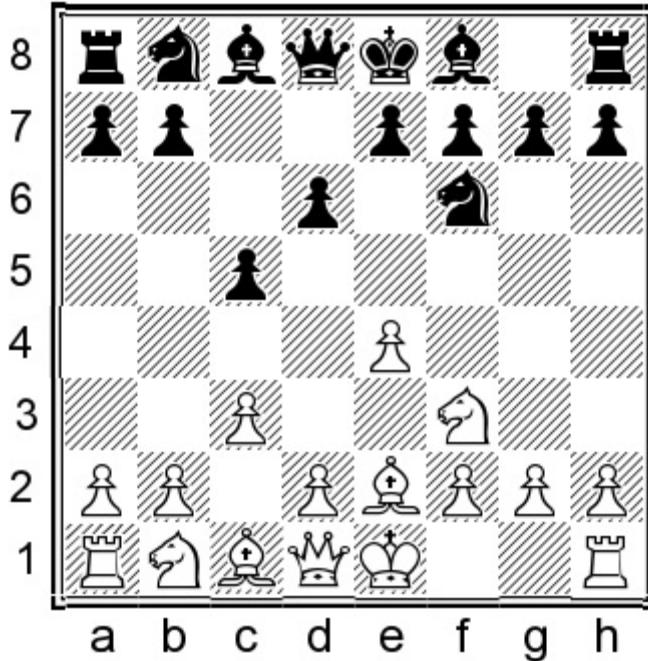


(Exercise no 11)

5.♗a4+ 1-0

You may ask why I'm bothering you with such a simple tactic, but it does play a role in quite a few opening lines. For example in the Sicilian Defence:

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.c3 ♘f6 4.♗e2



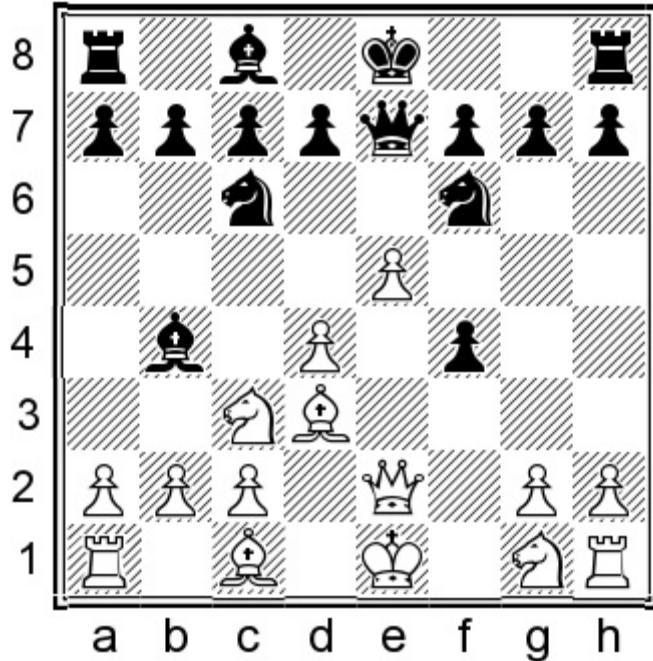
4.... $\mathbb{Q}xe4?$ 5. $\mathbb{W}a4+$

In my database I have 185 games with this position. I wanted to say ‘that finished like this’ and indeed, in some of these games Black promptly resigned, but in the majority of them Black continued; together the black players even managed to score a ‘respectable’ 18 per cent! Most of these games are between weaker players, a lot of them from junior championships. A case can be made for not (fully) entering those championships into databases. I sadly admit that, long ago, I myself fell for a version of this trick.

The next position is more complicated.

Gioacchino Greco – NN

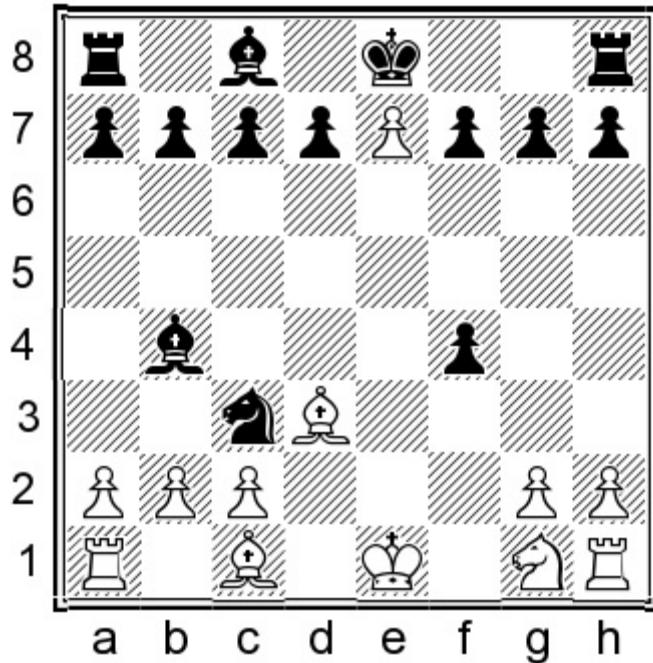
1.e4 e5 2.f4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ exf4 4.d4 $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 6. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7.e5



(Exercise no 12)

From the two alternatives that I offered for this exercise, 7... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ is the relatively safe choice, with about equal chances, and it is the move that had to be played. But when playing 7.e5 White had to reckon with Black taking the pawn:

7... $\mathbb{Q}xd4?$ 8.exf6 $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 9.fxe7 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$



These moves were all forced, and maybe Black stopped calculating at this point, since he seemed to have regained his sacrificed piece with some extra pawns.

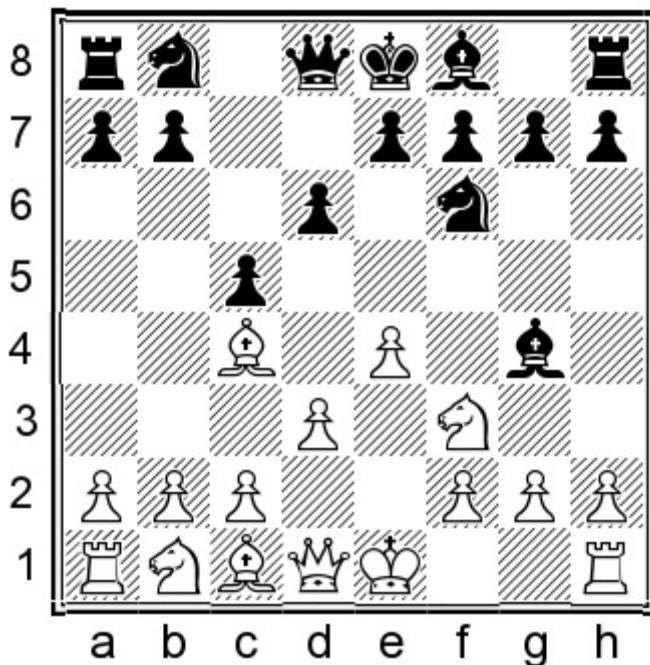
10.a3! ♜a5 11.♗d2 1-0

All this had to be foreseen by White when playing 7.e5 – high-level calculation!

This particular pin is not an everyday tactical mechanism but it might come in handy once or twice in your chess-playing life. Incidentally it played a role in a recent game of mine. I only found out at home, though I did have a ‘Greco experience’ earlier in that game.

Willy Hendriks – Nick Bijlsma Arnhem 2018

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗c4 ♘f6 4.d3 ♗g4?!

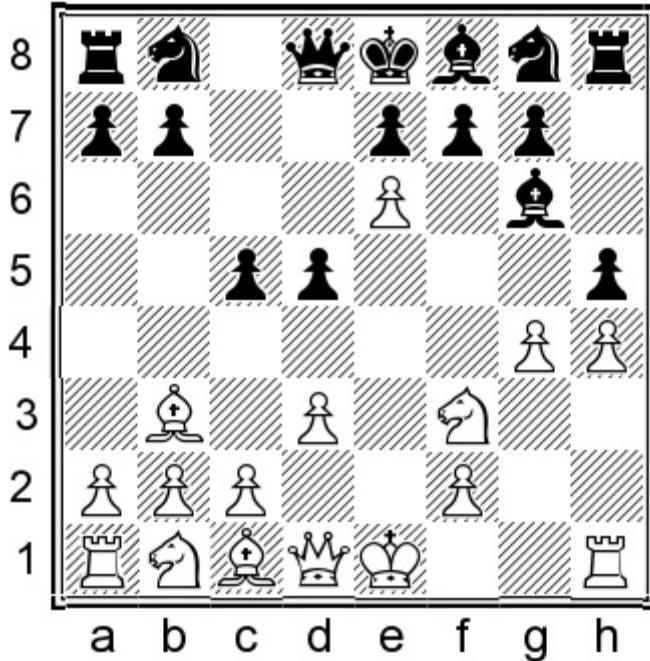


This move didn’t look familiar to me and I quickly discovered what was wrong with it. Studying Greco’s games might have been a help.

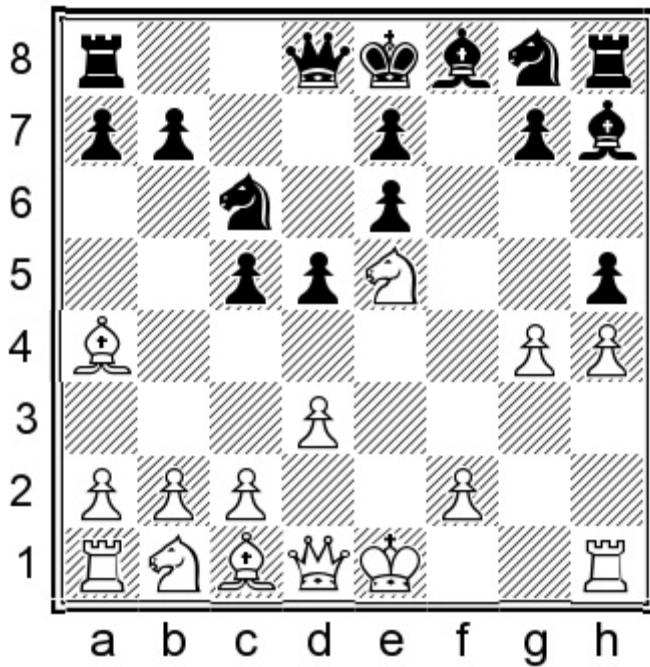
5.e5! d5

A sad necessity. The move Black relied on was of course 5...dxe5 (*Exercise no 13*) but then 6.♗xf7+! ♕xf7 7.♘xe5 is winning, or, even more in style, 6.♘xe5! ♕xd1? 7.♗xf7 mate. That could have been a Greco miniature.

6.♗b3 ♗g8 7.h3 ♘h5 8.g4 ♗g6 9.h4 h5 10.e6



A sharp position. I thought 10...fxe6 was impossible because of 11.♗e5, attacking the bishop and threatening 12.♗a4+. And after 11...♝h7 12.♗a4+ ♚c6 White indeed has a win:



(Exercise no 14)

With 13.♗f3! ♜f6 14.g5 White wins a piece – but not with the planned 13.♗xc6 because of 13...♝d7!, Greco's mechanism which I missed.

In the game Black continued with the best move 10...♝c6 with a double-edged position he eventually lost.

This book is about the development of our knowledge of chess and of our abilities to play a good game.

A central question in this investigation is what brings about progress in this development. One can think of two extremes: great abstract ideas (like Philidor's idea from the next chapter about pawns as 'the soul of chess') on the one side and the quantity and quality of all the bits and pieces of concrete knowledge on the other side.

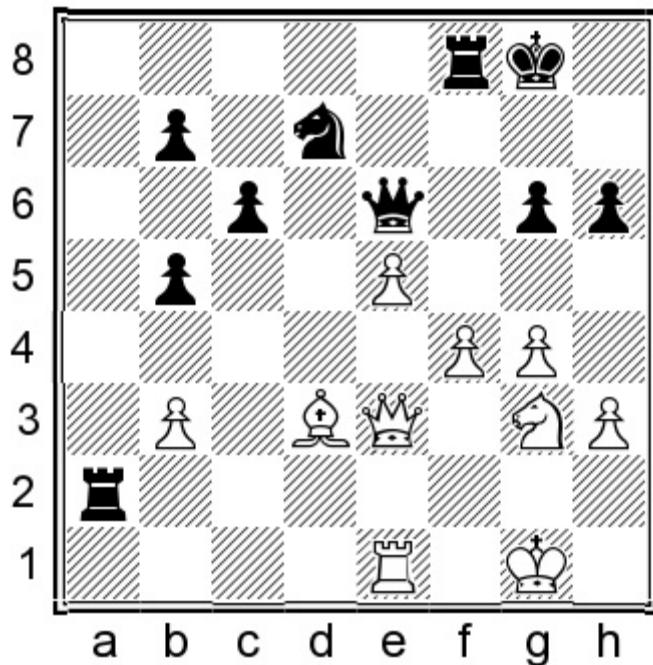
If we look at those bits and pieces in Greco's collection of games, I think his heritage is gigantic, in terms of both quality and quantity. Very relevant opening lines, different kingside attacking ideas, lots of pawn chain attacks, the rook lift, the beautiful blockading knight on d5, all kinds of concrete tactics like the Greek Gift, the h-file opening mechanism, the pin on the ♜c3 – to name but a few. Even such a simple tactic as ♘a4 check, picking up the ♜e4, is an important bit of chess knowledge.

I hope this small selection from this huge treasure trove has given a good picture of Greco's achievements. All the games by Greco are in the (online) databases and the interested reader is well advised to play them over.

So let's continue with the footnotes!

Exercises for Chapter 3

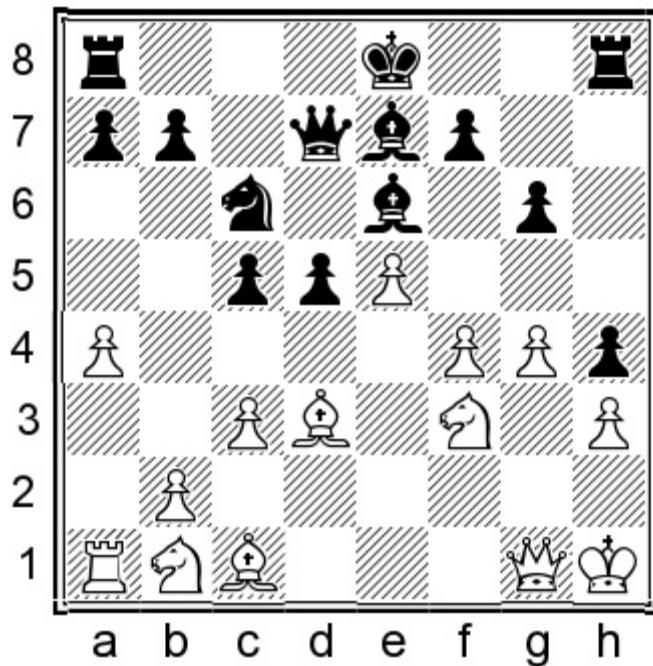
15 (go to the solution)



Black to move

Is White's compensation sufficient?

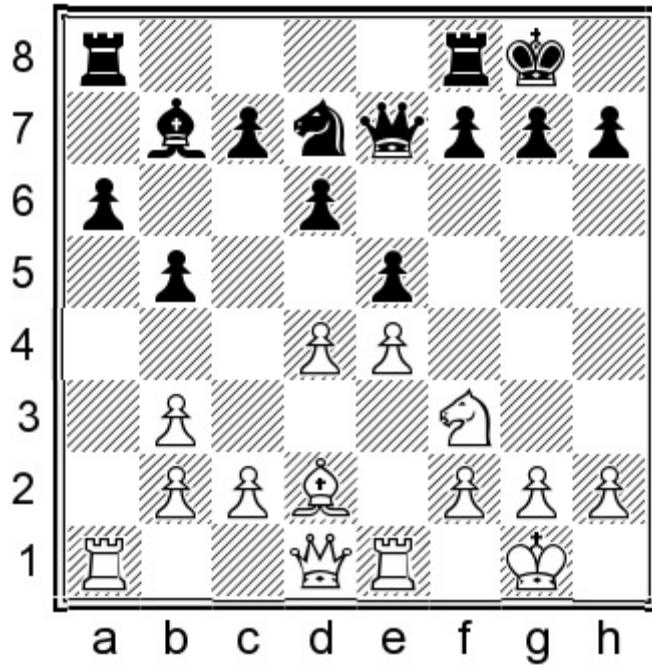
16 (go to the solution)



Black to move

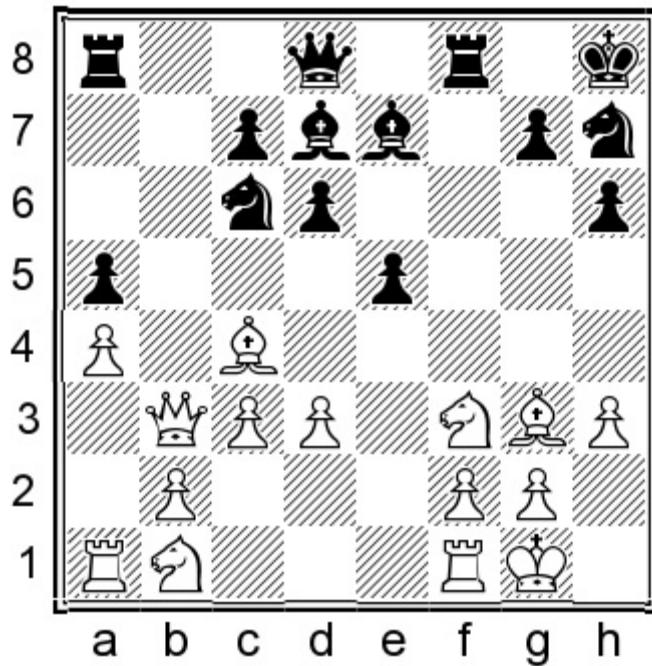
And the same question here.

17 (*go to the solution*)

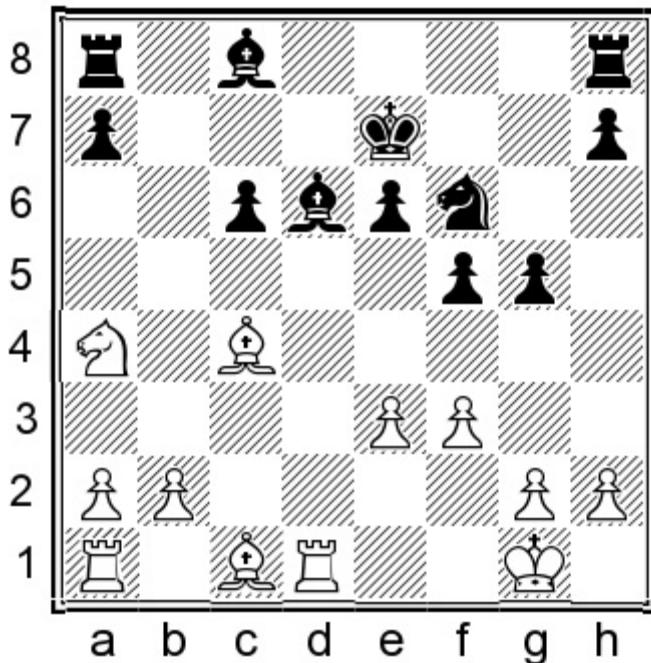


Black to move

18 (*go to the solution*)



Black to move

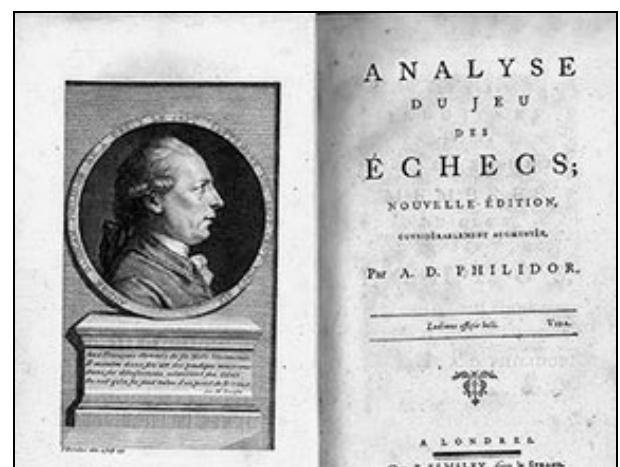


White to move

3

With a little help from the opponent

Most books on the history of chess make a leap of a century after Greco and go directly to the Frenchman François-André Danican Philidor (1726-1795). Although a few things happened in-between, he was the next player considered to stand head and shoulders above his contemporaries. Philidor had great talents for both music and chess and made a career in both. After beating the best players from France and England, the two countries he travelled between, Philidor was recognized as the strongest player alive for almost all of the second half of the 18th century.



According to the English chess historian Harold Murray (in his magnum opus *A History of Chess*) this was not that great an achievement: ‘It was an age of mediocre players, among whom Philidor stood easily first, but even he made mistakes repeatedly which would have been fatal against players of average skill who were not frightened into incapacity by the reputation of the master.’⁸

The previous chapter ended with the opposition between small pieces of concrete knowledge versus big ideas. If we look at Philidor from this perspective, his legacy falls for the bigger part in the latter category. This is partly due to the unlucky fact that in those days recording games was more a rarity

than common practice. Of the games with which Philidor built up his reputation as the best of his time, not a single one has been preserved. All we have is a small number of games on even terms, some blindfold games and a number of games played at odds, all from the later years of his career.

What he did leave was the book that he wrote at an early age, *Analyse du jeu des Échecs*. This book consists of a number of analysed games and some fine work on several endgames.

Philidor's work concerns the central role of pawns in chess. From the introduction to *l'Analyse*: 'My main purpose is to gain recognition for myself by means of a new idea of which no one has conceived, or perhaps has been unable to practice; that is, good play of the pawns; they are the soul of chess: it is they alone that determine the attack and the defense, and the winning or losing of the game depends entirely on their good or bad arrangement.'

I cannot deny that, like Philidor, I prefer to write something completely new instead of adding some small refinements. Before Philidor though, there was very little theory on the 'essentials' of chess, so almost any idea would be novel. But as I tried to demonstrate in the previous chapters, Greco was already 'able to practice' quite something regarding the 'good arrangement' of his pawns. However, I do not know how well acquainted Philidor was with Greco's games. He didn't have a high opinion of them, because Greco 'achieved the win in his games often in a risky way and only thanks to mistakes made by the opponent, without ever drawing the attention of the reader to these errors on both sides.'⁹

But as we will shortly see, one might argue that Philidor himself was even more outstanding at this 'technique'.

Several elements of pawn play are covered by Philidor, one of them the important strategy of creating a pawn majority that will ultimately lead to a win in the endgame. For *My Great Predecessors* Kasparov selected only one game from Philidor's book, the first one, an example of exactly this strategy. The way he comments on this game (or, actually, does not comment) is enlightening about some peculiarities of Philidor's analysis.

A bit later in Kasparov's chapter on the early days of chess we see him commenting on a famous game of Anderssen against Kieseritzky, the so-called 'Immortal Game'. Kasparov analyses this game in great detail, correctly adding several question marks and concluding: 'Objectively the game is rather weak and superficial, but what a finish!'

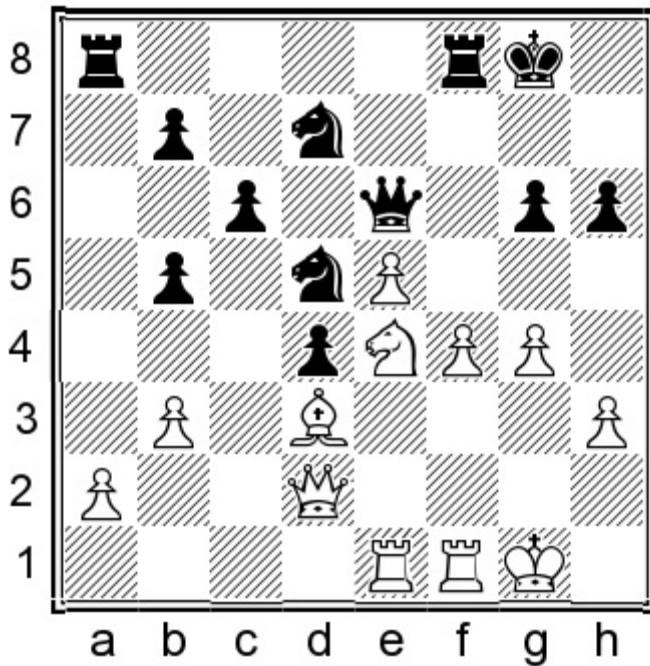
In this book I'll try to avoid as much as possible the well-known games that are shown in every textbook, but have a look at the needlework in the photo, which I encountered in the collection of Dutch chess historian Leo Hovestadt. He unfortunately couldn't tell me anything about its origin but the fact that someone created a work like this is a nice illustration of the great impression this game has left upon earlier generations.

Needlework of 'The Immortal Game'.



Some pages before Kasparov extensively analyses the Immortal Game, he gives the next fragment of a game by Philidor, but here the analytical scrutiny is completely absent and all that seems to count is the idea, and not the objective value of the moves.

Philidor l'Analyse, game one



White to move

White's pawn majority on the kingside looks more threatening than the black one on the queenside and his strategy is to get the pawns moving.

23.♗g3 ♗e3 24.♕xe3!

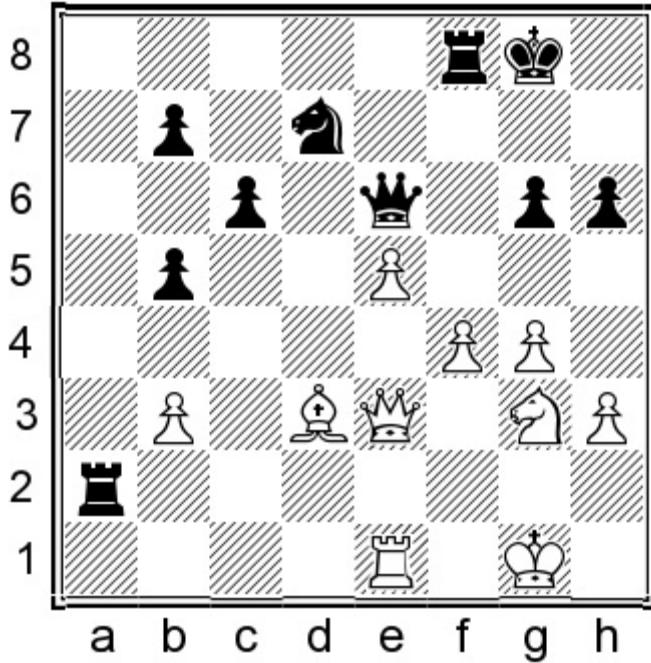
Kasparov now and then quotes Philidor, but also gives his own comments. The exclamation mark seems to be his.

24...dxe3 25.♕xe3 ♕xa2

Kasparov: 'The inhibiting 25...♚ae8 would appear to be more tenacious, although here too White has an appreciable advantage.' Only the very last part of this sentence is true.

26.♕e1!

Again an exclamation mark and quoting Philidor that by covering the pawn on e5, White is preparing for f4-f5.



(Exercise no 15)

Until the end of this game the comments by Kasparov and quotations from Philidor maintain the same optimistic tone, but the fact is that White simply has a losing position. It's hard to imagine that Kasparov wasn't aware of this or that he didn't notice that the rest of this game is full of mistakes and that Black was winning on several occasions.

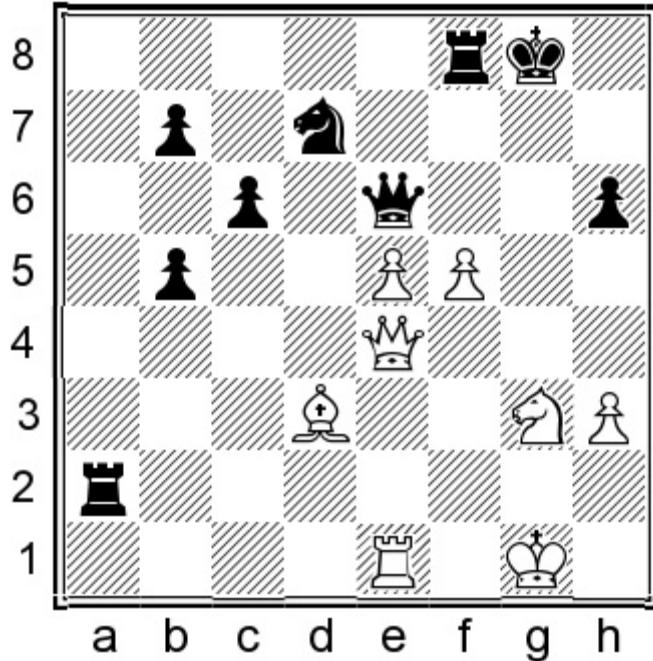
Basically, Black is an exchange up, f4-f5 is not that much of a threat, and he has all sorts of counterplay, White's king is exposed and his pieces, though active, are a bit loose. And Black's pieces aren't that bad either.

Best was 26... $\mathbb{W}b2$. If 27.f5, Black can choose between 27... $\mathbb{W}d5$ and 27... $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 28. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathcal{Q}xe5$ 29. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{B}xb3$, both giving a decisive advantage.

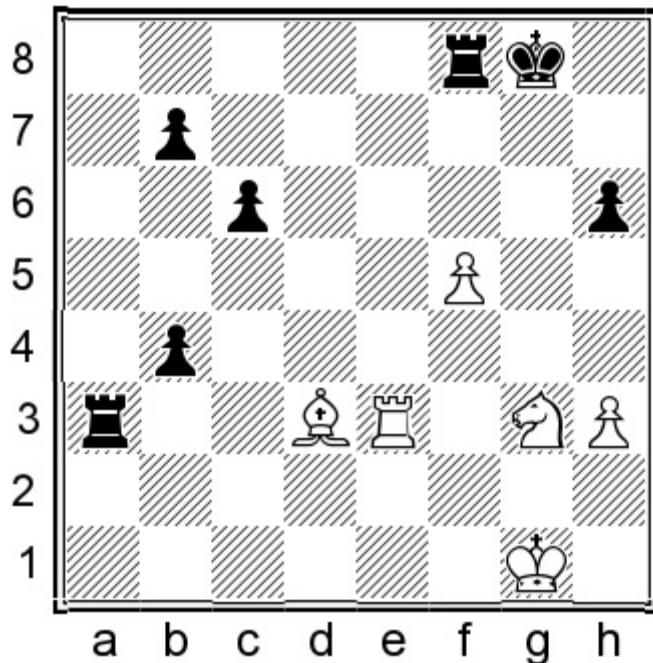
26... $\mathbb{W}xb3$ 27. $\mathbb{W}e4$ $\mathbb{W}e6$ 28.f5!

One more exclamation mark for this, but 28. $\mathbb{W}xg6+$ would have been much better. Now 28... $\mathbb{W}b3$ would be winning, threatening 28... $\mathcal{Q}c5$, and 29.f6 is nicely met by 29... $\mathcal{Q}xe5$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}xd3$ (after 31. $\mathbb{W}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 32. $\mathbb{W}xa2$ Black has 32... $\mathbb{W}xg3+$).

28...gxf5 29.gxf5



‘Here it is, Philidor’s dream!’, says Kasparov. But although Black has already missed a clear win, he still is much better. The move played is not bad but the other sensible try, giving some material back, also looks good, for example 29... $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{R}a3$ 32. $\mathbb{R}e3$ b4.

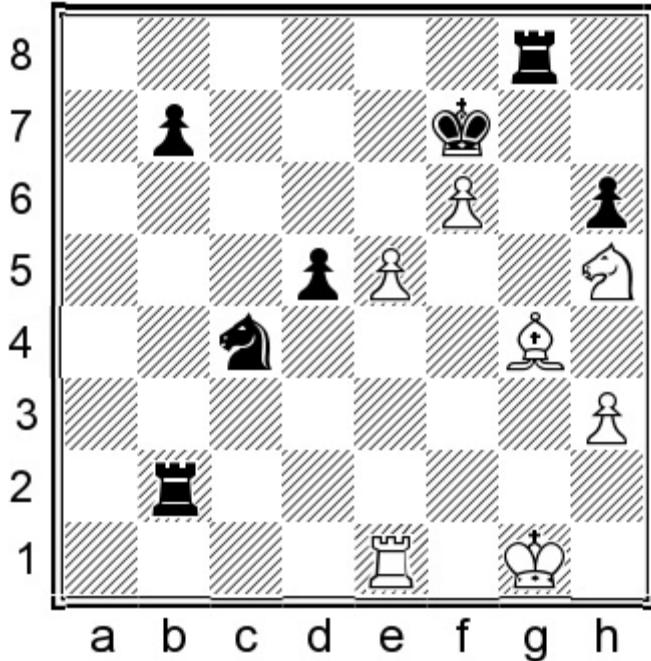


Here something like Philidor’s dream is developing on the other side of the board.

29... $\mathbb{W}d5$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xd5+$ $\mathbf{cxd5}$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$

Better was 31... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ with Black still on top. After some more mutual errors White’s pawns finally manage to break through.

32.f6 $\mathbb{R}b2$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{R}g8+$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}g4$



36... $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 37. $e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 38. $f7$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}f4+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 1-0

The scenario that Philidor displayed here, with the pawns steaming up the board, is a valuable contribution to chess strategy, although in this example it shouldn't have worked at all. I don't understand why noticing this should be a problem, so it puzzles me why Kasparov, who normally is very keen on analysing exactly what is happening, doesn't give a single hint that this fragment is full of mistakes and actually losing for White for the most part.

Since this is the only fragment from Philidor presented by Kasparov he might have felt a bit uneasy admitting that it resembles a comedy of errors. It would have contrasted too much with the glorifying comments that follow:

'Philidor discovered the eternal principle of the coordination of the forces – "genuine attacks are carried out by the unified efforts of many pieces" (in this respect his best pupil was Morphy),' Kasparov states directly after the above fragment.

I think this link to Morphy is rather far-fetched (more about that later), but the first part really rings hollow. If you look at Greco's games you already find beautiful examples of coordinated action – and moreover, coordination of your forces is such a basic principle in chess that it can hardly be 'discovered' by anyone. Every player that rises above the level of a beginner develops a feeling for the coordination of their pieces and the stronger the player gets the better they will coordinate.

A bit later on we read that 'the problem for the further development of chess was that the great French master was too far ahead of his time: no one was able to play successfully in the manner proposed by him [...] The chess world was simply not yet ready for the general principles of positional play.'

If we look at the second game in Philidor's book, the problem that I think Kasparov was confronted with becomes clearer. Again the quality of play by both sides is rather low.

These games are analyses – or maybe it's better to call them constructed, probably just like Greco's

games. It has been suggested that for didactic reasons Philidor made one side play badly and the other side demonstrate the proper way of play:

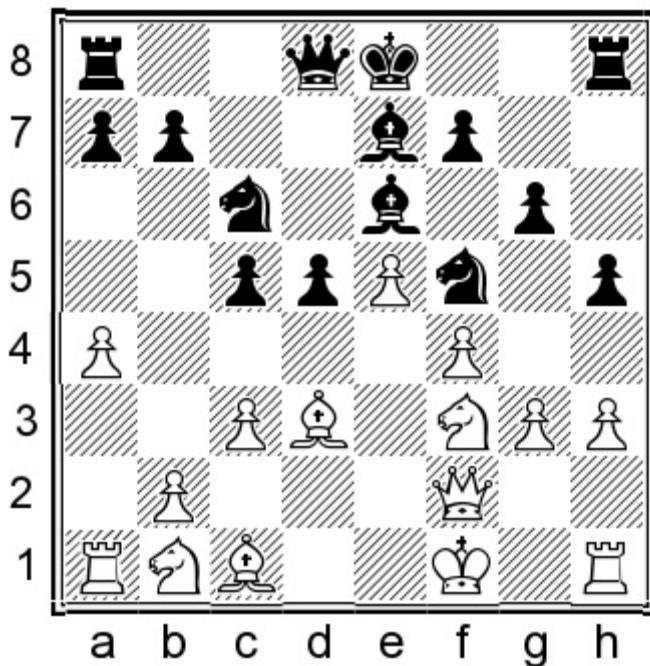
'Philidor's method has the disadvantage that, while he makes the winning side play what he considers the best moves, the losing side merely represents the type of player he would ordinarily encounter, that is, one who uses faulty strategy. [...] The winning side knows how to play, the losing side does not. Philidor sets out to teach and he does magnificently. He is very doctrinaire, to the point of nonsense at times, but he did not write for master players.'¹⁰

I'm not that sure about the didactic value of these games. For one thing, contrary to the above statement, not only 'the losing side does not know how to play', but quite often the winning side doesn't either. In many games, Philidor is the one with the faulty strategy, which succeeds thanks to a lot of errors by the opponent.

In the second game, just like in the first one, the ultimately winning side, playing in the favoured style, ends up in a completely lost position.

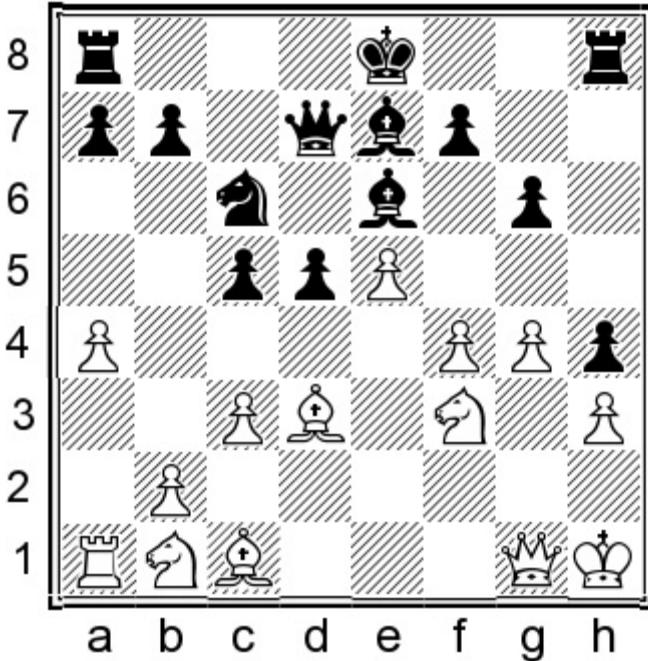
Philidor l'Analyse, game two

1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 c6 3.d4 exd4 4.♗xd4 d6 5.f4 ♘e6 6.♘d3 d5 7.e5 c5 8.♗f2 ♗c6 9.c3 g6 10.h3 h5 11.g3 ♘h6 12.♗f3 ♘e7 13.a4 ♘f5 14.♔f1



A strange move, but Philidor wants to encourage Black to win the exchange.

14...h4 15.g4 ♘g3+ 16.♔g2 ♘xh1 17.♔xh1 ♖d7 18.♗g1



(Exercise no 16)

The remarkable fact here is that Philidor is constructing a model game for White, but until this point it is Black who has played almost perfectly. In his note to move 17 Philidor says that although a rook is generally stronger than a knight, in this case White is better off, since it took Black some time to gain the exchange and by now White has a very safe king and attacking chances whichever side Black chooses to castle on.

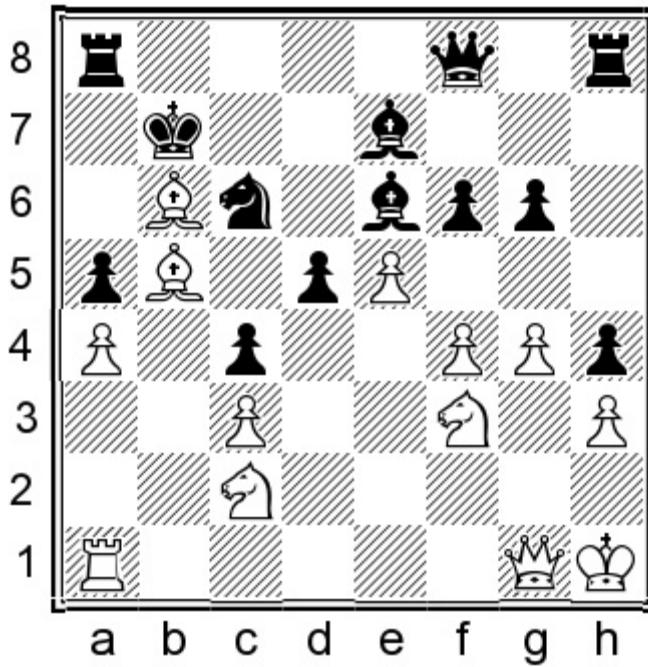
I'm sure you noticed that, quite on the contrary, Black is the one with the beautiful position, as well as being an exchange up. His pawn structure is by no means worse than White's, and the duo in the centre looks especially nice. Despite having spent some time on winning the exchange, he has somehow managed to achieve far better development. White has used his time partly to push forward nearly all of his pawns – a typical feature of Philidor's general strategy. One danger of this strategy is illustrated in this position: his king is actually rather unsafe and might become a target as soon as the position opens up.

Black is winning and he has several attractive moves, but most logical looks 18...d4, possibly followed by castling queenside, or the other way around. After 18...d4 White may regret having played a2-a4, as he can't keep the position closed with 19.c4 because of 19...♝b4.

In his book *Veldheerschap op 64 velden* (later translated as *The Development of Chess Style*), Euwe chose this game to illustrate Philidor's ideas. Just like Kasparov, Euwe must have felt a bit uncomfortable with this 'illustration'. On Philidor's verdict that White has the superior position, Euwe comments: 'The position is indeed difficult, but the conclusion that White has the advantage goes maybe a bit far.'¹¹ Quite an understatement!

There now follows a series of horrible moves by Black that I won't comment on any further, finally resulting in the desired win by White.

18...a5 19.♗e3 b6 20.♘a3 0-0-0 21.♗a6+ ♖c7 22.♘c2 ♕a8 23.♗b5 ♔d8 24.b4 ♔f8 25.bxc5 bxc5
26.♘d2 c4 27.♘f3 f6 28.♗b6+ ♖b7



A few things have gone wrong.

29.♗xc6+ ♖xc6 30.♘fd4+ ♖d7 31.f5 ♗g8 32.e6+ ♖e8 33.♘b5 ♗d6 34.♔d4

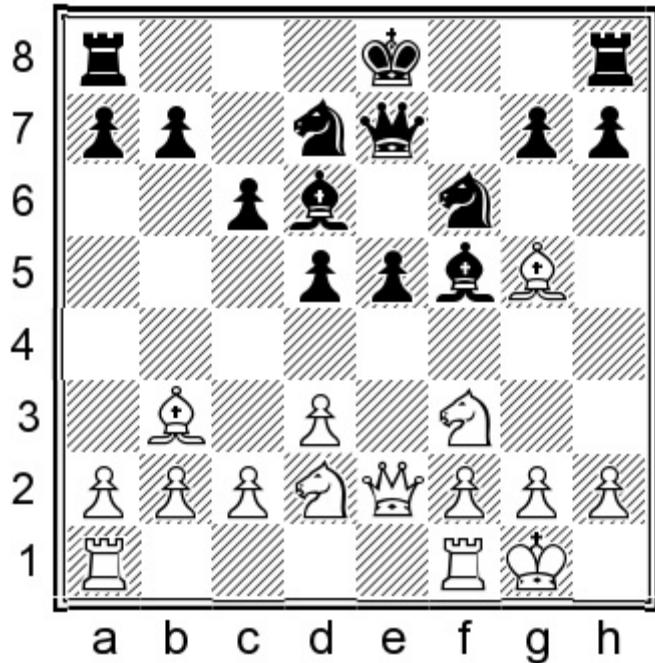
and White wins.

Exchanging the f-pawn for the e-pawn

The opening from the third game in *l'Analyse* has become known as the Philidor Defence. It starts with 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6. For Philidor the main idea was not to follow up with a quick ...♘f6 but first to play ...f7-f5, considering that the exchange of the f-pawn for the e-pawn is a very advantageous one. This is one of the cornerstones and also one of the most concrete ideas within Philidor's theory of handling the pawns.

Philidor l'Analyse, game three

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.♗c4 f5 4.d3 c6 5.exf5 ♗xf5 6.♗g5 ♘f6 7.♘bd2 d5 8.♗b3 ♗d6 9.♗e2 ♗e7 10.0-0
♘bd7

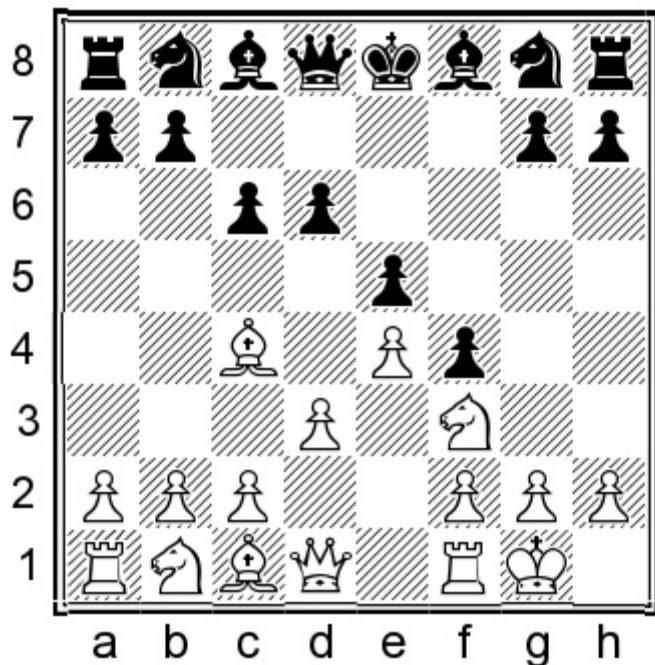


Black's opening has been a success. He controls the centre, thanks to the exchange of the e- and f-pawns, and has developed his pieces nicely. Kingside castling would bring his rook directly into play on the f-file.

If White doesn't take on f5 on move 5, Philidor has the interesting plan of continuing with ...f5-f4 and start a pawn avalanche on the kingside, a plan which anticipates Black's main attack in the King's Indian.

5.0-0 f4

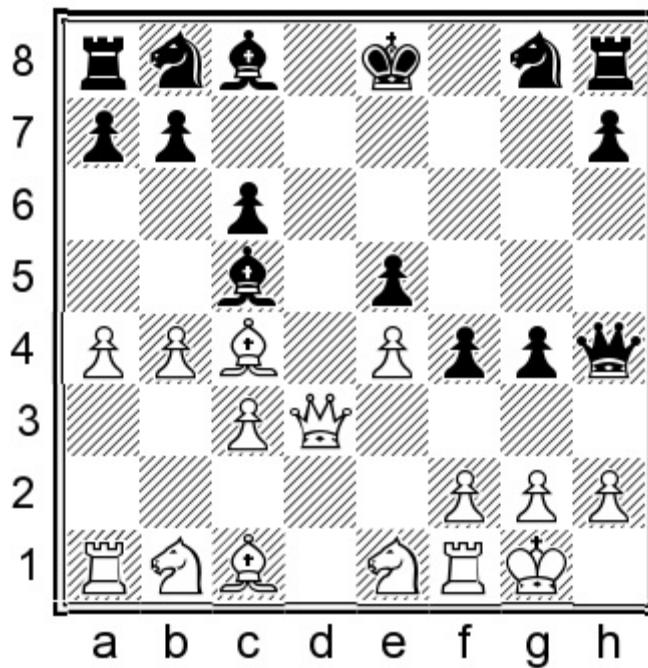
Philidor l'Analyse game three, second variation



White to move

The start of Black's kingside expansion plan. Black is, however, poorly developed, which makes this idea in this position rather dubious. One interesting option that immediately catches the eye is 6.♗xe5, probably resulting in an endgame with three pawns for the piece after 6...dxe5 7.♔h5+ ♔d7 8.♕xe5 ♕f6! 9.♕xf4 ♕xf4 10.♕xf4. These (advanced) tactics invariably fall outside Philidor's scope.

6.d4 ♕f6 7.dxe5 dxe5 8.a4 g5 9.♕d3 g4 10.♗e1 ♜c5 11.c3 ♘h4 12.b4



White has played some very slow moves, but playing 12.g3 himself would still have given him the advantage, and 12.♗xg8 ♜xg8 13.♕c4 was certainly something to look at as well (as one move earlier in the game – after 11.♗xg8 ♜xg8 12.♕c4 – Black was lucky to have 12...♕f8).

Now Black's kingside attack succeeds; note the premiere of the typical King's Indian sacrifice on h3:

12...g3! 13.h3? ♜xf2+ 14.♔h1 ♜xh3 15.♗f3 ♘h5

and Black wins.

Another cornerstone of Philidor's theory is the idea that the move ...♗f6 (or ♗f3), blocking the f-pawn, is a bad idea. After 1.e4 e5, playing 2.♗f3 is 'entirely wrong'. No matter how White continues after 2...d6, Black will get an attack by 3...f5. I will return to game three later on, because this disapproval of 2.♗f3 evoked severe criticism from some of his contemporary analysts.

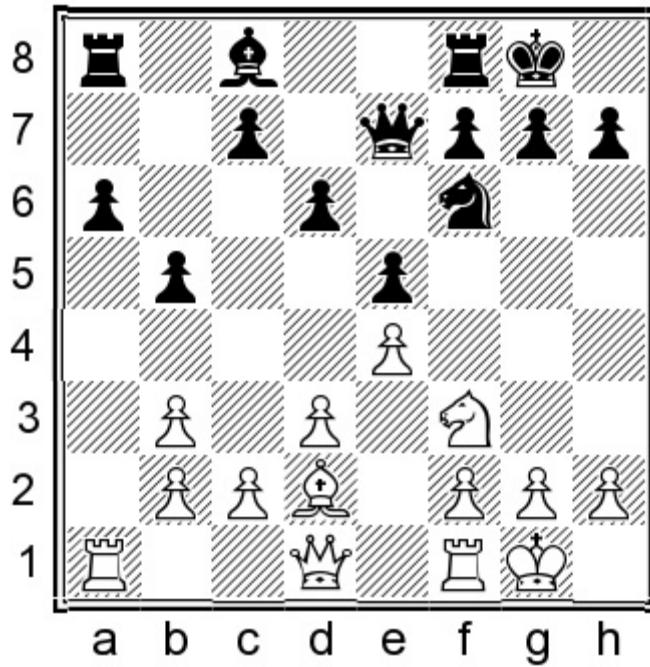
The 'delayed Philidor'

Though Philidor's Defence as it was meant by him, with an early ...f7-f5, is rarely seen today, the ...f7-f5 idea is still popular in a 'delayed' version. In the slow versions of the Ruy Lopez and the Italian, with a d3+e4 versus d6+e5 centre, both players might try to get the f-pawn moving.

Boris Spassky

Artur Jussupow

Linares 1990



Black to move

12...♝d7!?

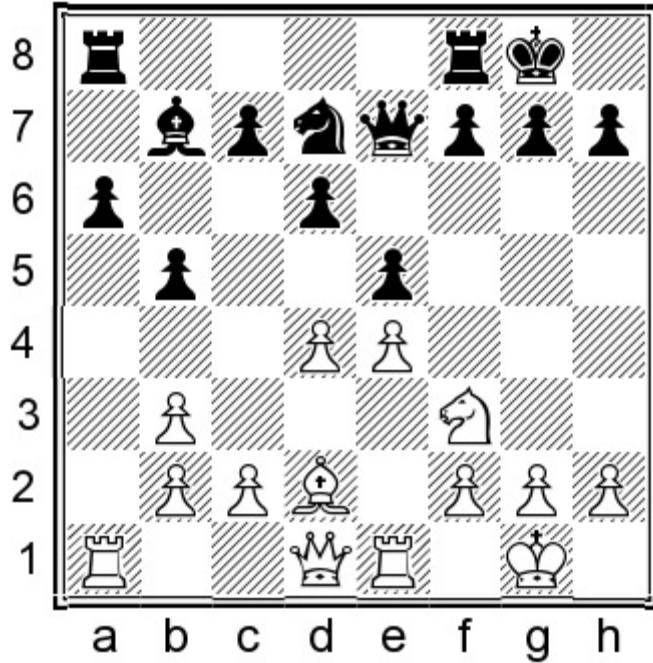
This is not the only plan, but it is an ambitious one. Had Black played 12...♝b7, then White might have started the Philidor plan himself with 13.♞h4!?.

12...♝d7!?

An important question is whether White will be able to get d3-d4 in time to cross Black's plan.

13.♜e1 ♜b7 14.d4??

It seems that White is just in time.



(Exercise no 17)

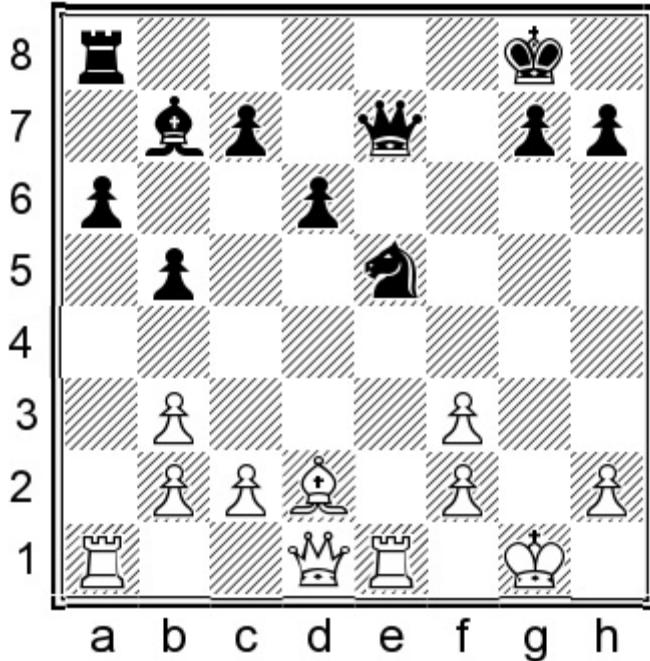
14...f5!

The natural follow-up to his twelfth move and well calculated. If 15.dxe5 fxe4 16.Qg5 Qxe5 wins a pawn; after 16.exd6 there is 16...Qf7!, pinning the knight because of the attack on f2.

15.exf5 Qxf5

With the annoying threat of taking on f3 and/or doubling rooks on the f-file.

16.dxe5 Qxf3! 17.gxf3 Qxe5



Black has an enormous attack and White saw nothing better than giving back the exchange.

18.♕f4 ♜xf3+ 19.♔xf3 ♜xe1+ 20.♔xe1 ♜xf3

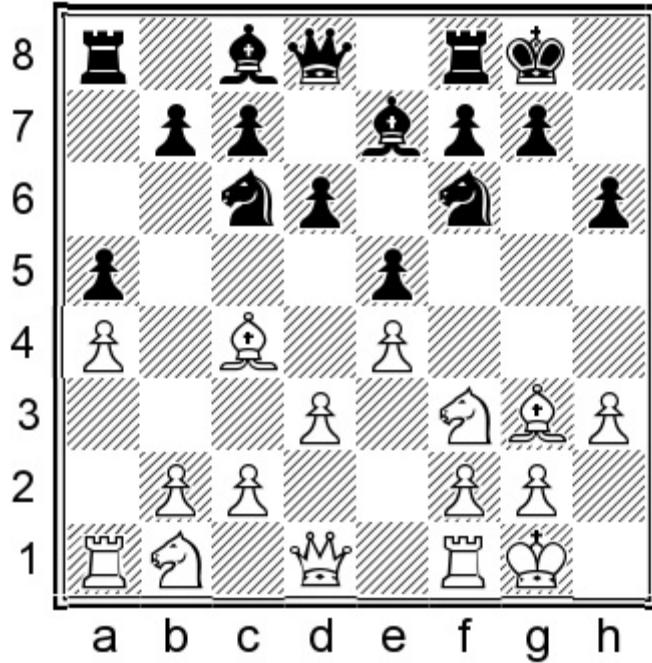
White is a pawn down and though the opposite-coloured bishops give him some drawing chances he finally lost.

I found this game in *Winning Chess Manoeuvres* by Sarhan Guliev, which has as a main theme the way in which strong players ‘borrow’ their ideas from the past.¹² Guliev gives an earlier game Taimanov-Lilienthal (1948) as a possible inspiration for Jussupow; the link to Philidor would have made the historical picture complete.

Those who follow present-day elite tournaments will have noticed that the slow Italian has become extremely popular. The ‘delayed Philidor’, or preparations for it, can be seen quite often. Here is just one example.

Sergey Karjakin – Levon Aronian Stavanger 2017

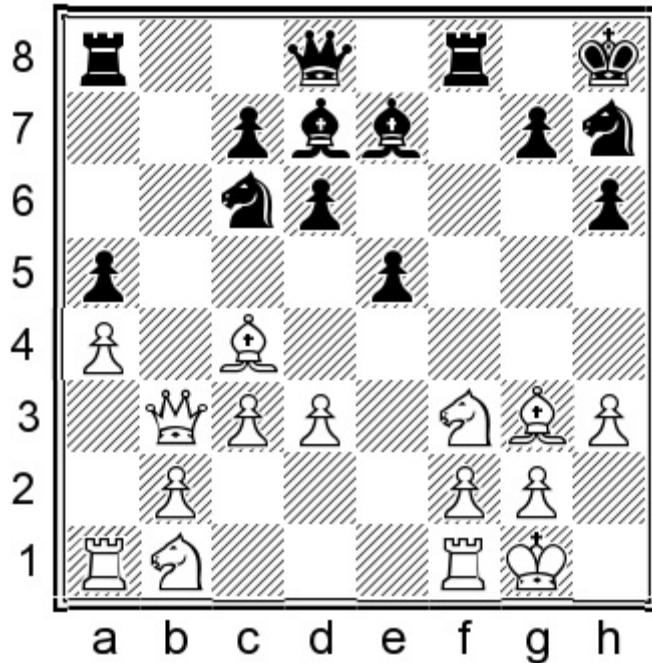
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♜c6 3.♗c4 ♜c5 4.0-0 ♜f6 5.d3 0-0 6.a4 a5 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗h4 ♜e7 9.♗g3 d6 10.h3



10...♘h8 11. c3 ♘h7 12. ♖b3 f5 13. exf5

Now Black didn't take back immediately but continued 13...♗f6 and later won this game after a hard struggle.

The direct 13...♗xf5 was possible – if White takes the pawn 14. ♖xb7 ♗d7 15. ♖b3?!, one of the main attractions of Philidor's idea shows itself again: the f-rook becomes active 'for free'.



(Exercise no 18)

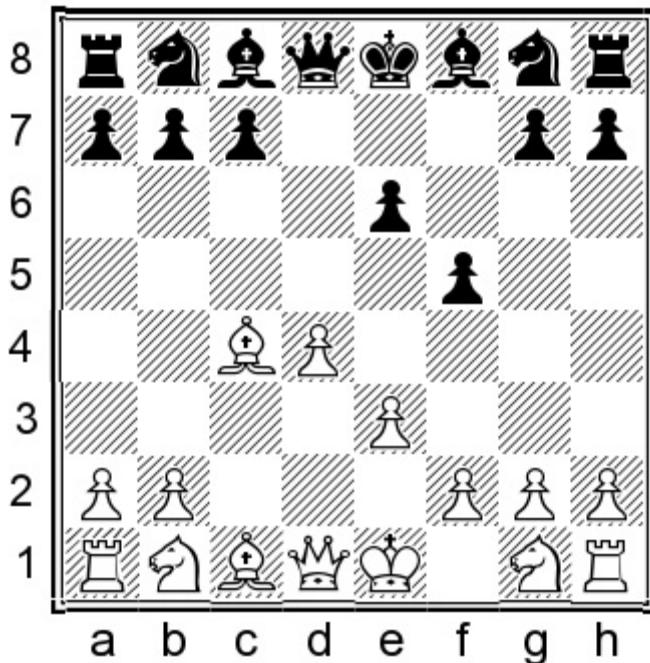
As in the previous game, the typical exchange sacrifice 15...♗xf3! would give Black nice play; 15...♗b8

also is a good idea, winning the b-pawn or continuing with the exchange sacrifice. But not 15... $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ because of 16. $gxh3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ (or 17. $\mathbb{W}b7$).

Those central ideas concerning the role of the f-pawn permeated Philidor's handling of almost every opening. Have a look at the following game from *l'Analyse* with the Queen's Gambit. It fits in with the picture painted above: extremely bad play by *both* sides and at the end some extra efforts to let the favoured side win.

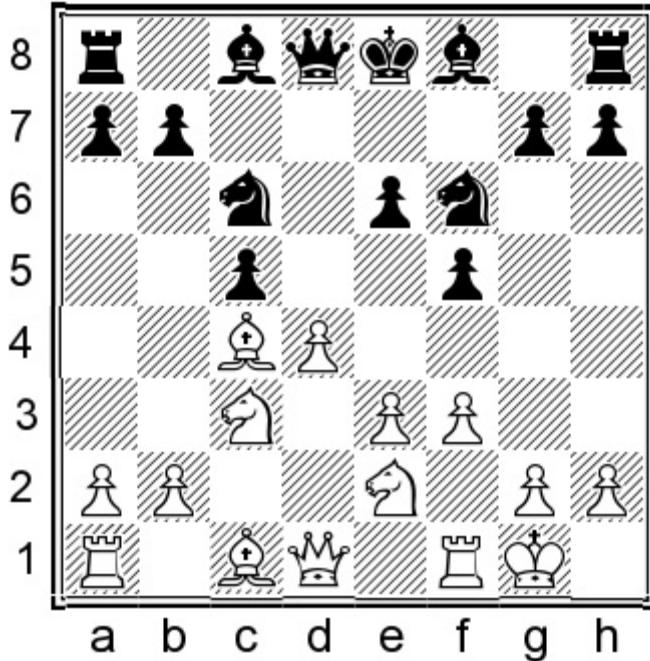
Philidor l'Analyse, the Queen's Gambit, first variation

1.d4 d5 2.c4 dxc4 3.e3 f5?! 4. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ e6



Playing ...f7-f5 is not a good idea in the Queen's Gambit. White's next move is also typical of Philidor's approach: since Black has already severely weakened the e5-square, developing the knight with 5. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ is an excellent move, but for Philidor this apparently never comes into consideration with the pawn still on f2.

5.f3?! $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c5 7. $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8.0-0



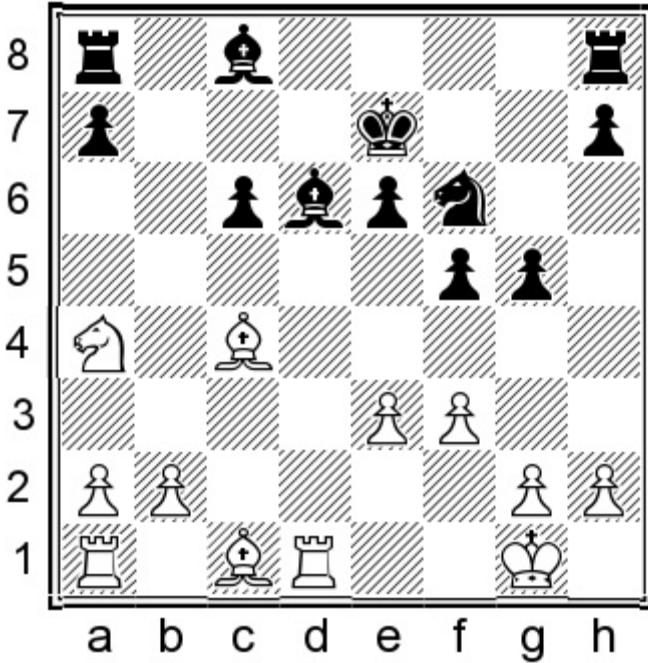
8...g5?!

This is also a rather shocking move. Philidor is often mentioned as a forerunner to Steinitz's theories, but where the latter became increasingly cautious in pushing his pawns, Philidor knew nearly no restraints. Throughout this book we will keep an eye on how this move (g4/g5) was used and appreciated, ending with Tarrasch's qualification 'the harakiri move'.

Since Black has severely compromised his king's position with his last move, permitting the exchange of queens, as White does next, is not the first thing that comes to mind, although White is not spoiling all of his advantage.

9.dxc5?! ♕xd1 10.♕xd1 ♕xc5 11.♗d4 ♔e7 12.♗a4 ♕d6 13.♗xc6+ bxc6

In the last few moves White has regained a big advantage.



(Exercise no 19)

His pawn structure is better and though the queens are off, Black's king is still rather unsafe. White can continue developing with 14.b3 or 14. $\mathbb{Q}d2$, but the strongest is 14.e4!, attacking g5 and threatening to open up the centre.

The move White plays is just repulsive:

14.f4? h6

In the remainder of the game, Black, with the usual helping hand, manages to win with his pawns.

15. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 16.g3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ c5 18. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd5+$ exd5 20. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}ag8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ gxf4 22. $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ fxе3+ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ d4+ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}de2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 29.g4 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ fxe8 31.h3 c4 32. $\mathbb{Q}h8$ d3 33. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ d2

and Black won.

Philidor's influence

Different opinions can be heard about the influence of Philidor on the further development of chess. Haije Kramer simply concludes about *l'Analyse* 'that soon after publication it got translated in a lot of countries and for a century it had a great influence on the entire chess playing community.'¹³

But above we heard Kasparov say that Philidor was too far ahead of his time to have a direct successful following. According to Lasker, there is no evidence whatsoever that Philidor's contemporaries understood his ideas.¹⁴

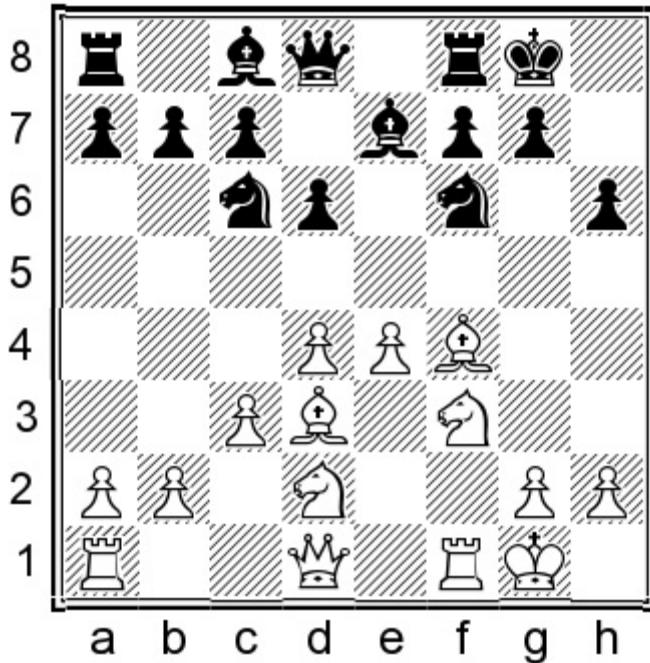
Euwe also talks about Philidor as being 'misunderstood' and 'underestimated', but he rightly adds that 'the examples, with which he tried to establish his theories on pawn play, generally were not very

convincing.' Euwe also notes that Philidor in his analysis often missed important tactics.

By 1871, *l'Analyse* had gone through about 70 editions and had been translated into English, Spanish, German, Russian and Italian. In the history of chess book writing this is an unparalleled success. So it would be strange if his influence had been of a limited nature. Philidor's didactic qualities are often praised and he expresses his ideas clearly, so it is a bit condescending to suppose that all these readers had little understanding of what his book was about.

According to Euwe, Philidor himself was groping in the dark regarding the application of his theories, and his proposals, especially concerning the openings, went way too far. Philidor clearly had some influence, although it was difficult to follow him. For White the King's Gambit could be a good choice – if Black chooses a timid reply, White gets ideal 'Philidorian' play.

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Qf3 d6 4.d4 Qc6 5.Qxf4 Qf6 6.Qbd2 Qe7 7.c3 0-0 8.Qd3 h6 9.0-0



White has exchanged his f-pawn for Black's e-pawn and thereby gained complete control over the centre, and has also brought his rook on the f-file into play.

This ideal scenario is often seen at club level and is one of the main attractions of playing the King's Gambit. But Philidor made a comprehensive analysis of the critical lines, in which Black tries to maintain his extra pawn with ...g7-g5, and was not convinced that these were advantageous for White. And since he condemned 2.Qf3 (after 1.e4 e5), not much is left for White.

For Black, the situation was equally difficult. He very much advocated what has been named the Philidor Defence in the version with a quick ...f7-f5 (before playing ...Qf6), and that's a rather dubious affair. And if you think 2...Qc6 (after 1.e4 e5 2.Qf3) to be ill-advised, again, not that much is left.

But in a more general way, you can see some influence of his ideas on the openings played in the next century. For example the way La Bourdonnais and McDonnell played their French-type positions (see Chapter 5) was clearly in line with Philidor. Also, the strange openings used by Saint-Amant

against Staunton, combining ...c7-c5 and ...f7-f5 (see Chapter 6) must have been inspired by Philidor.

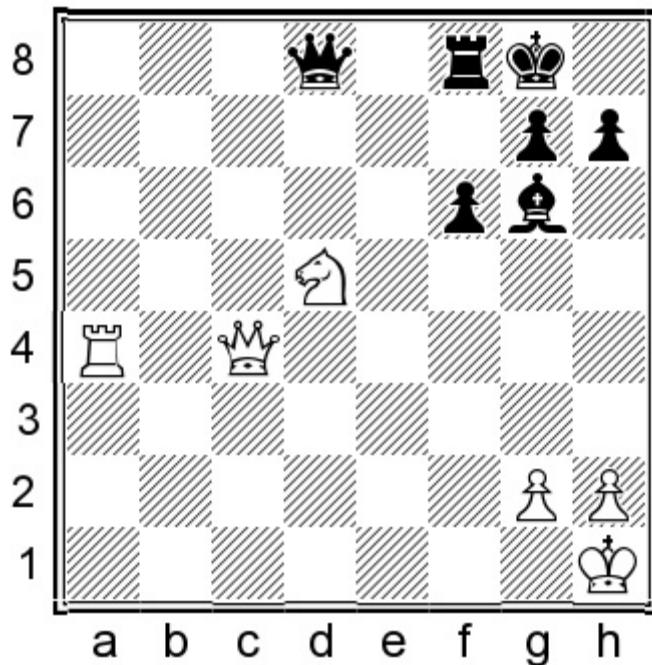
Maybe Kasparov was thinking of this when he noted that ‘no one was able to play successfully in the manner proposed by him’. But it might well be that we should blame not those who were trying to do so, but the manner proposed by Philidor.

If you look upon it from the perspective of ‘teaching by example’, the games in *l’Analyse* aren’t exactly models of fine play. But if you want to produce good chess, you have to take in good chess. Therefore, I cannot agree with the often heard opinion about Philidor that you should not be too critical about the individual moves, because it is the idea that counts. We often see Philidor trying to execute some impossible plan; then the opponent, although playing badly, still keeps the upper hand, so next some really nasty blunders get added to ‘prove’ the starting point. Not surprisingly, this doesn’t lead to exemplary chess.

The above argument reminded me of a player I once heard claiming that, on the positional level, he was rated 300 points above his actual rating, but often, having gained the advantage, fell for some silly trick. For one thing I think this is a bit of an abuse of the idea of the rating system, one of its benefits being that it should replace exactly this kind of boasting by objective figures. But more importantly, it misses the point that correctly appreciating all those subtle (tactical) features is an essential part of positional understanding. Putting a rook on an open file is something we are all capable of.

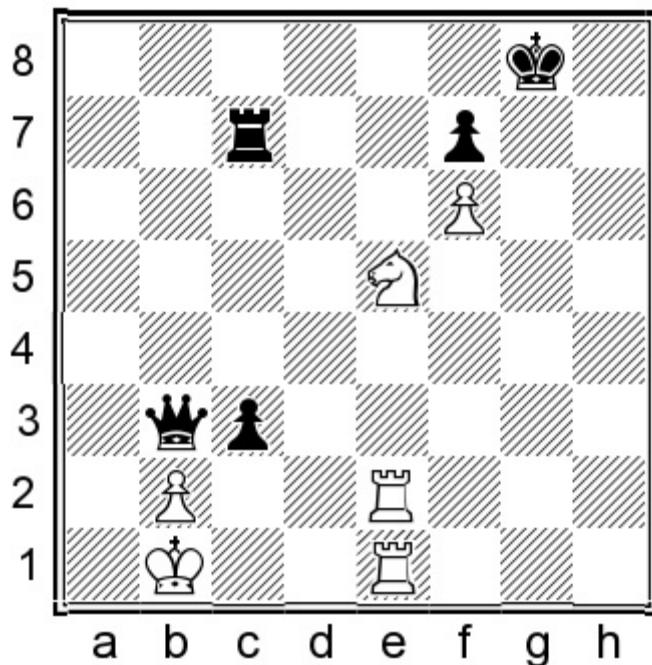
Exercises for Chapter 4

20 (go to the solution)



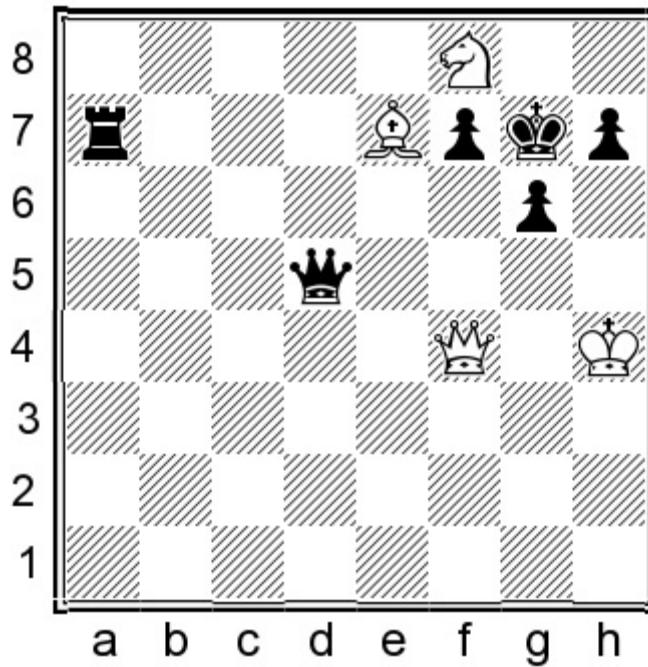
White to move

21 (go to the solution)



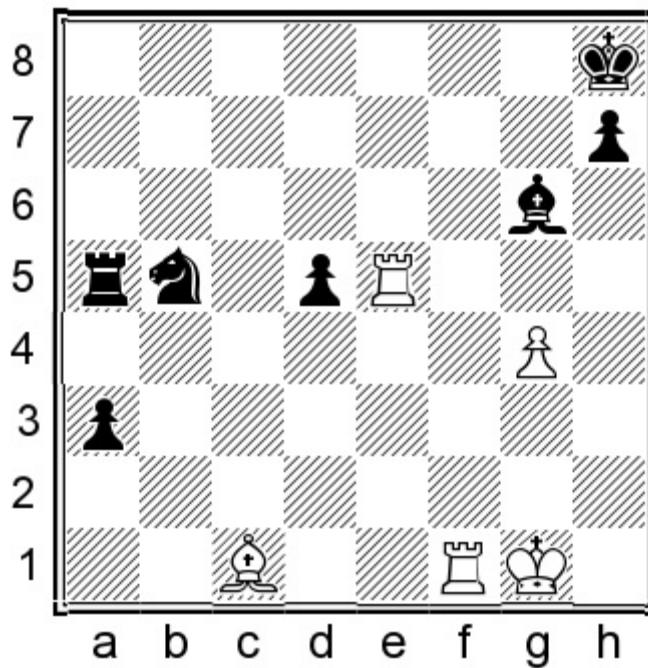
White to move

22 (go to the solution)



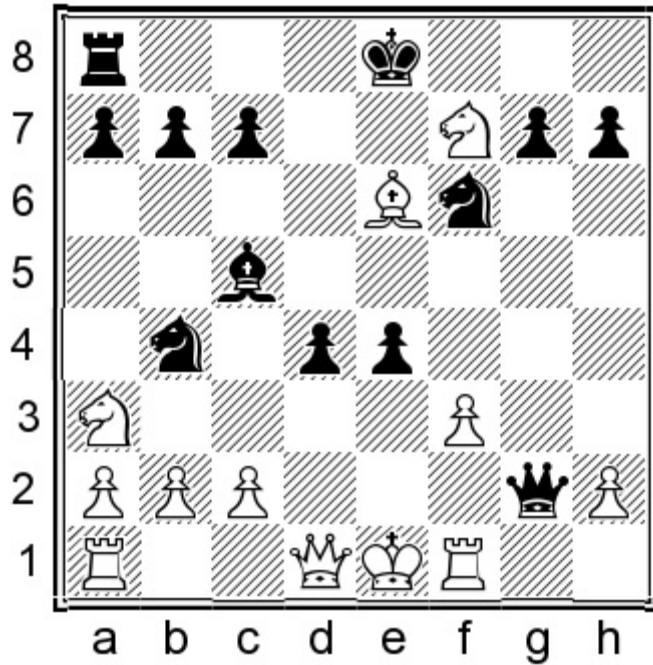
White to move

23 (go to the solution)



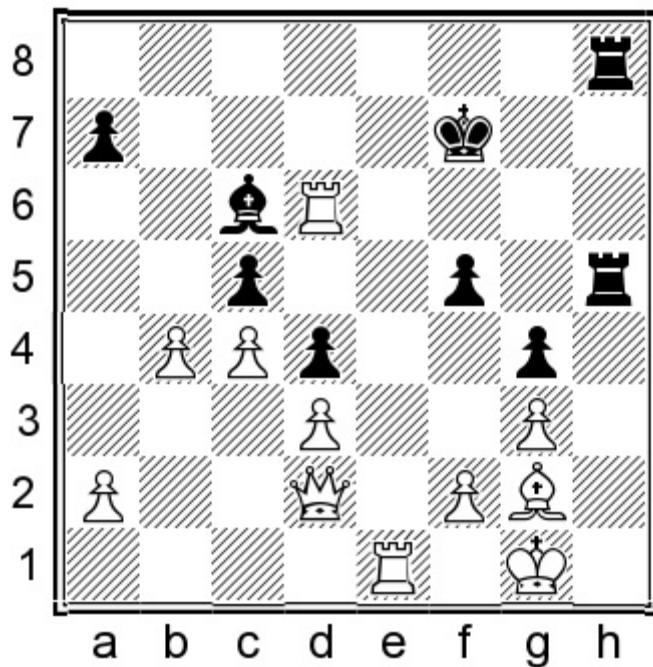
White to move

24 (go to the solution)



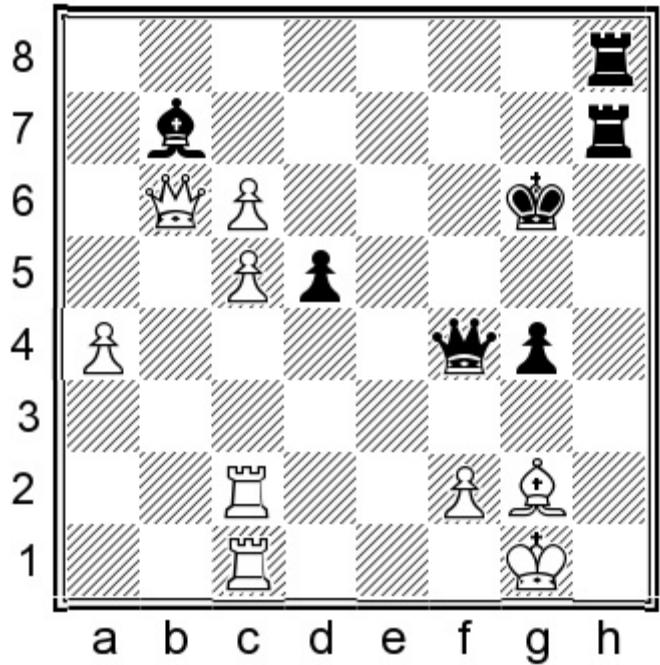
Black to move

25 (*go to the solution*)



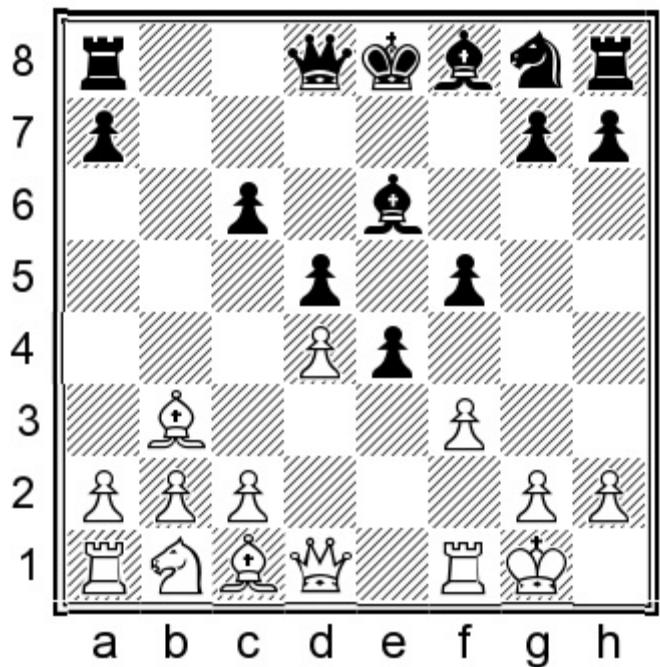
Black to move

26 (*go to the solution*)



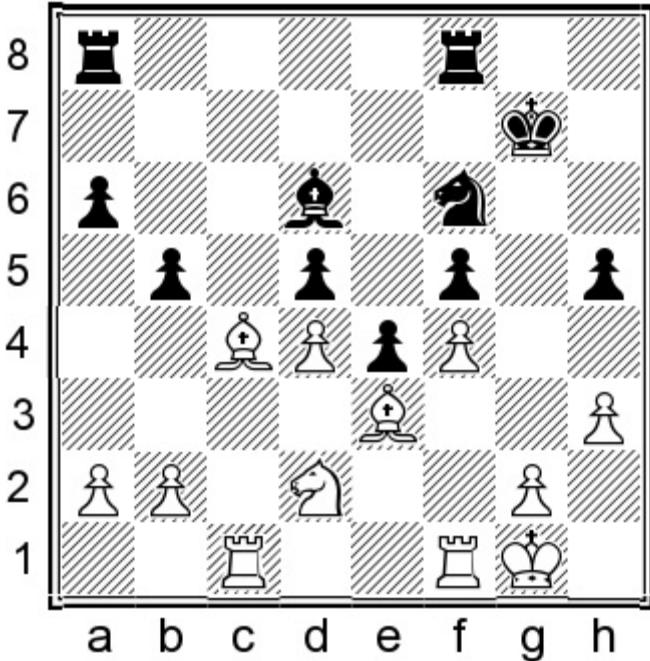
Black to move

27 (go to the solution)



White to move

28 (go to the solution)



Black to move

White has just played 24.♗xc4 and Black now has to make the principled decision we've met before: 24...bxc4 or 24...dxc4 ?

4

First discussions: Philidor versus the Modenese masters

Philidor describes his ideas about pawn play as ‘novel’, but later historians (Von der Lasa, Murray) put him in a school together with the 16th century player and writer Ruy Lopez:

‘Philidor belonged essentially to the school of Lopez, which, as a result of the many French editions of Lopez’s work in the 17th century, had become the school of the majority of French players. But he was not only the first player to realize and state the principles that lay behind Lopez’s analysis, but also the first player to carry those principles to their logical conclusions and to embody them in a system of play.’¹⁵

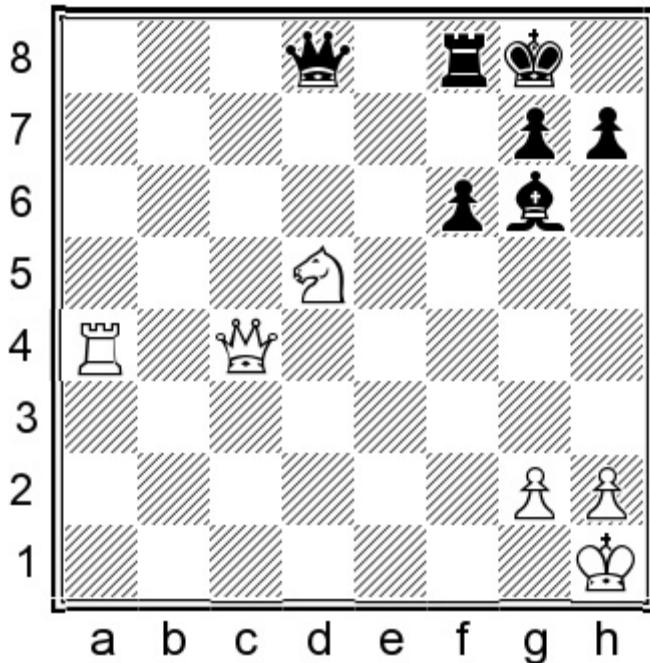


Although his was one of the first books on chess ever, Lopez did react to an earlier book by Damiano, offering ‘a close and hostile examination’. Even this early writing on chess had partly taken the shape of vehement discussions between different opinions of how the game should be played – or rather how the game should be opened, those early works concentrating mainly on the first part of the game.

Lopez himself preferred rather slow openings, whereas the Italians were known for their ‘lively piece play’. This basic dualism between the ideas of positional and attacking chess more or less lived on until Steinitz’s day, and many of the controversies in chess history somehow came to circle around it.

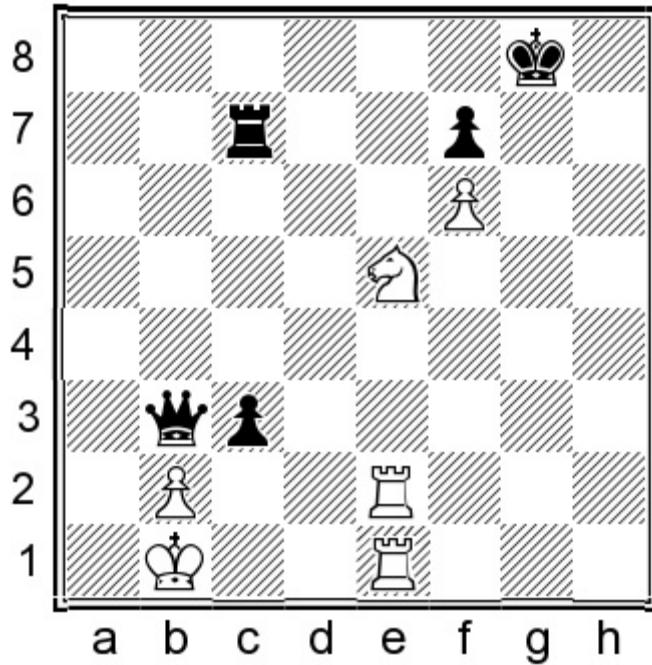
In Philidor’s time, the centre of chess activity had already moved from Spain and Italy towards the more northern parts of Europe, especially France and England. But in the city of Modena there still was a small circle of strong chess players. Three of them published a book: Ercole del Rio (1718-1802), Giambattista Lolli (1698-1769) and Domenico Ponziani (1719-1796). Proceeding from the earlier work of Greco and Alessandro Salvio, they are considered to be the last representatives of the Italian school. In those days there was little contact with the chess-playing community in the northern parts of Europe and it took until the beginning of the 19th century before their work started to compete with Philidor’s influence.

Those books dealt with openings, endgames and (tactical) puzzles. Not many of their games are preserved, but the quality of their books suggests that they were quite strong players. In particular, the puzzles composed by Del Rio are of a high level and also rather natural, so they may have been inspired by actual games. I present a small selection, since these puzzles belong to the highlights of the early writings on chess.



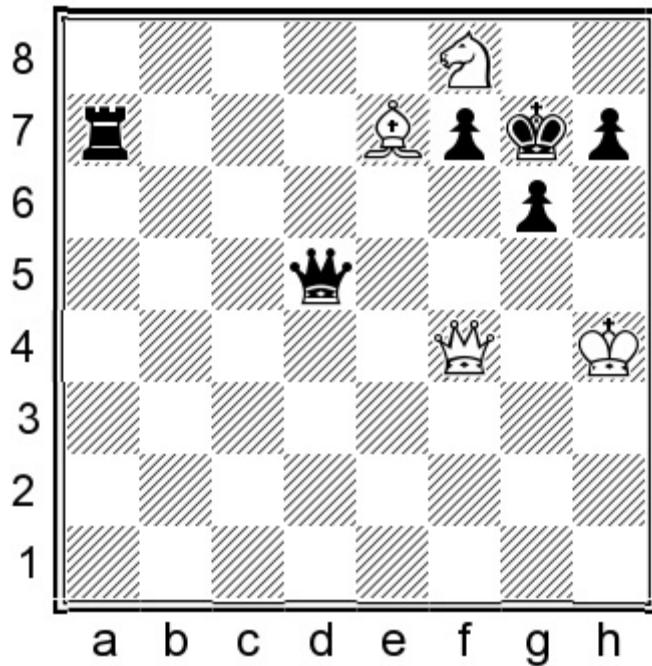
(Exercise no 20)

1. $\mathbb{Q}e7++ \mathbb{Q}h8$ 2. $\mathbb{W}g8+$ $\mathbb{E}xg8$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $hxg6$ 4. $\mathbb{E}h4$ mate.



(Exercise no 21)

1. $\mathbb{E}g1+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}d7+$ $\mathbb{E}xd7$ 3. $\mathbb{E}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 4. $\mathbb{E}g8$ mate.

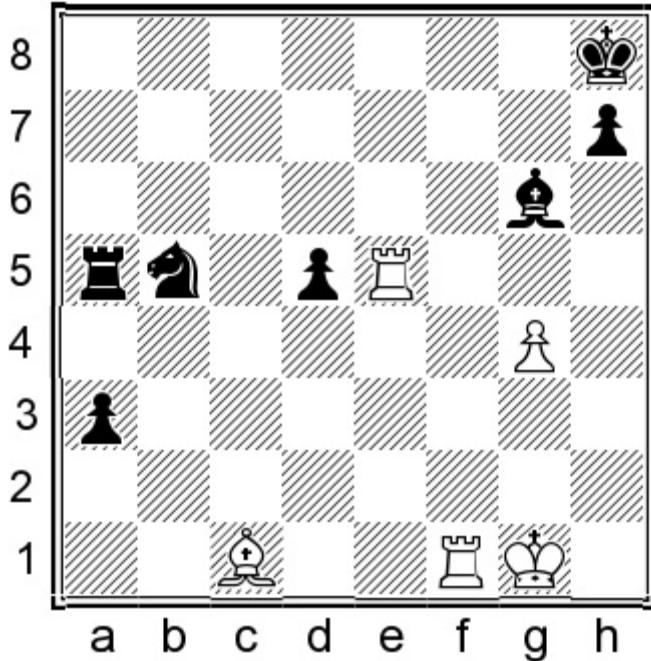


(Exercise no 22)

1. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{W}xe6$

1... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 2. $\mathbb{W}b8+$; 1... $f xe6$ 2. $\mathbb{W}f8$ mate.

2. $\mathbb{W}h6+! \mathbb{Q}xh6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}f8$ mate.



(Exercise no 23)

1. $\mathbb{Q}f8+$

1. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xe8$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ fails because of 2... $\mathbb{Q}f7!$

1. $\mathbb{Q}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}h6+! \mathbb{Q}xh6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}g8!$

A fine quiet move. There is no defence to White's threat.

3...a2 4. $\mathbb{Q}h5+ \mathbb{Q}xh5$ 5. g5 mate.

The Modenese masters were contemporaries of Philidor, and although the latter travelled between France and England (and also visited Holland and Germany) he never went to Italy, so they did not meet at the board. But the Modenese players were familiar with Philidor's *l'Analyse* and there is a comment from Del Rio preserved.

Knowing the work of other and earlier writers was in those days not a matter of course. For us, living in an age of complete availability of information, this is difficult to imagine. But when you look at the history of chess it is important to realize that those writers and theoreticians from the past only had a limited knowledge of what had happened before them, depending on the books they had incidentally had access to.

The older reader will be acquainted with this situation, where you had some books that might lead you to other books that hopefully were available in a library nearby – and this was of course already much better than in the days of Philidor. A lot of work had to be done, whereas today some research on the computer puts almost all information at your disposal with a few mouse clicks.

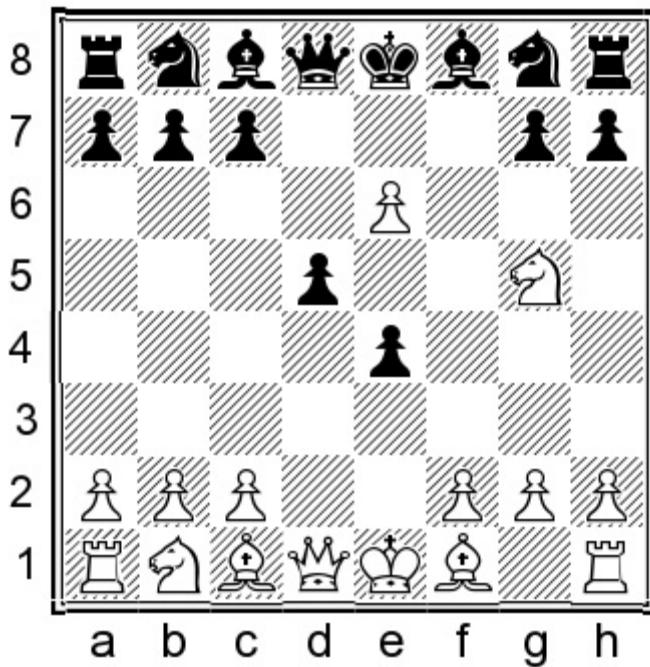
I said ‘the older reader’ but, as an additional consequence of the historical change mentioned, it is probably sufficient to say ‘the reader’ to address exactly the same group.

The comment by Del Rio was not part of a direct discussion with Philidor. For this type of discussions we had to wait until newspapers and magazines started to appear. Del Rio objected to Philidor’s disapproval of the move 2.♘f3 and his approval of his own defence with 2...d6 followed by a quick ...f7-f5:

‘The bold assertion that it is bad, to play 2.♘f3, always surprised me, seeing that the author proves this by a worse move on the part of Black, 2...d6, instead of defending with 2...♘c6, as the best approved writers do. I call this move worse, inasmuch as it confines ♜f8, which cannot speedily be placed in any attacking position, which it would be at c5; and because it often happens that you are obliged to push d5, for which object you employ two moves, when only one might be sufficient; and lastly because by defending with ♘c6 you bring a piece into play.’¹⁶

It would have been an interesting clash if Philidor and the Modenese masters had met at the board. For example, from the next position, from Del Rio’s comment on Philidor’s analysis:

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 f5 4.dxe5 fxe4 5.♗g5 d5 6.e6



This last move is Del Rio’s improvement on Philidor, and indeed this seems to be good for White. However after 6...♝h6 he intended 7.♗xh7, a clever move (7...♝xh7 fails to 8.♔h5+), but it helps Black to develop with the simple 7...♝xe6. White has better tries: for example 7.g3, intending to defend the important pawn on e6 with ♘h3, is very strong.

For Black, 6...♝c5 also looks interesting, with the idea of 7.♗f7 ♔f6, with ‘Romantic’ complications, but White has the nice tactic 7.♗xe4! (7...dxe4 8.♔h5+ and 9.♔xc5).

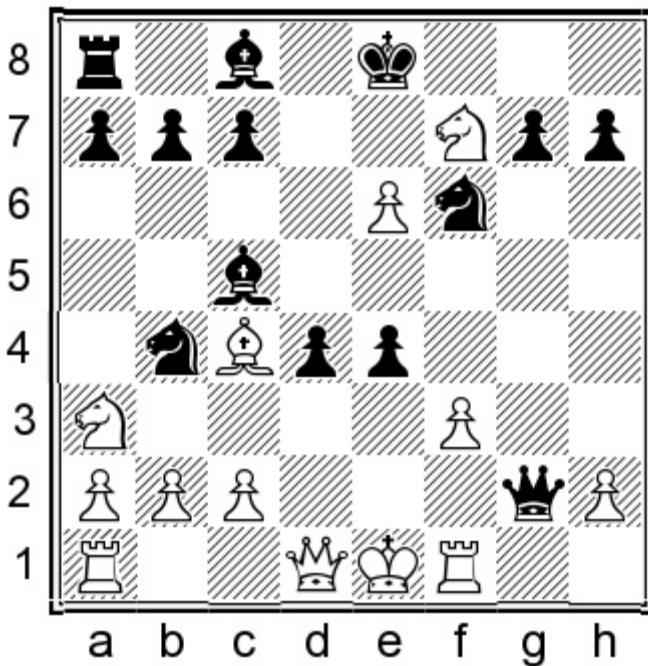
The above position results from a principled discussion, but it is a very complicated one, typically in need of practical testing. A century later, Morphy tried both moves as Black. A game with ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$, from his match against Thomas Barnes, led to some beautiful tactics against the king in the centre, a Morphy speciality we will return upon.

Thomas Barnes – Paul Morphy London 1858

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 f5 4.dxe5 fxe4 5. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ d5 6.e6 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ d4 9. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f7$ $\mathbb{W}xg2$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 14.f3? $\mathbb{Q}b4$

The start of the fireworks.

15. $\mathbb{Q}a3$

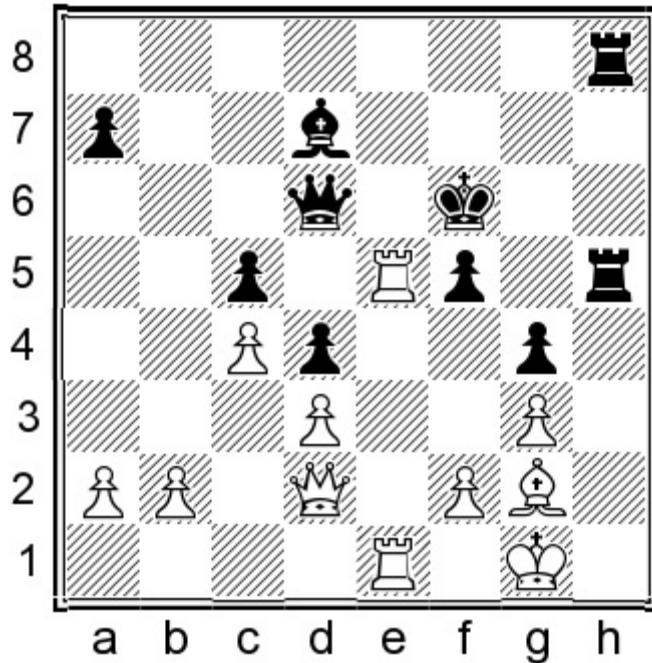


(Exercise no 24)

15... $\mathbb{Q}xe6$! 16. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}d3+$! 17. $\mathbb{W}xd3$ exd3

On 17.cxd3 there was 17... $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ and mate next move. White soon resigned.

How Philidor would have held himself in these complicated tactical positions we will never know. Compared to Greco and the Modenese players, few tactical brilliancies can be found in his work. The best I can think of is the following.

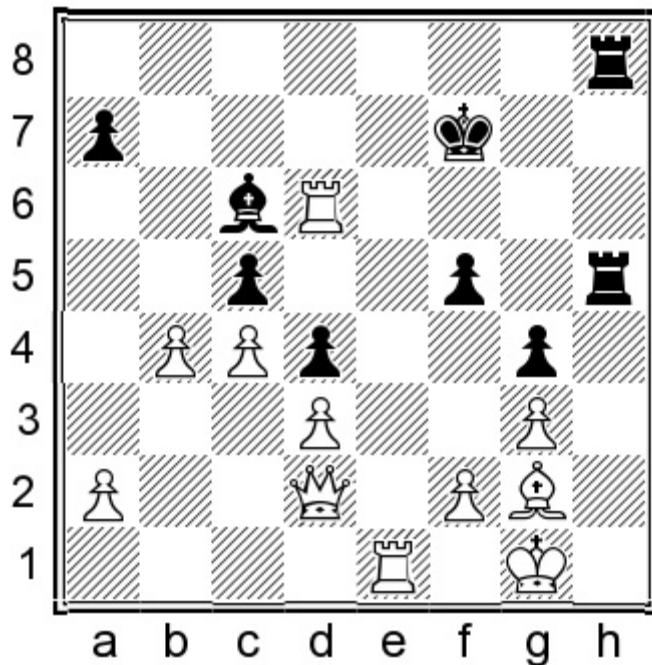


This position arose from a variation in the fourth game in which Philidor tries to show that the opening 1.e4 e5 2.c3 d5 favours Black. And though sympathy lies with Black, as usual the example has become completely out of hand and White has an excellent position besides his extra pawn. 27.♘f4 would have been very strong.

But Black has one last hope.

27.b4? ♜c6 28.♝e6+ ♔f7 29.♝xd6?

The final mistake. With 29.♜xc6 ♜xc6 30.♝e7+ White could still force a draw.



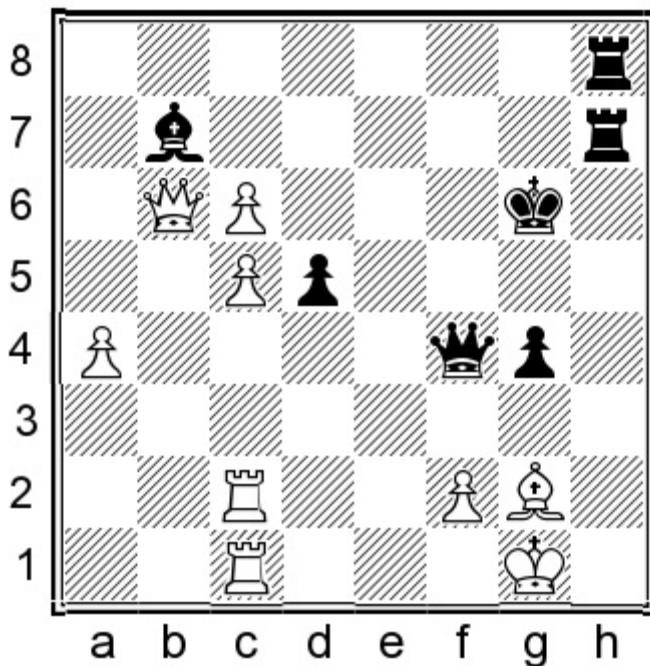
(Exercise no 25)

29...♝h1+!

This nice X-ray mate might well be an original, and in that case it is Philidor's most important contribution to chess tactics – if not to chess overall. It's nice to philosophize about the soul of chess, but 29...♝h1+ – there you have something!

This mate is not an everyday tactic but there occurred a brilliant variation of it some years ago in a game between the world's strongest players of the moment.

Vladimir Kramnik
Viswanathan Anand
Nice 2008

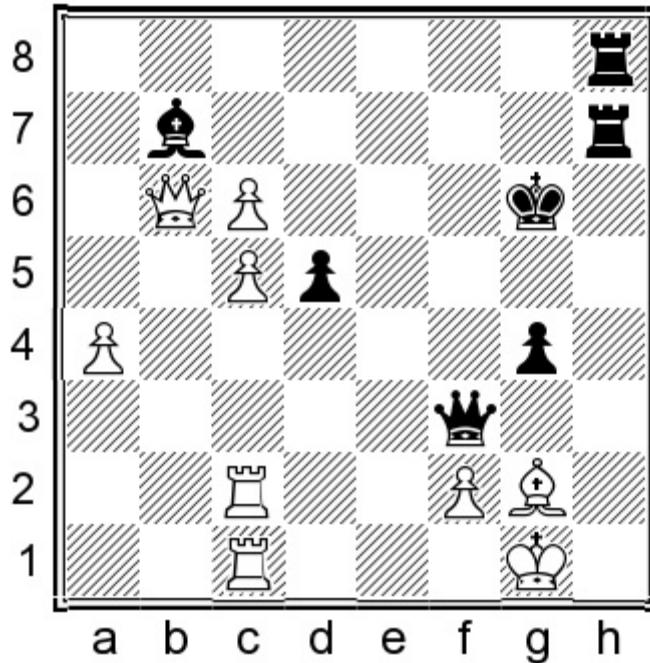


(Exercise no 26)

In this rapid game (with probably not much time left on the clock) White has just taken on c6. Maybe you decided on 42...♝h1+ 43.♝xh1 ♜h2+ 44.♝f1 ♜xh1+ 45.♝e2 ♜e4+ with at least a perpetual. That would have been some very good calculation. The engine thinks that Black even has a winning attack after 46.♝d2 ♜d4+ 47.♝e2 ♜c8.

But Anand had a different solution:

42...♜f3!!

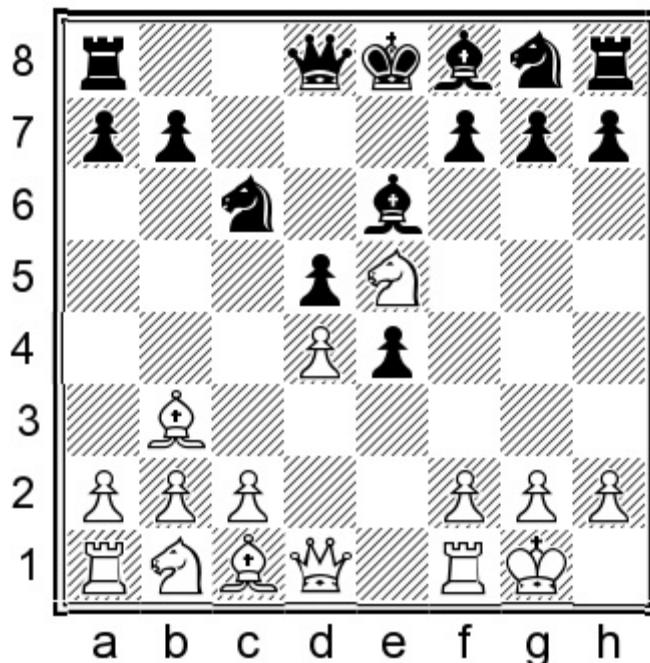


Giving up a bishop with check; surprisingly, after 43.cxb7+ ♔f5, White has no sensible checks against the king in the middle of the board, nor an answer to the mating threat of ♕h1, so he had to resign.

The opponents that Philidor did meet over the board were rather weak players. Against them he could carry through his plans unhindered, just as in the constructed games in his book, without really putting them to the test. The following two examples are from blindfold games. Philidor was the first player to enchant the public with blindfold simul (up to three games).

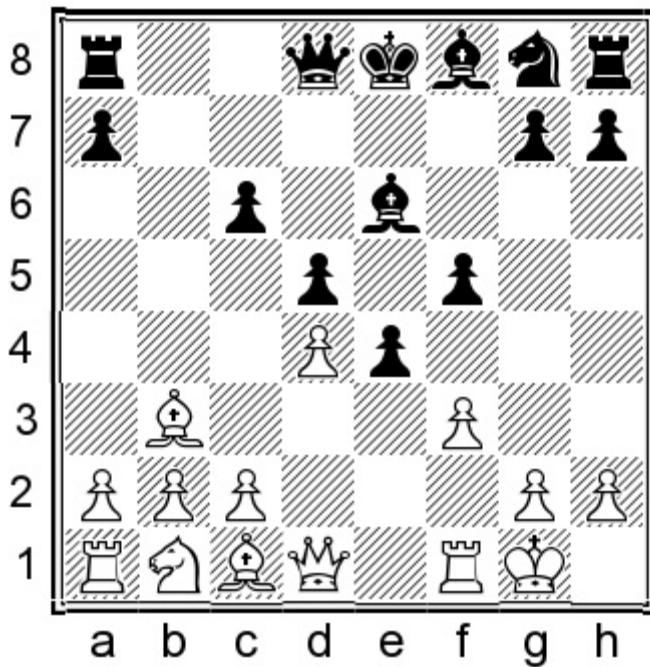
Sheldon – François-André Danican Philidor London 1790 (blindfold)

1.e4 e5 2.♗c4 c6 3.♘f3 d5 4.exd5 cxd5 5.♗b3 ♗c6 6.d4 e4 7.♗e5 ♗e6 8.0-0



Here 8... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ would have been an excellent move – but this is Philidor.

8...f6?! 9. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 10.f3! f5



(Exercise no 27)

Black has a strong central position, but he is badly developed, typical for Philidor's set-ups. Trying to open lines towards the king is the traditional recipe and White has several promising possibilities. Starting with 11.fxe4 fxe4 looks natural and then 12. $\mathbb{W}h5$ forces 12... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ (if 12...g6 then 13. $\mathbb{W}e5$), which is already a success. Also 12.c4 is a good try, or first 12. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ followed by c2-c4.

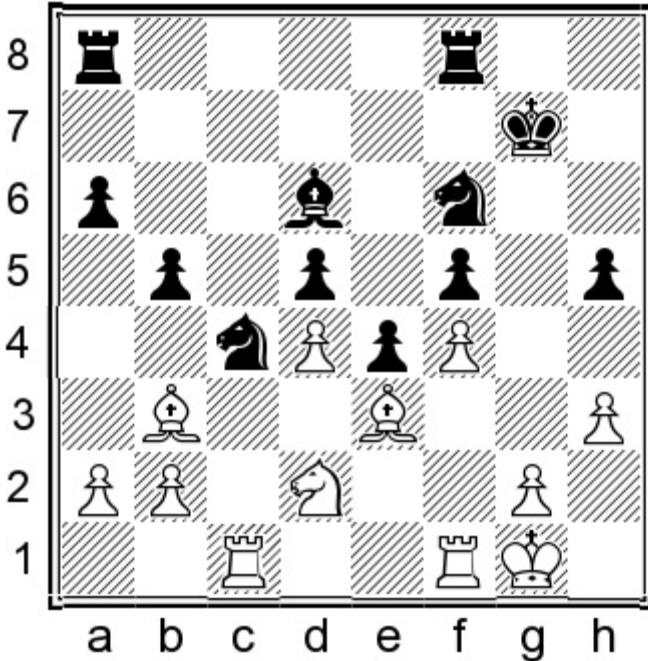
But White played the very slow 11. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ and after 11... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 13.c4 0-0 everything was okay for Black again, who later won the game.

Philidor was the first in chess history who had a system of play, with quite a few principles and rules. Such an approach automatically entails the danger of dogmatism, and in his games examples of this can be found in abundance.

Hans von Brühl

François-André D.Philidor

London 1783 (blindfold)



Black's opening play has been a success, and after 24. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ (*Exercise no 28*) Philidor had to make the same decision we encountered in Greco's game. Probably you saw that 24...dxc4! would have given Black a beautiful square for the knight on d5, winning easily. But alas, one of Philidor's rules prescribed always taking back 'towards the greater body of pawns'. Obedience to this with 24...bxc4 spoiled most of Black's advantage, although he later managed to win the endgame.

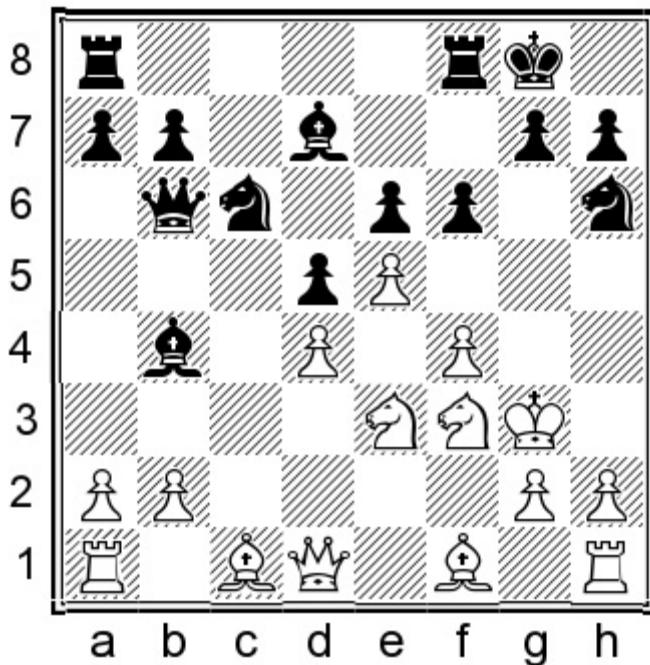
Several books have chosen this game to illustrate Philidor's theories, for example Lasker's *Manual* and *Geschichte des Schachs* by Silbermann and Unzicker. These strong players must have noticed this instructive possibility, but they didn't comment on it, displaying the same 'benevolent' attitude to Philidor's games as we saw before – as if you can't appreciate Philidor for what he did contribute without smuggling away his lesser moments.

Maybe I have been a bit too diligent in pointing out defects in Philidor's games, so as to compensate for the apologetic attitude of some of the history books. I think it was a bit unlucky for Philidor to have so little competition around. More of it would surely have benefited the development of his ideas. When there is no opponent to counter your plans, play becomes rather one-sided and it allows you to make the impossible happen. His opponents in his real games weren't strong enough and the 'opponents' in his constructed games offered, by his own choice, even less resistance.

The theoretical struggle between the Italian school on the one side and the Lopez/Philidor school on the other gave rise to the first discussions about how chess should be played. To find out the value of their different positions in practice we had to wait until the start of serious competition at the beginning of the 19th century.

Exercises for Chapter 5

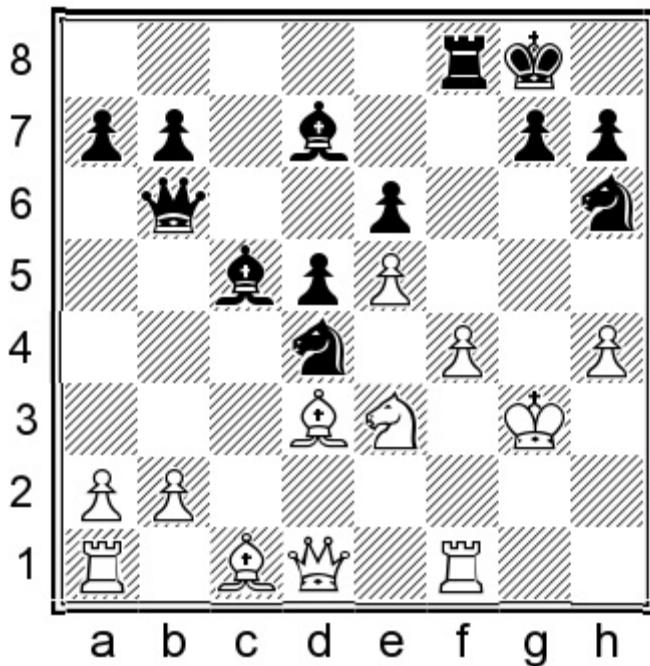
29 (go to the solution)



Black to move

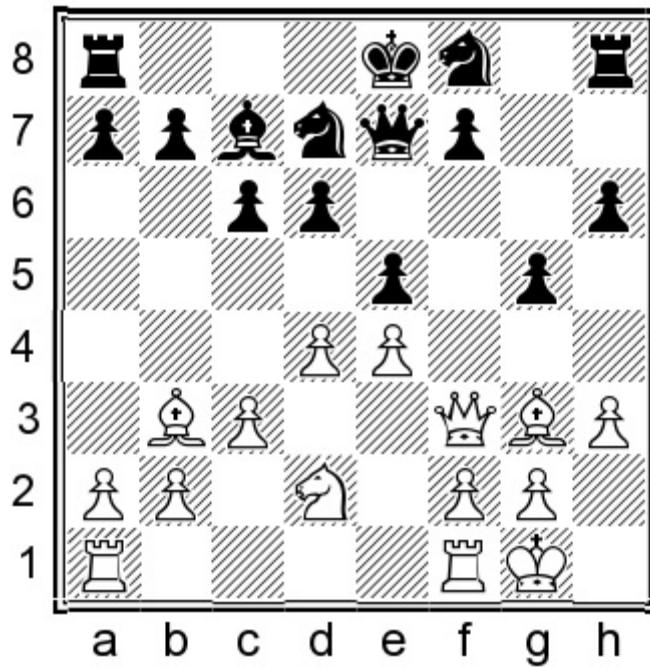
Who is better and what would you play?

30 (go to the solution)



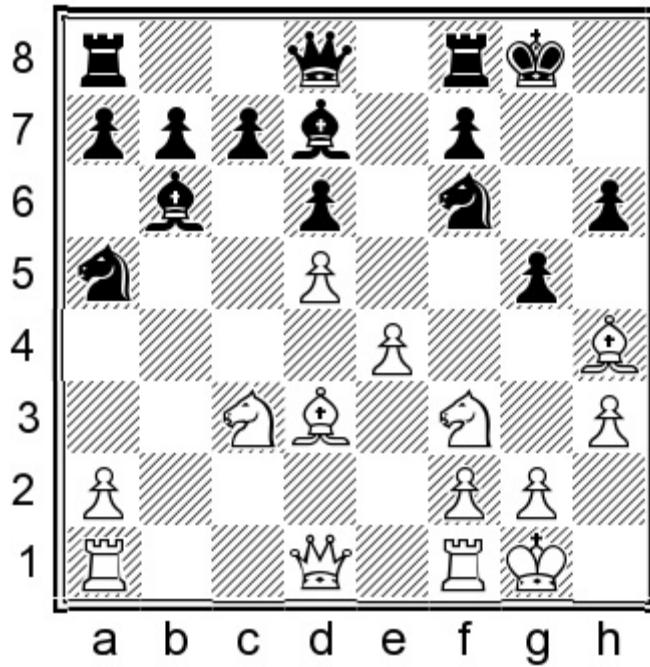
Black to move

31 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

32 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

The start of serious competition

Louis de La Bourdonnais

Philidor had little competition and only a small number of his games were recorded, almost all of them at odds or blindfold. I have no estimates of the number of people that played chess in the second half of the 18th century, but it won't have been huge.

However, competition is essential to make progress. You need different people who play at more or less the same level and inspire one another. Also these games have to be recorded so as to pass on the knowledge gained to future players or to players in other places. In the first half of the 19th century, chess life started to meet these conditions.

Society changed, a class of people with interest in the game and with leisure time emerged and localities (clubs, cafés) where chess was played arose. At first, Paris and London were the capitals of chess, but also in the rest of Europe (Berlin, Vienna, St Petersburg) and in the New World the level of play was slowly getting better.

Two famous matches were played in this period and they mark the start of serious competition. Both illustrated the rivalry between France and England.

The first was between Louis de La Bourdonnais (1795-1840) and Alexander McDonnell (1798-1835). It actually consisted of six different matches and it was won with the final overall score of 51-37¹⁷ by the Frenchman, who was considered to be the strongest player at the time. There is a very famous game with a spectacular finish (game 16 in the fourth match, with Black having three passed pawns on the second rank) however I'd like to show some other interesting fragments.

But first have a look at Harry Golombek's opinion of the quality of this match:

'The brilliance of the games was lauded in both countries, and they have had a good press ever since. How many of those who have so highly praised them, however, have in fact played through all the games is a matter for speculation, especially if you've done so yourself. I did this some years ago with the notion of analyzing them and presenting them as a study of the methods of the best players of the early 19th century, and I was appalled by the low quality of the play in general.'¹⁸



Harsh words, especially if you compare them with his estimation of the second match (see the next chapter). But Golombek makes an important point, about playing over all the games (in this case almost 90!). If you only look at the highlights, you don't get a correct picture of the quality of the whole. This,

however, is how chess history often gets presented to us: again and again we see the same (nice) games, with the same judgements about the players and about their place in the history of chess, frequently by authors who have not played through anything else and are just copying earlier works.

Although the quality of play might have been rather low, a lot happened in almost all of the games. I have the impression that McDonnell improved during these matches. This is not so strange: he seemed to be the more serious player of the two, took more time to think about his moves, and, unlike his opponent, did not engage in the ‘after parties’.

A later article in the *Westminster Papers* describes the differences between the players in picturesque (and rather chauvinistic) prose:

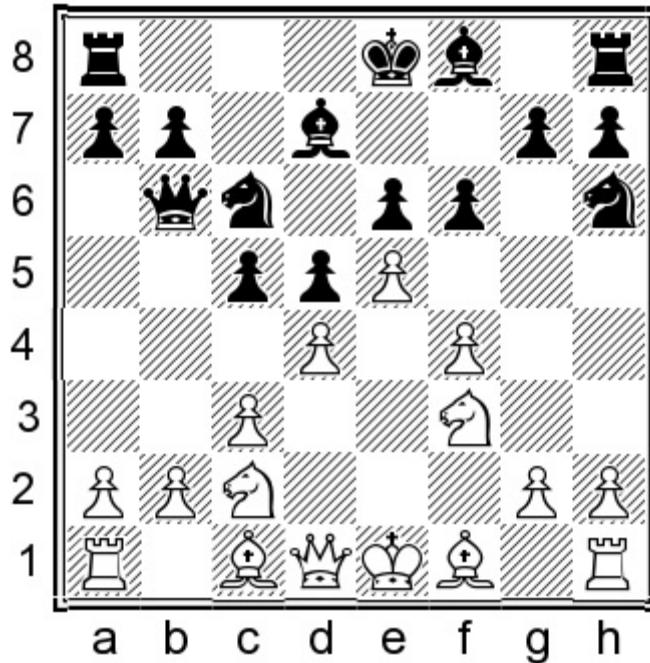
‘McDonnell [...] was dignified and composed in demeanour; vigilant, resolute and self-possessed. He sat at work maturing his conceptions with a patience and tenacity of purpose which nothing had the power to disturb. La Bourdonnais, who had a full share of the excitability of his nation, would jest and laugh with the gallery, puff his cigar, roll in his chair, and hum his favourite airs. This was when fortune smiled benignant on him; but when she shook her swift wings and fled, he fumed and fretted, rapping out maledictions with surprising rapidity. He was much quicker in his play than his antagonist, whose tardy strategy exercised him not a little, and made him give vent to his dissatisfaction in open grumbling, and frequent elevation of the shoulders.’¹⁹

But apart from his more serious attitude, if you have almost no knowledge to build on, playing over 80 games against the (likely) world’s best player of the moment should have an enormous impact on your playing strength. It’s difficult to see the same effect in the play of La Bourdonnais. For one thing, he took the lead by 14-4 in the first match, so he might have concluded that the matter was settled.

As evidence of his improvement, McDonnell’s play in the French Defence type of positions may serve as an example. In total they played 13 games with a structure that resembles the Classical or Advance variations of the French (although most of them started as a Sicilian).

Alexander McDonnell – Louis de La Bourdonnais London 1834 m1 (14)

1.e4 c5 2.f4 e6 3.♘f3 d5 4.e5 ♘c6 5.c3 f6 6.♘a3 ♘h6 7.♘c2 ♜b6 8.d4 ♘d7

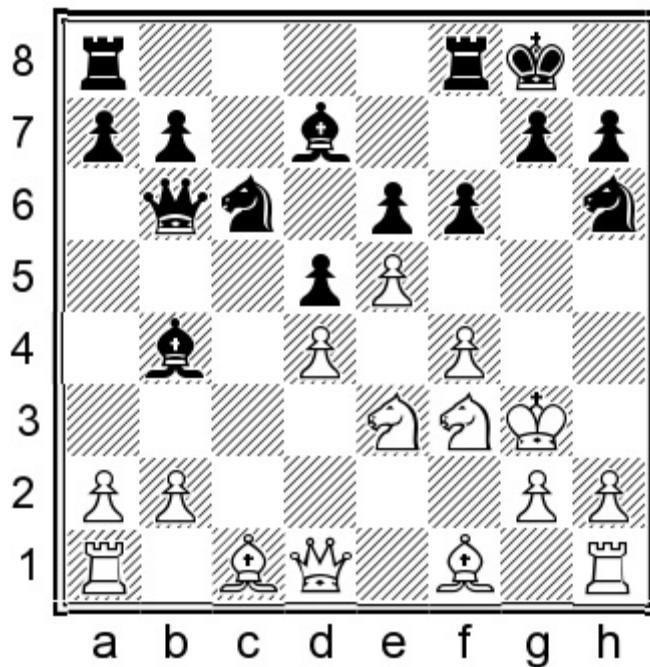


An interesting position with about equal chances. The set-up by both players is a clear sign of Philidor's influence (though one of Greco's games has a similar opening as well).

White's next move is of course 'appalling', neglecting the need for development; 9.Qd3 is the normal move.

9.Qe3? cxd4 10.cxd4 Qb4+ 11.Qf2 0-0 12.Qg3

A manoeuvre McDonnell was very fond of, playing it six times in more or less similar positions.

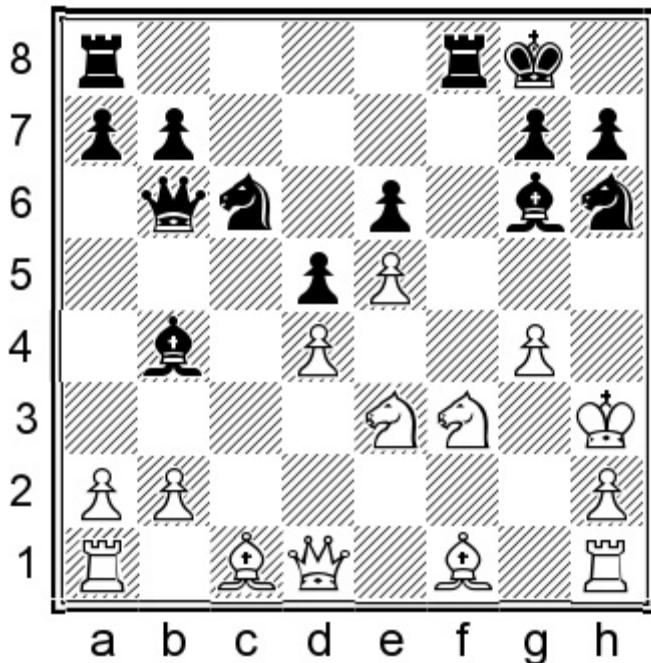


(Exercise no 29)

You were asked for a move and an evaluation. I hope you noticed White is in terrible shape; his king is very unsafe and his development is just ridiculous. Well, sometimes your opening turns into a disaster. That can happen, but what is really amazing is that McDonnell took up this position again in his next game with White! That sheds some light on his feeling for evaluation.

There are a lot of ways Black can win this position, but in these games La Bourdonnais chose two different powerful manoeuvres that have become standard weapons in the repertoire of players of the French ever since: redirecting the ‘French’ bishop on d7 to g6 or h5 and the exchange sacrifice on f3. As far as I can see La Bourdonnais was the first to discover these important elements of positional play.

12...fxe5 13.fxe5 ♜e8! 14.♔h3 ♜h5 15.g4 ♜g6

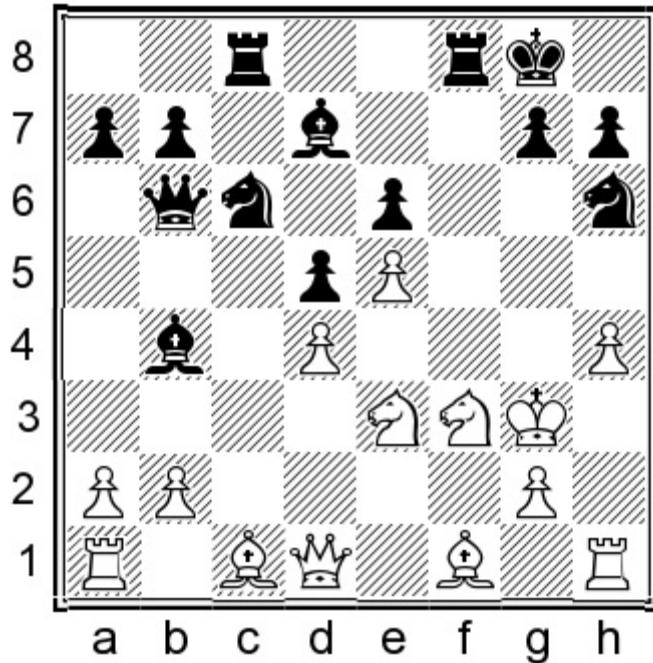


**16.♗g2 ♜e4 17.g5 ♛f5 18.♗xf5 ♕xf5 19.♗e3 ♜xf3 20.♗xf3 ♛xe5 21.♗g4 ♛xg4 22.♕xg4 ♕af8
23.♖hg1 ♜d6 24.♗c1 ♕f3+ 25.♔h4 ♕3f4**

White resigned.

We will never know what kind of ‘improvement’ McDonnell had in mind, because in the next game La Bourdonnais took a different course in the exercise position above.

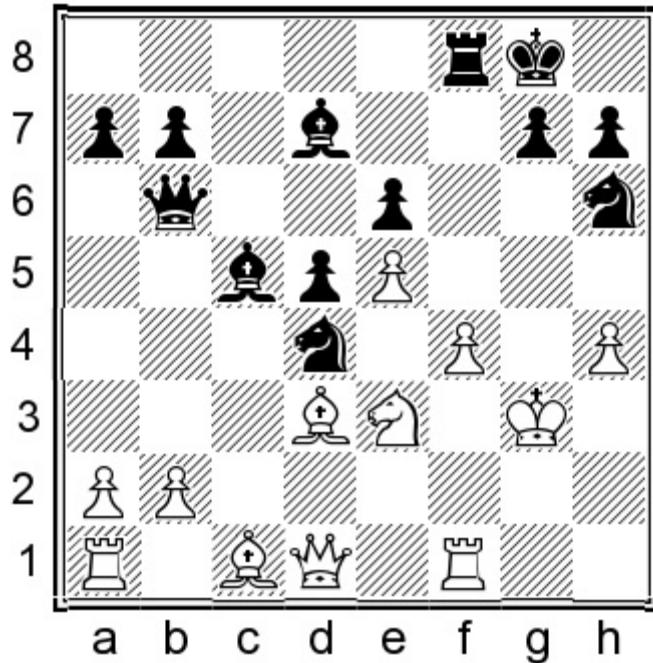
12...♜ac8 13.h4 fxe5 14.fxe5



14...Qxf3+!

This is the very first example of what was to become one of the major attractions of the French Defence from Black's standpoint (Black also could have played this directly from the exercise position, without first ...Qac8).

15.gxf3 Qxd4 16.Qd3 Qf8 17.f4 Qc5 18.Qf1

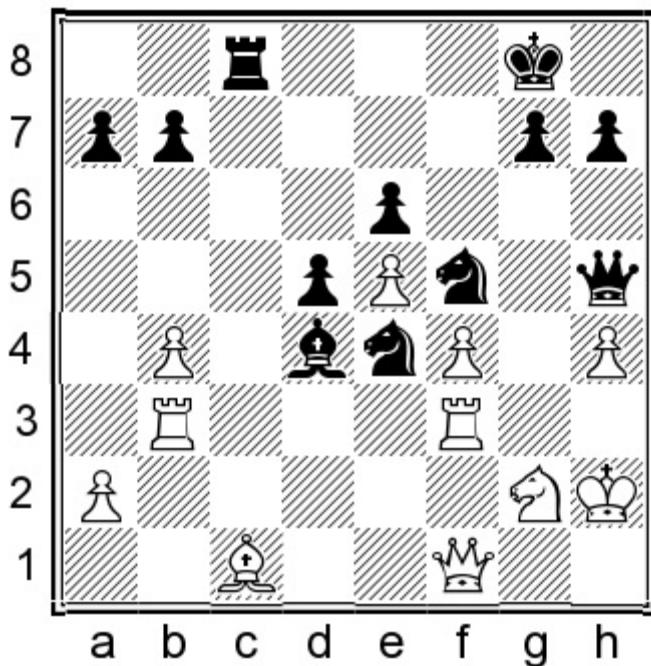


(Exercise no 30)

18... $\mathbb{Q}b5$!

And, as a complement to the manoeuvre from the previous game, this is the other important way to bring the French bishop into play (and exchange it for White's good bishop). There are other good moves, but I hope you at least considered this one.

19. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ $\mathbb{W}xb5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}e2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}eg3$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 24. $\mathbb{W}f1$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 25.b4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}bb3$ $\mathbb{Q}c8!$



A dream position for the French player. Golombek might be right about the quality of play in this match, but the influence of a picture like this and of Black's manoeuvres in this game must have been enormous.

28. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}c2$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}fxe3$ $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 31. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c1+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f1+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}f3+$

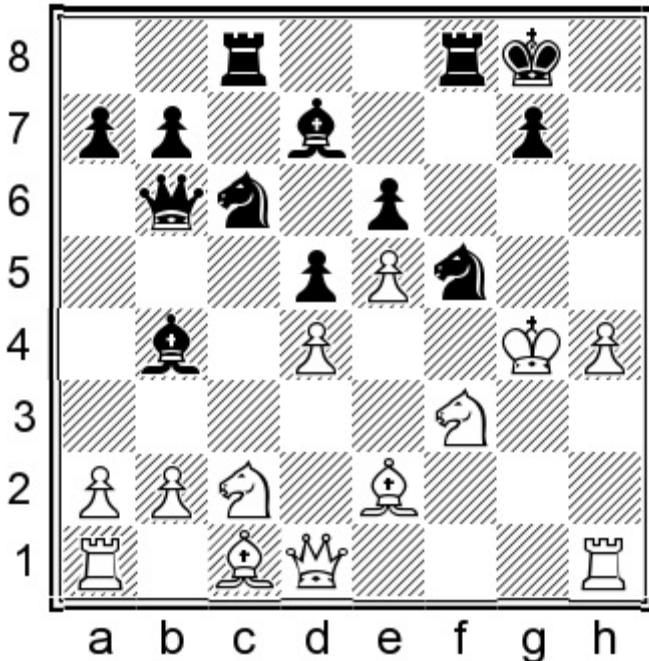
And White resigned.

However, the strong competition worked out well for McDonnell and, though it took him time, he finally drew some good conclusions and in the later games he played these positions better. Quite probably he had some help with this. A letter, written during this match, has been preserved in which he asks another strong English player, George Walker, for advice on how to handle the French Defence. He wants Walker to look at the following piece of analysis:

1.e4 c5 2.f4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.c3 e6 4. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 5.e5 f6 6. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 8.d4 cxd4 9.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 10.h4 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}e2$

McDonnell remarks that he played $\mathbb{Q}e3$ generally too soon (see move nine in the game above). That at least was a good conclusion.

11... $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ 0-0 13. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ fxe5 14.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ h5 16.g4 hxg4+ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xg4$



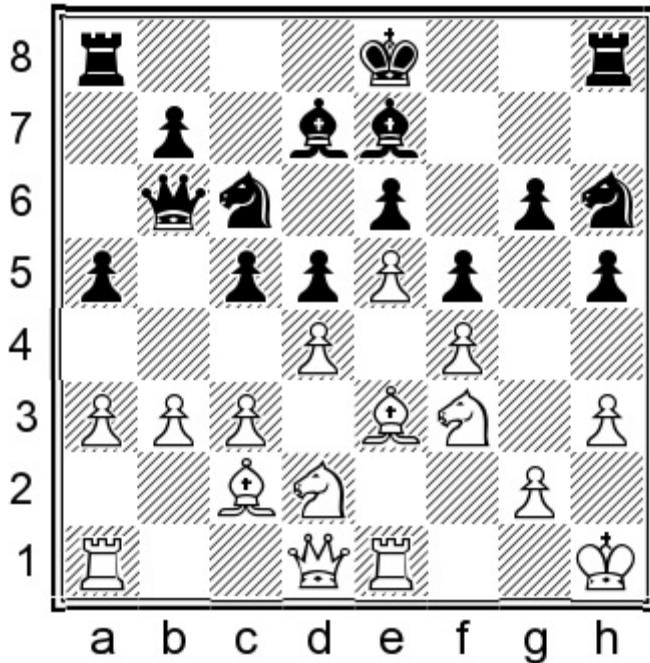
McDonnell ends his analysis, saying: ‘Look at the position of the King! Any one would swear it was a game of mine, but is it bad?’²⁰ The answer to this letter has not been preserved, but it may have been that Walker told McDonnell to stop this nonsense immediately. That would be the only sensible answer – the final position from the analysis above is not bad: it is terrible.

With or without help, if you look at the next position, from the last game with this French structure, the differences are striking.

Alexander McDonnell

Louis de La Bourdonnais

London 1834 m6 (8)



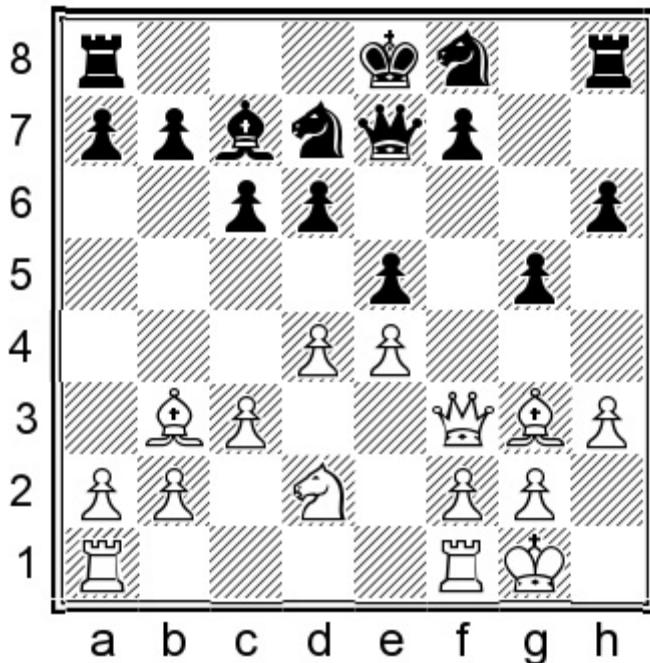
White has castled, developed all his pieces and kept his pawn structure intact. Black's pawn play on the kingside hasn't been perfect, so White is a bit better. A future ... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ (Greco's trick!) can be met by $\mathbb{Q}g1$. (16... $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g1$)

The above position is one example, but in general both players showed little restraint in sending their pawns into battle, which might also have been inspired by Philidor. In these matches you will often encounter the moves g2-g4 and ...g7-g5 – sometimes at a less than appropriate moment.

Louis de La Bourdonnais

Alexander McDonnell

London 1834 m4 (3)

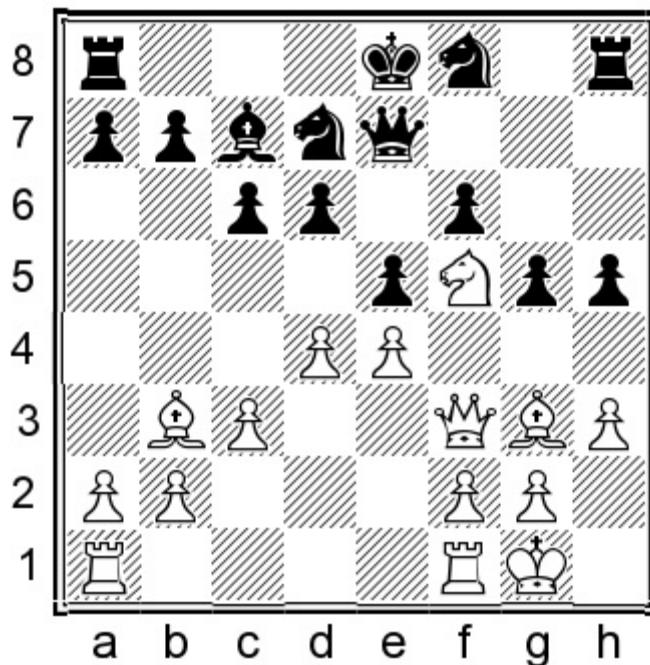


White to move

(Exercise no 31)

Black has combined an early ...g7-g5 with the exchange of the light-squared bishops. The next positional manoeuvre, exploiting the weakness of f5, must be in the toolbox of every stronger club player of today. (Simple developing moves like 16.♗ad1 also preserve some advantage for White.)

16.♘c4! h5 17.♘e3 f6 18.♘f5

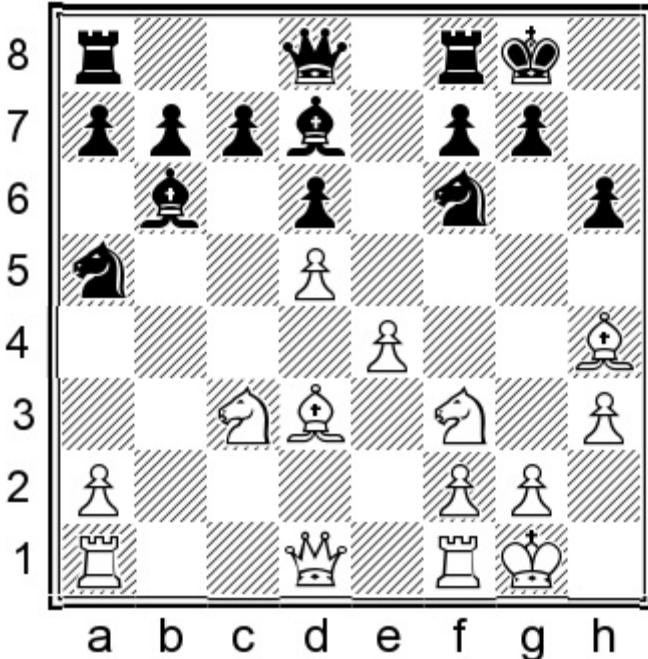


A dream position. The knight on f5 is one of the great heroes in the history of chess. Evidently La Bourdonnais already knew a thing or two about weak squares. Unfortunately, later in this game White managed to spoil the win.

Louis de La Bourdonnais

Alexander McDonnell

London 1834 m4 (17)



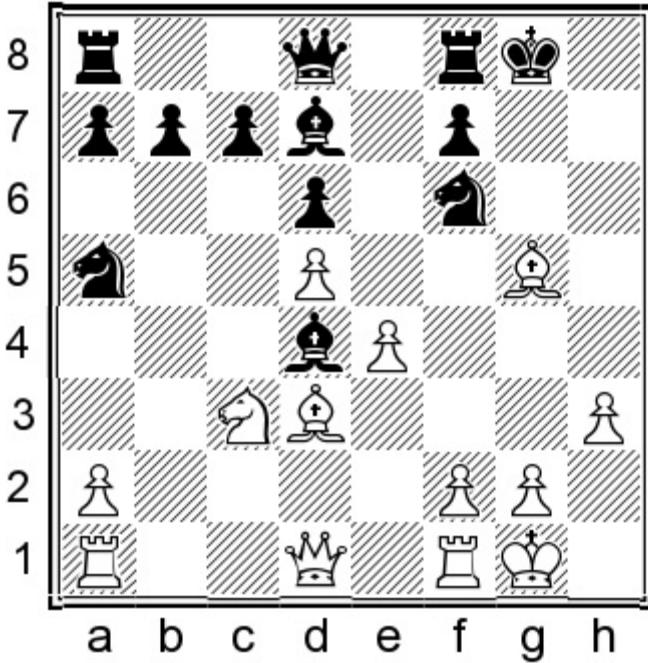
In those days the Evans Gambit was becoming popular. Although it was a British invention one might recognize the influence of the Italian school. McDonnell's tutor was William Lewis, who introduced the work of the Modenese in England.

Here, in compensation for the pawn, Black's knight on a5 is a bit out of play and the pin is very annoying.

14...g5 (Exercise no 32)

This is understandable, since there is no easy way to get rid of the pin. This move raises a well-known question every player gets confronted with now and then. The modest answer would be 14.♗g3, with sufficient compensation, but White rightly takes up the gauntlet:

15.♗xg5! hxg5 16.♕xg5 ♖d4



An important defence, although it loses quickly. Another try was 16... $\mathbb{E}e8$ (to defend against the threat of 17.e5 followed by $\mathbb{Q}e4$) and then the very patient 17. $\mathbb{Q}h1!$ to follow up with f2-f4 seems strongest. Black has great difficulties liberating himself.

Now the exchange sacrifice is killing:

17. $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$ 18. $\mathbb{W}xa1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 19.f4 $\mathbb{W}e7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}c3$ b6 21. $\mathbb{E}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 23. $\mathbb{E}g3+$ 1-0

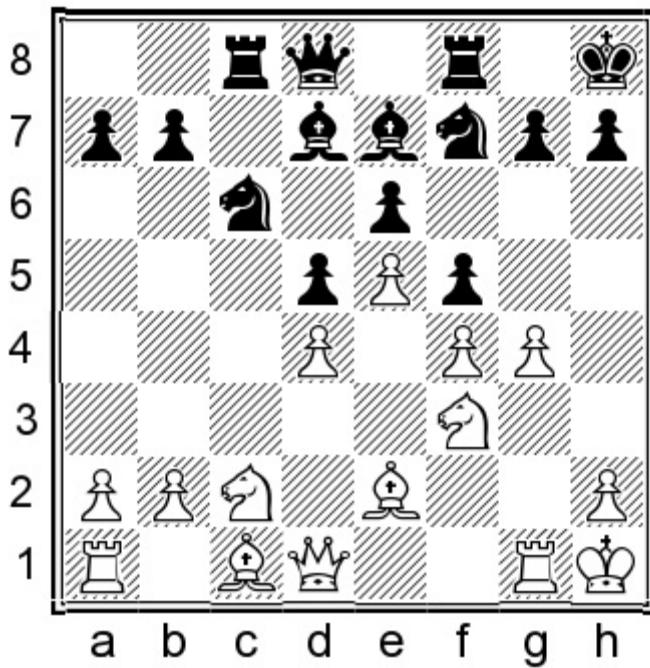
It's only fair to say that McDonnell in turn managed to beat La Bourdonnais a few times with this typical sacrifice.

I have singled out a few interesting themes, but a lot more happened in this match. In those days it was not at all customary for the players to keep score of their games, but luckily for this match a secretary was willing to volunteer. For several months, five to six hours a day, he was at his post and thanks to him this match became a great source for study and analysis for years to come. The importance of such an amount of real games of (for those days) high level to analyse, can hardly be overestimated.

After this match, life had little left in store for either player. McDonnell died within a year (some claim out of exhaustion) and La Bourdonnais also became ill. No longer able to earn a living by playing chess, he died in poverty a few years later.

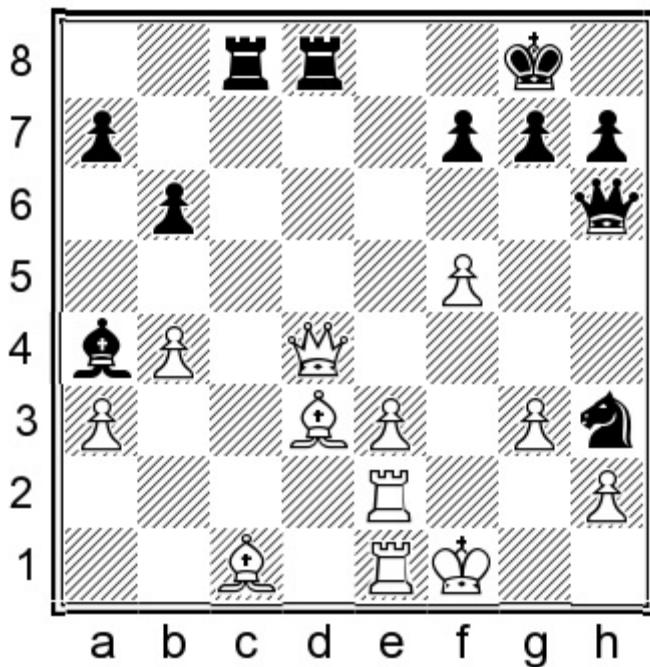
Exercises for Chapter 6

33 (go to the solution)



Black to move

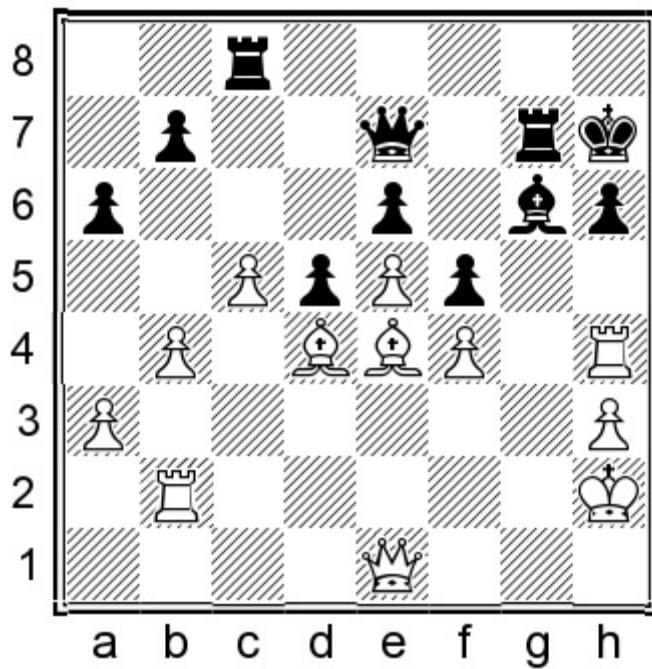
34 (go to the solution)



White to move

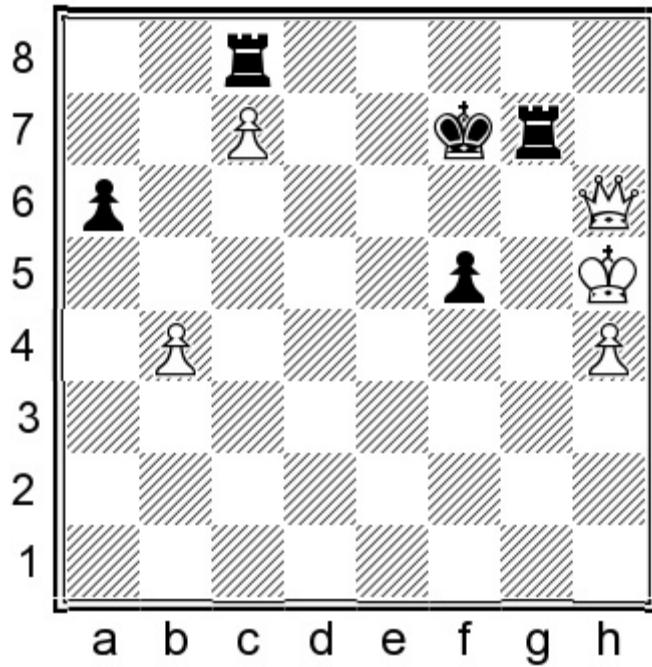
Black believed that with his last move 31... $\mathbb{E}ed8$ he was winning a piece when White shocked him with 32.b5. Has he been swindled?

35 (go to the solution)

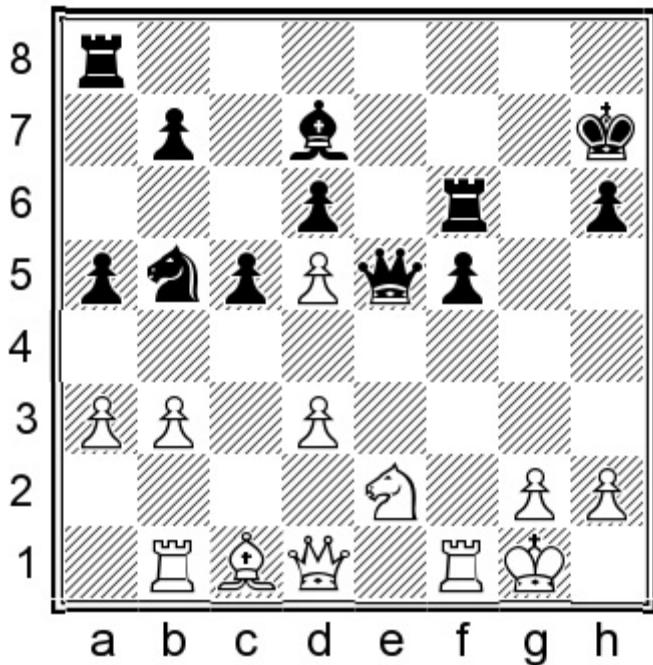


Black to move

36 (go to the solution)



White to move



White to move

The offer to you, playing Black, is made, to play position no 37 ‘half-a-dozen times, for as many guineas as you may think proper to risk on the result.’ Do you accept this offer and if so, how many guineas are you prepared to risk?

6

Staunton and the chess column as a second front

The Staunton-Saint-Amant match ('the match between France and England').

Nine years later, the rivalry between France and England was revived in a second match between two of the strongest players of the day, Howard Staunton (1810-1874) and Pierre de Saint-Amant (1800-1872). Whereas in the previous match it was more or less a lucky accident that the games were recorded, in this match it was prearranged. Already there were several newspapers and magazines that followed the events closely and the games attracted a lot of publicity.

About this match Golombek is remarkably mild:

‘An examination of the games shows them to be of much superior quality to those of the La Bourdonnais-McDonnell match. Blunders were much rarer and there was no shortage of strategic conceptions. Murray has rightly said that the games were



regarded as classical specimens of play.²¹

I find it difficult to see this enormous progress or to find more than a few examples of nice tactics or strong strategy. It seems that, even more than in the McDonnell-La Bourdonnais match, the difference in strength was rather great, although Saint-Amant did not agree, as we will see later on. Staunton took the lead with seven wins (and one draw, but draws did not count) before Saint-Amant could score his first. After that things went less smoothly for Staunton, but he finally clinched victory with eleven wins against six (and four draws).

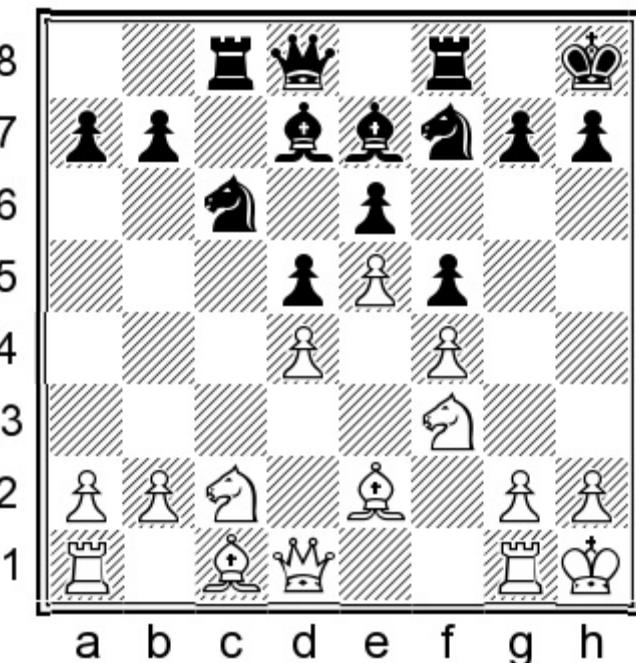
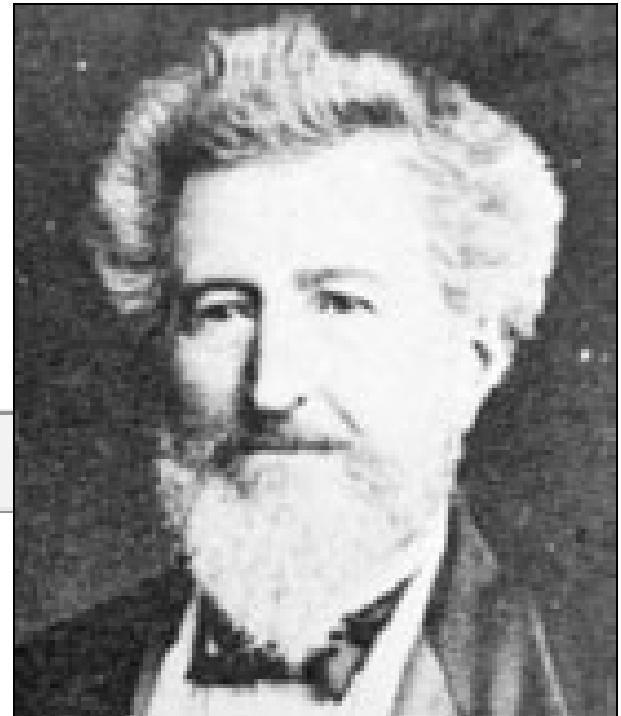
Pierre de Saint-Amant

One bad sign of the quality of the Frenchman's play is the fact that twice he kept playing on with a huge material deficit. We grant the younger children at the chess club the right to play on till mate, but in a match supposedly about who is the world's number one it's a bit embarrassing.

Let's have a look at some instructive and amusing moments. The first game continued the French/Sicilian discussion we saw in the previous chapter.

**Pierre de Saint-Amant – Howard Staunton Paris 1843
m (1)**

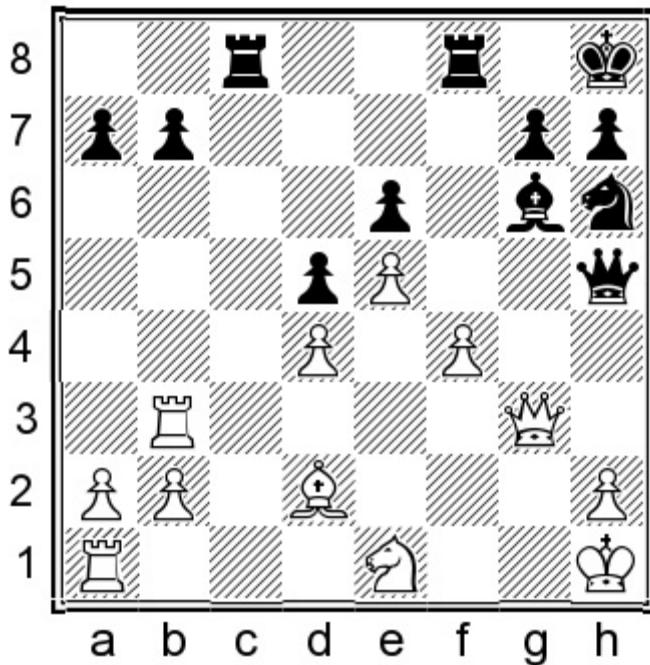
1.e4 c5 2.f4 e6 3.♘f3 ♘c6 4.c3 d5 5.e5 ♘h6 6.♘a3 ♘e7
7.♘c2 f5 8.d4 0-0 9.♗e2 ♘d7 10.0-0 ♜c8 11.♗h1 cxd4
12.cxd4 ♘f7 13.♗g1 ♛h8



14.g4?

A positional error. After the exchange of pawns, Black gains control over f5 with ... $\mathbb{Q}h6$. Extra credit for those who saw the manoeuvre ... $\mathbb{Q}d7-e8-g6$ (or -h5) as a possible follow-up. Staunton clearly took some lessons from La Bourdonnais's handling of these French structures. (*Exercise no 33*)

14...fxg4 15. $\mathbb{B}xg4$ $\mathbb{Q}h6!$ 16. $\mathbb{B}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 18. $\mathbb{W}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{W}xh4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 22. $\mathbb{B}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 23. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 24. $\mathbb{B}b3$



One more diagram to show Black's complete dominance on the light squares.

24... $\mathbb{W}e2$ 25. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{W}f1+$ 26. $\mathbb{W}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}e4+$ 27. $\mathbb{B}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{W}xf3+$ 29. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{W}xg2+$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{B}c2$ 31. $\mathbb{B}d1$ $\mathbb{B}xf4$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{B}xd4$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ $\mathbb{B}xd1$ 0-1

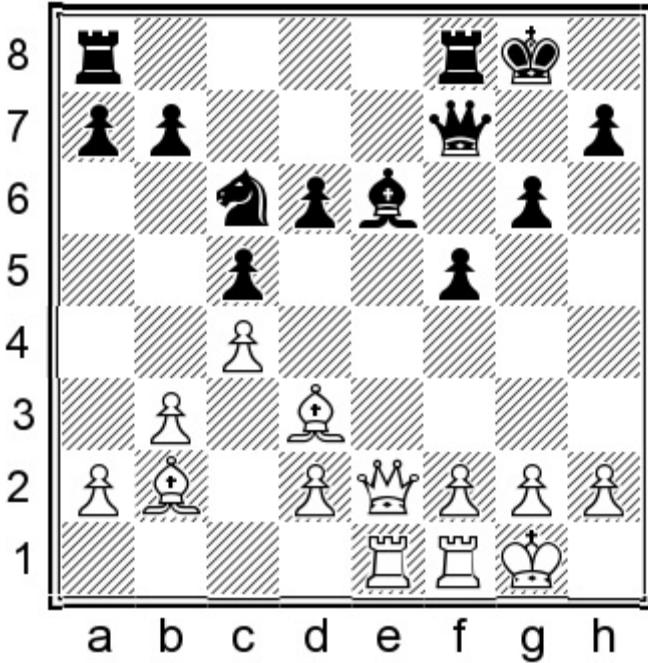
I mentioned McDonnell's progress during his match, and likewise Saint-Amant learned some things from his failures. In a later game with this opening he did prepare the g2-g4 advance with h2-h3 and obtained the advantage.

In this match, blunders were, in contrast to Golombek's opinion, not that rare. The next one is surely the most incomprehensible.

Howard Staunton

Pierre de Saint-Amant

Paris 1843 m (6)



Black to move

15... $\mathbb{E}ad8??$

On 1.d4 (and 1.c4), Saint-Amant several times chose a dubious set-up combining ...c7-c5 with ...f7-f5 (for example 1.d4 c5 2.d5 f5), which was probably inspired by Philidor's teachings. This time he has survived the opening and after a normal move like 15... $\mathbb{E}fe8$ White would have been only slightly better. Did he just miss that White with his last move (15. $\mathbb{E}ae1$) attacked the bishop? Or did he really intend to follow up with what he did, 'trapping' the rook?

A newspaper report suggested the first: 'An incomprehensible mistake! The Black player had warmed his feet, and on returning he inadvertently played 15... $\mathbb{E}ad8$, instead of 15... $\mathbb{E}ae8$.'²² So probably that is what happened, although even then it remains strange that, on seeing the next move, Black did not resign immediately.

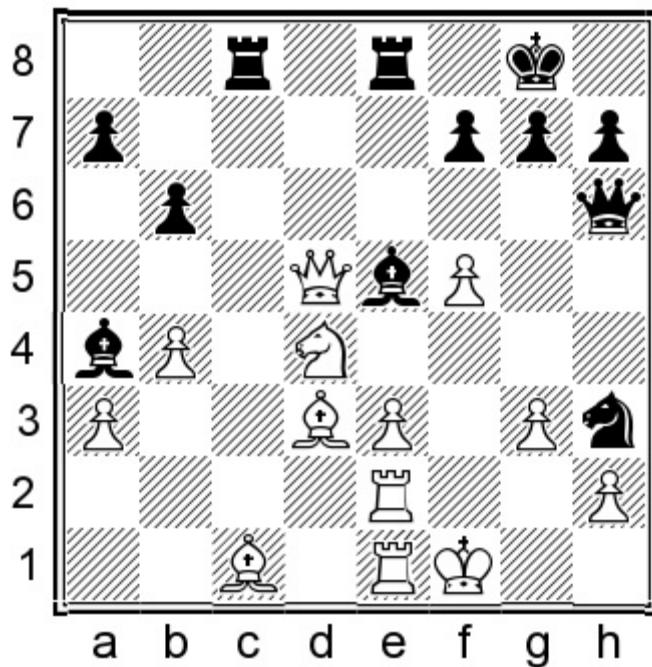
15... $\mathbb{E}ad8??$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 17. $\mathbb{E}xe6$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c2$

The two bishops for the rook are winning, of course, but keeping the extra piece with 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $dxe5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ was simpler.

18... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 19. $\mathbb{E}xe5$ $dxe5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}c3$

and White won at move 53(!) – though this is not one of the two games mentioned above.

The Frenchman's first victory has been described as one of the greatest swindles in the history of chess, and indeed what happened in this game is rather miraculous.



Black to move

White's last move was 30... $\mathbb{H}ge2?$ but that costs a piece.

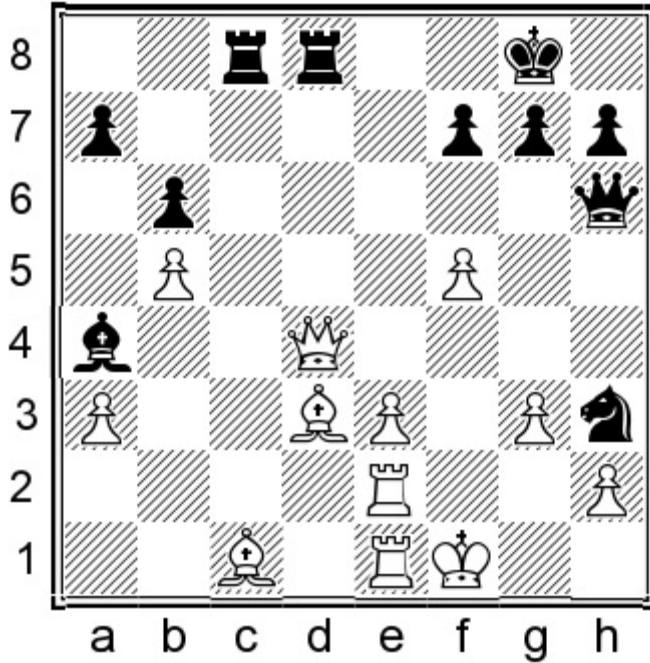
30... $\mathbb{Q}xd4!$ 31. $\mathbb{W}xd4$

Maybe White had put his hopes on 31.exd4 but after 31... $\mathbb{R}xc1$ the rook on e8 is sufficiently defended.

31... $\mathbb{R}ed8!$

Now the queen has no good squares to defend the bishop, on 32. $\mathbb{W}e4$ there is 32... $\mathbb{B}g5$. Time for the swindle.

32.b5!?



(Exercise no 34)

This introduces some back-rank tricks and one can imagine that Staunton hadn't seen this coming. Had he taken some time to adjust to the new situation, then he might have spotted some of his winning options.

32... $\mathbb{W}h5?$

Actually Black could have called White's bluff and taken the queen, but after 32... $\mathbb{B}xd4$ 33. $exd4$ he has to find 33.... $g5!$ and that's a hard one to spot.

But the next most natural move, 32... $\mathbb{B}b3$, is also completely winning. It's difficult to suggest a useful move for White.

With his move Staunton threatens mate as well as taking the queen, but that can be parried.

33.g4

The French chess magazine *La Palamède* (the earliest in its sort) commented: 'This last move was made with infinite talent. It is decisive.'²³ However, we have to take into account that Saint-Amant himself was the editor.

Now Black should have played 33... $\mathbb{W}h4$ 34. $\mathbb{W}xa4$ $\mathbb{B}xd3$, with excellent compensation for the pawn. Instead he takes the queen at the most ludicrous moment.

33... $\mathbb{B}xd4??$ 34. $exd4$ f6 35. $gxh5$ 1-0

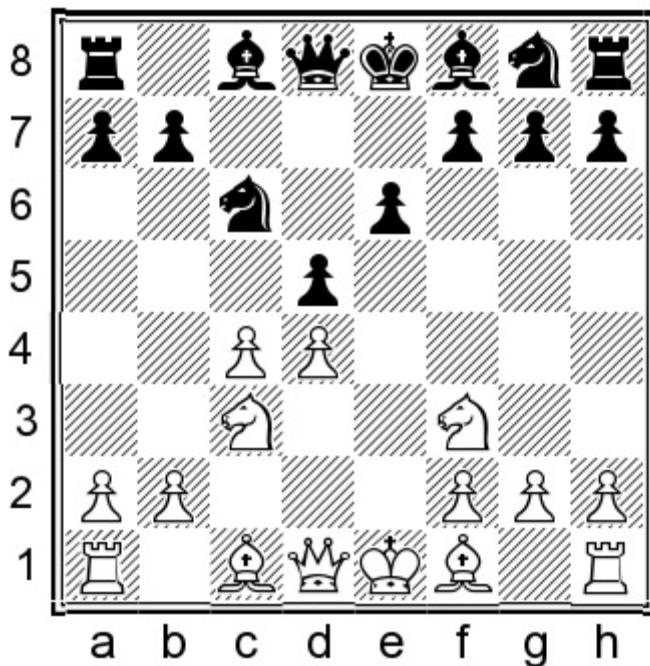
It is remarkable that in this match not a single game started with 1.e4 e5. If those players have to be placed in a school it would be Philidor's rather than the Italian. Staunton's frequent use of 1.c4

deserved the English opening its name.

The next game features several interesting moments that shed some light on the positional strength of both players.

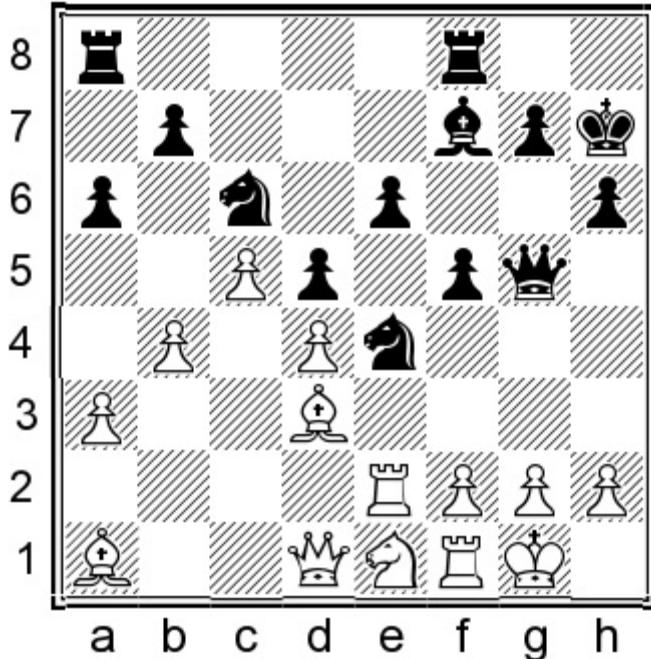
Howard Staunton – Pierre de Saint-Amant Paris 1843 m (14)

1.c4 c5 2. \mathbb{Q} c3 \mathbb{Q} c6 3.e3 d6 4.d4 cxd4 5.exd4 e6 6. \mathbb{Q} f3 d5



This position can arise from different openings, for example the Caro-Kann Panov. But since it has taken Black two moves to play ...d7-d5 he is a full tempo down. It is true that at the time no theory existed about this opening; that surely would have been of great help to Saint-Amant.

Later, in the middlegame, Staunton had to make a major decision regarding the knight on e4.

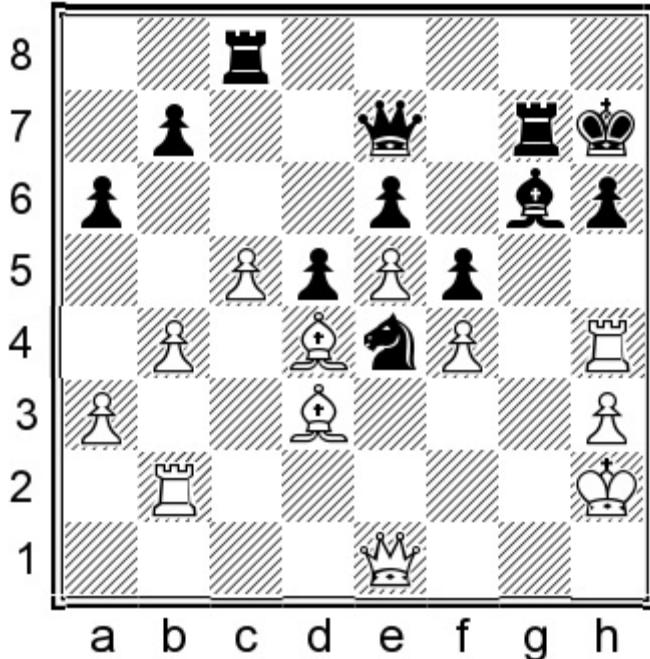


This knight is, for the time being, the pride of the black position. But it can be driven away and that would have been a good option for White: play 21.f3 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and then slowly improve his position with manoeuvres like $\mathbb{Q}d3-c2$ and possibly to a4, combined with $\mathbb{Q}e1-d3$ and maybe to e5 (after the exchange $\mathbb{Q}xc6$) to conquer the square e5 and $\mathbb{Q}a1-b2$ with sometimes the idea $\mathbb{Q}c1$, to improve his worst-placed piece. These are all very reasonable ideas and White can also start with them and follow up with f2-f3 at a later time. In the preface we saw Anderssen play f2-f3 in a somewhat similar position. Staunton, however, took a different course.

21.f4?

This gives away all the advantage. A knight like the one on e4 is difficult to tolerate for a long time, but now White can only get rid of it through an exchange.

Actually, Staunton did manage to live with this knight for quite some time, but something went wrong with his kingside play in the meantime.



I hope you noticed the rook has gone totally astray on h4. Now White finally took on e4.

45.♕xe4 (Exercise no 35) 45...fxe4?

We can only conclude from this move that Saint-Amant had no clue about the dire straits the rook on h4 is in, and which it would have stayed in after the correct move 45...dxe4. It is true that Nimzowitsch's concept of prophylaxis hadn't yet been invented, but you don't really need that to pay some minimal attention to the possibilities (and problems) of your opponent.

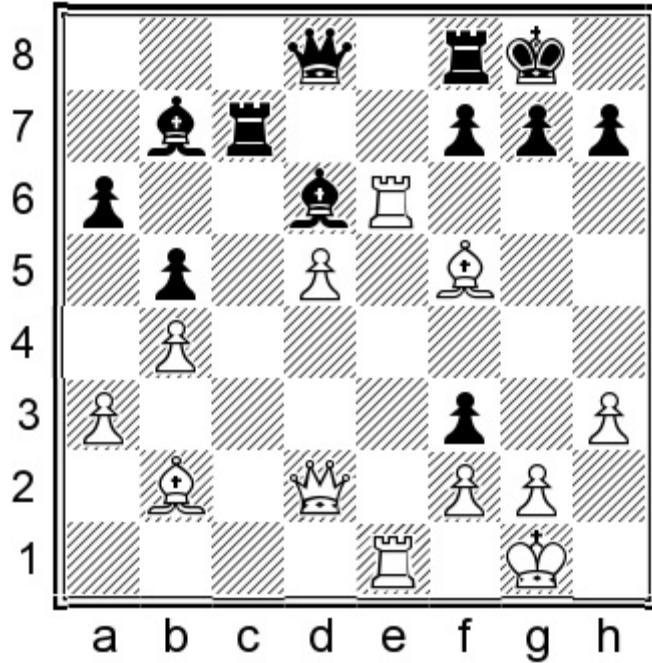
White gladly accepted the sudden opportunity with 46.♗g4 and later the game ended in a draw.

This match wasn't all trouble and affliction, and its two highlights deserve mentioning. Staunton ended the match with a famous exchange sacrifice, a forerunner to what later became known as the Russian exchange sacrifice. Saint-Amant's major achievement was of a tactical nature.

Pierre de Saint-Amant

Howard Staunton

Paris 1843 m (13)



White to move

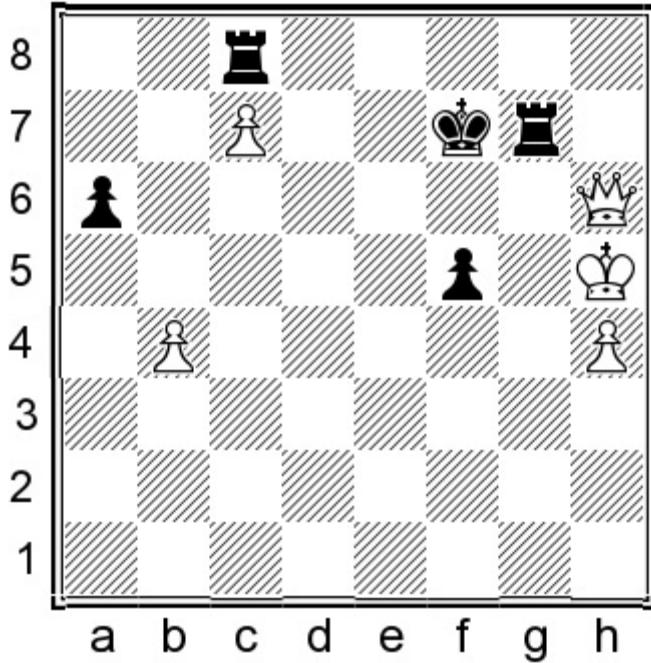
White ended the game with a small combination:

24.♗f6! gxsf6 25.♗xd6!

and after 25...♗xd6 26.♗h6 Black gets mated soon.

Before this match the contestants had already played a shorter one in London the same year, which ended in favour of Saint-Amant (3½-2½). He needed some luck for this, as the next fragment shows.

Pierre de Saint-Amant
Howard Staunton
 London 1843 m (5)



White to move

(Exercise no 36)

Having spoiled several enormous winning chances before, White now had to make a draw and he managed to do it brilliantly:

58.b5! axb5 59.♗g6+!

However, instead of complying with the stalemate, Staunton played on with 59...♔g8?? and could immediately resign after 60.♗e6+.

'The French considered it was now one match apiece and a third would be required to decide the matter. [...] Negotiations did not go smoothly [...].

According to Murray, the Frenchman regarded Staunton's victory as "accidental"; he posed as the champion and insisted on regarding Staunton as the challenger.'²⁴

This third match never took off and Saint-Amant didn't play much of a role amongst the best afterwards. It is hard to imagine he would have stood a chance in a third match, but funny he himself thought otherwise.

In those days, arguments about who was the stronger player often occurred, and later on we will see some more of them. That is not as strange as it may seem today. We have a rating system to decide the issue and we have far more competitions that make a reliable comparison possible. Also, there are many strong players who are able to judge each other's strength and the assistance of engine analysis makes these judgments even more perfect.

Back then, very little of this existed, so if you wanted to be recognized as one of the best players – or even the best – it was sometimes necessary to defend your own cause. Staunton was well known to be

perfectly capable of this, to put it mildly, but in this issue with Saint-Amant he was of course right.

For this purpose, Staunton made use of his chess columns. According to Harding he had a follower in Steinitz regarding this habit: ‘Unfortunately Steinitz had learned from Staunton [...] that a chess column could be a vehicle for answering critics and pursuing vendettas.’²⁵ In a later chapter we will see some of the controversy Steinitz got himself into.

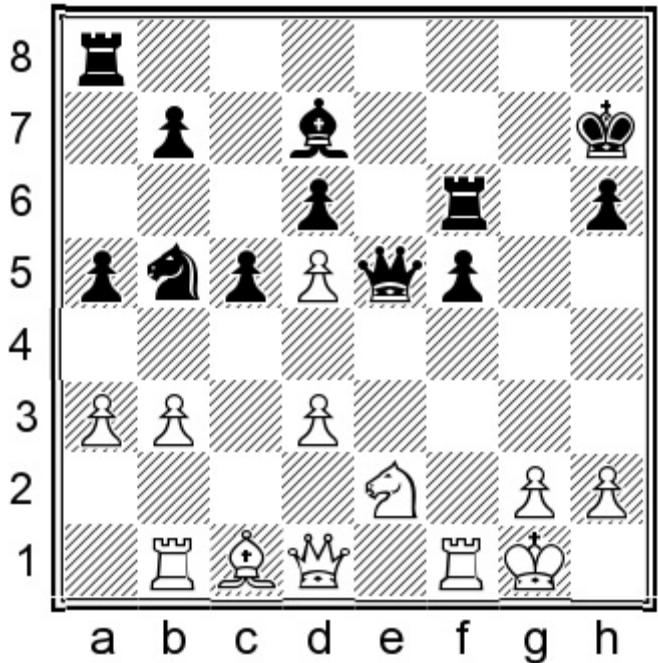
In my younger years, the use of rating systems was still in its infancy and only the strongest players had (national or international) ratings. The great majority did not, and this made the composition of club teams, for example, a tricky business. At the annual meeting, vehement discussions arose, often lasting until after midnight – and though most clubs had the wise policy of letting a small commission give binding advice on the composition of the teams, it sometimes led to lasting frictions. Older players, who had been on the first team for ages, were eager to hold on to their position. Today the rating system clinically documents the decline of the aging players (sigh), but back then, bringing forward their great experience often saved them their place in the first team.

Making a small jump to Morphy’s day, the next story nicely illustrates the great confidence people used to have in this ‘experience’. When young Morphy had his great successes in London and Paris (in 1858 and 1859) there also existed a chess community in Russia (St Petersburg), but because of the distance there were few contacts with the European chess capitals. Hoping to overcome this distance, Prince Urusoff wrote at the time: ‘I consider it absolutely necessary to call our Russian players out of obscurity because we Russians in my opinion have outstripped the foreigners in the art of chess.’ Urusoff especially thought that the strongest Russian player, Alexander Petroff, would stand a good chance against Morphy: ‘He is like Morphy in everything but has an advantage over him in years.’²⁶ At the time Petroff was sixty-five years old...

Let’s return to our two match players. Compared with a book, a newspaper column or a magazine is a much better medium to engage in a direct discussion with your antagonists. At the time of their match, both players had their magazines, *Le Palamède* and *The Chess Player’s Chronicle*, and their reactions to each other’s analyses added a lot of instructional and entertainment value.

Disagreeing on an analysis in *La Palamède* of a game he lost, Staunton reacted in a typical way:

Howard Staunton
Pierre de Saint-Amant
Paris 1843 m (16)



White to move

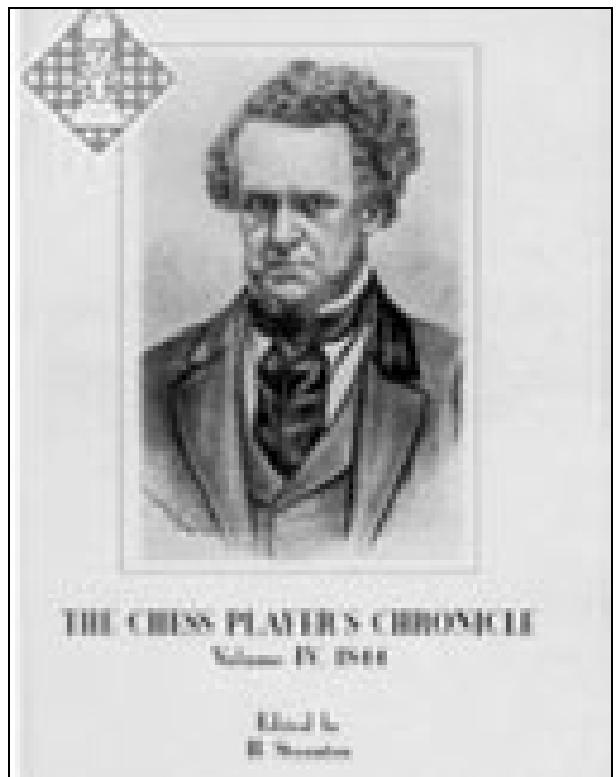
(Exercise no 37)

The Chess Player's Chronicle with Howard Staunton
on the cover.

'In the *Palamède* for February [...] we are gravely told at the present point, "Les Noirs ont maintenant l'attaque (!!), et leur jeu est supérieur à celui de leur adversaire." (!!!) We shall have much pleasure in affording the Editor of *Le Palamède* an opportunity of verifying this, to us, somewhat startling assertion; and for the purpose, we undertake, on his next visit to London, to play White's game against him from this move, half-a-dozen times, for as many guineas as he may think proper to risk on the result.'

Apparently, this invitation did not receive the wished-for answer; in an analysis of a later game we can read:

' [...] and we shall venture in this instance to repeat the offer we made to the Editor of *Le Palamède*, in reference to a position in Game No. 16 – to play [...] against him [...] half a dozen times, for any reasonable stake he may choose to name – and, that we have not again be met with the silly sneer about an Englishman's love for gold (a taunt which comes with exquisite grace from a Frenchman), we take leave to propose that the winnings in both cases be devoted to the subscription now in progress to solace the declining days of Mr. Sarratt's aged widow.'²⁷



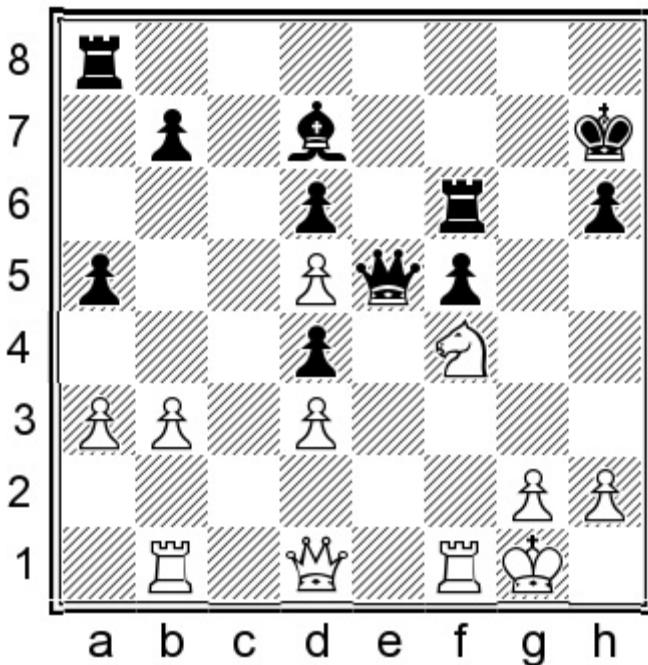
Well, were you prepared to put some guineas at stake? In that case you are probably a bit of a gambling type. Or you were caught by the first impression – it looks indeed as if Black has a very active and menacing position. But Staunton was right – White has the better position and if you look closer you can see that with the knight coming to f4, White's king is actually completely safe.

But to propose such a bet because of this assertion of Saint-Amant seems to be a rather heavy weapon – more preposterous claims were made in the analyses of these games.

The game continued:

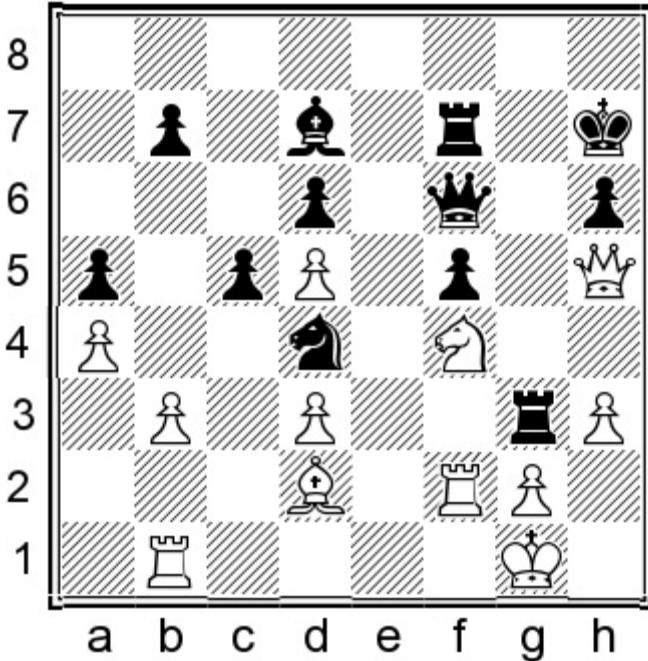
24.a4

Even better was 24. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ cxd4 26. $\mathbb{Q}f4$:



White's king is much safer and Black's rather sad bishop is no match for the beautiful knight. I hope you have your guineas at hand.

24.a4 $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 28.h3 $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$



White has a big advantage and he could have taken the pawn on a5 but instead he started some tactics that led to nothing:

30.♕e6? ♜xe6 31.dxe6 ♜xe6 32.♗xh6

The trick.

32...♝g6 33.♝xg6+ ♔xg6 34.♔f4 ♜xd3

and Black later managed to convert his extra pawn.

Those quarrels make an interesting part of chess history, but more important for the topic of this book is the role chess columns played in chess improvement. In the first half of the 19th century, these columns started to appear in magazines and newspapers. Staunton had several, over a longer period, and they had great influence. Apart from that, Staunton also wrote a few books that made an important contribution to the improvement of lots of players in the next generations.

During the 19th century, the literature on chess, in books and in columns, really got off the ground. Together with the start of serious competition and the recording of games this was a very important motor of improvement. As early as 1844, George Walker could publish a book containing *One Thousand Games*. One year before, Tassilo von der Lasa published the first edition of the *Handbuch des Schachspiels* (also known as the Bilguer, after Paul von Bilguer, who started the project but unfortunately died before the first edition was completed), which would remain very influential for decades to come.

Although there can be different opinions about the quality of the games in the two matches that I have discussed in this and the preceding chapter, they played an important role in the rise of scoring, publishing and analysing games.

By organizing the first international tournament, Staunton made another important contribution to the

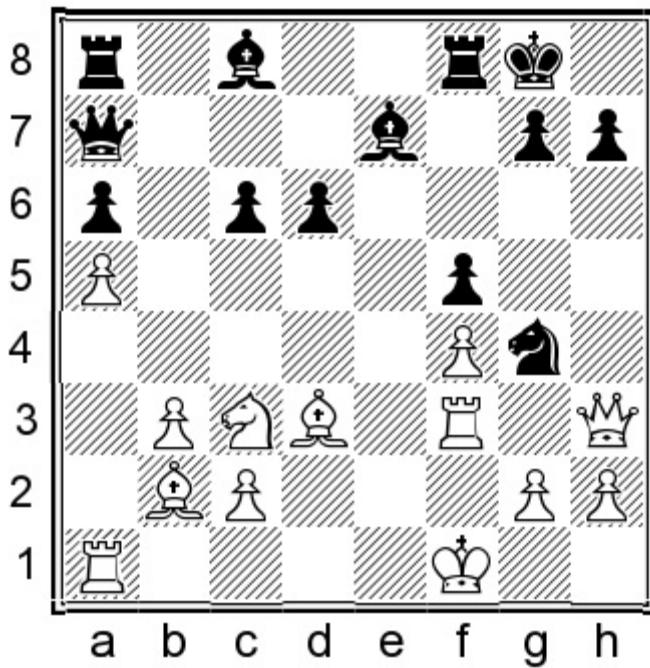
development of chess. Until then, a match between two players was the common form of competition, but in the London tournament of 1851 for the first time several players from different countries played together in one competition. This tournament was a knock-out event with mini-matches for 16 players. The all-play-all format was yet to be invented.

Unfortunately for Staunton, this tournament ended his reign as number one player in the world (if he ever had been), because Anderssen beat him convincingly in the semi-final. Anderssen went on to win the final and thereby became the new king of the hill.

After his disappointing performance, Staunton started to devote more time to his work as a Shakespearian scholar and less to his career as a chess player. As a writer on chess, he remained influential and, due to his pronounced character and his sharp pen, he kept being involved in all kinds of controversies.

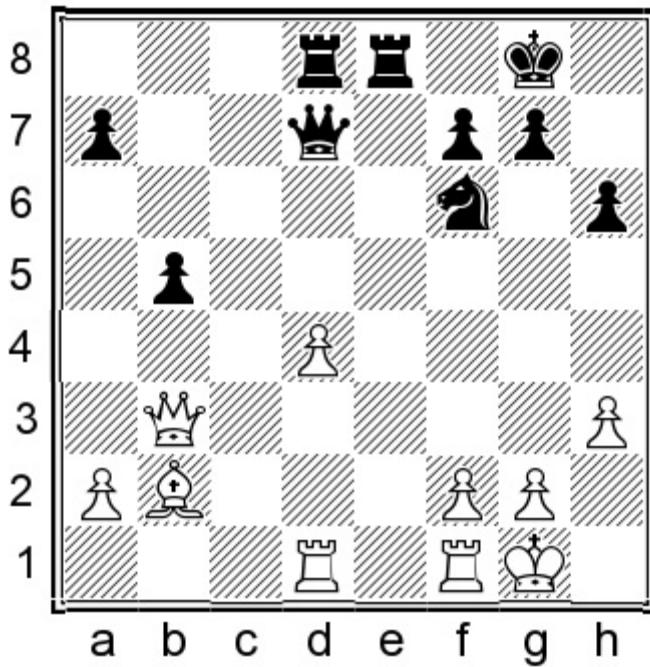
Exercises for Chapter 7

38 (go to the solution)



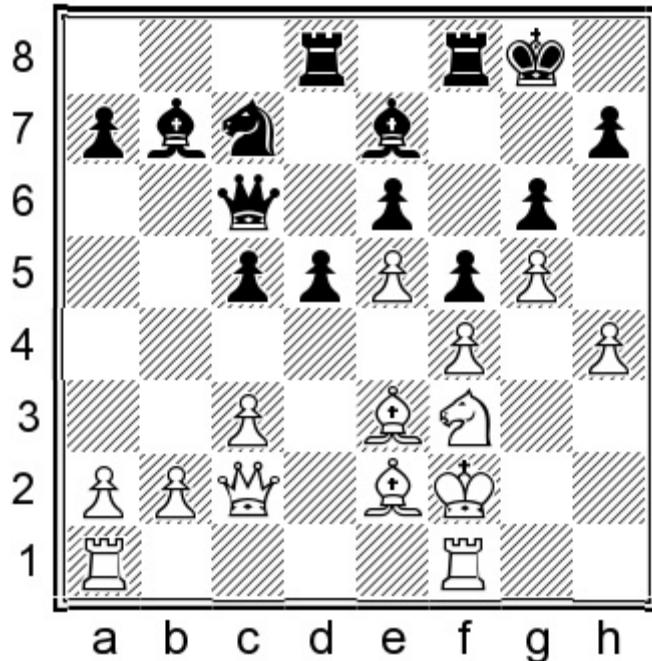
Black to move

39 (go to the solution)



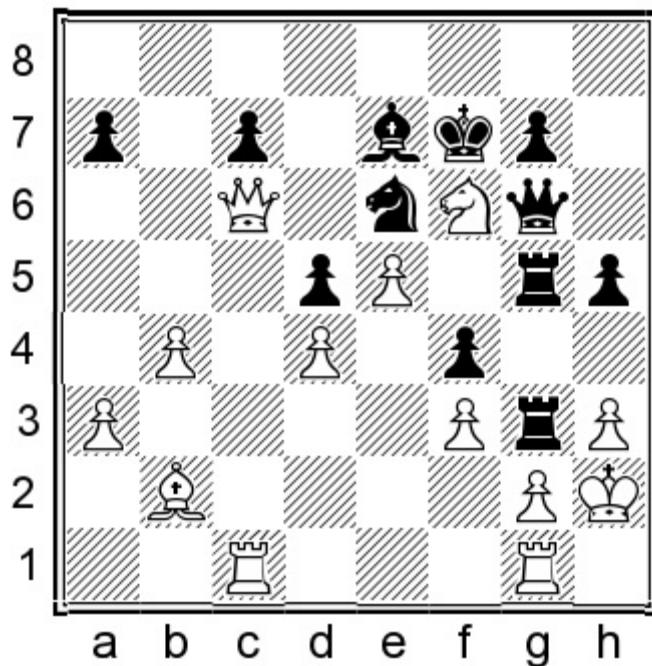
White to move

40 (*go to the solution*)



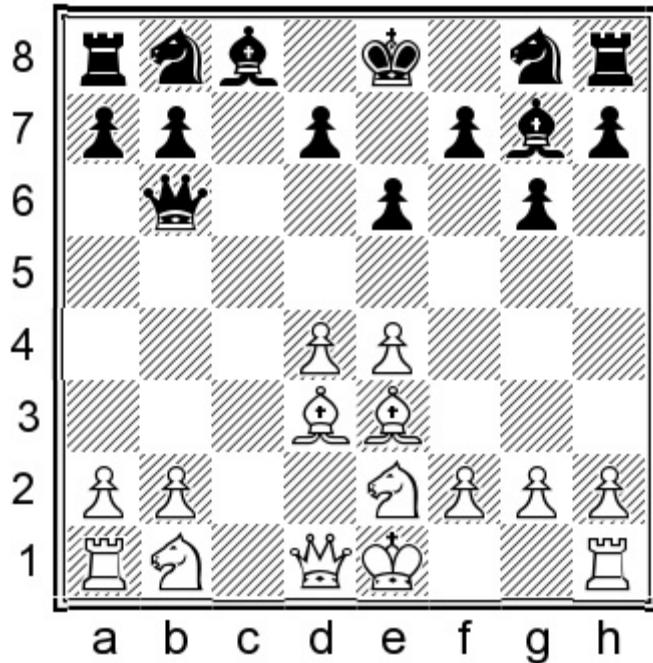
Black to move

41 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

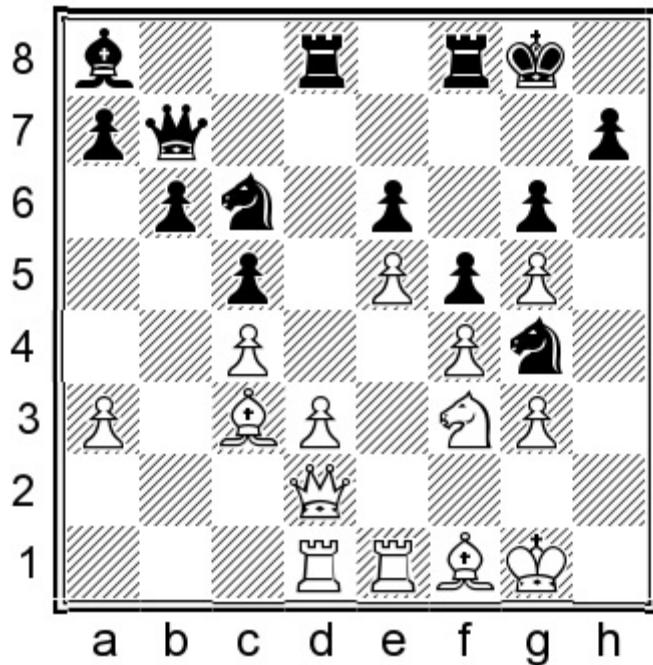
42 (*go to the solution*)



Black to move

A well-known question: is the pawn poisoned or not?

43 (go to the solution)



Black to move

London 1851

On the occasion of the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, Staunton organized the first international chess tournament. Not all the best players of the world could participate and several invited ones didn't make it in time, so there were some rather weak substitutes, but this tournament gives a good picture of how chess was played in the mid-19th century.

Staunton was the organizer and wrote the tournament book. He was also one of the favourites, or maybe the favourite, but he lost to Anderssen in the semi-final. In the tournament book, Staunton keeps on mentioning his poor form due to health issues and to fatigue resulting from his organizing duties. In chess (and in the rest of the world for that matter) there is a long tradition of looking for excuses for your defeats, and Staunton was an early and prominent representative.

Some considered Staunton to be the best player in the world after beating Saint-Amant, but there was also a lively chess-playing community in Germany. In Berlin there were several strong players, with Tassilo von der Lasa on top (the so-called Pleiades). He couldn't participate in the London tournament, but in 1853 he did beat Staunton in a match. Of the other German invitees, Anderssen had to overcome some financial problems, but Staunton generously offered to pay Anderssen's travel costs if necessary.

Maybe Staunton's complaints about his poor form had some basis, but either way I think Anderssen was the stronger player. His win was rather convincing, despite having had difficult pairings. The pairings in London were made at random and some of the weaker players did relatively well. But Anderssen had already faced Kieseritzky in the first round, followed by Szen, Staunton and Wyvill, all of them potential contenders for first prize, except perhaps for Wyvill, the other finalist, who had relatively easy pairings.

I have already mentioned that today Anderssen is portrayed as the personification of Romantic chess. If you look closely at his games in London you can see that he was a very versatile player to whom the 'attack at all costs' image doesn't fit at all.

For example, as Black he played mostly the Sicilian, a modern opening in those days, when Evans Gambits and King's Gambits were dominant. Against Kieseritzky he was very successful with it, winning two elegant miniatures:

Lionel Kieseritzky – Adolf Anderssen London 1851

1.e4 c5 2.b3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ a6 4.a4 e6 5. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8.0-0 0-0 9.d4 cxd4 10. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}b6$

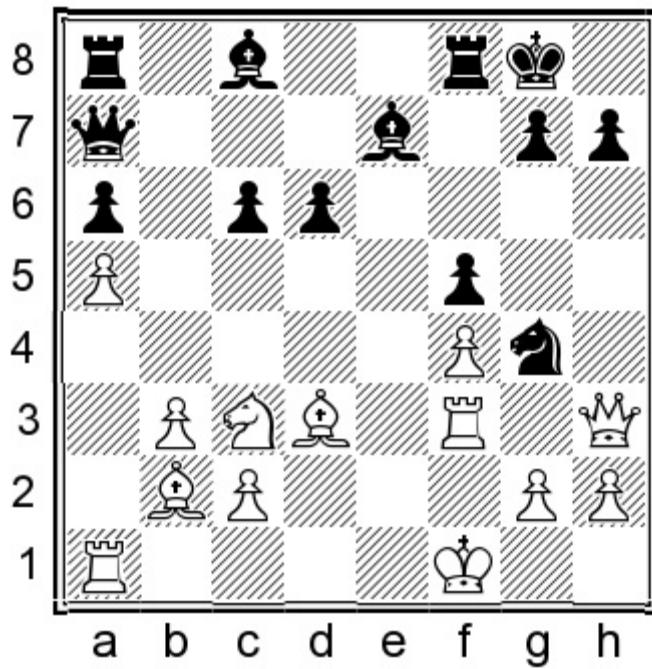
The Chess Tournament - London 1851

The first International Chess Tournament



Howard Staunton

11. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $bxc6$ 12. a5 $\mathbb{W}c7$ 13. f4 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ f5 15. exf5 exf5 16. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 17. $\mathbb{W}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 18. $\mathbb{E}f3$ $\mathbb{W}a7+$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f1$



(Exercise no 38)

19... $\mathbb{E}f6!$ 20. $\mathbb{E}g3$

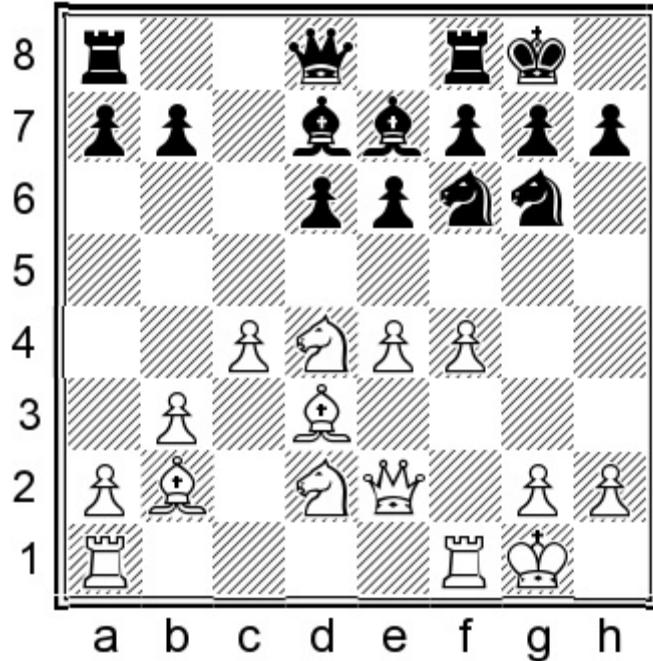
Staunton was very critical of this move: ‘a sort of double-barreled blunder I have hardly ever seen equaled, even among beginners at the game’²⁸, but it is easy to see that White has no way to save his position. After 20. $\mathbb{W}g3$ $\mathbb{E}h6$ 21. h3 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ the queen is trapped.

20... $\mathbb{W}f2$ mate.

Lionel Kieseritzky – Adolf Anderssen London 1851

1. e4 c5 2. b3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ e6 4. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 5. d4 cxd4 6. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 8. 0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ 0-0 10. c4 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 11. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 12. f4??!

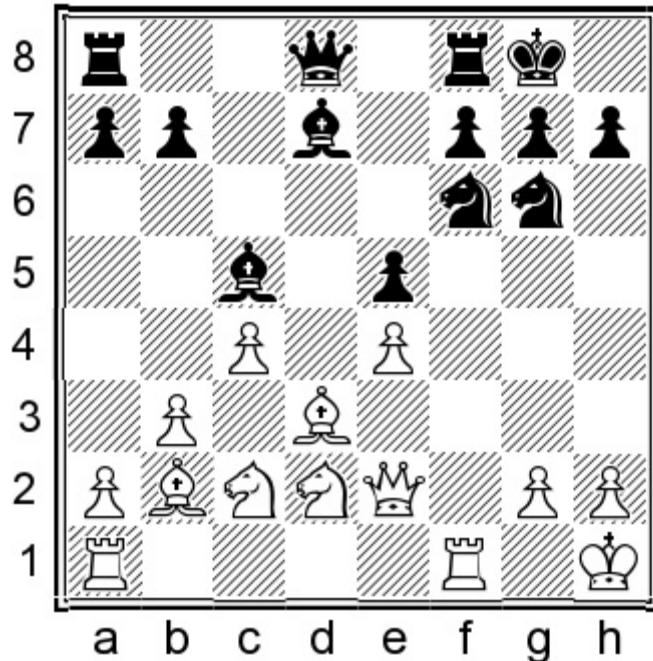
A normal-looking Sicilian move, but here it meets with a strong reply.



12...e5! 13.fxe5?

This makes things worse. Sacrificing the exchange with 13.f5 ♕f4 14.♕xf4 looks like the best practical option.

13...dxe5 14.♘c2 ♖c5+ 15.♔h1



15...♗g4!

Winning a piece.

16.♘f3 ♘f4 17.♗d2 ♗xd3

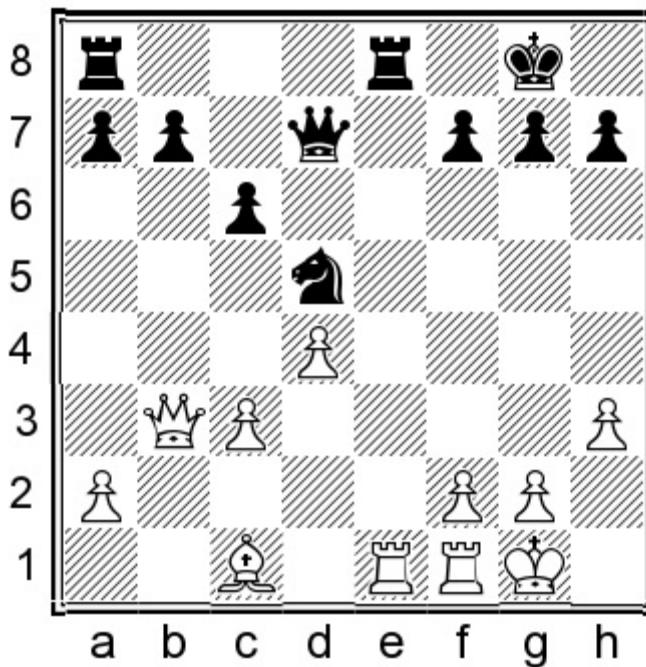
And White resigned.

Anderssen's first game from the second round, against the strong Hungarian representative Jozsef Szen, gives us an impression of the positional knowledge of the players regarding topics like strong squares, good knight versus bad bishop, the passed pawn and the blockade.

Adolf Anderssen

Jozsef Szen

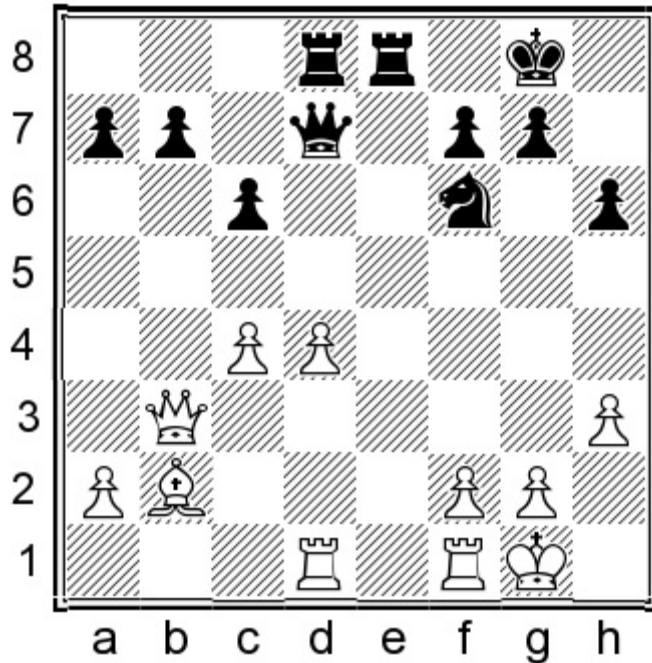
London 1851



Black to move

This is a good moment to try to gain control over the light squares by playing 18...b5. This threatens 19...♗b6, with a complete blockade, so 19.c4 is the obvious reply for White. After 19...♗b6 20.cxb5 cxb5 Black is better and after 20.c5? ♗d5 he would have had a dream position.

18...h6 19.c4 ♗f6 20.♗d1 ♗ad8 21.♗b2

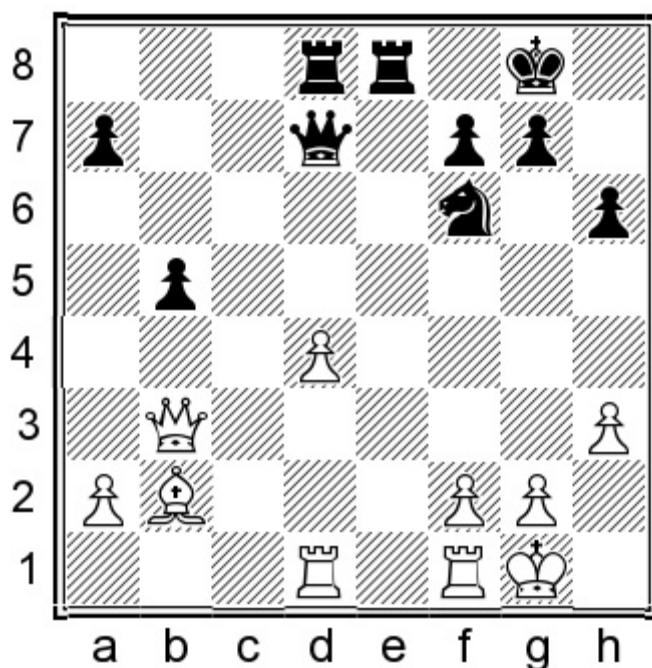


Now, with White ready for d4-d5, Black starts fighting for the blockade of the d-pawn.

21...b5 22.cxb5

Although things like weak and strong squares, bad bishop, good knight and blockade weren't part of some conceptualized knowledge back then, the stronger players surely had some feeling for these issues. For a start, Anderssen of course avoids 22.c5?, giving Black the ideal position mentioned before.

22...cxb5



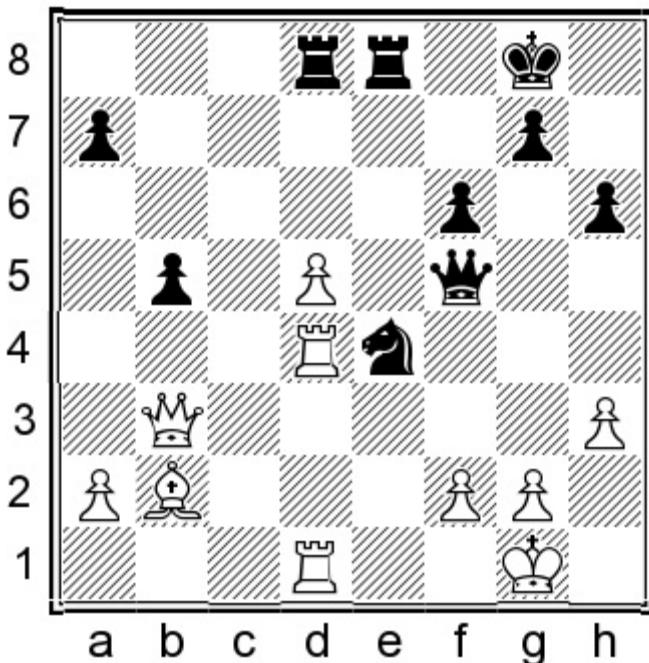
(Exercise no 39)

Some 75 years later, Nimzowitsch made his famous comparison: ‘the passed pawn is a criminal, which belongs under lock and key: gentler measures such as police surveillance are not enough’.²⁹ Anderssen sees the danger of Black turning his ‘surveillance’ into a physical blockade with either ... $\mathbb{Q}d5$ or ... $\mathbb{W}d5$. Another famous and melodious dictum goes ‘passed pawns must be pushed’; who brought us this wisdom is unknown, though I doubt if Anderssen could have been inspired by it. But whatever the value of all these sayings, to justify a move like 23.d5 you need some good lines.

23.d5! $\mathbb{Q}e4$

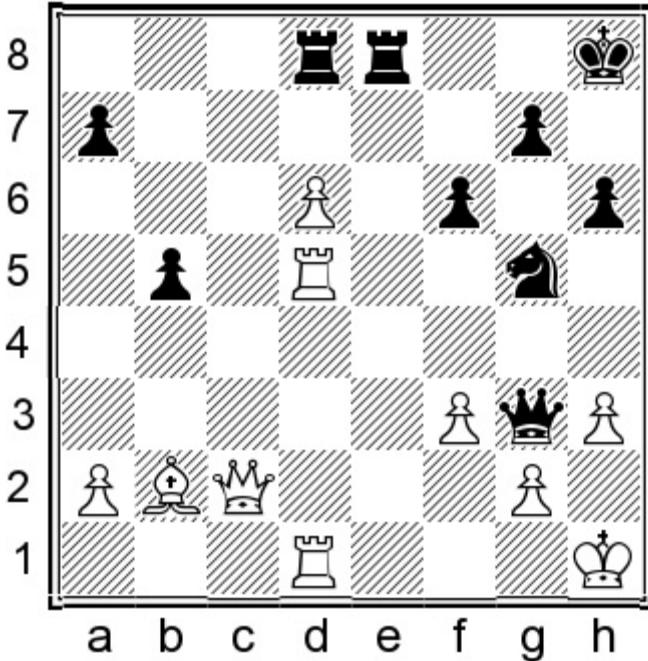
If Black takes the pawn with 23... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ White has 24. $\mathbb{W}g3$ g6 (only move; 24...f5 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ or 24...f6 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$) 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ (25. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ is another idea) 25... $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 26. $\mathbb{W}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 27. $\mathbb{W}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xh6$, regaining the pawn with an unsafe black king.

24. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ f6 25. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ $\mathbb{W}f5$



Instead of his last move, Black might again have put the pawn ‘under lock and key’ with 25... $\mathbb{Q}d6$. Now the pawn marches on, troubling Black more with every step. In the remainder of the game White finally managed to convert his advantage (though a curious incident happened in-between).

26.d6+ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 27.f3 $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}f4$ 29. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{W}g3$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}h1$



White has underestimated Black's counterplay and now 30... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ would have been strong. For example after 31.gxf3 $\mathbb{W}xh3+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}g3+$ 33. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{W}xg2+$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{E}e2+$ Black regains the piece and he is in time to stop the pawn after 35. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{E}xb2$ 36.d7 $\mathbb{Q}g8!$ 37. $\mathbb{E}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$.

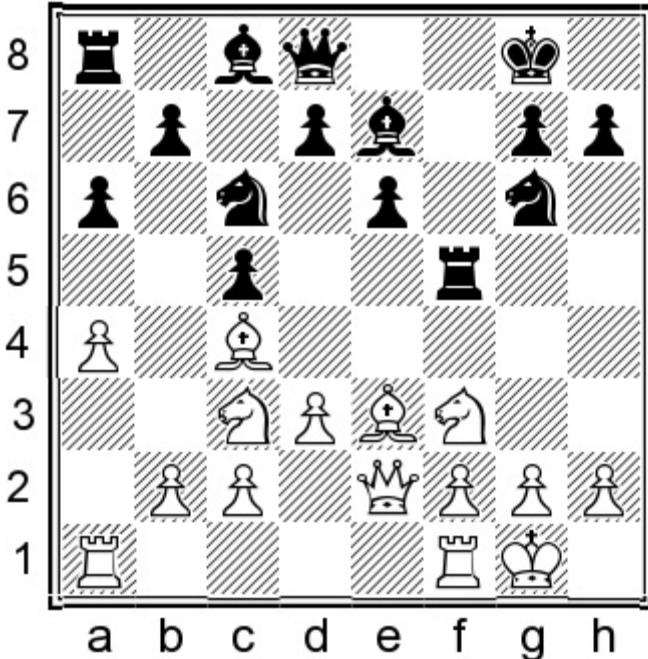
The story goes that at this moment a spectator shouted out: 'The German is lost! Knight takes Pawn.'³⁰ Szen heard this, but of course he had already spotted the move on his own. Apparently he didn't consider it sportsmanslike to play a move suggested by a spectator. Or maybe he just didn't trust the move – the lines are not that obvious. Anyway, those were the early days of serious competition.

30... $\mathbb{E}e1+$ 31. $\mathbb{E}xe1$ $\mathbb{W}xe1+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}e8$ 33. $\mathbb{W}c7$ $\mathbb{E}d7$ 34. $\mathbb{W}c6$ $\mathbb{W}e6$ 35. $\mathbb{W}xb5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 37. $\mathbb{W}d3+$ $g6$ 38.f4 f5 39. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 40. $\mathbb{W}c3$ g5 41. $\mathbb{E}xf5$ $\mathbb{W}g8$ 42. $\mathbb{E}e5$ 1-0

After this, Szen even managed to take the lead by 2-1, but then lost the remaining three games (in the first round two wins were needed, in the other rounds four wins).

Jozsef Szen – Adolf Anderssen London 1851

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e6 4. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ a6 5.a4 $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 6. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 7.d3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-0 9.0-0 f5 10.exf5 $\mathbb{E}xf5$



White's handling of the Sicilian hasn't been a success. You often see young players with no theoretical knowledge playing like this, using an 'Italian set-up' to tackle all openings.

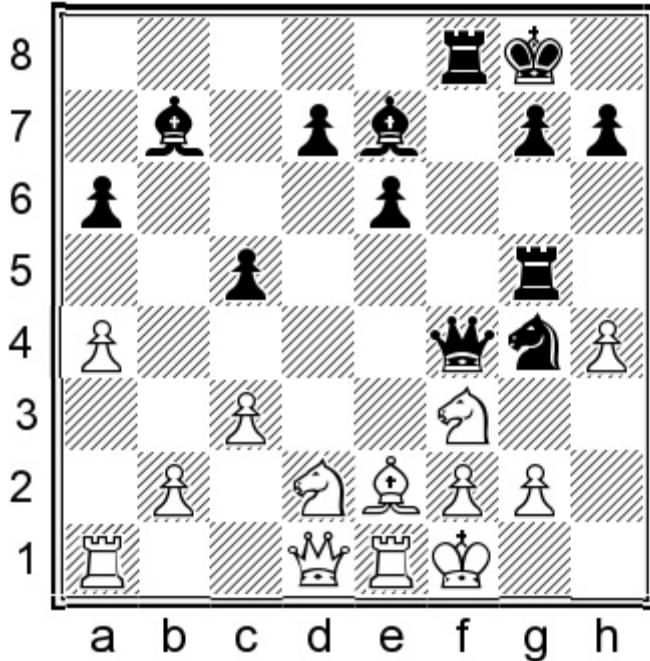
Staunton's book on the tournament was the first of that kind in chess history and he did a good job, providing some short notes on most of the games in a concise style. He had no trouble speaking his mind, to put it mildly, and it has been noted that his receiving of Anderssen's victory wasn't very sportsmanlike. His comments to the above position are typical in this respect, but they also shed some light on the level of play in this tournament and the quality of his analyses. Of course there were huge differences between the players, but in general we see quite a lot of simple tactics being missed. Sometimes Staunton noted this, but often he didn't, and the lines he added weren't faultless either.

On White's next move he comments: 'Unless to afford Mr. Anderssen time to consolidate his attack, I am quite at a loss to understand the object of this retreat. If by taking the Knight home, he could afterwards be brought into freer action, the lost time might be justified, but here, nothing whatever can be gained by withdrawing him. Why not rather have played d4?'

However, it is clear something has to be done against Black's threat of ...d7-d5-d4. Staunton's proposed 11.d4 fails to the rather simple 11... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 12. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ cxd4, which makes his explicit question look a bit odd.

In the rest of the game Anderssen plays in a very nice (modern) style with some typical tactics at the end.

11. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ b6 12.c3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}bd2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 14.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}af8$ 16.dxc5 bxc5 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 18. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{R}g5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 21.h4



21... $\mathbb{W}h2!?$

By no means necessary but a move hard to resist for Anderssen.

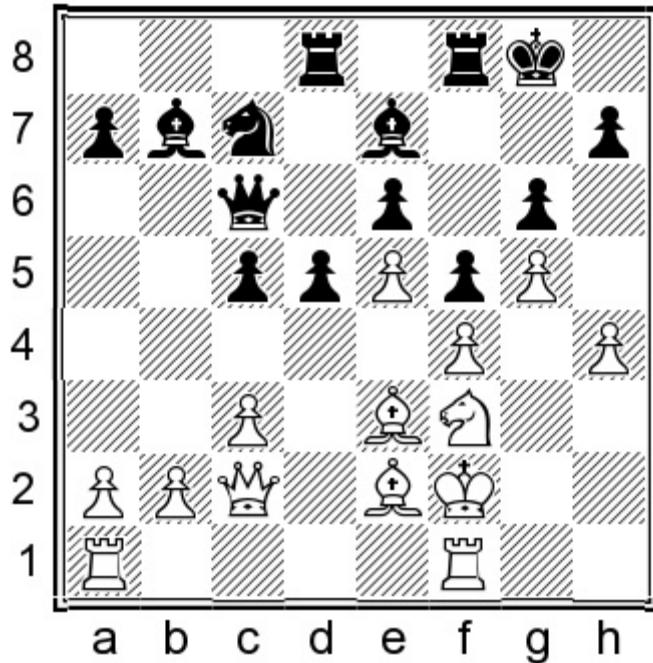
22. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}h1+$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}xg2$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 25. $hxg5$ $\mathbb{W}xf2+$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{W}f5+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{W}e5+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}f2+$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{W}f5+$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}xd1$

and Black won after a few more moves.

The last game was again a very modern Sicilian performance by Anderssen. This time Szen makes an Open Sicilian out of it, but his pawn advances on the kingside only weaken his position. This game is probably one of the first specimens of the proverb advising us to answer an attack on the wing with an attack in the centre. In the Sicilian especially you can find many successful examples of applying this principle (since White often castles kingside *and* pushes his kingside pawns forward) and this game is an excellent one.

Jozsef Szen – Adolf Anderssen London 1851

1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ e6 5. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7.0-0 0-0 8.c3 d5 9. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bxc6 10.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 11.f4 f5 12. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ c5 13.g4 g6 14.g5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 15.h4 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}ad8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}c2$



(Exercise no 40)

White's last move was very unfortunate, inadvertently setting up the ideal tactics to make it possible for Black to break through in the centre.

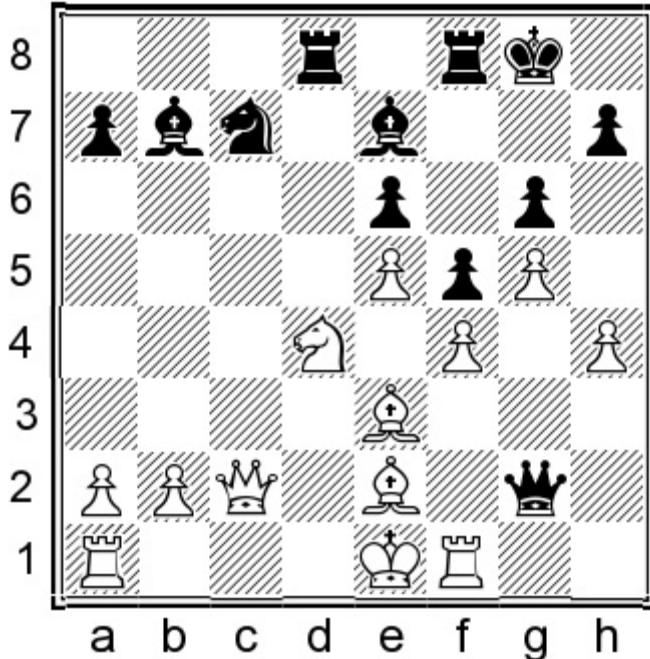
19...d4! 20.cxd4

20.♗d2 d3.

20...cxd4 21.♘xd4

21.♕xc6 dxe3+.

21...♕g2+ 22.♔e1



The outcome is a typical Sicilian scenario: the black pieces enter diagonally from the queenside behind the white lines. Now Black can choose how to win.

22... $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{Q}xd4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xb4 \mathbb{Q}xb4$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xc7 \mathbb{Q}xb2$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f2 \mathbb{W}g1+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}f1 \mathbb{W}g3+$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d1 \mathbb{Q}xe2$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xe2 \mathbb{Q}a6+$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{W}d3+$

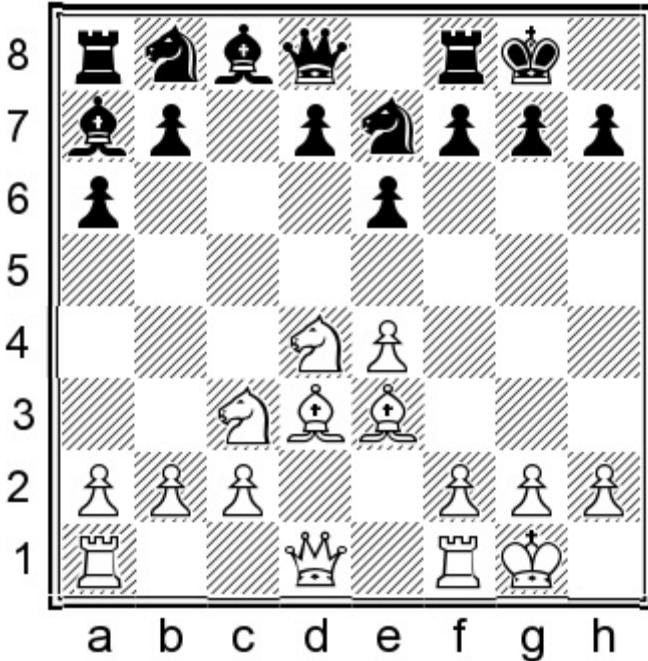
And White resigned.

Had the tournament been organized with a seeding system, then the match between Anderssen and Staunton might have been a worthy final, but as it happened, those two favourites met in the semi-final. Anderssen deservedly won in an interesting fight.

The first game of the match saw Staunton play some kind of a Sicilian Kan, playing ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ first and ...a7-a6 later. I have already used the label ‘modern’ a few times, but it applies to this game as well, particularly in regard to Black’s set-up. Staunton, however, was rather dissatisfied with his experiment.

Adolf Anderssen – Howard Staunton London 1851

1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4 \mathbb{Q}c5$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ a6 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3 \mathbb{Q}a7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{Q}e7$ 8.0-0 0-0



This position wasn't presented to you as an exercise, since White has several decent moves, but I like his next one very much. With no knight on f6 it is nice to have the queen near to what you hope will be 'the scene of action'. An important manoeuvre (if this word is permitted for just one move) to add to your repertoire of attacking ideas.

In this game White's attack finally succeeds in fine style (in my opinion; Staunton evidently didn't agree) though on the way Anderssen passes over some more direct possibilities.

9.♕h5! ♜g6 10.e5 ♜c7

Staunton: 'The opening of this wretched affair is a sufficient indication of how utterly unfitted Black was by suffering, to maintain his reputation in these encounters. Already he has permitted his antagonist to bring nearly every Piece into action, while his own are almost all locked up at home.'

11.♖ae1 b5 12.f4 ♜b7 13.♘e4 ♜xe4 14.♘xe4 ♜c6 15.♘xc6 dxc6 16.g4 ♜ad8 17.♗h1 c5 18.♗f3 ♜a5 19.♗ef1 ♜a4 20.♗d3 ♜xa2 21.♗h3 h6 22.g5 ♜xd3 23.cxd3 ♜d5+ 24.♗ff3 ♜e7 25.gxh6 g6 26.h7+ ♔h8 27.♗g5 ♜f5 28.♗f6+ ♜g7 29.f5 ♜b3 30.♗h6 ♜d1+ 31.♗g2 ♜e2+ 32.♗f2 ♜g4+ 33.♗g3 1-0

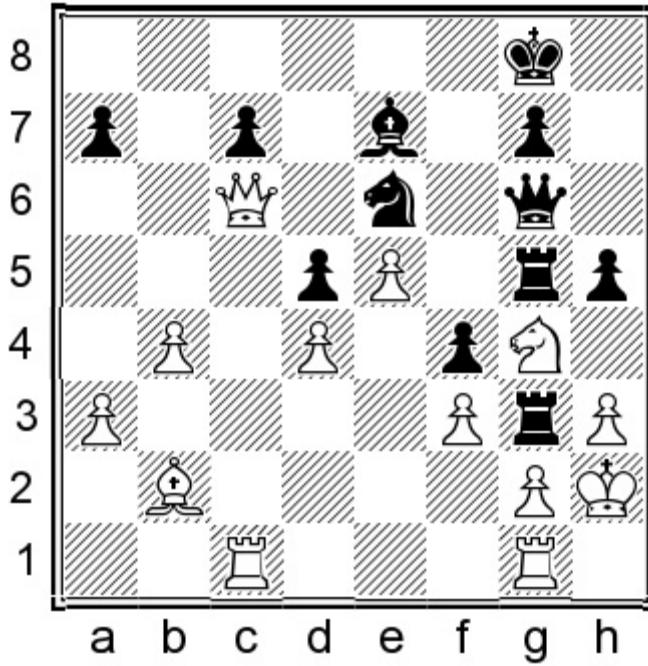
Staunton: 'Let the reader compare this game, which would be discreditable to two third-rate players of a coffee-house, with any of the match games in which Black has taken part heretofore, and say how far the result of this mere mockery of Chess is a proof of the absolute powers of two men who are called proficients.'

Staunton was one of the first in a long line of players who have difficulty in coping with defeats, and in his writings he immediately set a standard that is difficult to surpass.

The next two games also went to Anderssen, both hard-fought battles with Staunton having good chances as well. I have to restrain myself from giving some more of Staunton's sour quotations on these games.

The fourth game finally saw Staunton scoring his only win, albeit in a peculiar way. From a bad position a pawn down Anderssen managed to organize some strong counterplay and in the following position there already is no escape for White.

Howard Staunton
Adolf Anderssen
London 1851



White to move

29. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$

The only try.

29... $\mathbb{Q}f7??$

There were no time limits in this tournament (more about that later), but Anderssen was known to be a fast player. Maybe he played this *a tempo*, in the euphoria caused by the favourable turn of events in this game. The winning move was 29... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$. If White regains his piece with 30. $\mathbb{W}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ there is no defence against Black's attack against g2: 31. $exf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2+$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ and White has run out of checks.

Staunton sparingly comments: ‘A palpable slip; he should have taken the Knight with his Bishop, and he would then have had *the better game*’ (italics mine). (*Exercise no 41*)

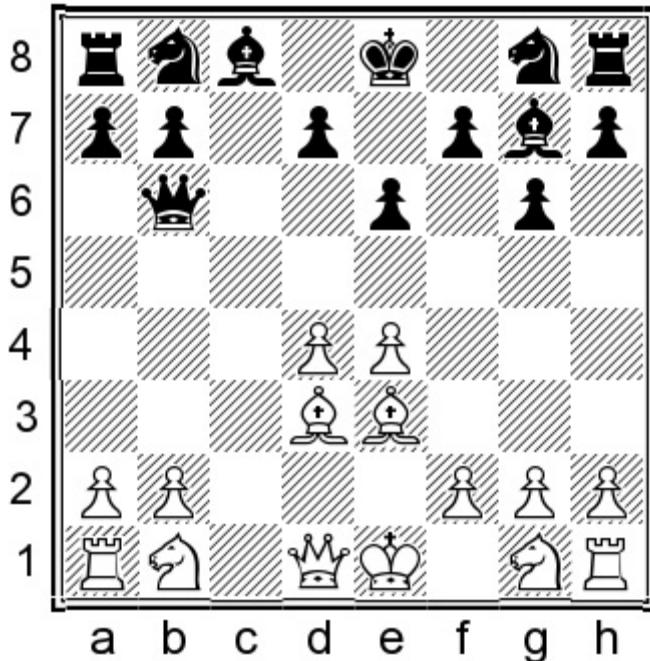
30. $\mathbb{W}e8$ mate.

The last game of this mini-match saw what might well be the premiere of a question every player will

be familiar with: is the b-pawn poisoned or not?

Adolf Anderssen
Howard Staunton
London 1851

1.e4 e6 2.d4 g6 3.♗d3 ♗g7 4.♗e3 c5 5.c3 cxd4 6.cxd4 ♖b6

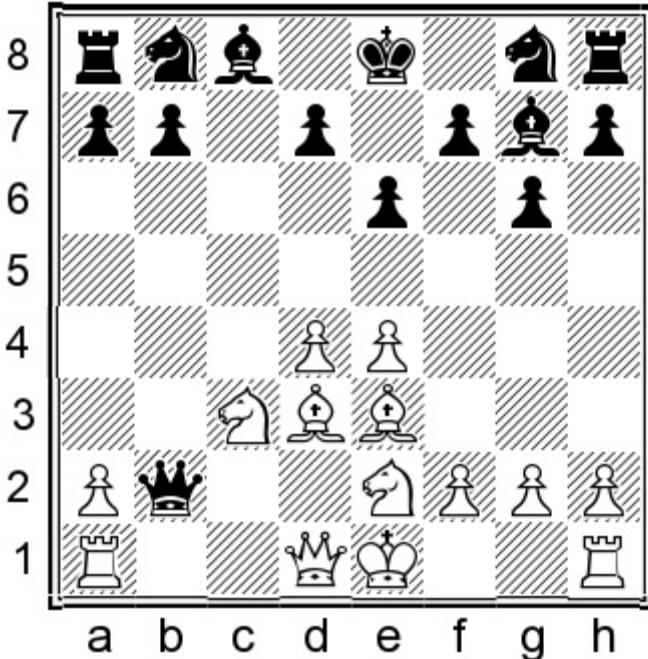


A very dubious set-up by Black. Of course Anderssen is more than ready to give up the pawn.

7.♗e2! (Exercise no 42)

The question I posed to you is a difficult one insofar that the move ...♖b6 only makes sense if you are prepared to take on b2. So those of you who took on b2 did show consistency, I'll grant you that. But it wasn't too late to start developing.

7...♖xb2?! 8.♗bc3



There is no playing chess with proverbs like ‘never take on b2, even if it’s a good move’. Of course we all prefer to attack rather than defend, but sometimes you have to call the opponent’s bluff, otherwise you will be fooled around with. But here ‘bluff’ is not the right word – even ‘beautiful compensation’ is too modest an expression: with his lead in development and the weakened squares in Black’s camp, White already has a winning advantage.

8...♝b6 9.♝c1 ♝a6 10.♝b5 ♞f8 11.0-0

Although Staunton managed to defend for quite some time, White finally clinched in the point.

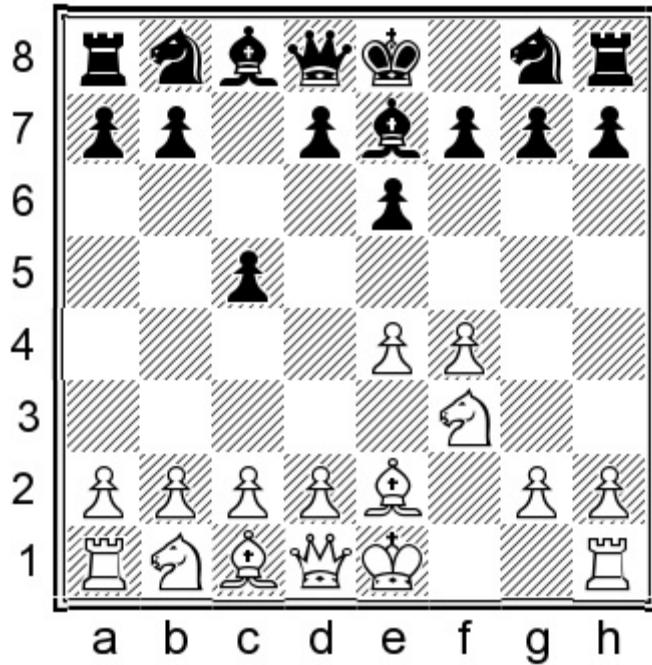
In the final Anderssen faced Marmaduke Wyvill, a politician and Member of Parliament and one of the strongest players in England.

In the semi-final Wyvill had to deal with Elijah Williams (about whom more later). In the deciding game Wyvill used one of his favourite manoeuvres.

In previous chapters we have already seen a lot of typical ideas, actions and plans appearing for the first time in chess history and having a bright future ahead. But of course a lot of ideas were tried that did not stand the test of time. The following invention of Wyvill belongs to the latter category.

Elijah Williams – Marmaduke Wyvill London 1851

1.e4 c5 2.f4 e6 3.♝f3 ♞e7 4.♝e2

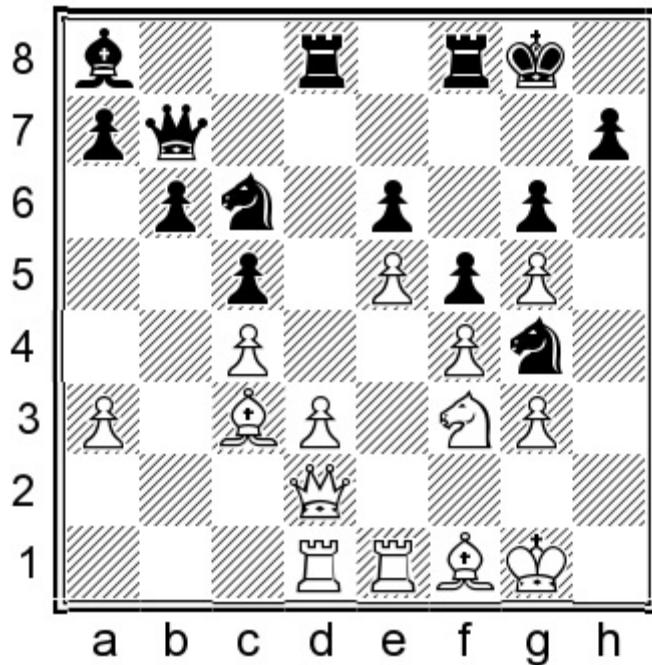


4... $\mathbb{Q}h4+$

An idea Wyvill employed several times with both colours. He must have been convinced that the move g2-g3 constitutes a serious weakness, well worth the loss of time (and possibly the pair of bishops).

It is tempting to make fun of Black's play, but see what happens in this game:

5.g3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 7.d3 d5 8.e5 $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 9.0-0 0-0 10. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ f5 11. $\mathbb{W}e1$ b6 12.a3 $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ d4 14. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 15.h4 $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}d5$ 18.c4 dx c 3 19.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 20.c4 $\mathbb{W}c6$ 21. $\mathbb{E}b1$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$ 24. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 25. $\mathbb{E}bd1$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}hg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 27.hxg5 g6 28. $\mathbb{E}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f1$?



(Exercise no 43)

29...Qcxe5!

Equally strong was 29...Qd4!. The white pawn on g2 is seriously missed.

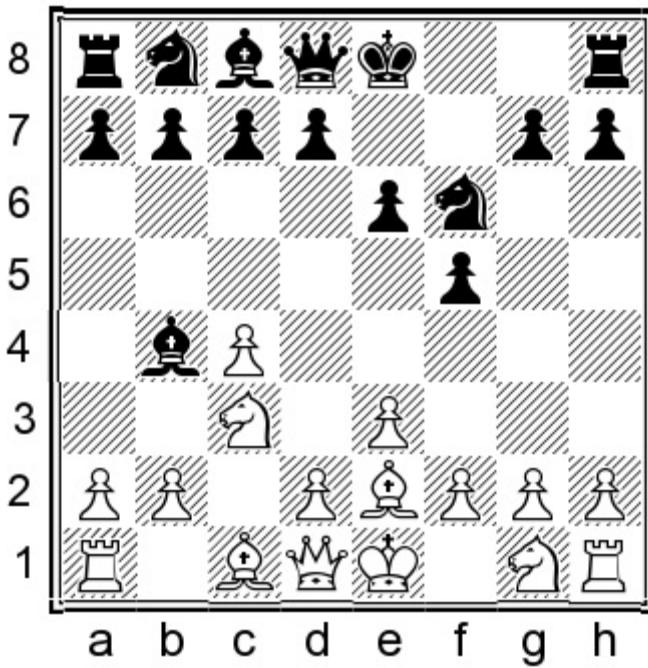
30.Qxe5 Wxf3 31.Wg2 Wxd1! 32.Wxd1 Qxg2

and Black later won thanks to his extra material.

Inspired by this success, Wyvill again employed his idea in the final.

Marmaduke Wyvill – Adolf Anderssen London 1851

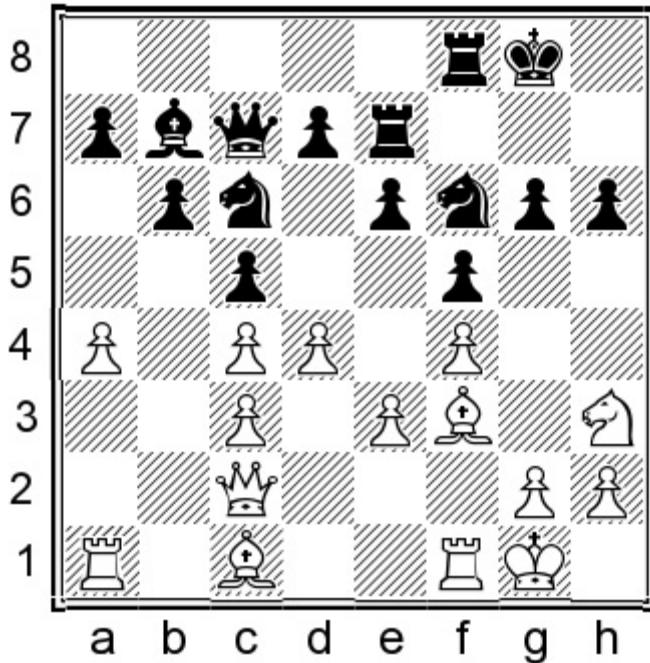
1.c4 f5 2.Qc3 Qf6 3.e3 e6 4.Qe2 Qb4



5.Qh5+

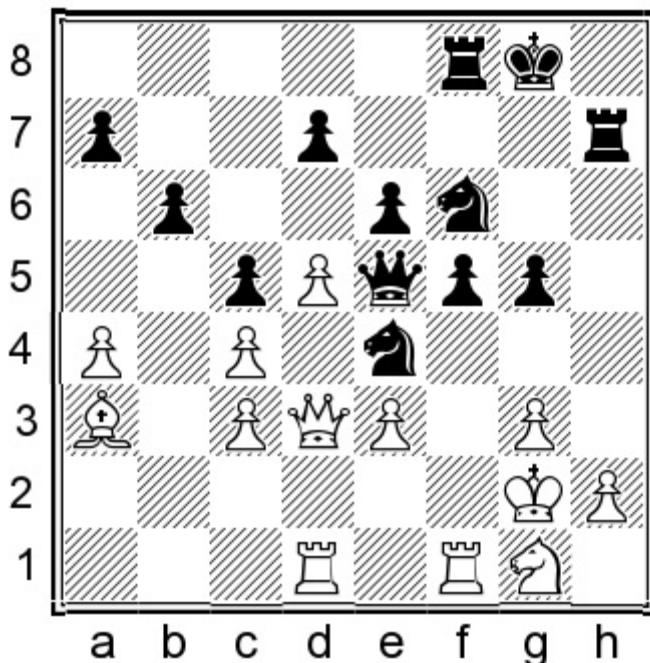
Here we go again.

5...g6 6.Qe2 0-0 7.f4 c5 8.Qf3 Qc6 9.0-0 Qxc3 10.bxc3 b6 11.a4 Qb7 12.Wc2 Wc7 13.Qg5 h6 14.Qh3 Wa8 15.Qf3 We7 16.d4



In his famous book *Die Kunst der Bauernführung*, Hans Kmoch calls this pawn structure, with the doubled c-pawns and the d4-pawn (or d5-pawn), the Wyvill formation. Kmoch writes that ‘according to Tarrasch the weakness of such structures was first recognized by the Englishman Wyvill some hundred years ago.’³¹ This phrase seems to imply that it was Wyvill himself who demonstrated this weakness, but I have only found games in which the weakness was demonstrated to him by his opponents. In this game we see Anderssen play a part of the typical plan against the doubled c-pawn; more of it will be shown in the coming games of Williams.

16...Bg7 17.Qa3 Qa5 18.Qxb7 Qxb7 19.Qad1 g5 20.g3 Qd6 21.fxg5 hxg5 22.Qd3 Qde4 23.d5 We5 24.Qg2 Bh7 25.Qg1



25... $\mathbb{Q}xh2+$!

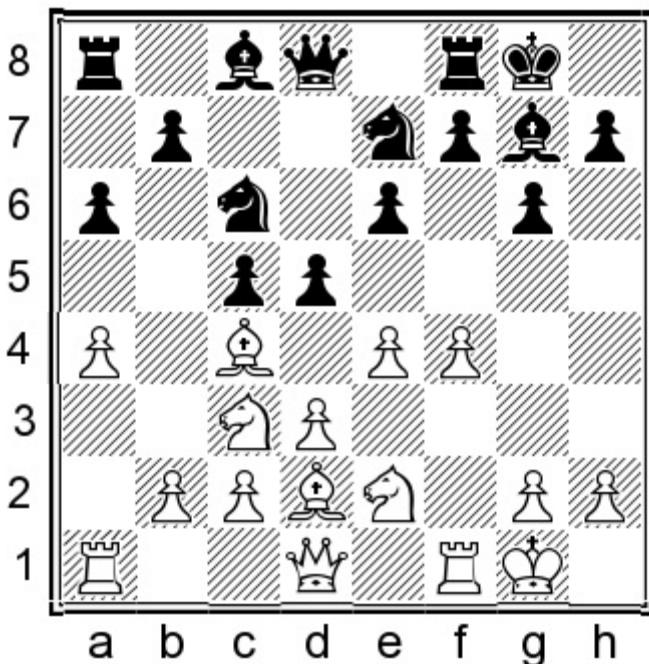
Other moves win as well, but this is the nicest, and a forced mate moreover.

26. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{W}xg3+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}g7!$ 0-1

The final ended with Anderssen winning 4½-2½, a result I think Wyvill could be quite satisfied with. The last game clearly shows Anderssen's superiority.

Adolf Anderssen – Marmaduke Wyvill London 1851

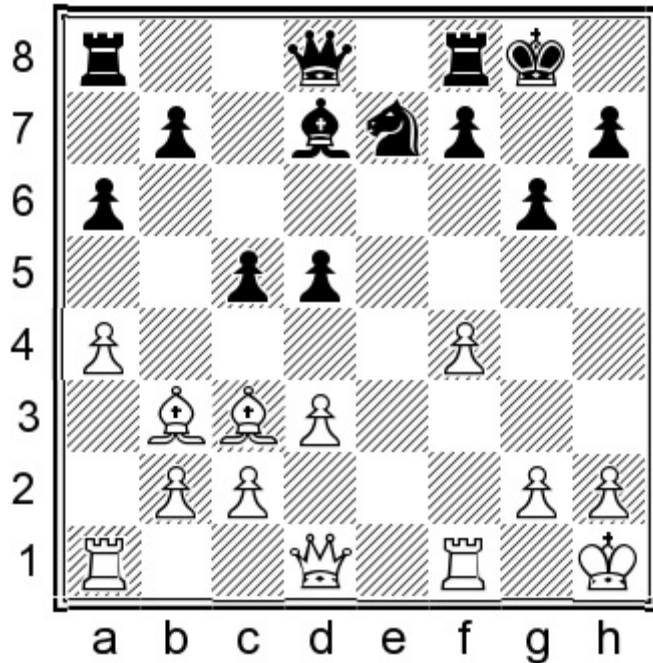
1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ a6 3.a4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ e6 5.d3 g6 6. $\mathbb{Q}ge2$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 7.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 8.f4 0-0 9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ d5



Some kind of a Grand Prix Sicilian has arisen and Black is doing okay. His set-up is a very flexible one and a typical English invention of those days; Staunton also experimented with these structures. But as we will soon see in this game, those fianchetto positions still contained some unknown dangers.

Staunton and the other strong English players of his time are sometimes put together in the so-called 'English school', which would be a third school after the Italian and the Philidor school. In the coming decades the English set-ups moved to the background and it took until the days of Réti and the Hypermodern school before they gained popularity again.

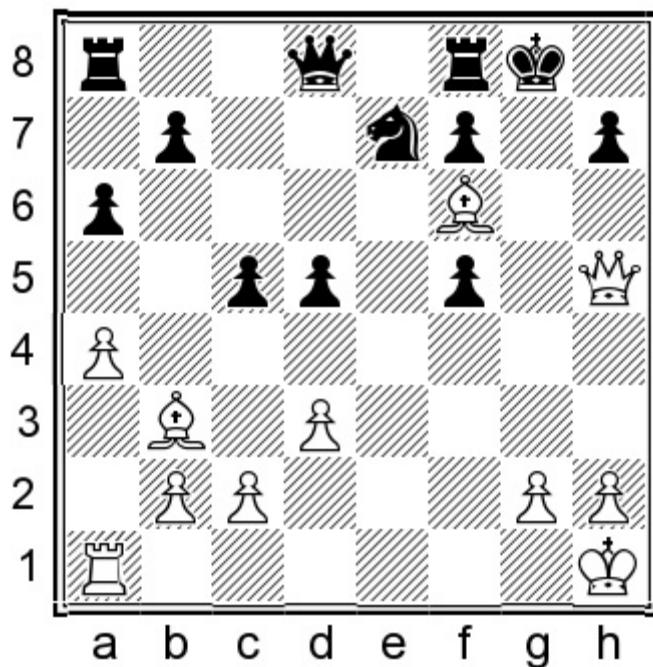
10. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4+$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 13.exd5 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ exd5



In the last few moves Black has gone completely astray. Considering the ease with which Wyvill departed from his fianchetto bishop, he apparently had little notion of how weak his kingside position was without the defender of the dark squares – common knowledge for every club player today.

With a few powerful moves Anderssen ends the game. The first one destroys Black's hope of shutting the bishop out with ...d5-d4.

15.♕f6! ♕e6 16.f5! ♕xf5 17.♕xf5! gxf5 18.♗h5

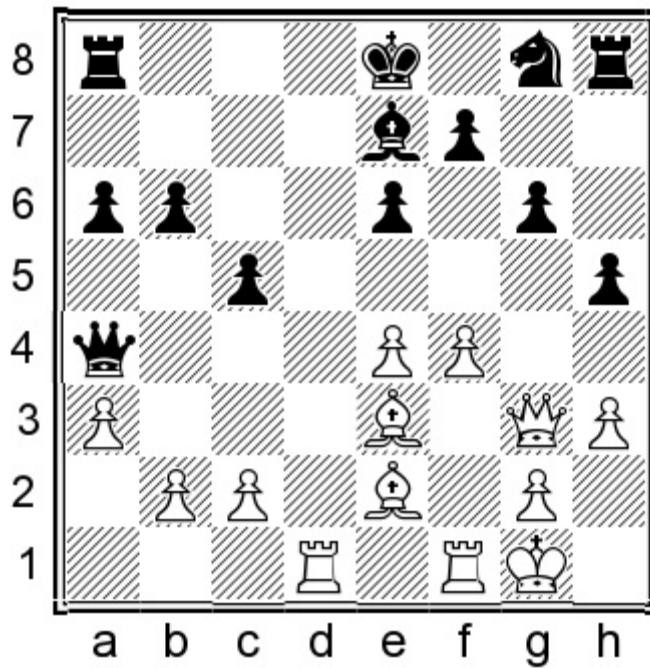


18...♗d6 19.♗h6 ♗xf6 20.♗xf6 1-0

This London International Tournament was a milestone in the history of chess and, as we will see in the next two chapters, a lot more interesting ideas were introduced during this event.

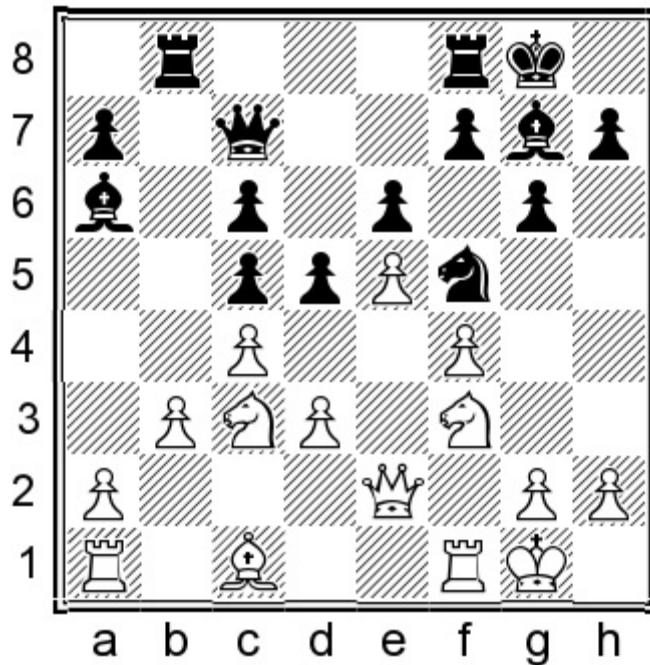
Exercises for Chapter 8

44 (go to the solution)



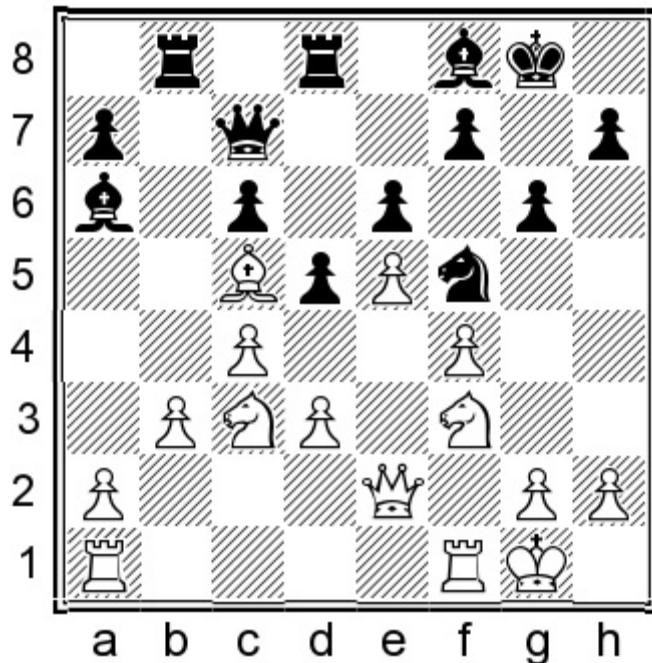
White to move

45 (go to the solution)



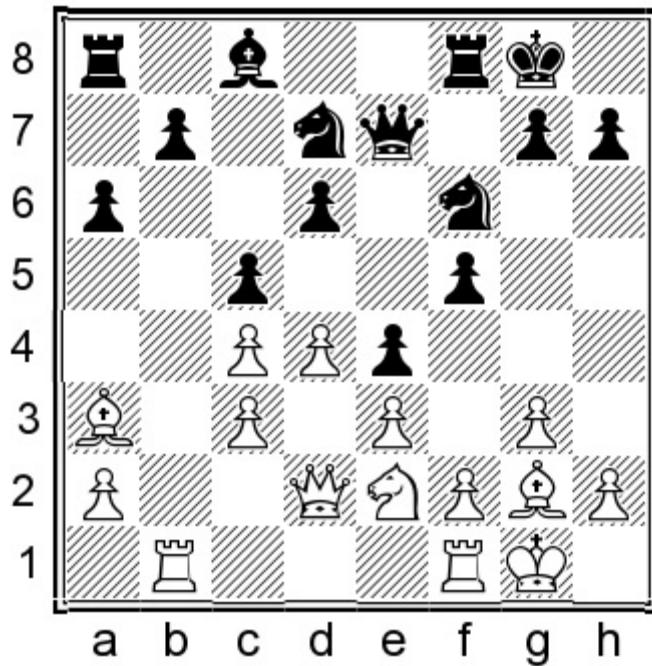
White to move

46 (go to the solution)



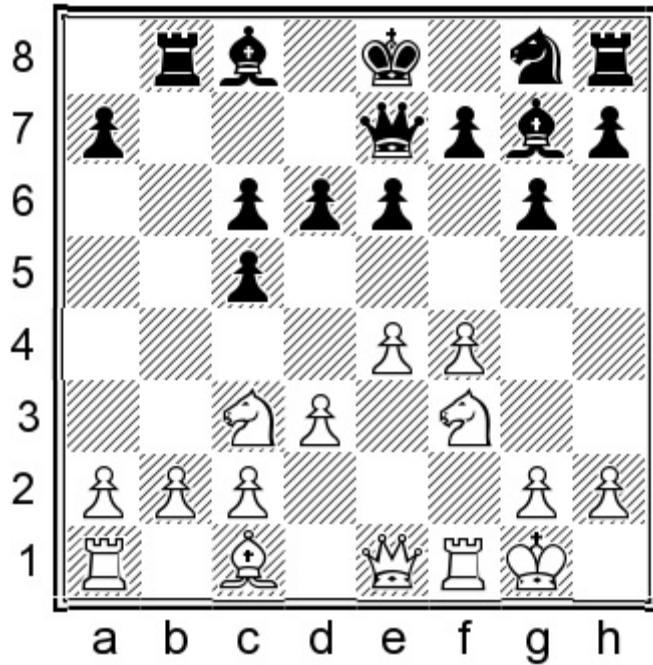
White to move

47 (go to the solution)



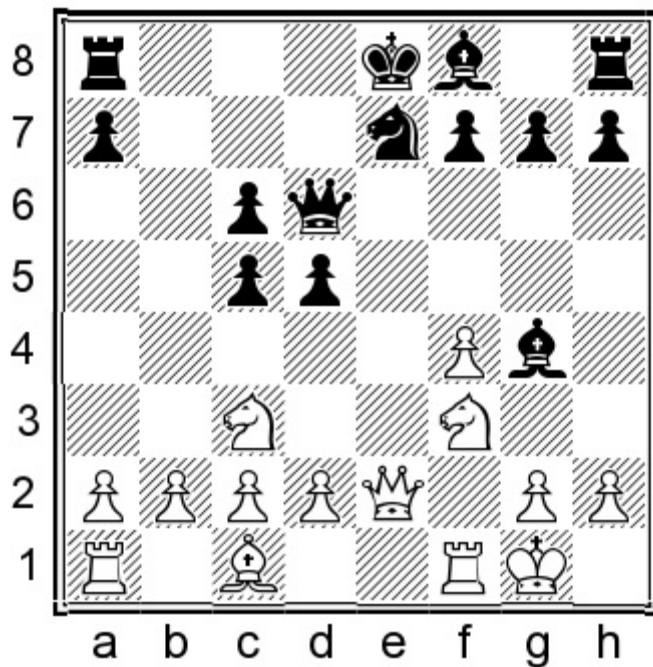
Black to move

48 (go to the solution)



White to move

49 (go to the solution)



White to move

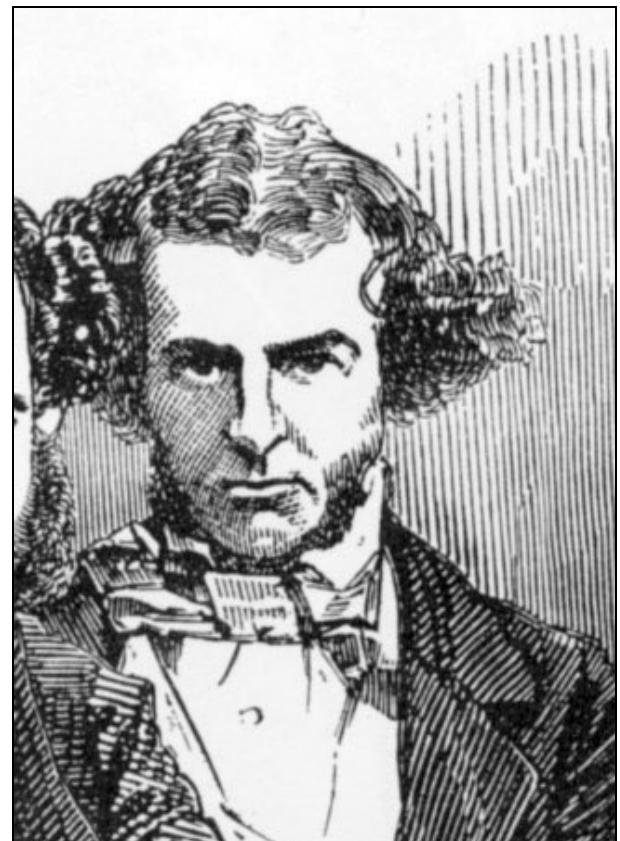
For Staunton it was disappointing to be eliminated before the final, but his bad luck didn't end there. In the play-off for third and fourth place he lost to his countryman, Elijah Williams. To him, Staunton notes, he 'has always given the odds of the Pawn and two moves, and beaten easily.' If you look at those play-off games this is hard to imagine, and we will see one in due course. (As a side note: giving odds was a common practice back then to compensate for the difference in strength between two players.)

Williams was a remarkable player in several respects. For one thing, he had a reputation as a very slow player. In this tournament there was no time limit, but bad experiences with this led to the introduction of ways of limiting time, and finally to the introduction of the chess clock.

Williams's opponent in the second round, James Mucklow, also liked to take his time. Staunton notes:

'In some respects these players were well paired, not for equality of force, indeed, Mr. Williams being by far the stronger, but because each, in his degree, exhibits the same want of depth and inventive power in his combinations, and the same tiresome prolixity in manoeuvering his men. It need hardly be said that the games, from first to last, are remarkable only for their unvarying and unexampled dullness.'

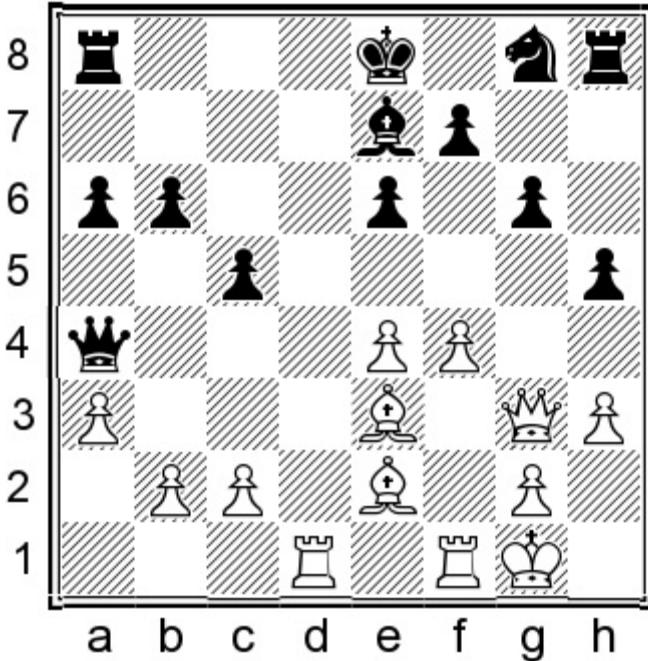
The first game of this match, won by Williams 4-0, does support Staunton's point of view.



Elijah Williams

James Mucklow

London 1851



White to move

(Exercise no 44)

This is the position after twenty moves and I'm sure you noticed that the time has come to finish Black off. He is badly developed and his king is still in the middle, whereas all White's pieces are very active. After the thematic 20.f5! Black's position falls apart – for example 20... $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d3$. I hope you chose 20.f5; I'm sure Anderssen would have played like that.

Instead White played the defensive 20. $\mathbb{W}f2$, preventing 20... $\mathbb{W}xc2$ with a small trick, and after a few more slow moves the position was already near equal. Finally, White managed to win an endgame on move 77.

Staunton adds a nice anecdote to this game:

'I am not aware whether the time consumed in this game has been recorded. It must have been portentous, as about midway in the original copy I find a significant notification by the unfortunate Secretary, "Both players almost sleep!"'

And as it goes with these anecdotes, they get even better with time. In the play-offs for third and fourth place Staunton lost against the white player in this last game. Golombek notes that:

[Staunton] accused him of deliberate slowness, and indeed Williams had a good claim to be considered the slowest player of all time. There were no chess clocks then [...] and Williams took advantage of this. In those days [...] there was a special scorer for each game and the players did not take the moves down themselves. It was averred that when one score was handed in, that of a game in which Williams was one of the competitors, the scorer had noted in the margin: "both players now asleep".'³²

An extreme version of this story can be found on Wikipedia:

‘[Williams] was accused by Staunton of taking an average of 2½ hours per move during some matches, a strategy thought to cause opponents to lose their focus on the match. [...] Staunton is quoted as remarking while playing against Williams, “Elijah, you’re not just supposed to sit there – you’re supposed to sit there and think!”’

Staunton indeed speaks at some point about ‘single moves [that] occupy two hours and a half’ but although he clearly did not shun some exaggeration, 2½ hours *on average* would have been too much of a good thing.

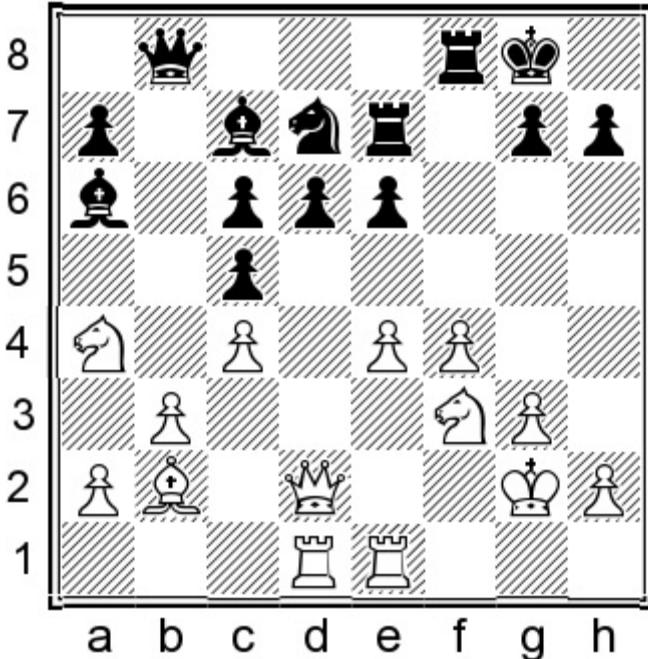
Just one more Staunton quotation (on one of his games with Williams) to end this topic for the time being:

‘But when a player, *upon system*, consumes hours over moves when minutes might suffice, and depends, not upon outmanoeuvering, but out-sitting his antagonist, patience ceases to be a virtue, and one cannot help expressing deep regret that there is not some legal or moral force which may be brought to bear upon the offender, so that, in default of accelerating his pace, he should be held disentitled to a victory gained by such unworthy strategy.’

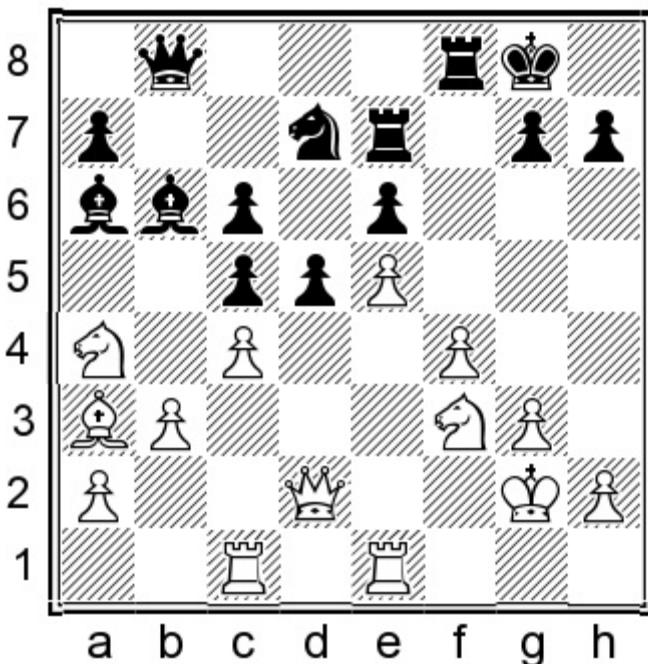
Irving Chernev suggests that Williams was taking his time ‘because he was slowly evolving a new system of play’.³³ Chernev’s suggestion is based upon Williams’s handling of the doubled pawns on the c-file in a way that supposedly was ‘discovered’ by Nimzowitsch some 70 years later. A few pages ago I mentioned this type of position and Kmoch’s naming it the ‘Wyvill formation’. According to Kmoch, Wyvill was the first to put his finger on this weakness, and later Tartakower and Nimzowitsch showed great perfection in exploiting it. But actually it was Wyvill who liked to play with the doubled pawns and Williams who showed how to make use of the weakness.

Chernev’s suggestion might not be completely serious, but he has a good point in that Williams’s play in this type of position was rather sophisticated for those days. In the London tournament he managed to reach a Wyvill-like formation no fewer than four times and he played it with quite some success, scoring 3 out of 4. I’ll show you three of them.

Elijah Williams – Marmaduke Wyvill London 1851



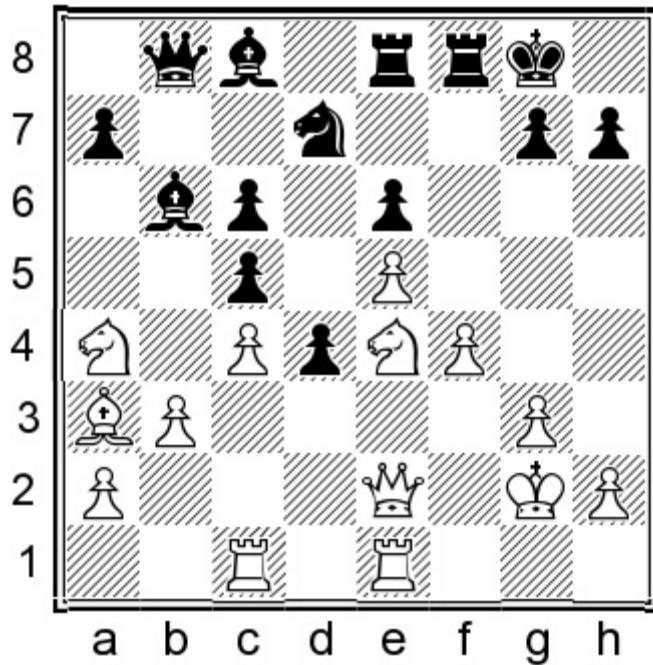
In the semi-final, Williams took a 3-0 lead against Wyvill, who then successfully played against match point for the next four games. But in the fifth game Williams came close. Some sort of Wyvill formation has been reached by Wyvill, although the d-pawn is not yet on d5 (or d4). It would have been a good idea to force Black into this formation by playing 22.e5 d5 23.Qa3 Qb6 24.Qc1.



Here we see some typical features of the strategy against the Wyvill formation. The $\mathbb{Q}a4$ and $\mathbb{Q}a3$ attack the weak c5-pawn from the a-file. The white queen might join in on the attack from f2 or e3. Both black bishops are bad, especially the one on a6. If Black is forced to play d5-d4, these bishops will have even fewer prospects. White might play one of his knights over to d3.

If we add a few moves extra, say 24... $\mathbb{W}c8$ 25. $\mathbb{W}e3$ d4 26. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{E}ee8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}b8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$, we reach the following position. It is not often that such dream scenarios unfold, but it is useful to have

pictures like this in store.

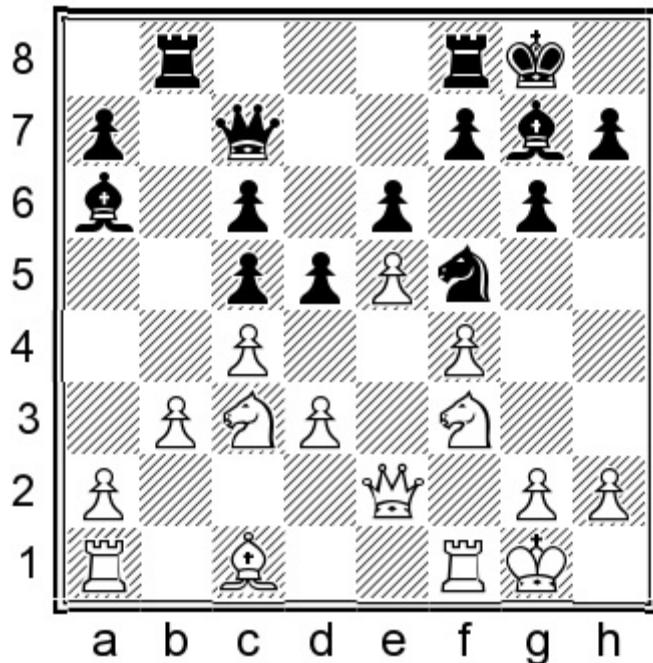


In the game Williams chose another move, 22.f5 (in the first diagram) – not bad either, but in the ensuing complications he finally went down.

In the play-off for third prize against Staunton, Williams twice managed to outplay his opponent in a Wyvill formation.

Elijah Williams – Howard Staunton London 1851

1.e4 c5 2.f4 \mathbb{Q} c6 3. \mathbb{Q} f3 e6 4. \mathbb{Q} b5 g6 5. \mathbb{Q} xc6 bxc6 6.c4 \mathbb{Q} g7 7. \mathbb{W} e2 \mathbb{W} b6 8.e5 \mathbb{Q} h6 9. \mathbb{Q} c3 \mathbb{Q} f5 10. \mathbb{Q} e4 0-0 11.d3 \mathbb{E} b8 12.0-0 d5 13. \mathbb{Q} c3 \mathbb{Q} a6 14.b3 \mathbb{W} c7



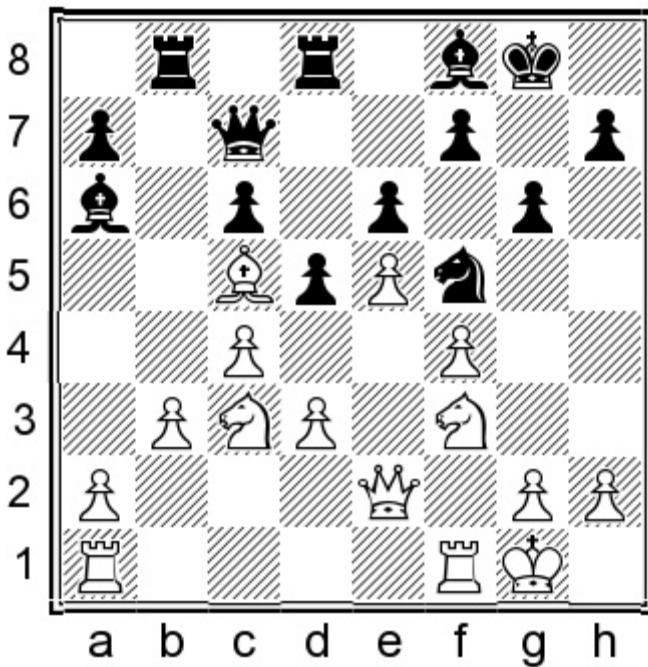
(Exercise no 45)

This time the doubled c-pawns resulted from a sort of Sicilian Grand Prix Variation.

15.♗a3!

This is the best way to attack the c5-pawn, but starting with ♜a4 or ♜f2 also gives a big advantage to White. Pay attention to the bishop on a6: in this case, with the pawn still on e6, it has almost no future at all. An important tactical detail is that on 15...♝a5, a move Black might have relied on, White simply plays 16.♗a4.

15...♝fd8 16.♝xc5 ♜f8



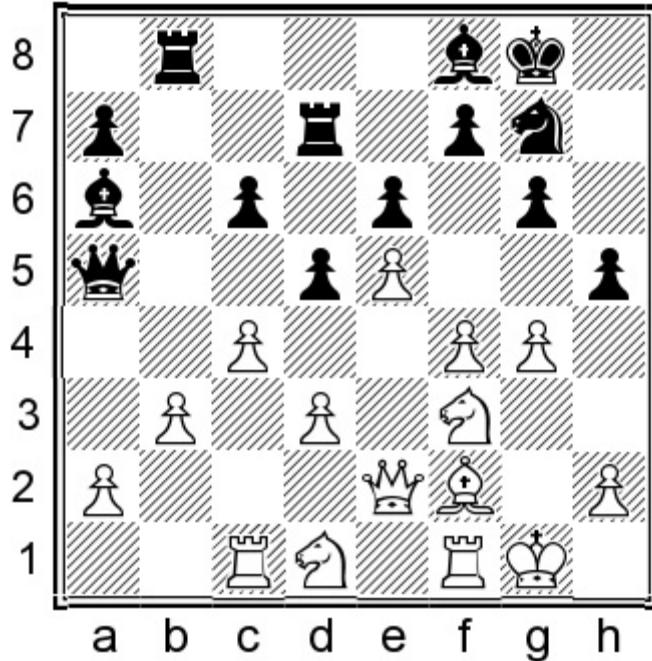
(Exercise no 46)

17.♝f2?

Not giving away all the advantage, but taking into account Black's weaknesses on the dark squares White should welcome the exchange of the dark-squared bishops. So both 17.♗a4 and 17.♝f2 are fine, or first exchange the bishops and then play ♜f2. Keeping the c5-square under control is important: being able to play ...c6-c5 himself at some point is Black's only hope to get his bishop on a6 back to the land of the living. Although Black later on did manage to get ...c6-c5 in, it could not save this game in the end.

In the struggle for control over weak squares, the exchange of the defending bishop is of frequent occurrence, but apparently this basic scenario wasn't standard knowledge in Williams's day.

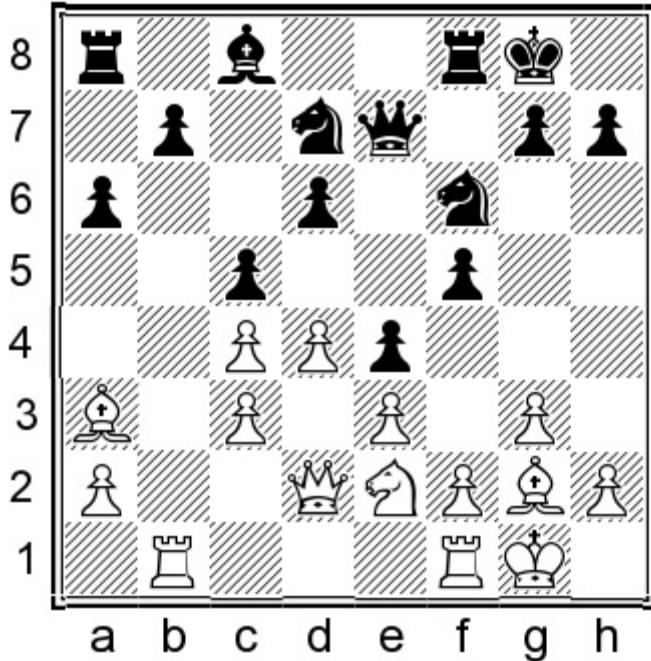
17...♝a5 18.♝ac1 ♜d7 19.g4 ♜g7 20.♗d1 h5



Apart from the Wyvill theme, this game shows another sophisticated piece of positional knowledge. I would like to draw your attention to the pawn on g4 versus the knight on g7 contraposition. A pawn at this distance restrains a knight to a considerable extent, and this is a basic pattern of positional play with very wide application. Clearly, Williams was well aware of the strength of this construction, as he keeps it intact with his next move. A terrible idea, of course, would have been to advance the pawn with 21.g5?, handing over the f5-square on a silver plate and turning the poor knight into a giant.

21.h3! ♕e7 22.♗e3 d4 23.♗g2 c5 24.♗g5 ♖xg5 25.fxg5 ♖b7 26.♗f4 hxg4 27.hxg4 ♖b6 28.♗g3 ♖c6 29.♖h2 ♗e8 30.♖c2 f5 31.gxf6 ♖h7 32.♗xg6 ♗xf6 33.exf6 ♖xh2 34.♖xh2 ♗e8 1-0

**Howard Staunton
Elijah Williams
London 1851**



Black to move

(Exercise no 47)

15... $\mathbb{W}f7!$

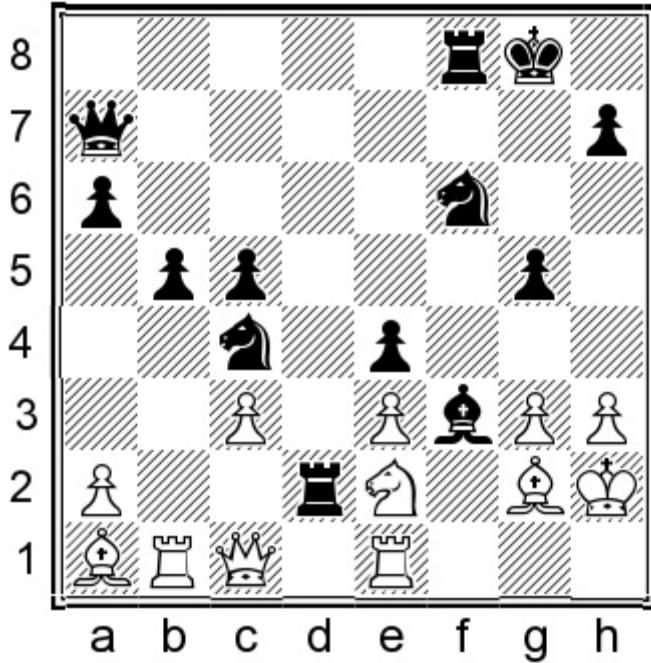
It's a bit strange to see Staunton suffering for the second time in this structure. The engine also likes 15...b5.

15... $\mathbb{W}f7!$ 16.f3

'Throwing away a Pawn without equivalent of any kind,' Staunton says, but the pawn was already lost – in a more disastrous manner after 16.d5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$.

16... $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 17.fxe4 fxe4 18. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ b5 19. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}f7$ 21.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}c4$ 22. $\mathbb{W}c1$ $\mathbb{W}a7$ 23. $\mathbb{E}e1$ dxc5 24. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ g5 25. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 26.h3 $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{E}ad8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{E}d2$

This game has turned into a positional catastrophe for White. For one thing, take a look at the bishop on a1.

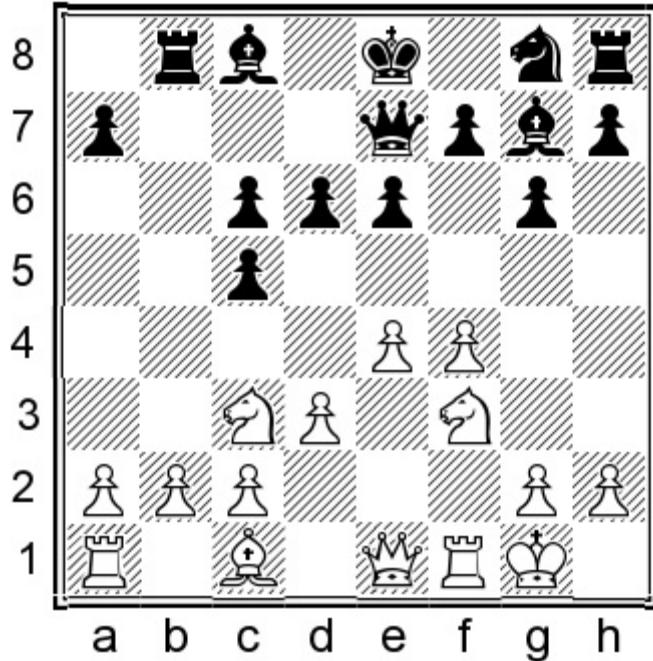


29. $\mathbb{B}b2$ $\mathbb{B}fd8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{B}xb2$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $cxd4$ 32. $cxd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}xg2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{B}f8$ 35. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{W}f7$
36. $\mathbb{B}e2$ $\mathbb{W}f1$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 0-1

These Wyvill formations and the plans we saw Williams use against them are still as topical as they were one and a half century ago. Openings like the Nimzo-Indian and the Dutch or, from a white perspective, the Grand Prix and the $\mathbb{Q}b5$ Sicilians can easily lead to them. Take the next three miniatures.

Curt Hansen – Fred Feistenauer Groningen 1981

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ d6 3. f4 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ g6 5. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}xc6+$ $bxc6$ 7. 0-0 e6 8. d3 $\mathbb{B}b8$ 9. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{W}e7$



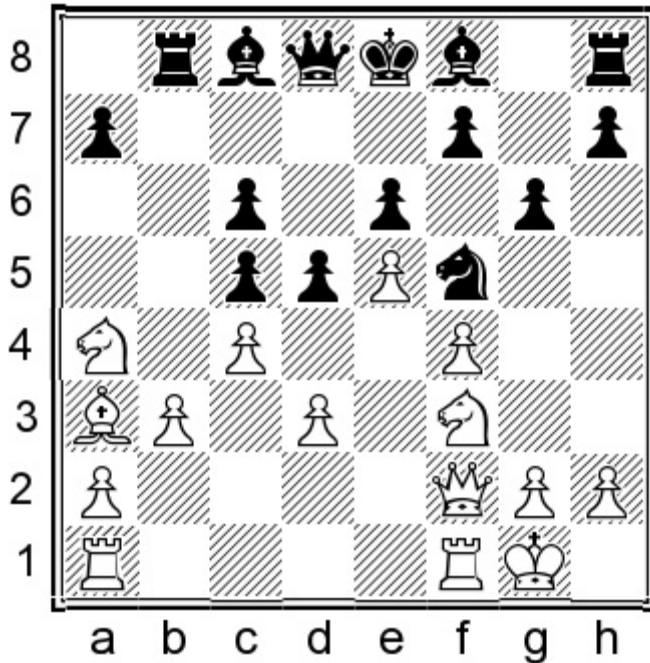
(Exercise no 48)

10.e5! d5

I think the reason players end up with this bad position so often is that it doesn't look bad at all at first sight. Black seems to have nice control over the centre. If you don't know White's plan, you might not see the slightest problem for Black. The first time I saw a position similar to this, I too was enthusiastic about Black's massive centre.

One of the central dogmas of chess didactics states that evaluations lead to plans and moves. This order can easily be reversed: knowing the good plans or moves leads you to the correct evaluation.

11.b3 ♕d8 12.♕a4 ♔f8 13.c4 ♔h6 14.♔a3 ♔f5 15.♔f2

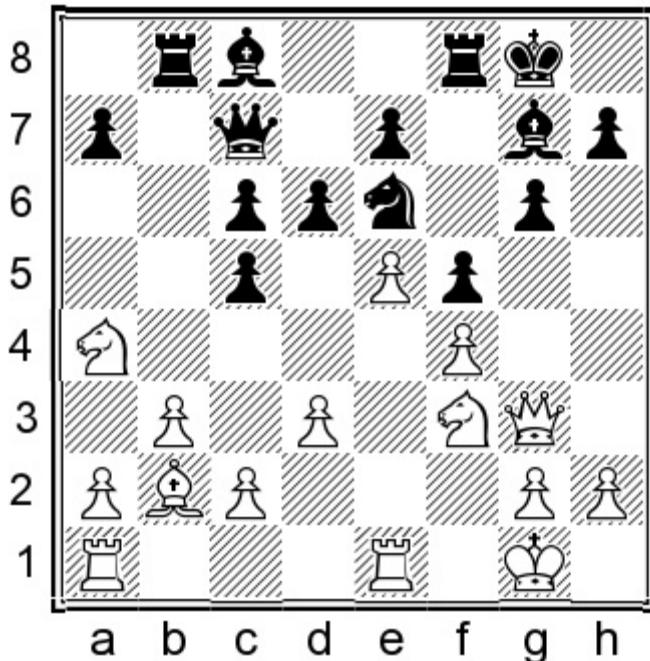


The by now well-known disaster has struck again.

15...Qd4 16.Qxd4 cxd4 17.Qxf8 Qxf8 18.Qxd4 1-0

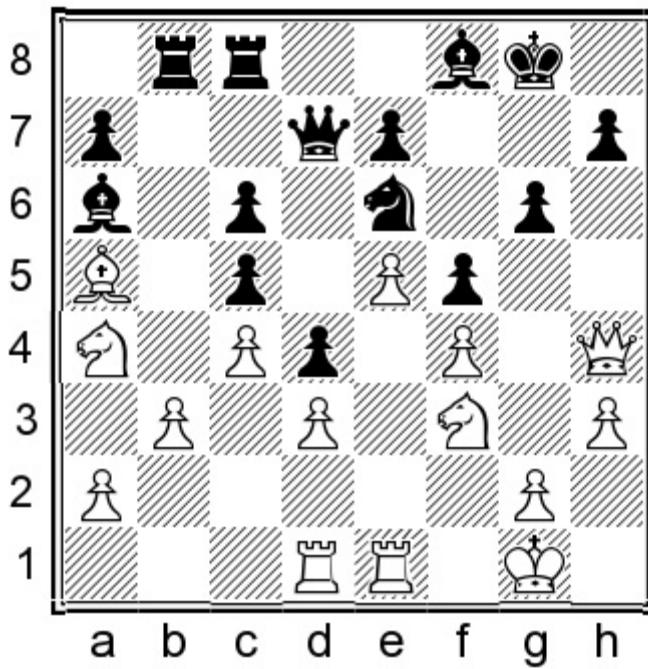
Mark Hebden – John Fedorowicz London 1981

1.e4 c5 2.f4 g6 3.Qf3 d6 4.Qc3 Qg7 5.Qb5+ Qc6 6.Qxc6+ bxc6 7.d3 Qh6 8.0-0 f5 9.Qe1 0-0 10.e5 Qc7 11.Qg3 Qb8 12.Qe1 Qf7 13.b3 Qd8 14.Qa4 Qe6 15.Qb2



In this instructive game, Black has an unpleasant position. Going over into the Wyvill formation, however, gives only temporary relief.

15...d5? 16.c4! $\mathbb{E}d8$ 17. $\mathbb{E}ad1$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}a5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 20. $\mathbb{W}f2$ d4 21. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 22.h3 $\mathbb{W}d7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{E}dc8$



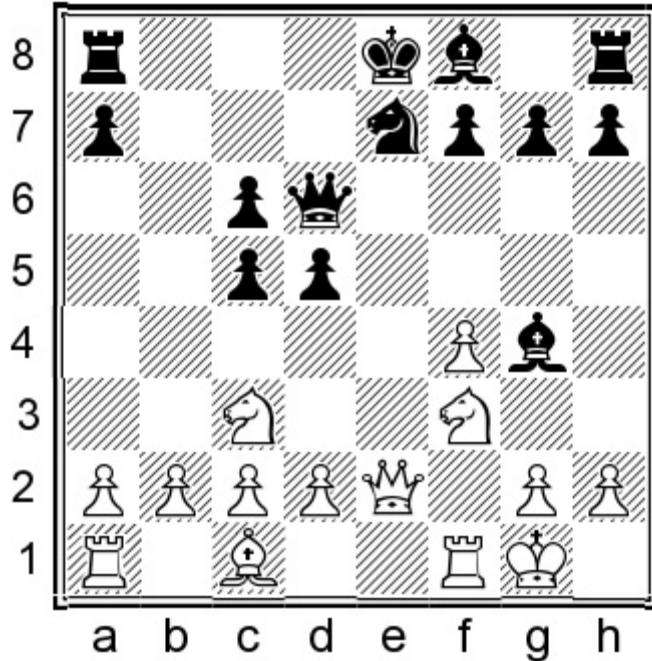
Again we have the same total mess. Eliminating Black's only decent piece is sufficient.

24. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 1-0

If 24.... $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ White first takes on c5.

Bartłomiej Heberla – Krystian Singer POL-ch U18, Bartkowa 2002

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.f4 e6 4. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d5 5. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 6.exd5 exd5 7. $\mathbb{W}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc6+$ bxc6 9.0-0 $\mathbb{W}d6$



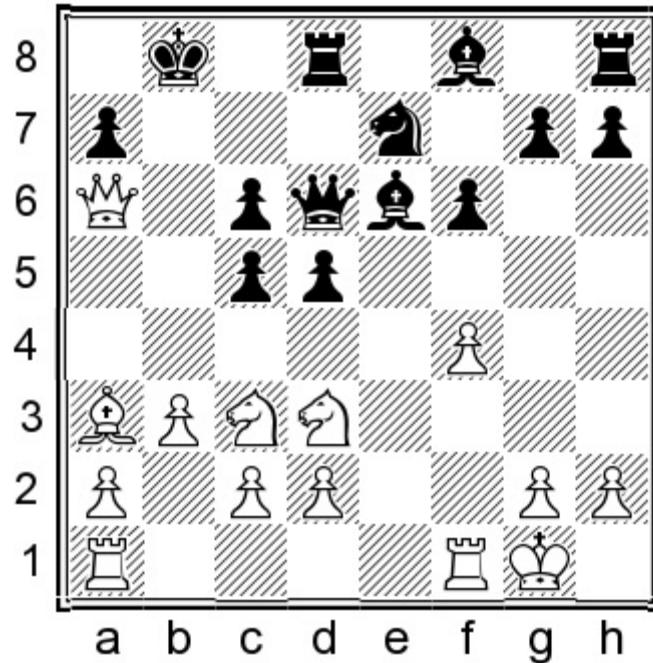
(Exercise no 49)

Black has some developing problems, but if he could manage to fianchetto the bishop and castle kingside he would be doing okay. But with the standard plan White attacks Black's weak pawn and at the same time prevents castling kingside.

10.b3!

Now after 10....g6 11.Qa3 Qg7 12.Qae1 Black still cannot castle. But on the queenside the king will definitely not be safe.

10....0-0-0 11.Qa6+ Kb8 12.Qe5 Qe6 13.Qa3 f6 14.Qd3

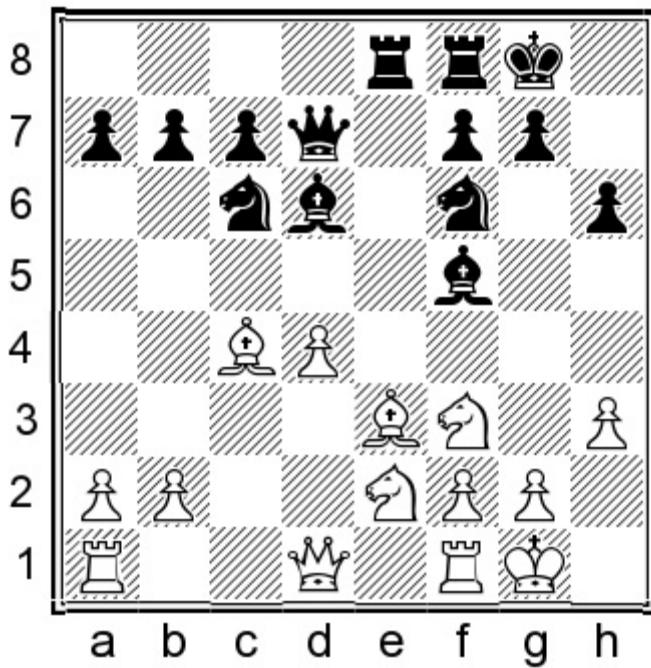


The basic weakness of the Wyvill formation is again decisive.

14...Qf5 15.Qxc5 Qc7 16.Qxf8 Qc8 17.Qb4 Qdxf8 18.Qxc6+ Qa8 19.Qxd5 1-0

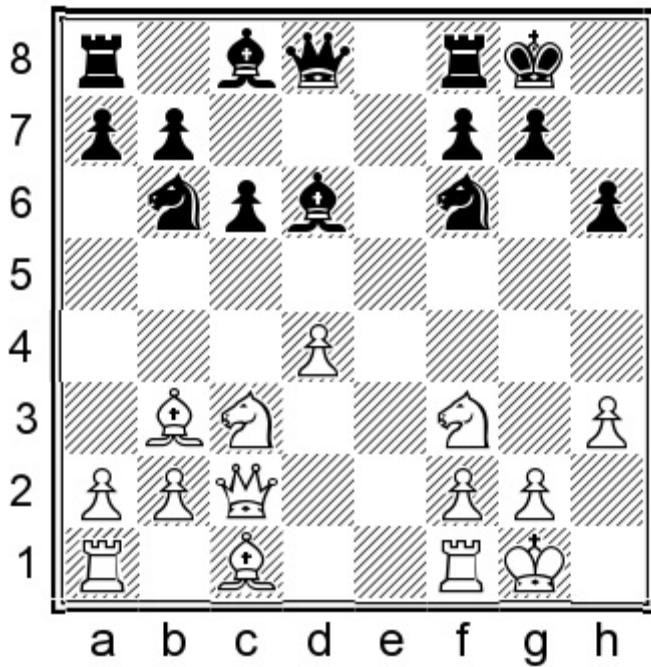
Exercises for Chapter 9

50 (go to the solution)



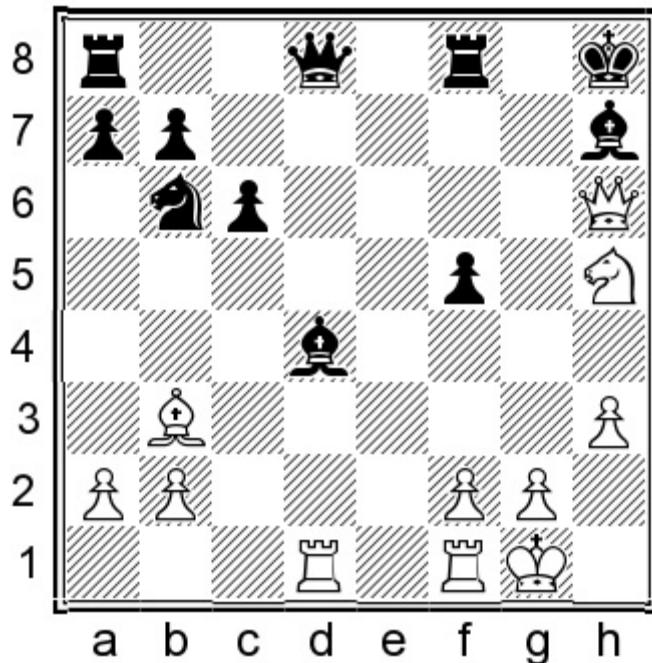
Black to move

51 (go to the solution)



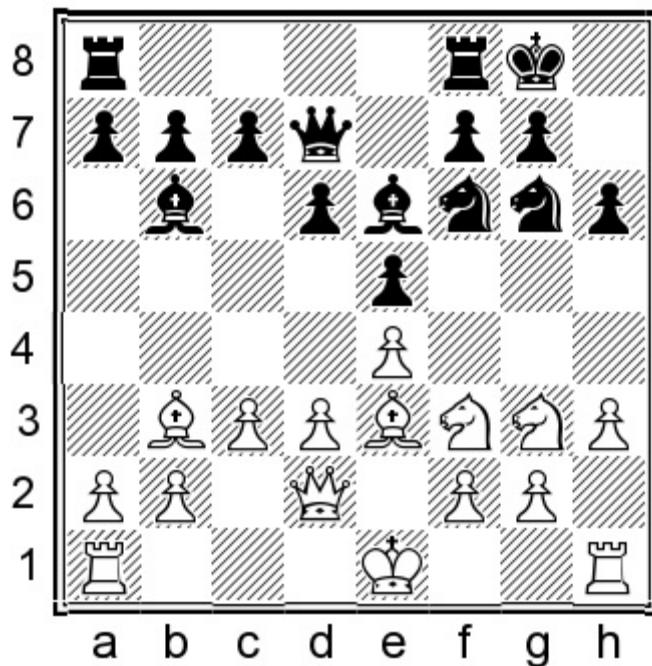
White to move

52 (go to the solution)



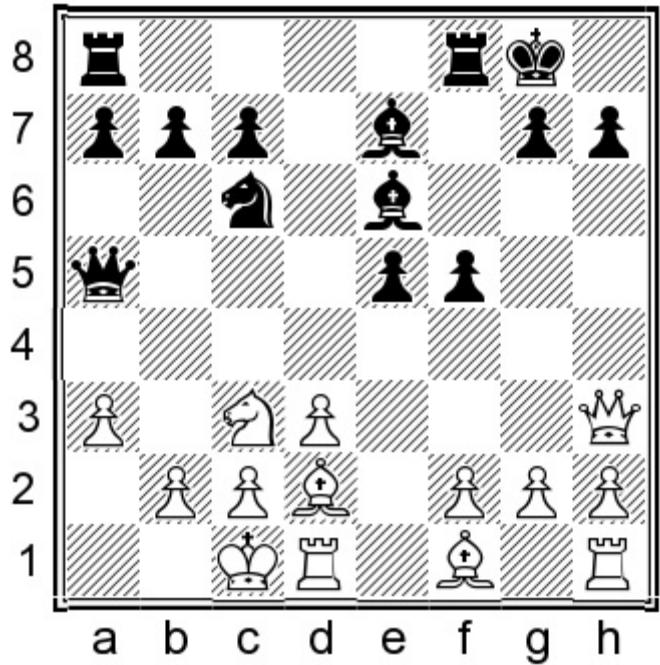
White to move

53 (go to the solution)



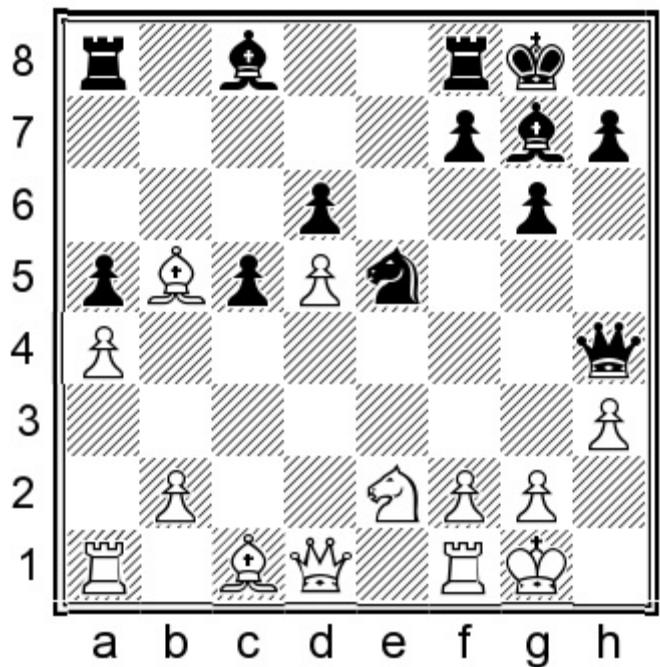
White to move

54 (go to the solution)



Black to move

55 (go to the solution)



Black to move

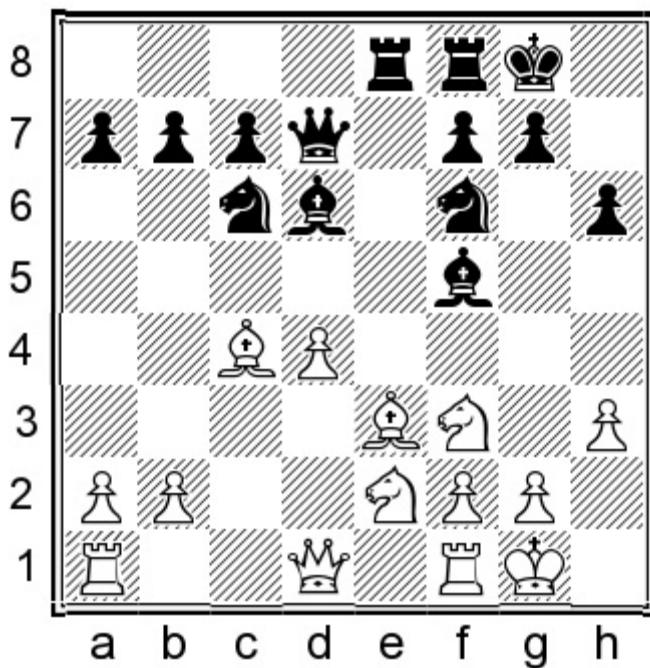
In the previous chapter we saw Williams in action against the Wyvill formation. In his first game from the tournament, against Löwenthal, there was an interesting moment concerning the typical sacrifice ... $\mathbb{B}xh3$. It did not occur in the actual game, only in Staunton's annotations, but it is well worth looking at it. In the chapter on Greco we have already seen the typical Greek Gift sacrifice on h7. Probably every chess player comes across this a few times in their career, be it on the board or only in analysis. I haven't done any database research on this topic, but my guess is that the $\mathbb{B}xh6/...\mathbb{B}xh3$ sacrifice is a no less frequent occurrence. It does depend a bit on the openings you play: in my repertoire with the Italian, the Caro-Kann Panov and some c3 Sicilians, the chances are quite high. But from virtually every opening, opportunities to sacrifice your bishop on h6 or h3 might occur.

And just as with the $\mathbb{B}xh7$ sacrifice, although the same moves and ideas often return, almost every case is special and has its own fine points. So studying a lot of these sacrifices, or even better trying them out yourself (in online games) and studying them afterwards, is an efficient way of training.

Johann Löwenthal

Elijah Williams

London 1851



Black to move

(Exercise no 50)

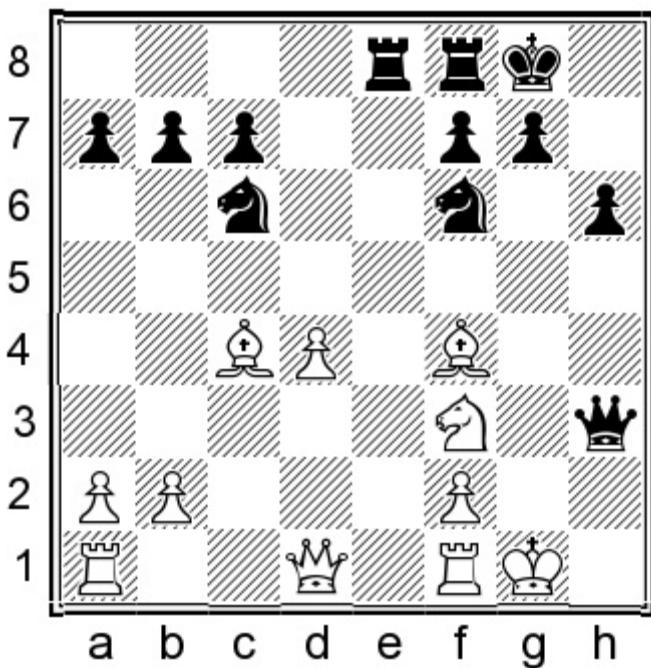
On White's next move, Staunton comments that 'this move appears to have been made from the apprehension that Black would take h3 with his Bishop; it strikes me as a mistaken precaution.'

This sacrifice on h3 (or h6) is one of the most regular piece sacrifices and every chess player needs to develop a feeling for when it is correct, when incorrect and when something in between. I did some

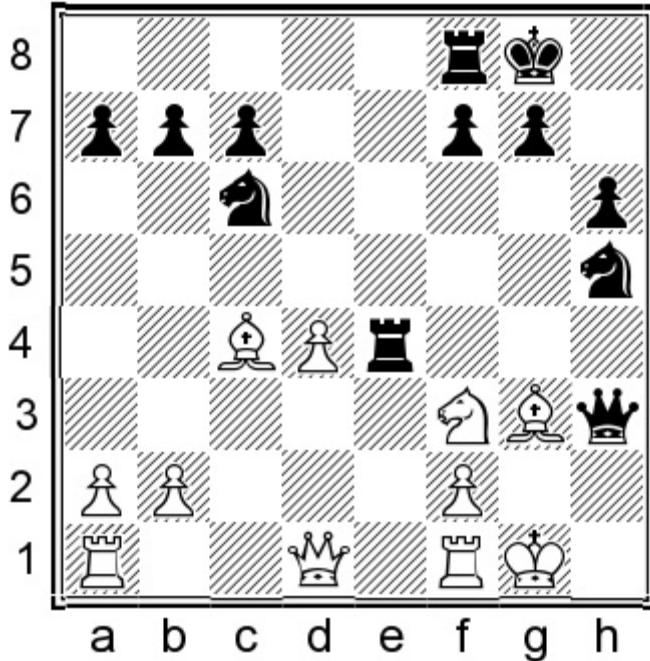
research on who was the first to play this sacrifice (see below), but since Staunton is mentioning it, it clearly was not an uncommon idea at the time.

Although White was to move, I gave you this position as Black to move, to see if you agree with Staunton's appreciation.

I hope you didn't: with Black to move, 13... $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ would be a promising possibility. But it is a real sacrifice, not a fake one that leads to a clear win. After 14.gxh3 $\mathbb{W}xh3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ (what else, since the knight on f3 is hanging) 15... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ we reach the following position:



If you calculated this far and decided not to go for it, since no clear knock-out seems to be available, you are not to be blamed and you won't be alone. But the brave and the very best would still go for it. Already Black has two pawns, and more importantly, White's position is still rather shaky. With 16... $\mathbb{Q}e4!$ Black can bring new forces into the attack and after 17. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ there follows 17... $\mathbb{Q}h5$.



Now 18... $\mathbb{Q}xg3$ and/or 18... $\mathbb{B}g4$ are threats, and after for example 18. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ Black brings his knight into the attack with 18... $\mathbb{Q}xd4$, at the same time taking a third pawn. Black is winning.

In the game White defended against the threat with 13. $\mathbb{Q}f4$, but lost after a blunder late in the middlegame.

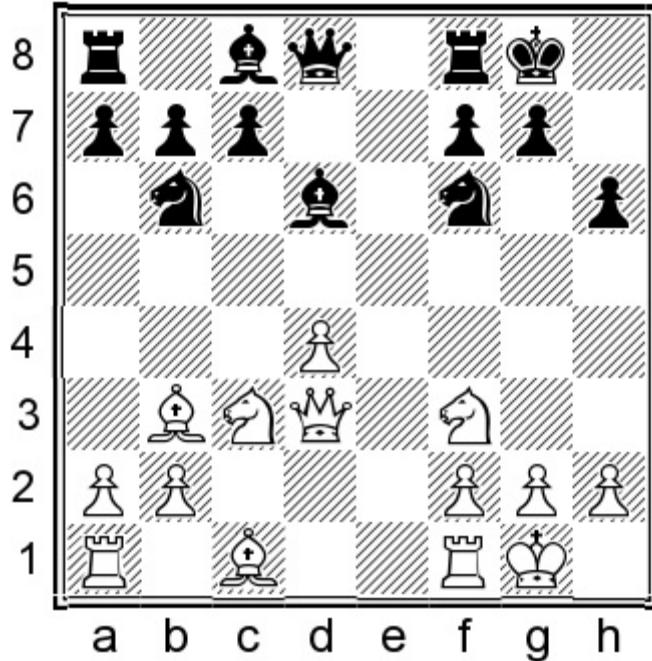
Staunton mentioned the ... $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ idea and thought Löwenthal tried to defend against it. Although he certainly underestimated Black's chances, he did not give the impression that the sacrifice was something new or special.

I tried to find some earlier examples of it in the databases and one of the earliest I came across was incidentally played by Williams.

Elijah Williams

Daniel Harrwitz

London 1846



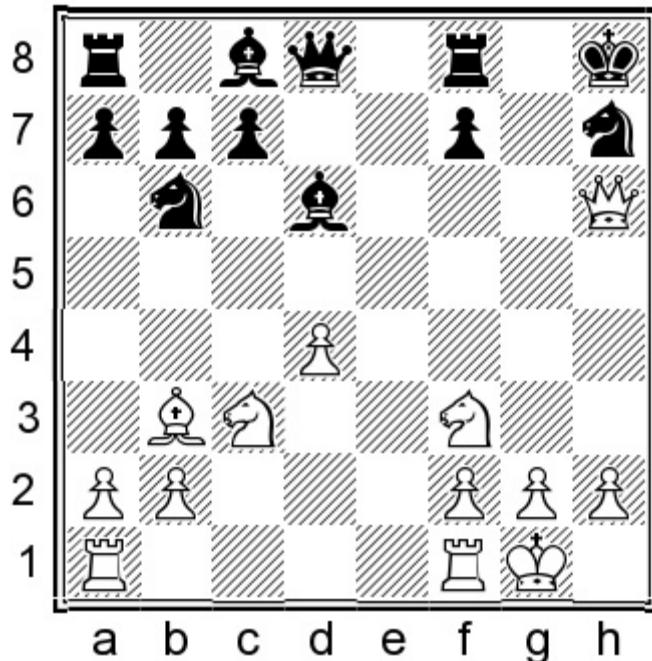
White to move

Most often the $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ sacrifice is made with a battery like $\mathbb{W}d2$ plus $\mathbb{Q}e3$. Here we will see a slightly more sophisticated version.

White could have played 11.h3 and then 11...c6?! 12. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ would lead to the next game.

Even more cunning would have been 11. $\mathbb{Q}e1$: if Black is unaware of the dangers and replies 11...c6? or 11... $\mathbb{Q}e8$?, then 12. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ is more forceful.

11. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$!? $gxh6$ 12. $\mathbb{W}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 13. $\mathbb{W}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$



The engine thinks White's compensation is just sufficient. If 14. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ Black has 14...f5.

14. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$

With the pawn on c6 this would not be possible because the bishop on d6 would be hanging.

15. $\mathbb{Q}eg5?!$ $\mathbb{Q}f6!$

It is often a bad sign if the queen can join in the defence.

16. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$

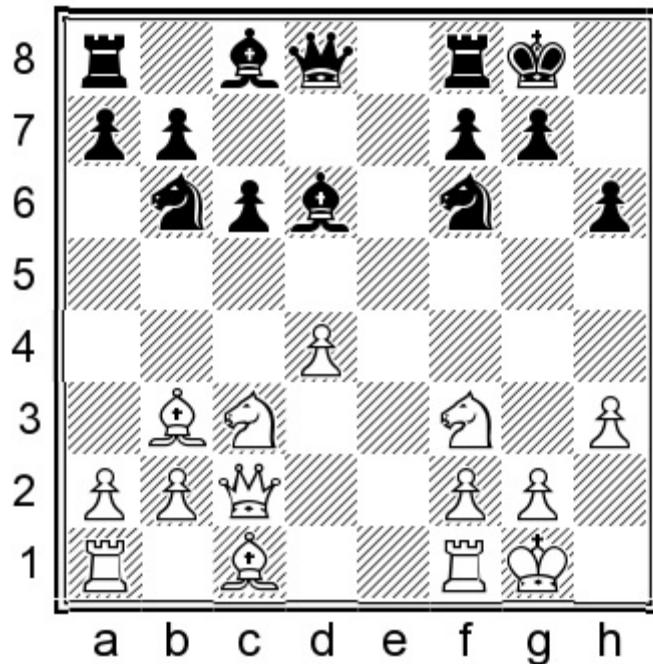
Now White has three pawns, but with the queens off the attack is gone. After quite some adventures, with winning chances for both players and two entirely different stalemate tricks by White (which is special, but probably not a record), the game ended in a draw.

When I saw the previous game, the next beautiful game immediately came into my mind. Actually I thought the position was identical, but there are some small but meaningful differences. I have used this one over the years in several training sessions, as a position for analysing or playing out. As an exercise it is difficult if not impossible to work it out till the end, which actually isn't that clear at all.

Sergey Smagin

Nikolay Monin

Pinsk 1986



White to move

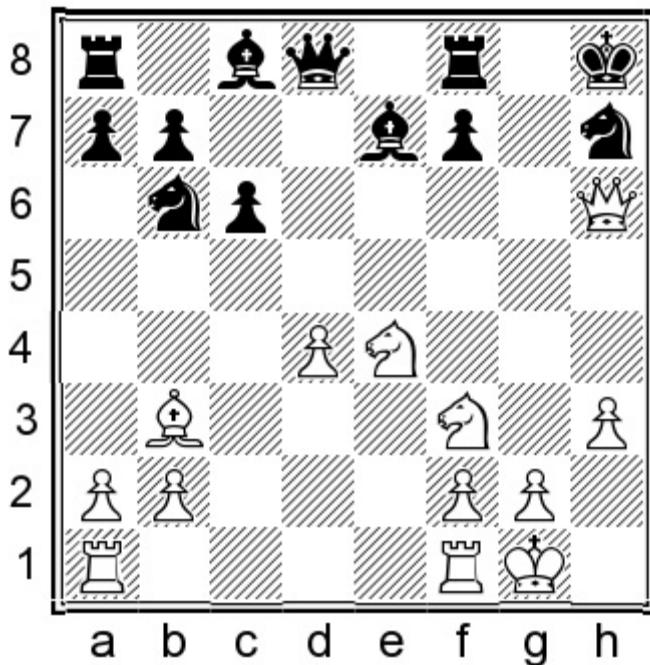
(Exercise no 51)

13.♕xh6!?

Maybe normal moves (like 13.♖e1

or 13.♗d2) are no worse, but after 13...♝bd5 there won't be a second chance. Either way, spotting this advanced tactic earns you full points.

13.♕xh6!? gxh6 14.♗g6+ ♔h8 15.♗xh6+ ♔h7 16.♘e4 ♕e7



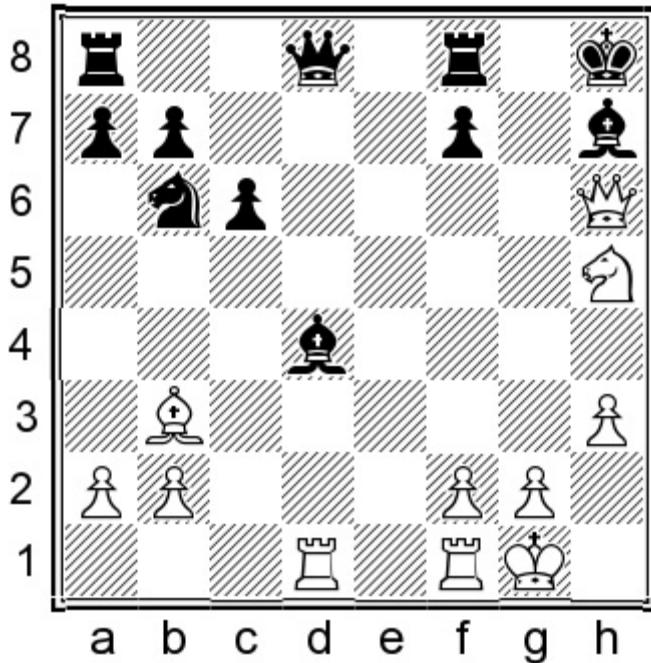
If you calculated this far you did a good job and I guess most strong players would stop their analysis somewhere around here and make a choice – either for or against this adventure. If you even foresaw White's next move you must be very strong (and/or a fan of Bobby Fischer's games).

There are other moves; my engine by the way prefers 17.g4 – inhumanly patient.

17.♘f6!?

A beautiful move, but Black can defend. The fine point is 17...♝xf6? 18.♗c2 and now the defence 18...f5 is no longer available, just as in the famous Fischer-Benko game (1963) – if this doesn't ring a bell, do have a look at that game.

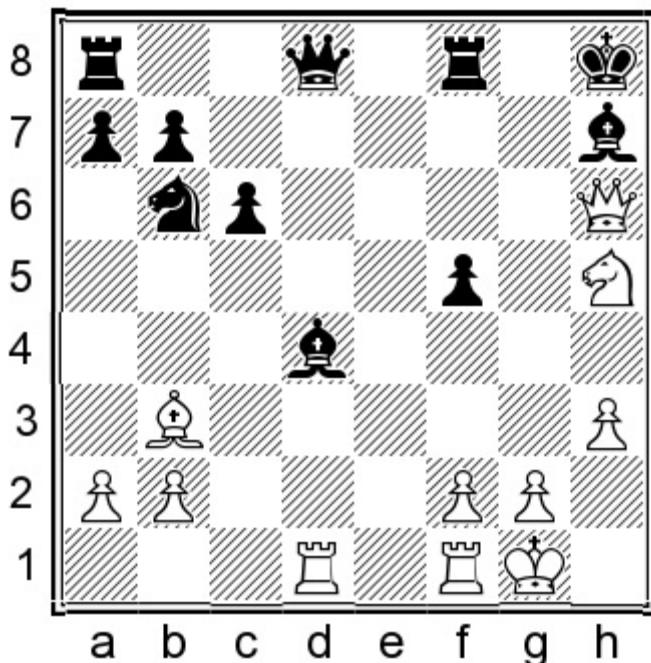
17...♝f5 18.♗h5 ♘f6 19.♗g5 ♘xd4 20.♗xh7 ♘xh7 21.♗ad1!



From our starting position, calculating this far, with all the alternatives I didn't mention, is almost impossible. Besides, the position is still unclear. White wants to take on d4 and then drive the black queen off the long diagonal with $\mathbb{Q}d1$. For example: 21...c5 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ (not 23. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}d3$) 23... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f6$ and wins. But Black can defend with 21... $\mathbb{Q}g8!$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ $f\mathbb{x}g6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$. White then has at least a perpetual after 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e7+$.

But finally Black crumbled under the pressure.

21...f5?



(Exercise no 52)

This is one of the puzzles in *Imagination in Chess*, a collection of rather difficult puzzles by Paata Gaprindashvili. Black's position is beyond repair, but Smagin's move is by far the best and most direct, and besides that exemplary, bringing his last piece into play.

22.♕fe1!

Now the threat is 23.♕xd4 followed by 24.♕e7. If 22...c5 23.♕xd4 cxd4 then 24.♕g7 mates.

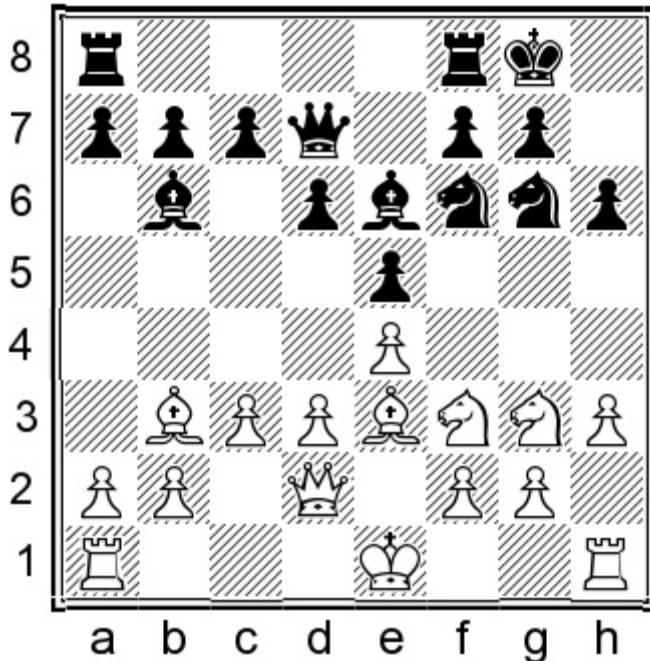
22...♗f6 23.♘xf6 ♗xf6 24.♕e6 ♗g7 25.♗h5 a5 26.♗dd6 ♘ac8 27.♗e7 a4 28.♗h6 1-0

As a whole, a specimen of very powerful chess!

But Williams was not the first to play the ♘xh6 sacrifice. As far as I can see, the next game, played one year earlier, saw the premiere of our sacrifice (corrections are welcome – I'm basing this on database research, but of course the sacrifice might have been mentioned earlier in annotations to other games). This game stems from a match for the title of chess champion of the USA, the first one in history, between Charles Stanley (an Englishman) and Eugene Rousseau (a Frenchman). It was played in New Orleans and eight-year-old Paul Morphy was present – at that moment maybe already a stronger player than the two contestants for the title.

For reasons soon to become clear, as the first appearance of our sacrifice, this was really a funny game.

**Charles Stanley
Eugene Rousseau
New Orleans 1845**



White to move

(Exercise no 53)

The slow Italian has become extremely popular in recent years, but little progress seems to have been made in the last century and three-quarters. For me this popularity is a bit unfortunate: I have played the Italian my whole life, but now I'm suddenly playing mainstream theory with no surprise value at all.

As noted before, regarding the sacrifice under investigation, the Italian is an ideal breeding ground and here we even have two batteries ready to fire.

When doing the exercises, at this point you probably guessed that your opinion on 13.♗xh6 was asked for. Well, it is an excellent move. After 13...gxh6 14.♕xh6 White first of all is threatening 15.♗g5; 14...♗h7 isn't a defence because of 15.♗h5. Despite having all his pieces in the vicinity, Black has no means to withstand the attack.

13.0-0?! ♕ae8?!

Now Black misses his chance: 13...♗xh3 14.gxh3 ♕xh3 with more than enough compensation.

14.♗c2?!

This is an ugly move, and it also misses the chance to play 14.♗xh6; after 14...gxh6 15.♕xh6 the extra rook on e8 mainly blocks the king's flight squares.

14...c5?!

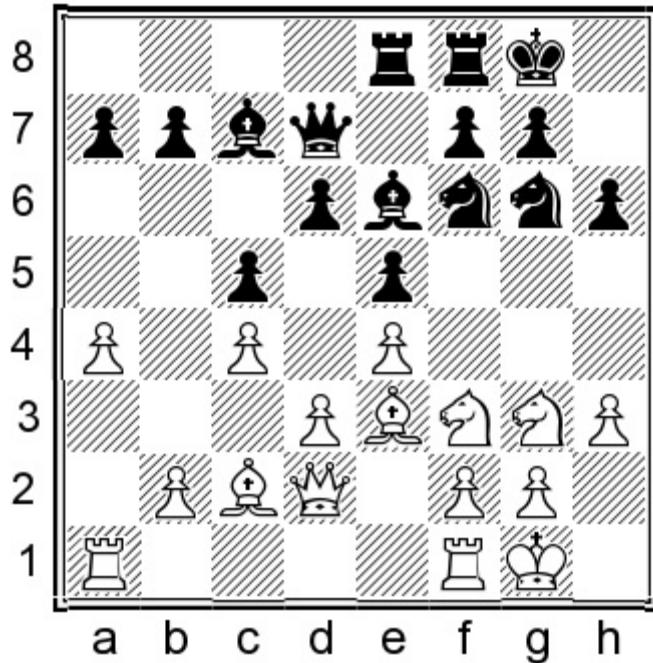
Also a bit ugly, but you'll have guessed by now that 14....♗xh3 was the move.

15.a4?!

Even without the help of the light-squared bishop, 15.♗xh6 still looks very strong. After the move played White is threatening 16.a5 followed by ♕a4.

15...♗c7 16.c4?!

It is not clear to me why both players are so fond of shutting their bishop in, but apart from that, here White misses his last chance for 16.♗xh6 with a strong attack after 16...gxh6 17.♕xh6.



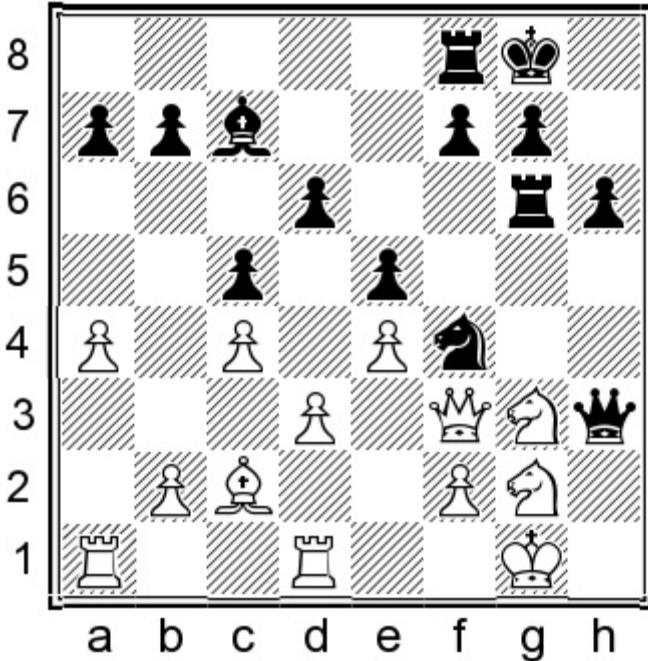
16...Qxh3!?

Seven is the lucky number! Or maybe not, considering the outcome. There have been better opportunities and maybe White can survive, but it is easy for him to go wrong.

17.gxh3 Qxh3 18.Qe2? Ng4

Even stronger was 18...Nf4 19.Qxf4 exf4, because 20.Qf5 fails to 20...Qxf5 and after the saddening 20.Qh1 Nf4 White is completely paralyzed.

19.Qfd1 Nxe3 20.Qxe3 Nf4 21.Qe1 Qe6 22.Qf3 Qg6 23.Qg2



After the sacrifice Black has conducted the attack quite strongly and here 23...h5! would have been the finishing touch. Black is going to win back material thanks to the pin on the g-file.

After the move played things got messy again and finally the win went to White.

23...f5 24.d4 fxe4 25.Qxe4 Qe6 26.Qf5 Qh8 27.Qxh3 Qxf3 28.Qh4 Qfxg3+ 29.fxg3 Qxg3+ 30.Qh2 Qxh3+ 31.Qxh3 Qxd4 32.Qf1 Qe6 33.Qg4 Qf4 34.Qxf4 exf4 35.Qg6+ Qh7 36.Qf5 1-0

Although Black didn't manage to clinch the win, he played the last part very well, nicely bringing extra troops (i.e. the rook) into the attack – one of the basics in chess, ‘inviting everyone to the party’ as Yasser Seirawan called it.³⁴ Unfortunately, trying to get the other rook in with 23...f5 was the start of Black's decline.

It's easy to see the fun in this fragment, but the players hadn't seen this sacrifice before, so it's admirable that one of them finally took the step.

Since then innumerable games have been played with this sacrifice and it should have a place in every player's repertoire. Over the years I have laid out a large collection on this topic (one could write a whole book about it), but I will restrict myself to a few extra examples.

The sacrifice is also possible on the queenside, but of course that is a less frequent occurrence. One of the earliest is also one of the most famous games in chess history. It is the sad story of Mikhail Chigorin (more about him in later chapters) not winning Hastings 1895, one of the strongest and most prestigious tournaments in history. All the top players of the time were present, including Lasker, Steinitz, Tarrasch and the surprise winner Pillsbury (in a total of 22 participants).

After nineteen rounds, Chigorin was leading with 15 points, but then he lost to Janowski with white in 16 moves in inexplicably bad style. In *Mikhail Chigorin* (by Jimmy Adams) a Russian biographer says: ‘Again, unsteadiness of sporting form let down the Russian champion.’³⁵ Kasparov, in *My Great Predecessors*, speaks in the same guarded terms: ‘But here, after failing to withstand the tension and

“violating the competitive regime”, he lost an unthinkable game with White to Janowski, probably the worst in his life.³⁶

More outspoken is Vasily Panov, in a chapter (in Adams’s book) headed ‘Mysterious incident in Hastings’: ‘To put it bluntly, the game gave the impression that Chigorin had played it in the state of a heavy hangover. [...] It was said that on the eve of this game, admirers held a celebration for Chigorin with plentiful supper and wine. This explanation is strange, since it is well known that at the beginning and in the zenith of his chess career, Chigorin never drank during competitions.’

So for Chigorin to behave like this would have been very strange, according to Panov, but he also thinks that real ‘admirers’ never could do such a thing.

What follows are some conspiracy suspicions in the best Soviet tradition:

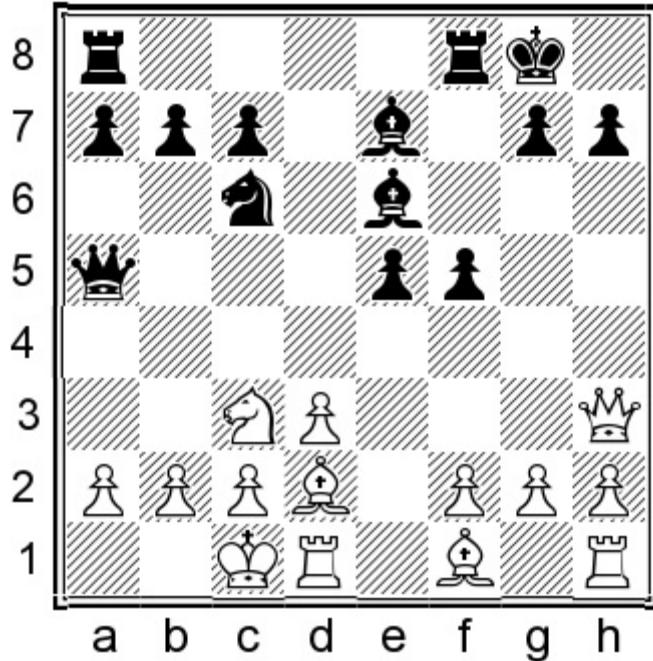
‘There remains only one explanation: all this supper with wine business was subversive activity, a dirty trick, contrived by rivals or people envious of Chigorin, who were aware of Chigorin’s partiality for alcohol. And it is well known that when a man abstains from unhealthy habits for a long time and then suddenly, by a freak of chance, returns to them, it rages in him like a forest fire! We can only surmise who would be the perpetrator of this underhand operation [...] Possibly some day, with work by English chess historians, this “mysterious event” will be cleared up.’³⁷

My knowledge of chess history isn’t perfect but as far as I know the English historians haven’t come up with new clues on this ‘whodunnit’ since. But what a beautiful collision of two past worlds this little episode shows.

Now let’s get to the game. The reader might like to play over the opening moves to see how Chigorin managed to get himself in such a mess this quickly.

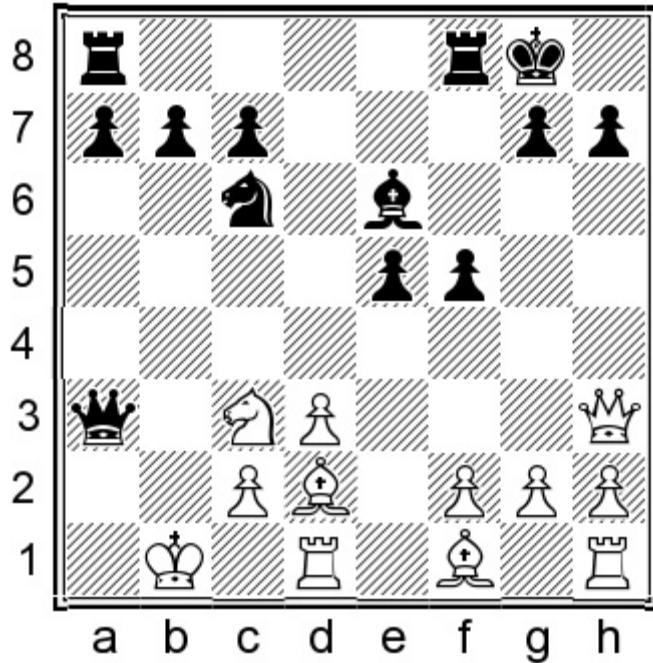
Mikhail Chigorin – David Janowski Hastings 1895

1.e4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘f6 3.d3 d5 4.exd5 ♘xd5 5.♗e2 ♘c6 6.♗d2 ♘e7 7.0-0-0 0-0 8.♗f3 ♘e6 9.♗ge2 f5
10.♗h3 ♘d6 11.♗xd5 ♘xd5 12.♗c3 ♘a5



13.a3

At this moment White's position is already beyond repair. After 13. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ one way to continue the attack is 13... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ and after 14.a3 $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ 15.bxa3 $\mathbb{Q}xa3$ we reach the next position (*facing page*). Compared to the same line one move later White is a full tempo up, but still completely lost.



The participants of the Hastings 1895 tournament.

This construction I call 'the hold'. If White can't manage to drive the black queen away from a3, Black will follow up with ... $\mathbb{Q}b4$, after which White is completely paralyzed.

(Exercise no 54) 13... $\mathbb{Q}xa3!$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b1$

As noted, here 14.bxa3 $\mathbb{W}xa3+$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ is even worse. The only thing Black has to do is add another piece to the attack, for example lifting the rook on f8 via f6 to the queenside.

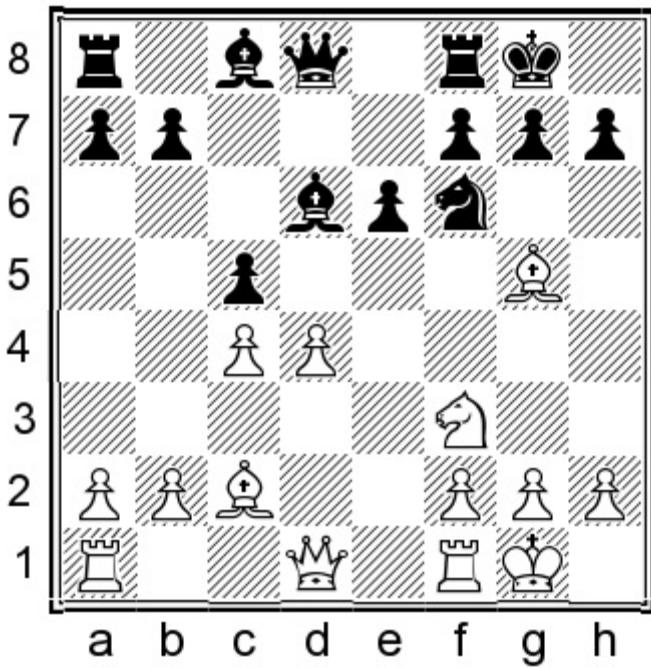
14... $\mathbb{Q}xb2+!$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{W}a2+$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 0-1



This was not too difficult. Here is one more standard example, again illustrating ‘the hold’. There is a category of games that are lost many times in exactly (or more or less) the same way: miniatures, of course, very often opening traps, and sometimes something a bit more sophisticated. I don’t know which game tops the list. The term ‘opening trap’ doesn’t seem appropriate for what happens in the next game. Black’s play seems rather obvious and decent, which is probably why so many have followed in the black player’s footsteps, but it has a serious defect.

Charles Jaffe – David Baird New York 1911

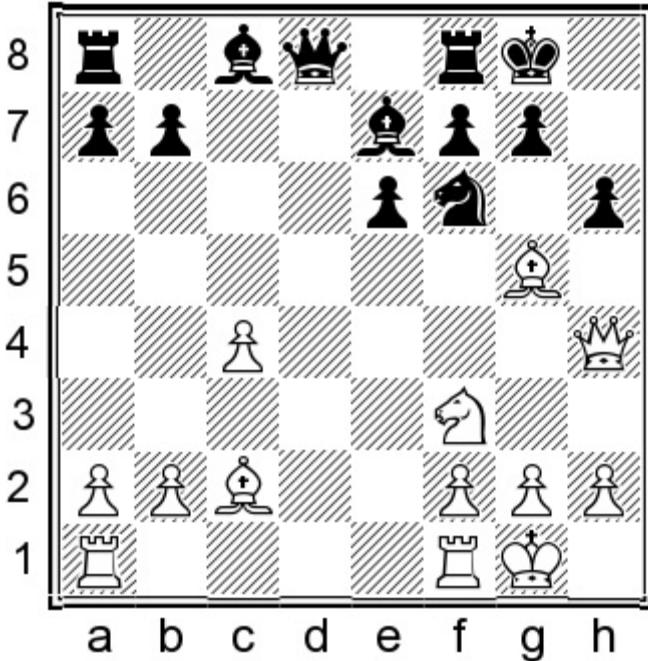
1.d4 d5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3.c4 e6 4. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ c6 5.e3 $\mathbb{Q}bd7$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 7.0-0 0-0 8.e4 dxe4 9. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ c5 12. $\mathbb{Q}g5$



12...cxd4?

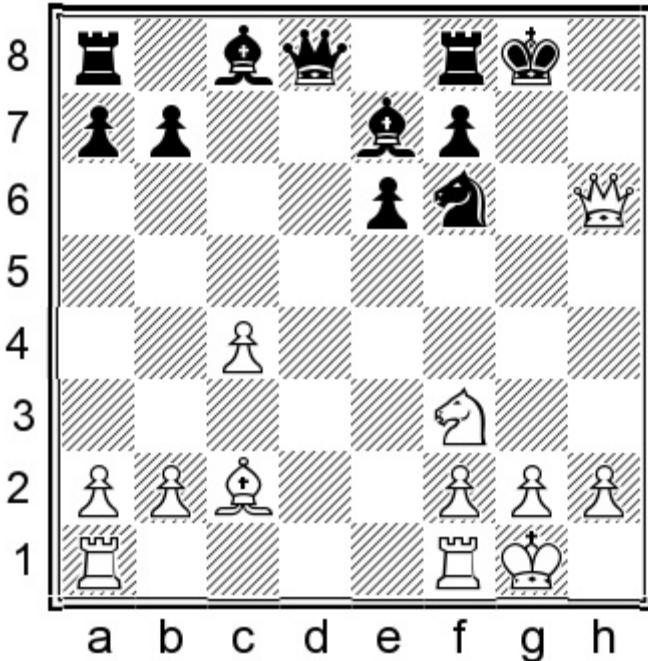
In the database there are 81 games with this (losing) move. Now was the moment to insert 12...h6: after 13. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ cxd4 14. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ nothing serious is happening to Black.

13. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ h6



No good either was 14....g6 15.Qad1.

15.Qxh6! gxh6 16.Qxh6



An important position. Had Black's rook already been on e8 he would have been in time for the defensive manoeuvre ...Qe7-f8-g7, with a relatively safe square for his king on f8. Now on 16...Qe8, as on most other moves, there follows 17.Qg5 and 17...Qf8 comes too late because of 18.Qh7+ Kh8 19.Qxf7 mate.

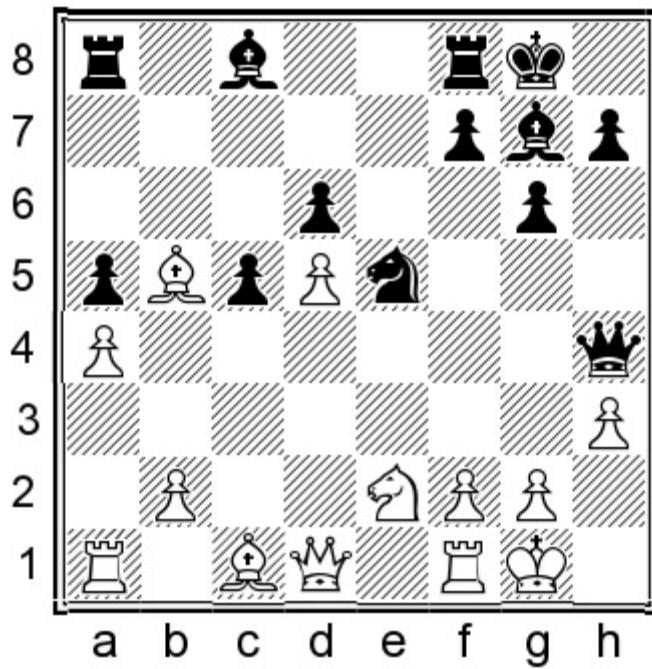
16...Qd6 17.Qad1 e5 18.c5 1-0

My fondest memory of this sacrifice has to do with some complicated tactics.

Erik van Heeswijk

Willy Hendriks

Nijmegen 2000

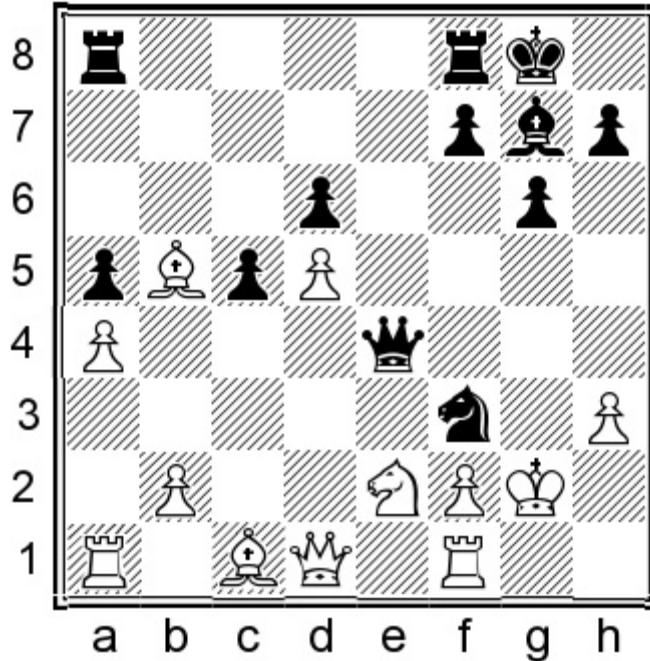


Black to move

(Exercise no 55)

After the last few exercises the reader might have become a bit too relaxed: it's time to get sharp again. Here I was thinking about 18... $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ but I discovered some strong defensive resources for White. To start with, 18... $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 19.gxh3 $\mathbb{W}xh3$ followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}f3$ mate looks very attractive, but White has the slightly hidden defence 20. $\mathbb{R}a3$!

Equally attractive looks 19... $\mathbb{Q}f3+$ first and after 20. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ setting up a deadly discovered attack with 20... $\mathbb{W}e4$:

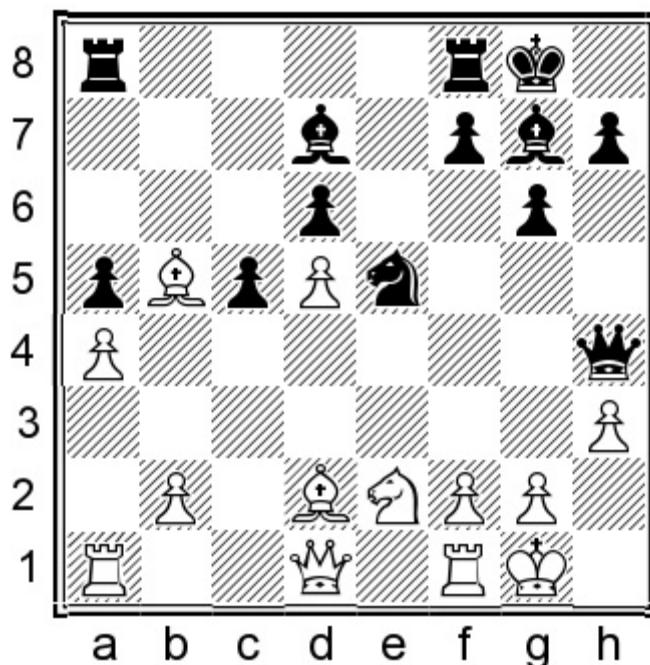


But White has the beautiful defence 21.Qh1! and there is no effective discovered attack, for example 21...Qh4+ 22.f3 Qxf3? 23.Qd3, winning material.

18...Qd7

So with great regret I had to renounce the sacrifice and play this modest move. But I was immediately rewarded for my fine piece of calculation in a funny way.

19.Qd2?



19.... $\mathbb{Q}xh3!$

The tiny difference becomes vital in the line 20.gxh3 $\mathbb{Q}f3+$! 21. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}e4$ and now after 22. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ Black does have an effective discovery with 22... $\mathbb{Q}xd2$.

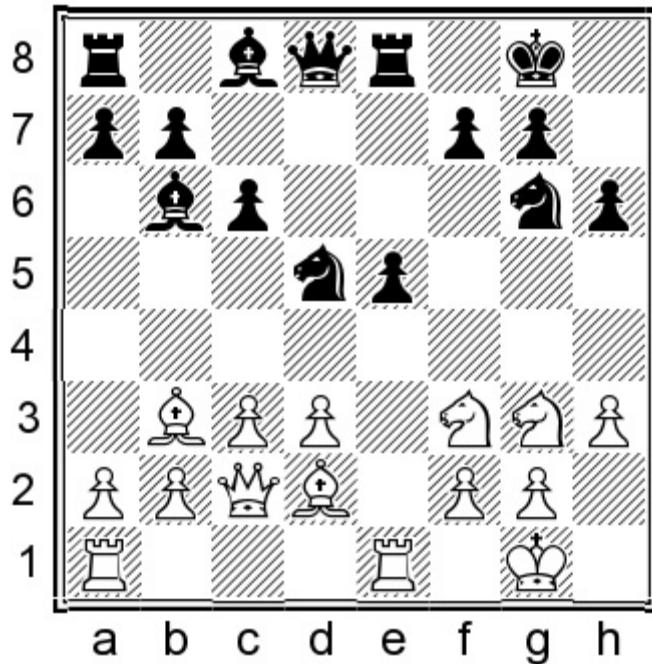
White fought on with 20.f4 but lost a few moves later.

Some years later I came across the next game with different tactics, but I'm sure Karjakin must have had the same pleasant sensation.

Vasily Ivanchuk

Sergey Karjakin

Medias 2011



Black to move

At this moment Karjakin surely contemplated the sacrifice, but the outcome is not clear, for example 15... $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 16.gxh3 $\mathbb{W}f6$ and now Black attacks the knight on f3, which cannot move because of 17... $\mathbb{W}xf2$. Nor does 17. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ help because of 17... $\mathbb{Q}h4+$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{W}xf2+$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}xg3$. But White can defend with 17. $\mathbb{W}d1!$ and if now 17... $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ $\mathbb{W}xf2+$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}xg3$ White has 20. $\mathbb{W}g4$.

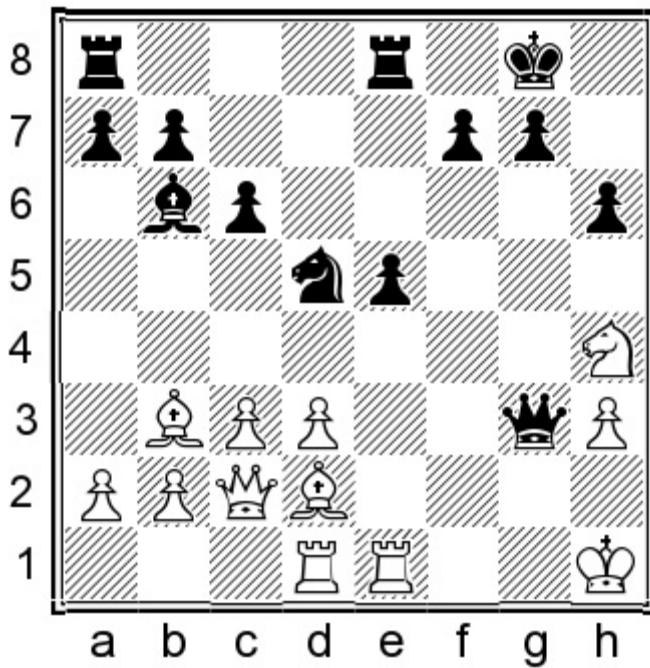
So, just like me, Karjakin reluctantly settled on just a decent move.

15... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}ad1?$

A very natural move but now there is no $\mathbb{W}d1$ any more.

16... $\mathbb{Q}xh3!$

After 17.gxh3 ♜f6 18.♗g2 ♖h4+ 19.♕xh4 ♜xf2+ 20.♔h1 ♜xg3 (see the analysis diagram) there is no white queen assisting in the defence.



White therefore tried to stir up some complications with 17.c4 but that could not save his game in the end.

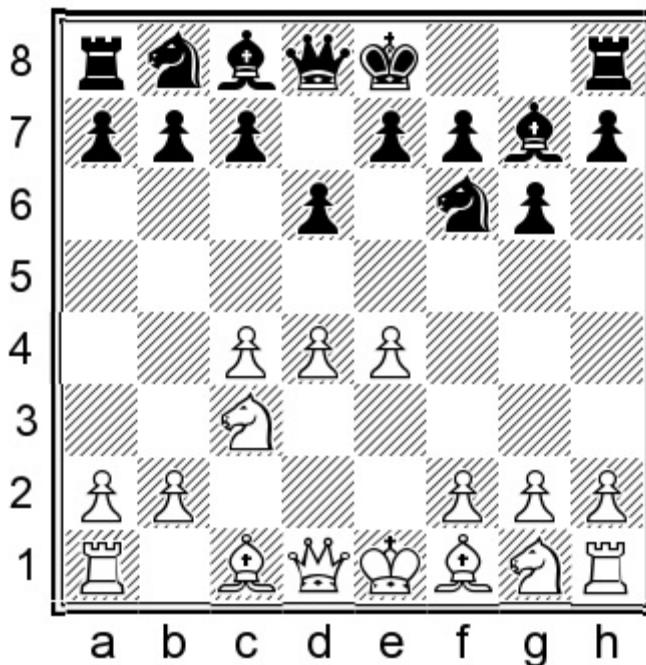
Questions for Chapter 10

We'll start this chapter with two questions in the 'pub quiz' genre. Have a look at the following positions.

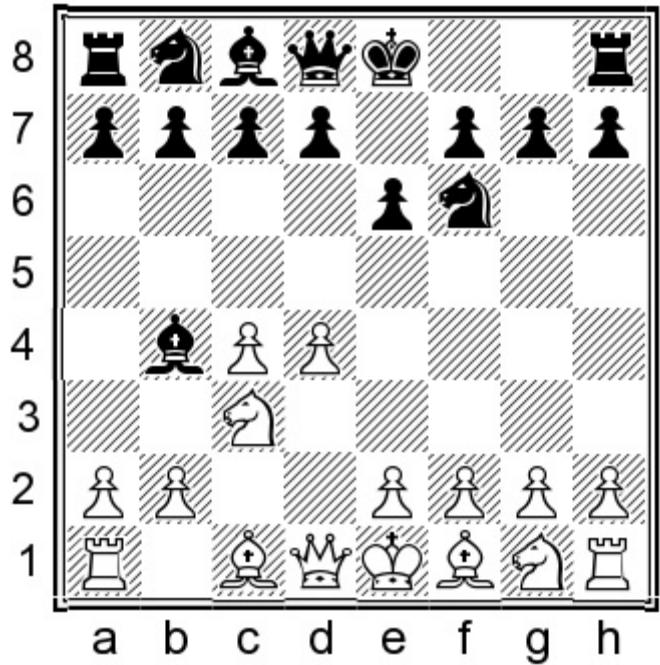
1. Only one of these openings or opening lines is named after its inventor/the one who first played it. Which one is it and what was his name?

2. What is the name of the player who invented/was the first to play the five other openings?

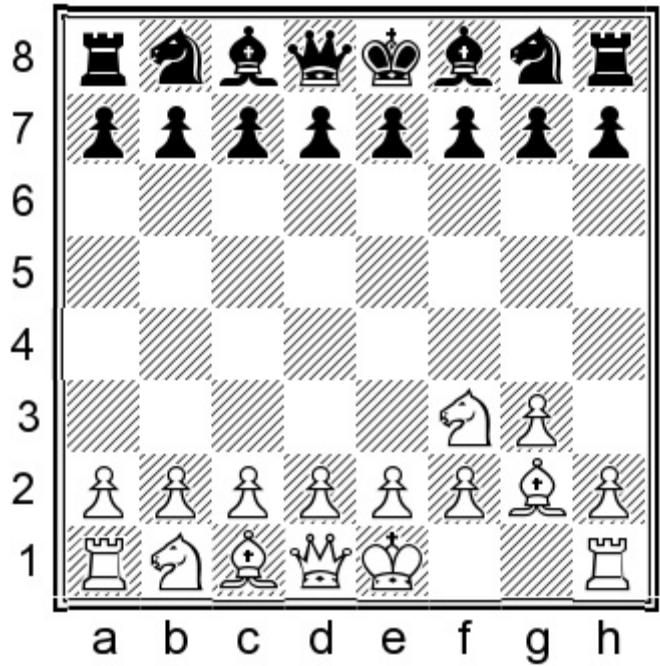
1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 g6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 4.e4 d6



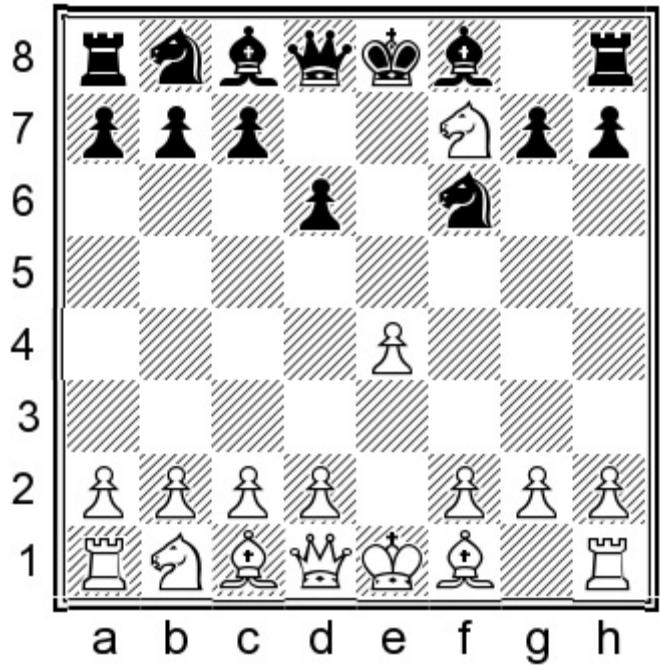
1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 e6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$



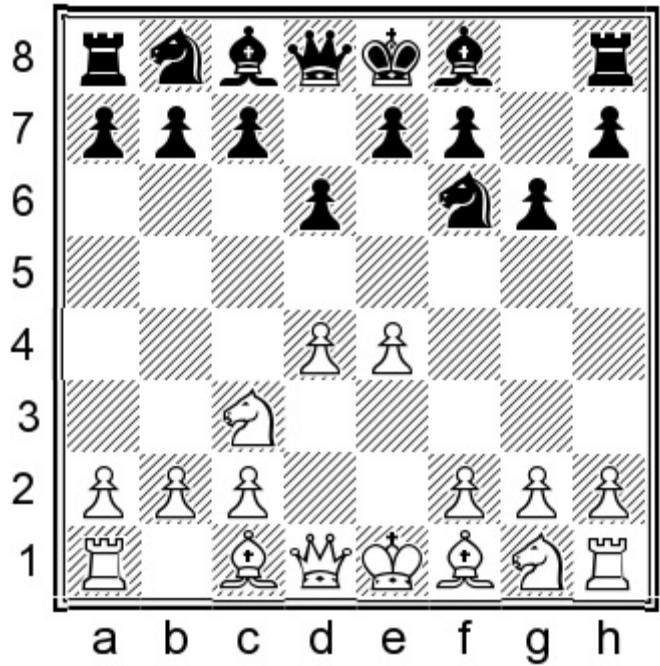
1. $\mathbb{Q}f3$, 1...-- 2. g3, 2...-- 3. $\mathbb{Q}g2$



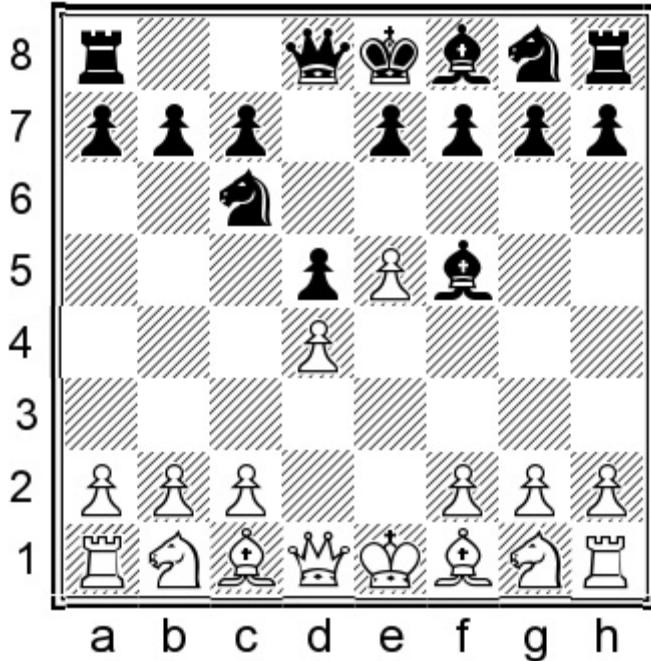
1. e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ d6 4. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$



1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♜f6 3.♗c3 g6



1.e4 ♜c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 ♛f5



10 Meanwhile in India

East-Indian chess set, 19th century.

In several western countries, a heated debate is going on about how to deal with the shadowy sides of parts of our history, like the acts of our ‘national heroes’ during the colonial episodes. You might think chess has no place in this debate, to the relief of many, because during the parts of history we are talking about, chess (in our version) was almost exclusively played in the western world.

Those who started this debate somehow want to rectify the past in the way it lives on in our times – for example, in statues or in the names of streets, buildings, institutions and so on. I’m not sure what to think about this project of rectification, but on the topic of naming in chess in fact we do have our own little story of colonial injustice. It concerns the positions in my pub quiz.

The correct answer to the first question is the position after 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.♗xe5 d6 4.♗xf7: this aggressive way to meet the Petroff Defence is named after its inventor, John Cochrane. He was one of the strongest players in the UK in the first half of the 19th century, but spent parts of his working life as a lawyer in India.

There was a chess community in India, but they played a slightly different version of the game. Cochrane managed to find an opponent who could give him a good game, Moheschunder Bannerjee,



though the latter had to adjust to the European rules of play. He was a talented player and managed to overcome this handicap.

Cochrane and Moheschunder played an enormous number of games together and some of them found their way into Staunton's chess columns. Cochrane was the stronger of the two, roughly winning two to one.

Moheschunder came from a different chess culture, with different openings, and though he maybe did not invent them all, at least he was the first to introduce them into European chess. So his name is the correct answer to the second question.

He often chose the King's Indian ($1.d4 \mathbb{Q}f6 2.c4 g6 3.\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}g7 4.e4 d6$) but also played the Nimzo-Indian ($1.d4 \mathbb{Q}f6 2.c4 e6 3.\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}b4$) and the Grünfeld Indian ($1.d4 \mathbb{Q}f6 2.c4 g6 3.\mathbb{Q}c3 d5$) once.

He was the first to play the Pirc ($1.e4 d6 2.d4 \mathbb{Q}f6 3.\mathbb{Q}c3 g6$)

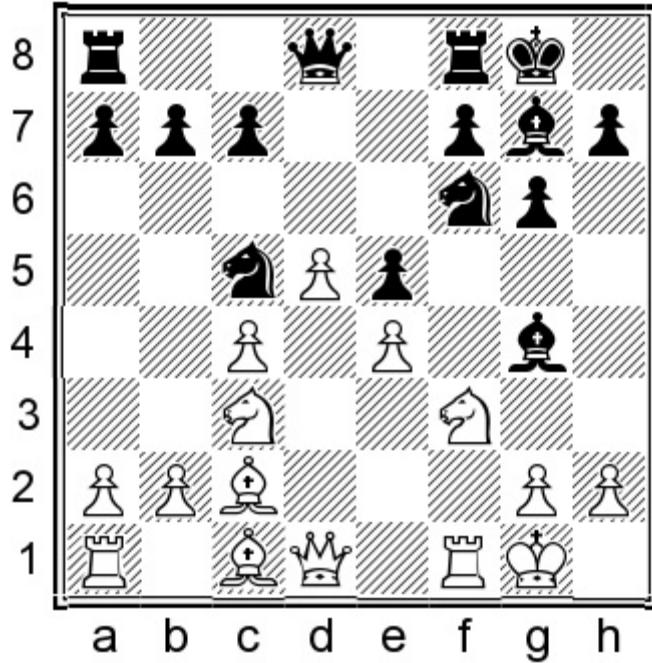
and also the Nimzowitsch defence ($1.e4 \mathbb{Q}c6 2.d4 d5 3.e5 \mathbb{Q}f5$). With white he liked to play fianchetto openings as well, an Indian specialty, like the Réti ($1.\mathbb{Q}f3, 2.g3, 3.\mathbb{Q}g2$), often transposing to a King's Indian Attack. But there is no opening named after him, only the general term 'Indian openings' reminds us of their origin.

Regarding the Pirc, Kmoch involuntarily offers an amusing follow-up to this story. In *Die Kunst der Bauernführung* he complains about the names Pirc or Yugoslav Defence, as if this opening had only just been invented at that time (mid-20th century), because the Paulsen brothers had already employed the opening at the end of the 19th century. 'I had to get this off my chest,' Kmoch adds.³⁸

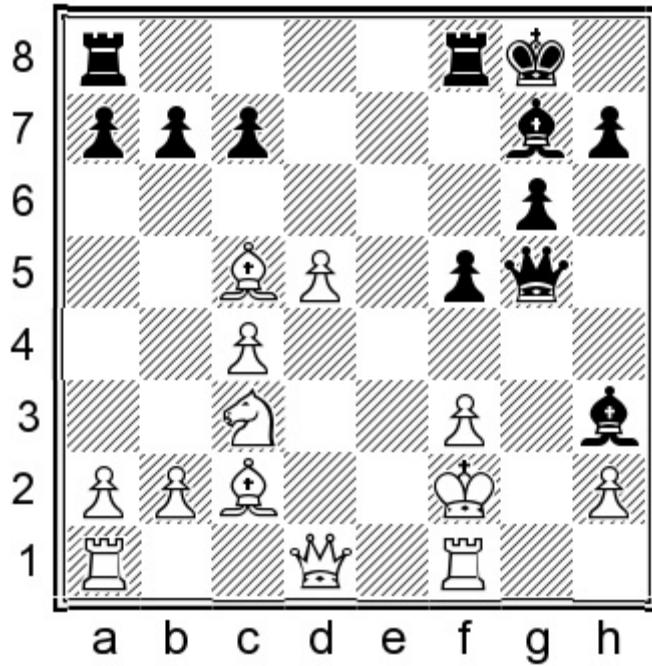
The next game is a good example of Moheschunder's handling of the King's Indian Defence. If you were to see this game without any information, you might well think it had been played in the modern era of chess.

John Cochrane – Moheschunder Bannerjee Kolkata 1855

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 d6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ g6 4.e4 $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 5.f4 0-0 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ e5 8.fxe5 dxe5 9.d5 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 10.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}c2$



11... $\mathbb{Q}fxe4!$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ f5 13. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ e4 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ exf3! 15.gxf3 $\mathbb{Q}h3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}g5+$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f2$



Now the quiet move 17... $\mathbb{Q}ae8!$ would have crowned Black's enterprising play. After 18. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}h4+$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ there is 19...f4.

17... $\mathbb{W}h4+$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$

Things have become unclear and Black by now is a full rook down but his attack is still hard to resist.

20. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}f4+$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}e3$ 0-1

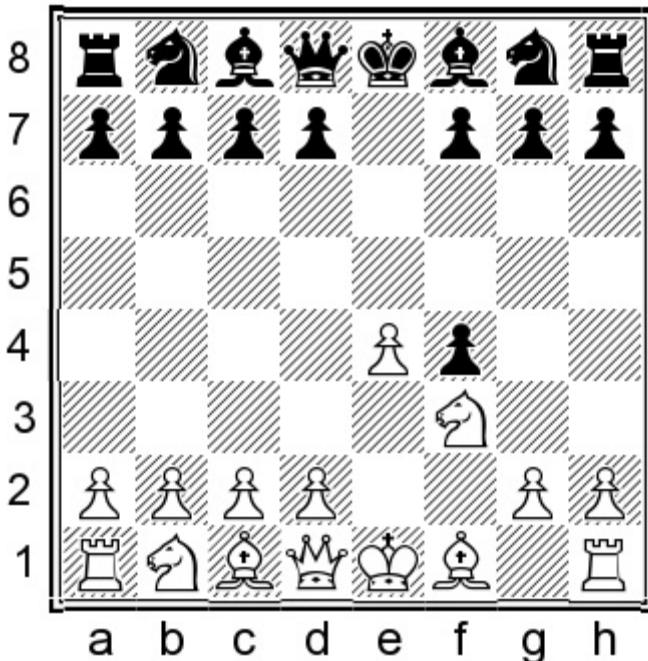
For those days the games between Cochrane and Moheschunder were of good quality and since some of them were published by Staunton one might expect that the opening experiments in them would have inspired others. But little of that happened and it would take three-quarters of a century before the Indian openings returned to the scene. That is, with the minor exception of Chigorin, who in his match against Tarrasch adopted some sort of a King's Indian Attack in answer to the French Defence (1.e4 e6 2.♘e2, followed by a kingside fianchetto).

The variety of chess that Moheschunder was brought up with didn't include the pawn's option of moving two squares instead of one at the start of a game. This made fianchettoing one bishop an attractive means of development (since moving a central pawn one square opens up one bishop but adds an extra pawn in obstructing the other).

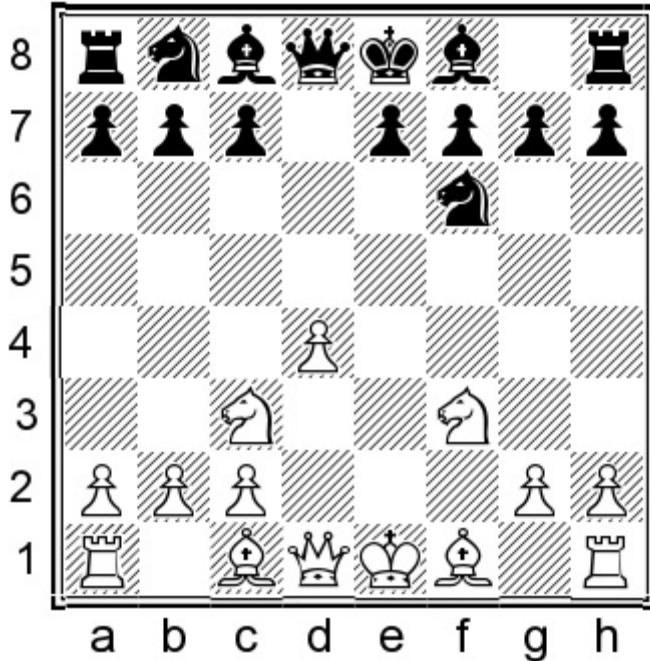
Was the time not ready to accept the fianchetto as a decent way of developing a bishop? One can philosophize about this sort of question for a long time without getting an answer. That 'it had to go as it did' always is an argument hard to argue against. But one can also look at the future (and the past) as open to many different scenarios, giving chance its role in the unfolding of events (and the above story about the introduction of these 'Indian' openings in Western chess is already a good example of a series of contingencies).

I let my engine run for the same amount of time on the next two positions and incidentally it came to the exact identical evaluation of -0.39.

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.♗f3



1.d4 d5 2.e4 dxe4 3.♗c3 ♗f6 4.f3 exf3 5.♗xf3



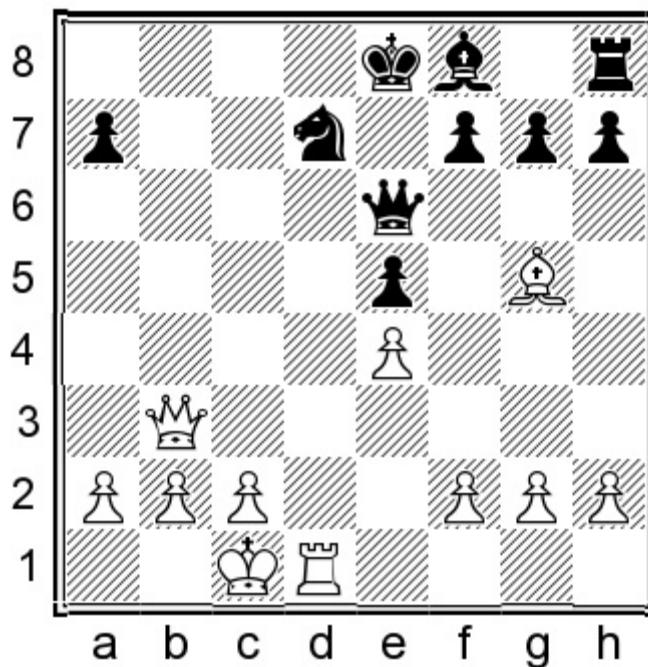
Is there an alternative history conceivable, in which instead of the King's Gambit, the Blackmar-Diemer was dominant for three centuries? And that somewhere halfway through the 20th century an eccentric theoretician stood up and started something of a crusade to persuade the chess world that this new invention, the King's Gambit, was a sure winning strategy?

Returning to the question of why those (Indian) opening experiments did not take root, one reason might be the rather conservative taste of our hero of the next chapters, Paul Morphy, for whom 1.e4 e5 was the only decent way to start a game of chess. He had a negative opinion about all kinds of experiments in general and about the English school (Staunton) in particular. In a column in the *New York Ledger* he spoke about:

'that pernicious fondness for the Sicilian defence which was displayed during what may be called the period of closed games, extending from about 1843 to some time after 1851. It was an epoch of uninteresting games and dreary analytic labour. [...] It should be a subject for rejoicing for every lover of the game that an age in which so much labour led to such improfitable results has passed away. There is now a visible tendency to cultivate a higher style of chess art – to substitute for the false taste which has so long prevailed a more elevated standard of excellence.'³⁹

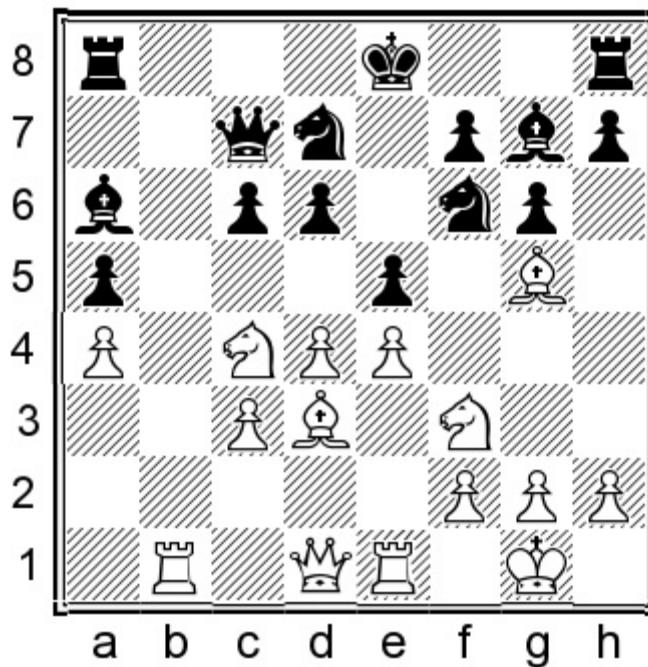
Exercises for Chapter 11

56 (go to the solution)



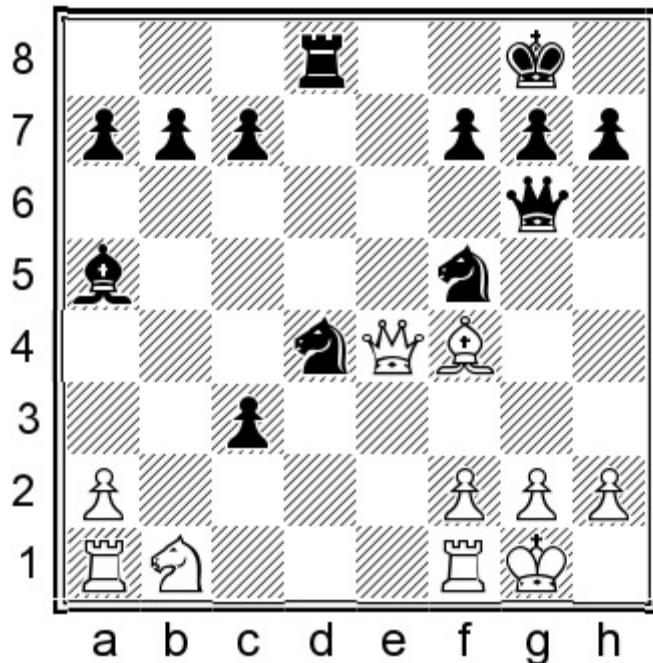
White to move

57 (go to the solution)



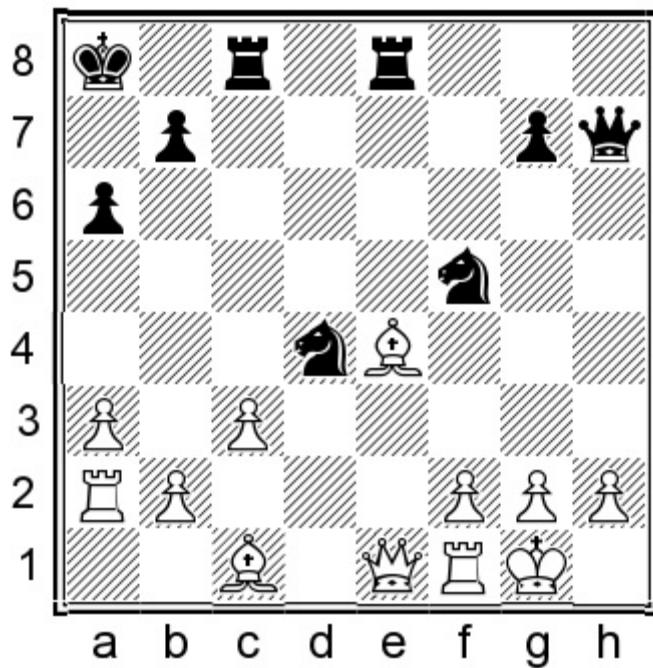
White to move

58 (go to the solution)



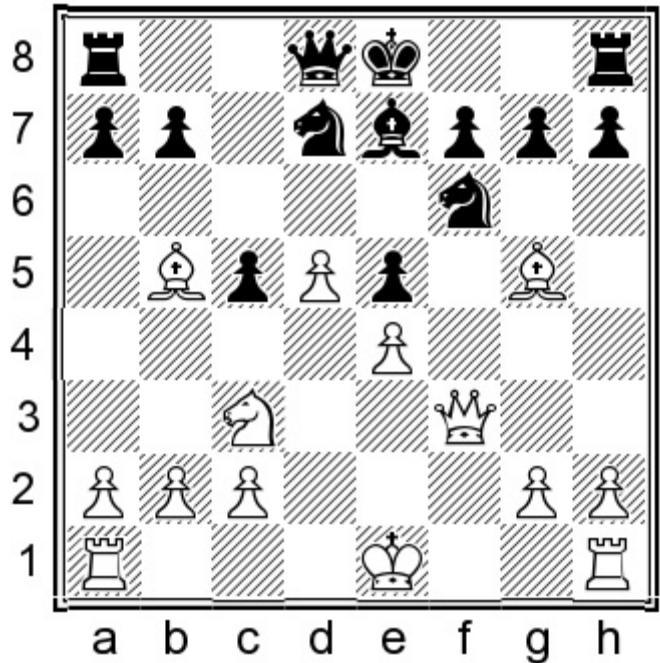
Black to move

59 (go to the solution)



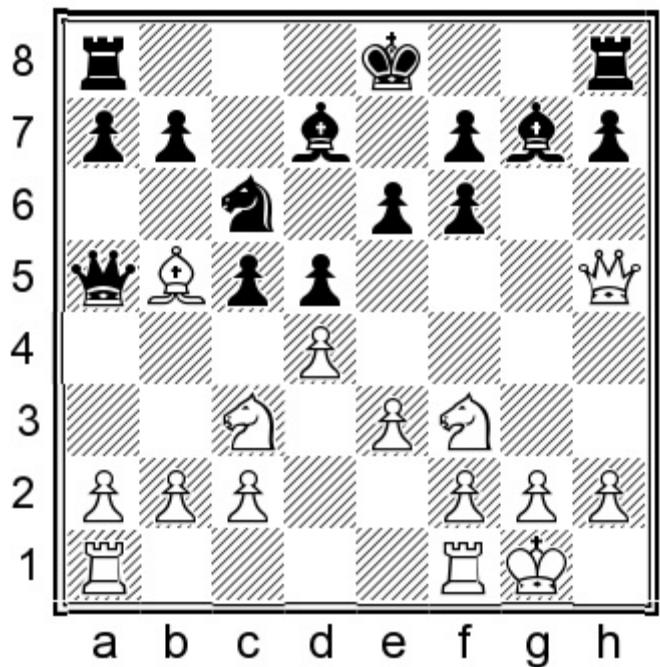
Black to move

60 (go to the solution)



White to move

61 (go to the solution)

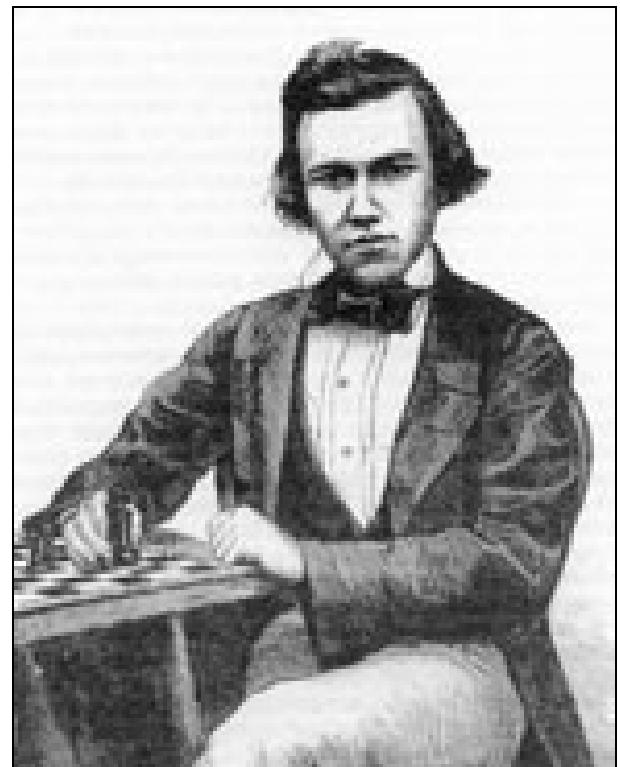


White to move

11
Blitzkrieg chess

The story of Paul Morphy (1837-1884) is well known – how he conquered the chess world and how he left it as quickly as he came – his playing career amidst the stronger players of his time lasting less than two years. He remains an enigmatic figure though, and his biography doesn't provide many clues about his personality or the nature of the mental health problems he suffered from later in life.⁴⁰

In my country (and maybe in other countries as well) football reporters sometimes use chess as a metaphor for a style of football. As you might guess, this is not meant as a compliment for the match in question. Very likely both teams keep the ball in or near their own half for a long time before any attack is initiated. Probably those reporters aren't practitioners of our game. I would use the expression exactly the other way round, when a football match is very exciting.



So I like telling my pupils: 'Chess is a fast game. No time is to be lost, every move must be to the point. If you're not fast enough the opponent will get past you.' There are of course positions of a rather 'slow' character, and even some exceptional ones where having the move is a disadvantage, but in general it is my feeling that I'm playing a game where time is an all-important factor.

There is no player more fit to illustrate this point than Morphy. If you play over his games it is astonishing how many of them are decided early, with the opponent's king still in the middle and/or part of his army undeveloped.

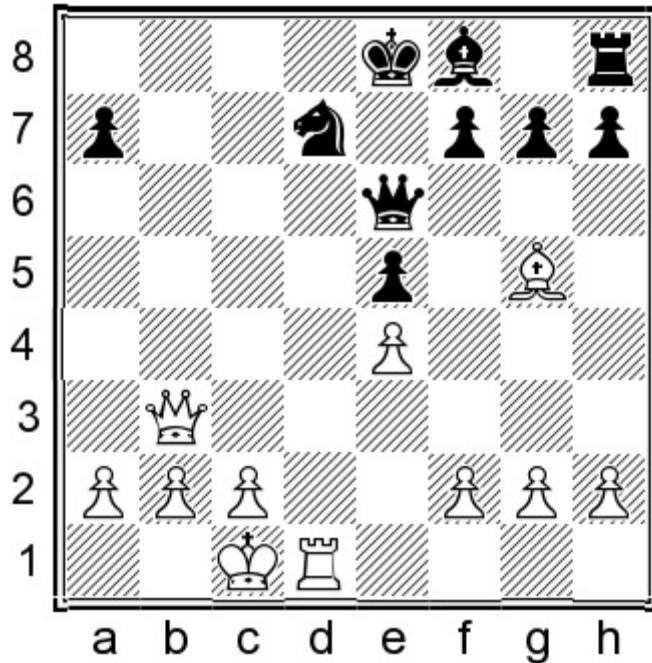
The play (or playing tempo) of Williams, our hero from a previous chapter, has jokingly been described as 'Sitzkrieg'. Morphy was his exact counterpart and the word 'Blitzkrieg' adequately characterizes his style and the quality of his play.

In this book I have tried to avoid the famous games that have been presented over and again, but I'll make an exception for the next one because it is the perfect illustration of the above: every move hits the nail on the head.

Paul Morphy – Duke of Brunswick and Count Isouard Paris 1858

This was a casual game, played at the Italian opera house; Morphy's opponents played in consultation.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 ♘g4 4.dxe5 ♘xf3 5.♗xf3 dxe5 6.♗c4 ♘f6 7.♗b3 ♗e7 8.♗c3 c6 9.♗g5 b5
10.♗xb5 cxb5 11.♗xb5+ ♘bd7 12.0-0-0 ♘d8 13.♗xd7 ♘xd7 14.♗d1 ♗e6 15.♗xd7+ ♘xd7



(Exercise no 56)

And now the final combination, not very difficult but pleasing anyway:

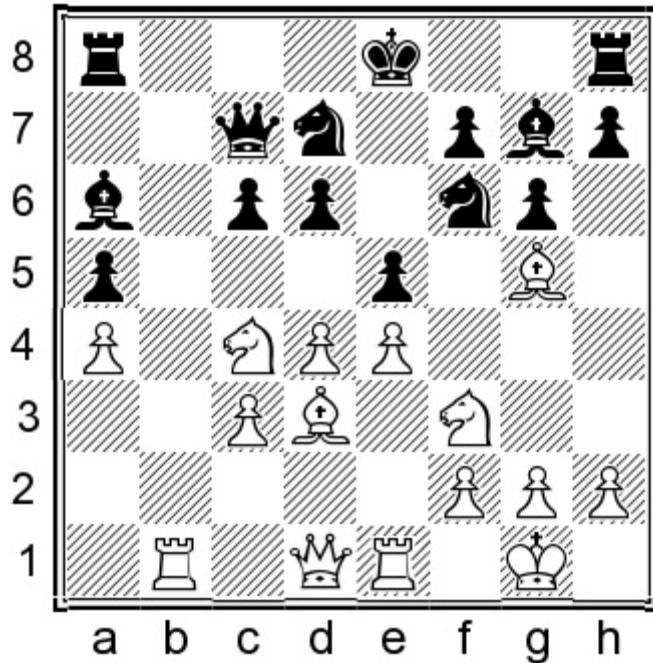
16. $\mathbb{W}b8+$! $\mathfrak{Q}xb8$ 17. $\mathbb{B}d8\#$

I hope you don't feel insulted by this rather easy (and well-known) puzzle. It provides a stepping stone to the next position which is really difficult. Although the combination only wins a pawn I'm rather proud of this variation on Morphy.

Willy Hendriks

Ron Hoffman

Groningen 2007

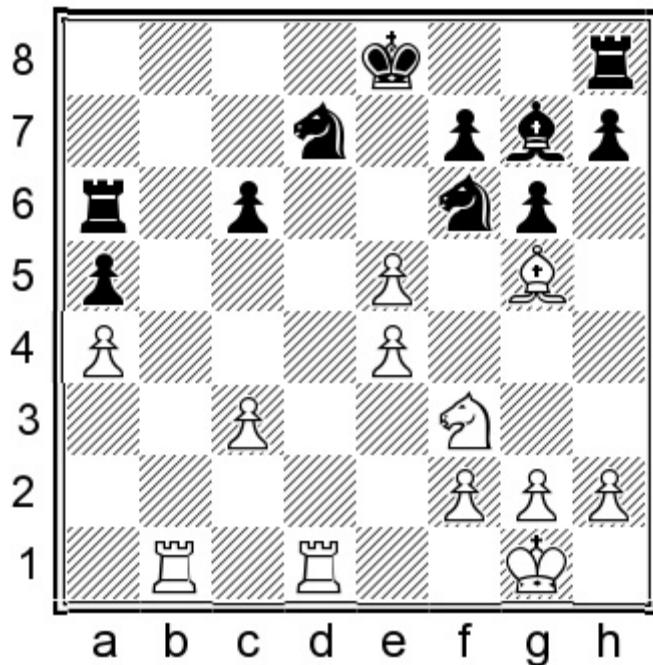


White to move

(Exercise no 57)

Black is only one move away from castling but White strikes just in time:

16. ♜xd6+! ♕xd6 17. ♘xa6 ♕xa6 18. dxe5 ♕xd1 19. ♘exd1!



Until here everything was forced. Now Black fled into an endgame a pawn down with 19...0-0 20.exf6 which he later lost.

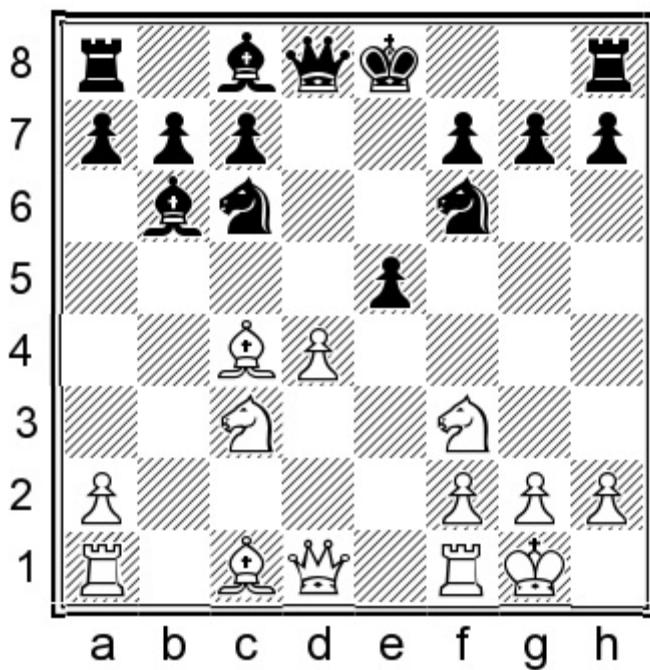
The point of White's combination was, of course:

19...Qxe4 20.Qb8+! Qxb8 21.Qd8 mate.

Let's look at some more examples of Morphy finishing off the game before the opponent has managed to 'get into play'. The first one sees the Evans Gambit, one of Morphy's all-time favourites. He'd already used this 10 years before (at age 12) to demolish his poor father in almost the same fashion.

Paul Morphy – Thomas Hampton London 1858

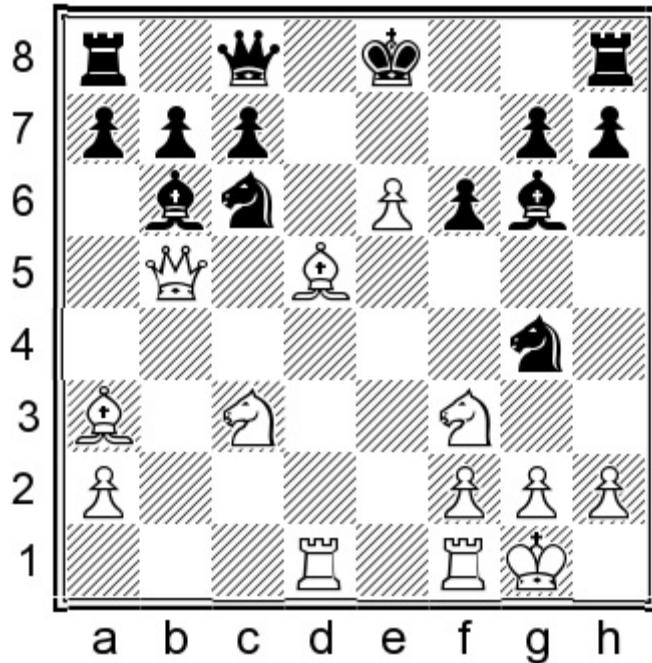
1.e4 e5 2.Qf3 Qc6 3.Qc4 Qc5 4.b4 Qxb4 5.c3 Qc5 6.0-0 d6 7.d4 exd4 8.cxd4 Qb6 9.Qc3 Qf6? 10.e5! dxе5



11.Qa3!

This manoeuvre is typical for the Evans Gambit, but it figures in a lot of openings as a way of keeping the enemy king in the centre. Morphy employed it successfully many times, although he was not the first to use it (the inventor of the gambit had already played the move – it is of course one of the sunny sides of getting rid of your b-pawn this early).

11...Qg4 12.Qb3 Qh5 13.dxe5 Qg4 14.Qad1 Qc8 15.e6 f6 16.Qb5 Qg6 17.Qd5 1-0

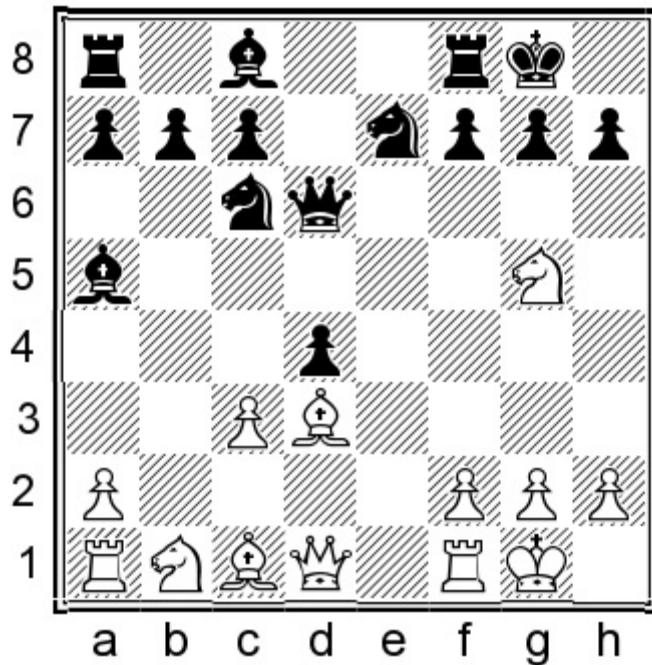


The ♜a3 move also appears in the next fragment, but this time Morphy is playing against the Evans Gambit. It's a game from a blindfold simul in 1857. During his stay in Europe the next year Morphy created a great impression with these simul.

Napoleon Marache

Paul Morphy

New Orleans blindfold sim 1857

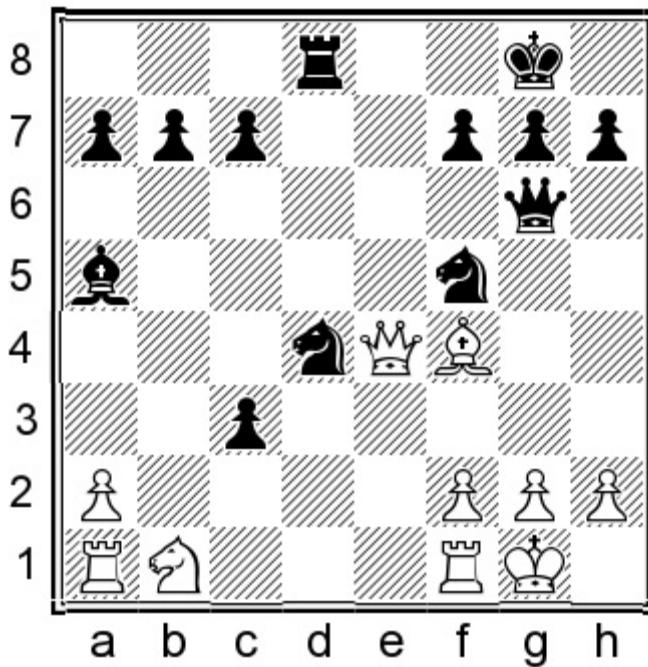


Black to move

Black already has a lead in development (plus two pawns) so he doesn't mind sacrificing the exchange

to keep the speed up.

11... $\mathbb{Q}f5!$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $dxc3$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}g6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{E}d8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}cd4$ 19. $\mathbb{W}e4$



(Exercise no 58)

19... $\mathbb{Q}g3!$

Not the only winning move but the fastest and most beautiful.

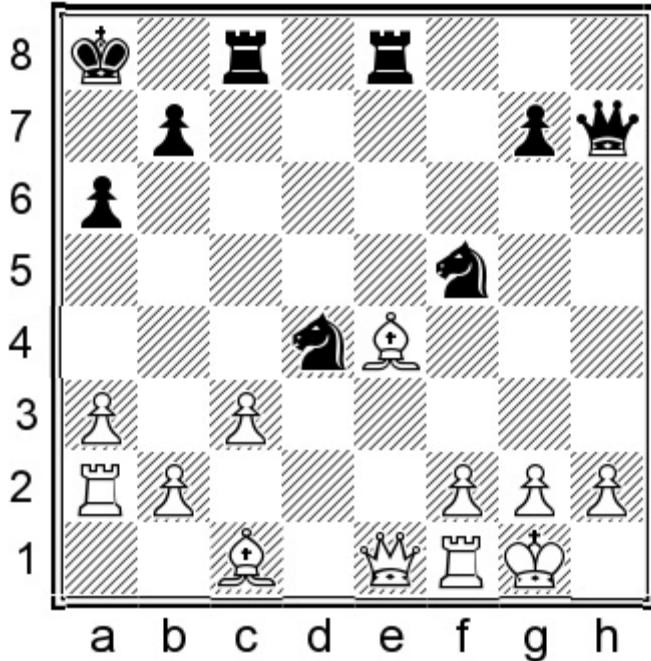
20. $\mathbb{W}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}de2$ mate.

In my database there is also the next position, allegedly from a simul in New Orleans in 1857, but it looks like an elaboration of the last position. An Anastasia's mate has been added. But I don't know if this was done by Morphy or by someone else (maybe based upon a suggestion by Morphy).

NN

Paul Morphy

New Orleans sim 1857



Black to move

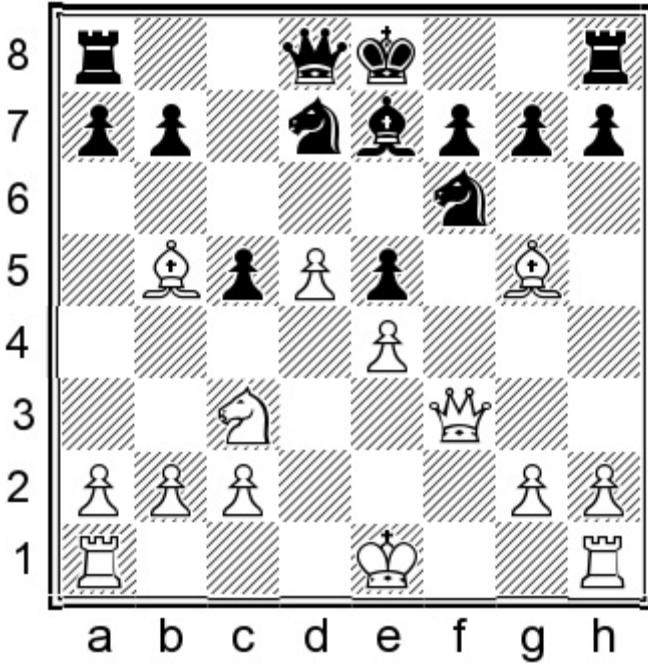
(Exercise no 59)

1... $\mathbb{Q}xe4!$ 2. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 3. $\mathbb{W}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}e2+$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{W}xh2+$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}xh2$ $\mathbb{Q}h8+$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$ 7. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}xh4$ mate.

A last one, again from a blindfold simul and in the same Blitzkrieg style as the famous opera game.

Paul Morphy – Alexander Meek New York blindfold 1857

1.e4 e6 2.d4 c5 3.d5 e5 4.f4 d6 5. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 6.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 7. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ dxe5 8. $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}gf6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$



(Exercise no 60)

11.d6! ♖xd6 12.0-0-0

And Black resigned.

Take the opponent out of book

Morphy was much stronger than these opponents and that is of course one reason why they didn't survive the opening stages of the game. Another reason, which also explains why in our days it is more difficult to win games in this fashion, is their lack of good opening knowledge. The opening is a difficult part of our game, certainly no less difficult than the other parts, and if you have to find your own way there is plenty of room to get lost.

So for the stronger player, in general, it should be advantageous if the battle commences in the opening: the longer both players are left to their own devices, the longer one gets to put the difference in strength into effect. On the other hand, if you face a stronger opponent it seems to be common sense, advocated in several books, not to try to surprise him by stepping into unknown terrain but to stick to decent opening theory as long as possible. There is a fair chance that the stronger player also has the better openings but in the end holding on to the openings you know well will be the most beneficial.

If you yourself are the stronger player, it might be a good strategy to try to get your opponent out of book. (Though nothing is for free and most surprise weapons will make concessions to quality, and the more so the greater the surprise value.) I have experienced many times, on either side, how difficult the opening can be and how easy it is to take a wrong turn once you are no longer supported by theoretical knowledge. For instance, regarding a king that hasn't managed to castle I have afterwards heard lots of reasons why 'first something else had to be done' – until it was too late.

In a recent game I did get my opponent out of book rather early, but I missed the opportunity for a

thematic break and some nice tactics. Would Morphy miss a chance like this? Would you?

Willy Hendriks – Ruud van Meegen Dieren 2017

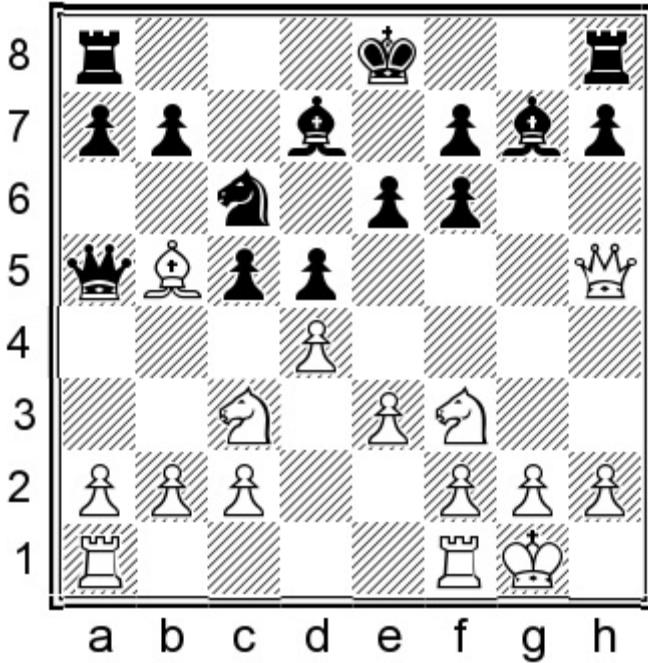
1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

You won't catch anyone unaware of this possibility nowadays, but the Trompowsky still does increase the chance of leaving the beaten track early on.

2...d5 3.e3 c5 4. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ gxf6 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ e6 7. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}a5$??

Already we have a new position. In the few games played before Black mostly continued with 7... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ or 7...cxsd4.

8. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}g7$??!



(Exercise no 61)

Black has made some minor mistakes and his lag in development is only small, but nevertheless with castling one move away this was the moment for White to strike in the centre with 10.e4!.

After both ways for Black to capture a pawn, White has an elegant tactical refutation. After 10...cxsd4 11. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$! $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ (11...0-0 12. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ followed by exd5 is just disastrous) 12. $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ is winning.

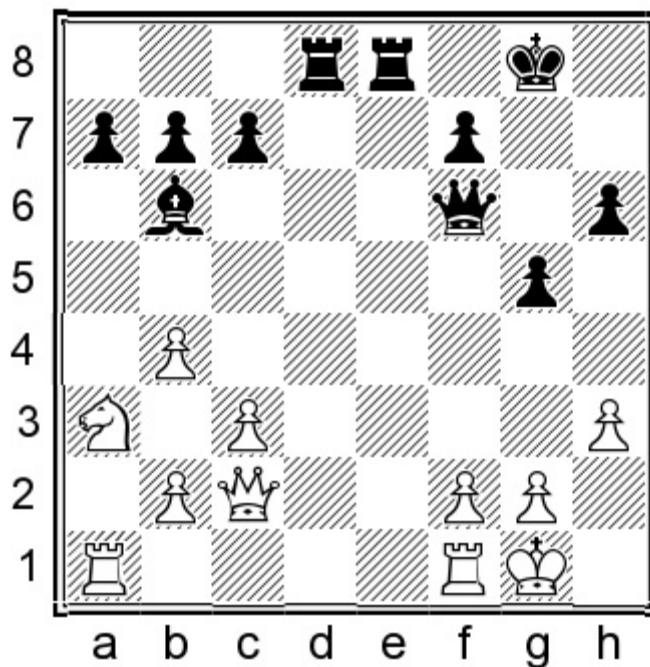
After 10...dxe4 there follows 11. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$! and now 11... $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ drops the queen; 11...0-0 offers no relief after 12. $\mathbb{Q}d3$, threatening mate and winning a pawn with 13. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$.

Instead I played 10. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ and after 10...0-0 the opportunity was gone (so it was well-deserved that I

later lost this game).

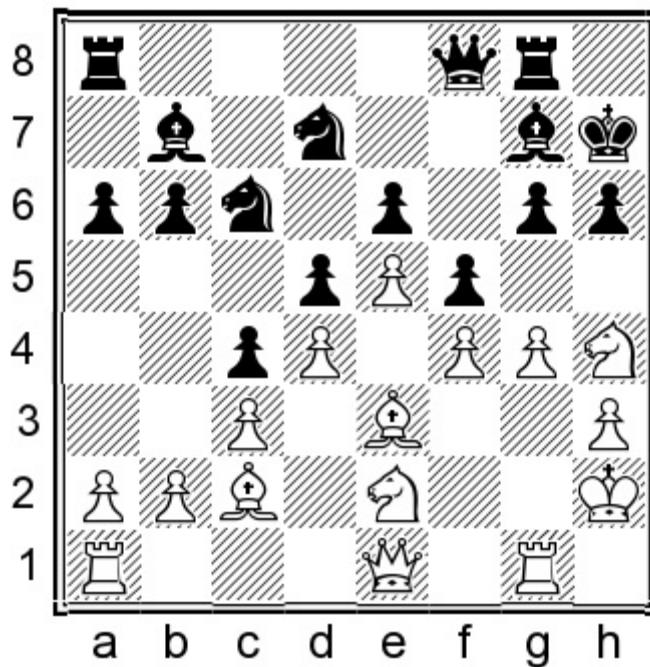
Exercises for Chapter 12

62 (go to the solution)



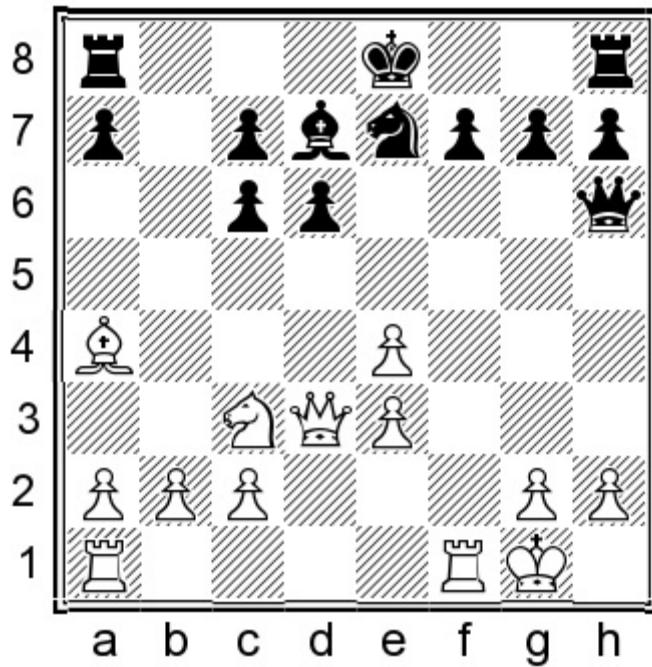
Black to move

63 (go to the solution)



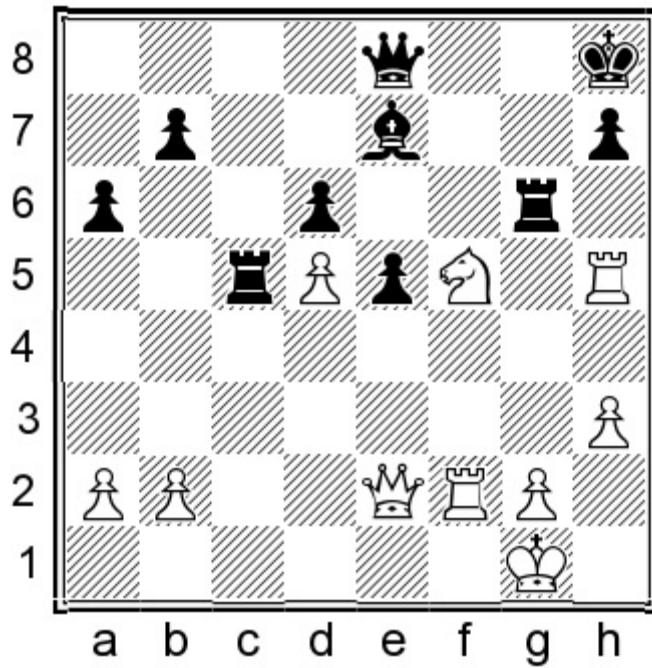
White to move

64 (go to the solution)



Black to move

65 (go to the solution)



White to move

A chivalrous battle in the open field

Morphy's short career amongst the stronger players of the world started in 1857 when he won the first American Chess Congress. Then he came to Europe, where he beat all the best players in matches. The final one was against Anderssen, and his victory by a wide margin made it clear that Morphy was in a class of his own. Only Staunton did not play against Morphy, though that was one of the latter's main objectives for travelling to Europe.

There are different views on Morphy's role in the history of improvement in chess. Some consider him to be, like Anderssen, one of the great protagonists of the Romantic era. Others try to see him as the link connecting Philidor to Steinitz in the development of positional chess. In this picture Morphy stands in a sort of opposition to Anderssen, the latter being the representative of the Romantic period that was soon to end.

In *My Great Predecessors*, Kasparov seems to advocate the second position. On Anderssen being defeated by Morphy he writes:

'It was for the sake of beauty that in any position he would seek drastic measures and would boldly burn his boats behind him. [...] Such play was admired, but the progress of chess was inexorable, and the old combinative school led by Anderssen proved powerless against the modernised technique of Morphy (and then also Steinitz), which was based on a sound positional foundation.'⁴¹

With this interpretation of Morphy's position in chess history, Kasparov follows other chess historians (for example Euwe), but in any case it is a recent interpretation. Morphy's contemporaries, including Steinitz himself, did not consider Morphy as the heir to Philidor and predecessor to Steinitz.

The strong American player George Mackenzie said:

'It's a pity that Morphy has retired from Chess, as some games between him and Steinitz would be of great interest, they being the chief exponents of two entirely different schools.'⁴²

About the tournament in Hastings 1895 it was said that:

'This tournament attracted a lot of attention because of the clash between the followers of Morphy (Chigorin, Blackburne, Mieses, Bird) and members of the modern school (Steinitz, Lasker, Tarrasch, Schlechter) and those who combined the two (Pillsbury and Janowski).'⁴³

Let's have a closer look at some of Morphy's games and see in what way the words used by Kasparov, 'modern' and 'positional', do apply. But do note that these are not words with a clear definition.



In particular, the word ‘modern’ very much depends on personal taste and opinion. And fashion can change quickly. In the days of Morphy there was still a lot of unexplored territory in chess, so that might be a criterion to look for. In the opening especially the room for experimenting was vast.

The word ‘positional’ seems to be better defined, but although we use it a lot in chess, no clear definition seems to be available. Often positional play is set in opposition to tactical play – small improvements instead of direct actions. It might also be used to describe a style of playing, a preference for the direction in which to look for solutions. But it can even mean something like ‘playing according to (the needs of) the position’. Then it comes close to simply ‘correct’ play. You can depict the pretended opposition between romantic and modern chess in this way as ‘trying to impose your will on the position (by attacking regardless)’ versus ‘playing according to the needs of the position’.

Taken into account the above nuances, I would say that Morphy’s play could hardly be called modern, and is only positional in the meaning of ‘correct’. He was much stronger than his contemporaries but ‘ahead of his time’ doesn’t seem to be a fitting description.

Morphy and the openings

The first American Chess Congress in 1857 was played in the same modus as the 1851 London tournament: a knock-out system with mini-matches. There were few strong participants, but in the final Morphy met Louis Paulsen, a German player residing in America at the time. Although not well known, Paulsen was already quite strong. Later he moved back to Europe and for the rest of his playing career (until the 1880s) he belonged to the world’s elite.

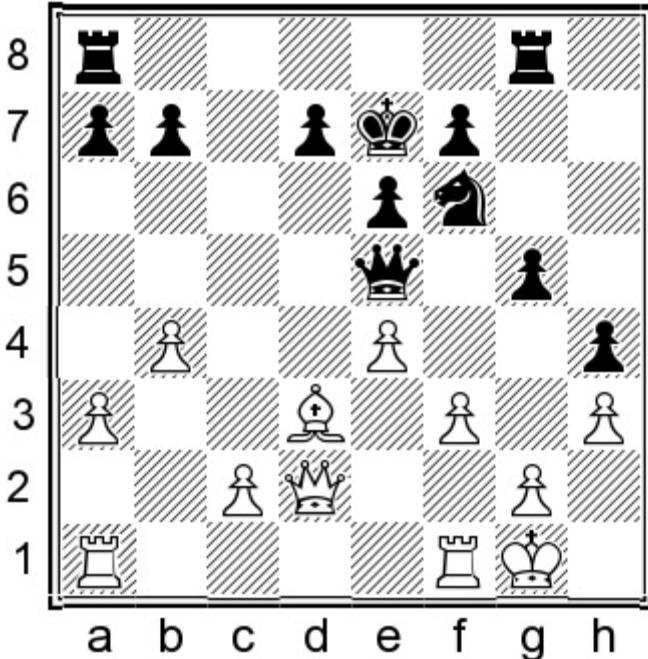
To reach the final, Morphy defeated James Thompson (3-0), Alexander Meek (3-0) and Theodor Lichtenhein (3½-½).

The final between Morphy and Paulsen was an interesting fight, convincingly won by Morphy 6-2. The sixth game with the queen sacrifice on f3 is one of Morphy’s most famous.

With black, Paulsen played the Sicilian in all four games. This brought him only a half point and in two games his experimental play quickly went wrong, but in one game it worked out really well in a style that deservedly could be described as ‘far ahead of his time’.

Paul Morphy – Louis Paulsen New York 1857

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♜c5 5.♗e3 ♜b6 6.♘b5 ♘f6 7.♘xc5 ♜xc5 8.♘d6+ ♜e7 9.♘xc8+ ♜xc8 10.♘d3 ♜c6 11.0-0 h5 12.♘d2 h4 13.h3 g5 14.a3 ♜g8 15.b4 ♜b6 16.♘c4 ♜c7 17.f3 ♘e5 18.♘xe5 ♜xe5 19.♘d2



Black's dark-square strategy has been a success. Now with moves like ... $\mathbb{Q}f6-h5-f4$, ... $d7-d6$, ... $\mathbb{E}a8-c8$, and maybe first 19... $\mathbb{W}d4+$, he would be very much in control. Unfortunately in the rest of the game Paulsen slowly drifted and finally lost. One might think that Morphy could be inspired by Black's play and now and then leave the well-trodden roads himself, but he never showed any inclination towards experimenting. We have already seen his negative verdict on the Sicilian.

In Morphy's days the (great) majority of games started with the king's pawn openings (1.e4 e5). But as we have seen in the London tournament and the two previous matches, some players varied on this.

For White, apart from the queen's pawn openings (mainly 1.d4 d5 and the Dutch Defence), the English Opening had a few adherents.

Those with black who liked some variation chose the Sicilian or French. The latter had a reputation for being boring, but for that the white players, who almost invariably played the Exchange Variation, were to blame.

Morphy was not a member of the 'experimental' club. With white he played exclusively 1.e4 and with black he always answered this move with 1...e5. In those days a sort of 'chivalrous' sentiment existed that this was the proper way to start a game, and Morphy seemed to share this feeling.

The following comments on the French Defence by two English authors shed some light on this chivalrous spirit.

John Cochrane, who we have already met, wrote (as early as 1822):

'I am willing, therefore, to admit, that moving the king's pawn one square, as a defence against the advantage of the move is, for any thing yet known, perfectly sound. I have said that I make this admission with considerable reluctance, and this reluctance has proceeded from considering the game as originally invented by those who were afraid of meeting their adversaries in the field, and who, by retiring behind their pawns, seek to weary out an antagonist with whom, in open

combat, they could not, for a moment, contend.⁴⁴

Almost 25 years later, in 1846, the following verdict by George Walker shows that this sentiment was still much alive: one disadvantage of the French, he notes, is that it might be

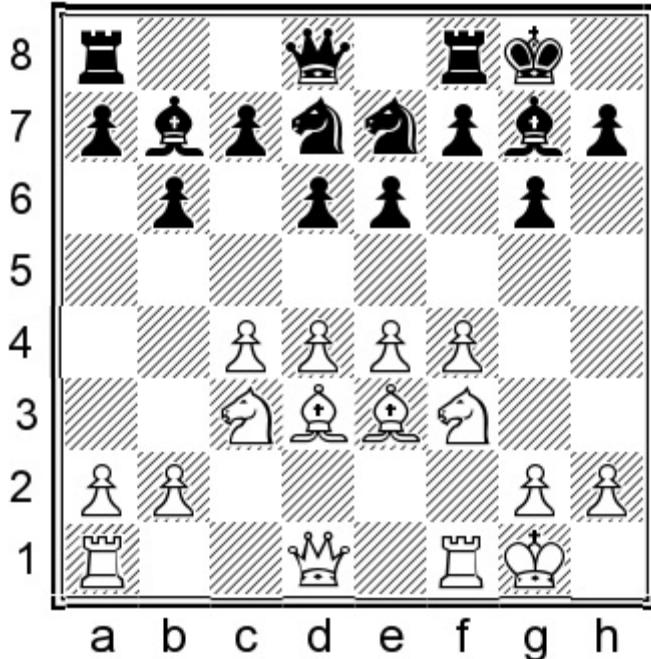
‘causing repugnance in an adversary to play you; [...] Suppose two players, of equal force, the one always coming boldly out with his King’s Pawn, the other playing it but one step, I should decidedly never play with the latter, if the former were in the room. [...] I have allowed that this form of beginning is safe for the second player; so is fighting from behind a tree [...] cowardly and mean in spirit, aiming to lie in wait, rather than chivalrously to do battle in a “fair stricken field”.⁴⁵

Raymond Keene adds that these ‘extracts from Cochrane and Walker deserve a place in history for their novel and inventive method of setting about the refutation of a chess opening: that is, by simply (*faute de mieux*) railing against it as unworthy of an English gentleman.’⁴⁶

Morphy must have felt affinity for this ideal of the chess player ready to do battle in the open. In comments on his performances in Europe his ‘chivalrous’ attitude often gets mentioned. His whole European tour does remind one a bit of a crusade.

After returning from Europe in 1859 Morphy retired from serious chess, definitely as we now know, but in the chess world back then hopes of him returning to the board remained alive. The organizers of the London 1862 tournament sent him their programme, which noted that ‘Two-thirds of the Players agreeing, may compel Pawn to King’s fourth to be played on each side every game.’⁴⁷

This curious proposal may well have been inserted to persuade Morphy to participate. I don’t know if it was abandoned later on or didn’t get the required majority, but all kinds of openings were played at the actual event, including 1.f4 and 1.g3, Owen playing his defence (1.e4 b6) and Mongredien playing the Scandinavian (a famous loss against Steinitz) as well as some modern defences, one of them (against Anderssen) a ‘Hippopotamus’, as it was called much later:



For those who consider the king's pawn opening the only one 'worthy of an English gentleman', this must look as a mere mockery of chess.

The positional Morphy

So Morphy wasn't experimental in his openings, but what about his positional play? Was he far ahead of his time?

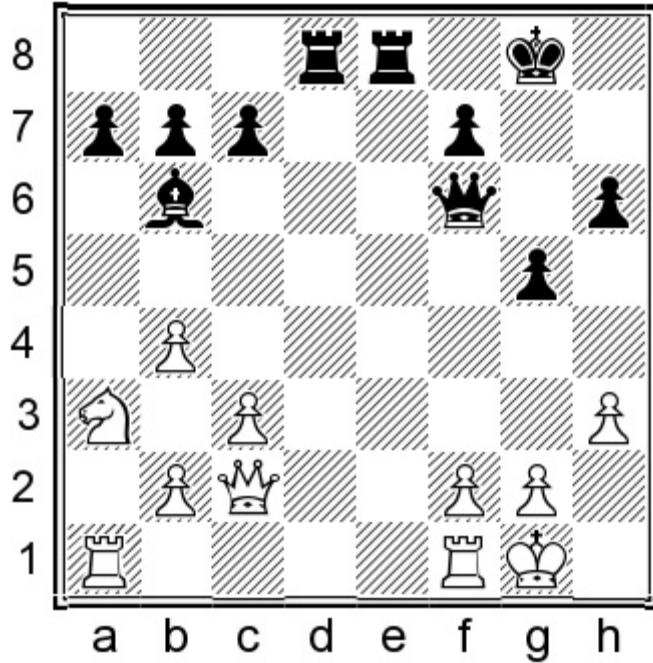
In his own days, and in the following decades, Morphy was characterized as a brilliant attacking player. Later on, maybe due to the influence of Steinitz, the 'solid positional foundation' of his play gets identified as the basis of Morphy's superiority. And with this he starts, in the general picture, to be opposed to Anderssen, who is supposed to lack this positional foundation.

About this opposition more will be said in the next chapter. In my opinion the truth about the positional character of Morphy's play is somewhere in the middle. He clearly was extremely focused on attacking the king. And evidently he was a very strong (correct) player, so he rarely played 'anti-positional' moves. But you can easily make a list of things associated with the concept of positional play for which Morphy had little interest: slow manoeuvring, play on the queenside, (semi-)closed positions, play against the isolated pawn, etcetera. Let's have a look at a few games.

James Thompson

Paul Morphy

New York 1857



Black to move

(Exercise no 62)

Black has some lead in development but at first glance it seems White should be able to catch up. Morphy acts very energetically:

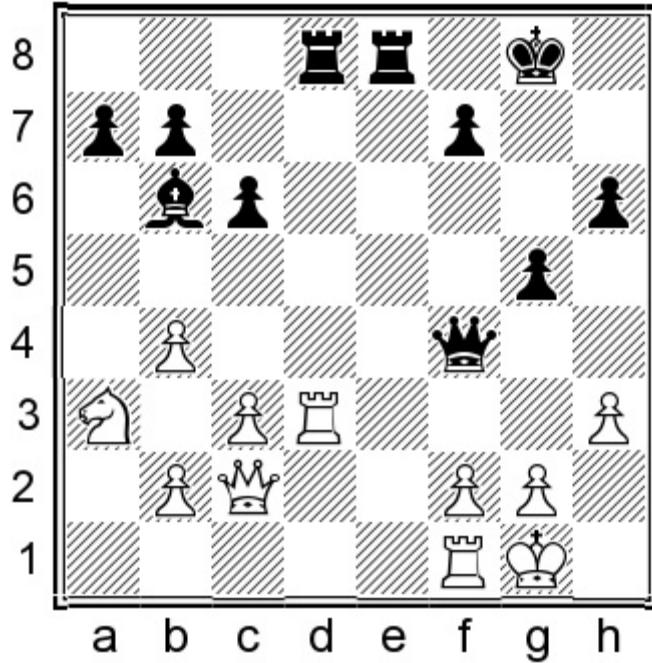
20...Qf4!

Threatens 21...Qd2 and (prophylaxis) prevents White from bringing his offside knight into play via c4.

21.Qad1 c6!

The battery with ...Qc7 comes into play. White now cracks under the pressure.

22.Qd3?



22...♝xf2+! 23.♔h1 ♞xd3 24.♗xd3 ♞e3 25.♗d8+

25.♗c2, hoping to win the bishop, fails to 25...♝xh3+.

25...♝g7 26.♗d4+ ♞xd4 27.cxd4 ♞e2

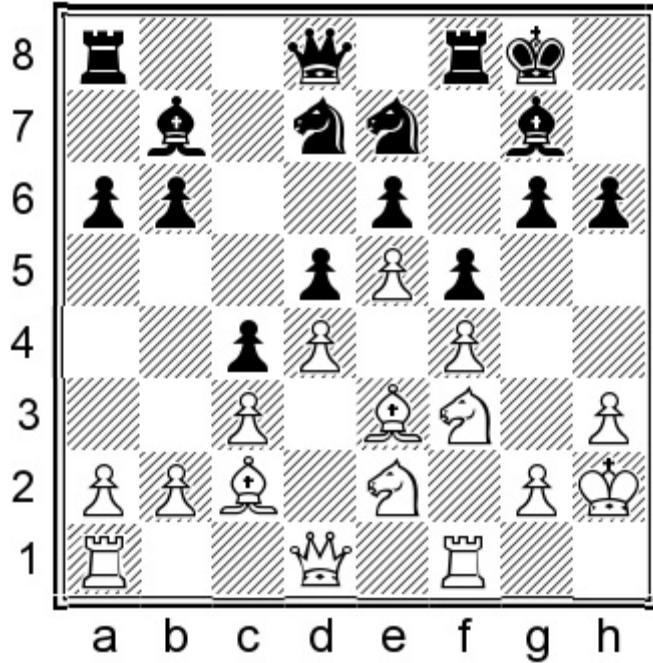
and Black won the endgame.

Due to his choice of openings Morphy hardly ever played closed positions, but in the following game he has gotten into one. In an earlier chapter we saw Staunton demonstrating to Saint-Amant that sometimes h2-h3 is necessary in preparation for g2-g4. Morphy of course knows this.

Paul Morphy

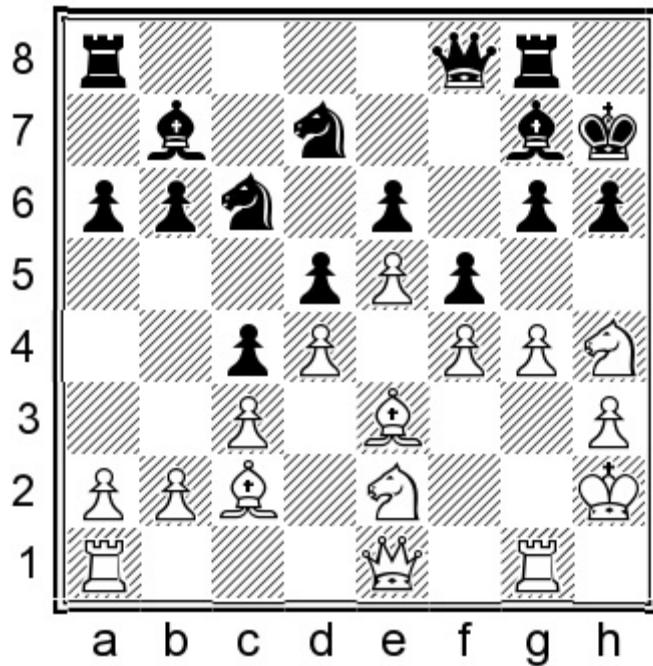
Alexander Meek

New York 1857



White to move

15.g4! ♕h7 16.♕g1 ♕g8 17.♕e1 ♜c6 18.♕h4 ♕f8



(Exercise no 63)

Black is helpless, so White may first put all his pieces into the right positions and the more cautious among you may have chosen something like doubling (or trebling) the major pieces on the g-file. But Morphy is not going to waste time.

19. ♦xg6! ♠xg6 20. gxf5+ ♠f7 21. fxe6+ ♠xe6 22. f5+

and White soon won.

If you look at the last two games, slow manoeuvring isn't the right characterization, but in Morphy's collection these belong to his more positional efforts.

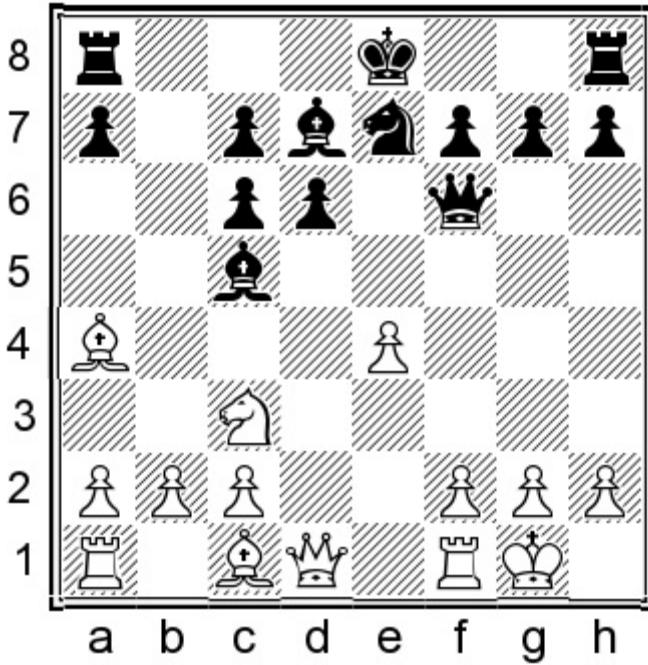
Playing against weaknesses in the pawn structure, for example by putting a piece on a strong square, is an essential part of positional play, but finding examples of it in Morphy's games is not so easy.

I'd like to present two of them. In both, after conquering a strong square for his knight, Morphy continues in a remarkably aggressive fashion.

Louis Paulsen

Paul Morphy

New York 1857

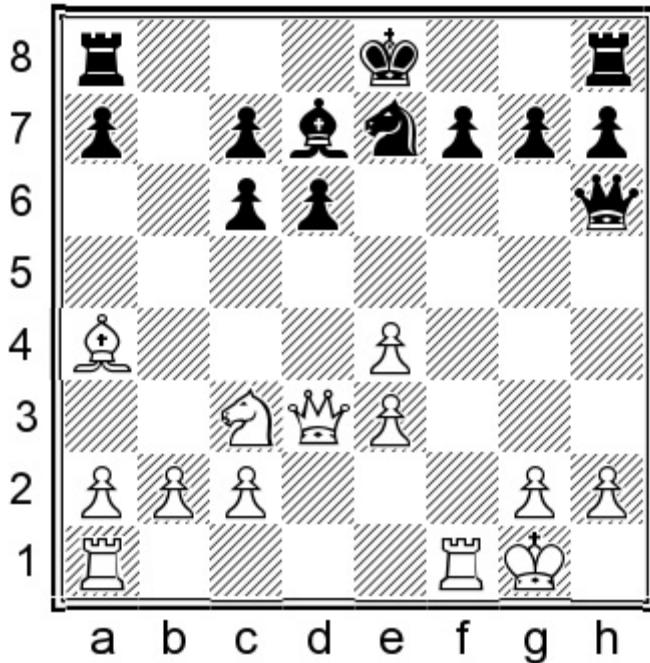


White to move

Paulsen is sometimes considered a forerunner to Steinitz's positional school, but here, without any need, he ruins his pawn structure. Maybe he had some tactical expectations along the f-file.

It should be noted that this game was part of a four-game blindfold simul by Paulsen, but Morphy also played blindfold (with that, it was still a bit peculiar that he participated in a simul by someone else).

10. ♣e3? ♣xe3 11. fxe3 ♜h6 12. ♜d3

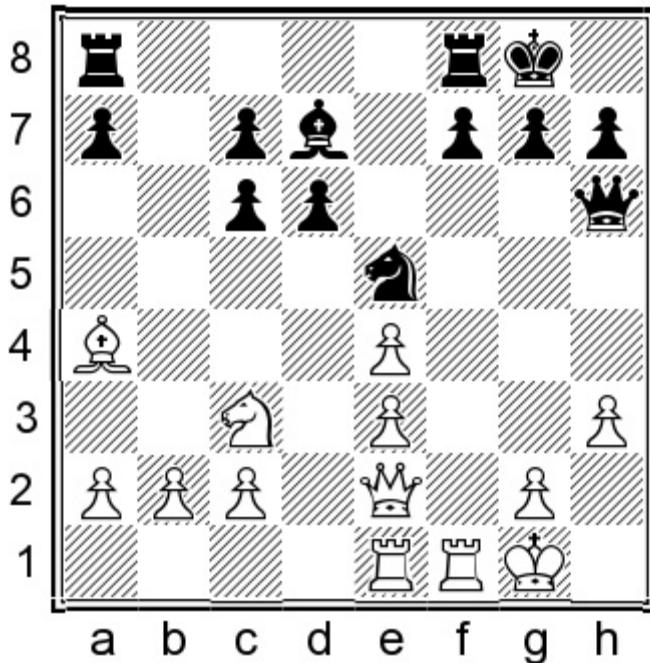


(Exercise no 64)

12...Bg6!

On its way to the beautiful e5-square.

13.Bae1 Be5 14.We2 0-0 15.h3



Black has a nice advantage but how would you continue?

I guess most (positional) players would start on the queenside with 15...Bab8, with moves like ...a7-a5, ...Bb4 or ...c6-c5 as a possible follow-up. Also 15...f6 and either rook to e8 looks like a normal plan.

But Morphy chooses an entirely different, highly original and very aggressive plan involving the advance of the g-pawn (triggered by White's 15.h3). In *Winning Chess Manoeuvres*, Sarhan Guliev discusses this plan under the heading 'Morphy's needles' and presents it as an inspiration for Bobby Fischer's ...g7-g5 advance in the Hedgehog structure (though there Black still has an e-pawn, keeping an eye on the potential weaknesses on the f-file).

I have to admit that, if one of my pupils came up with the idea of playing or preparing ...g7-g5 in this position, I probably would have reprimanded him. That would make me as dogmatic as Tarrasch – we will later meet him on exactly this subject.

15... $\hat{Q}h8$ 16. $\hat{Q}d1$ g5!? 17. $\hat{Q}f2$ $\hat{Q}g8$ 18. $\hat{Q}d3$ g4 19. $\hat{Q}xe5$ dxe5 20.hxg4 $\hat{Q}xg4$ 21. $\hat{W}f2$ $\hat{Q}g6$ 22. $\hat{W}xf7$ $\hat{Q}e6$ 23. $\hat{W}xc7$

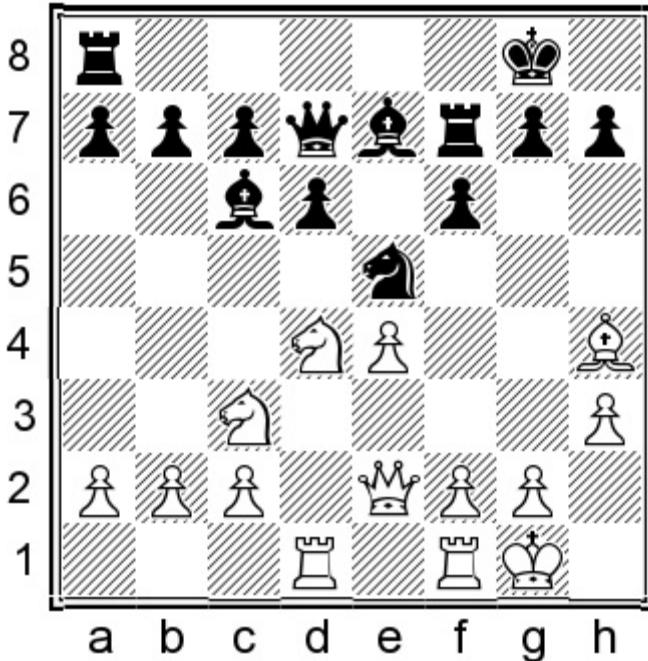
Allegedly the game ended here with Morphy announcing mate in five.

The next game comes from the match against Harrwitz, one of the stronger opponents Morphy met in Europe. Harrwitz had the reputation of not being a very sympathetic player and in this match, after taking a 2-0 lead, he openly belittled Morphy and his play. But Morphy struck back, and with the score at 5½-2½ Harrwitz resigned the match, though he later asserted that it had ended undecided.

Paul Morphy

Daniel Harrwitz

Paris 1858

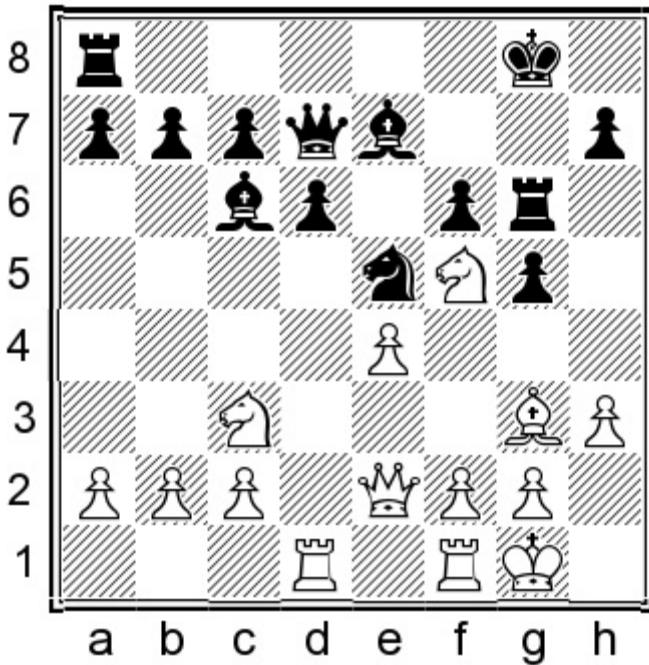


Black to move

Things have not gone well in Black's opening and f2-f4 is coming, but the next move clearly makes things worse. This ...g7-g5 move we have discussed before, and following it through history gives us a

good idea about how conscious people were of the potential weakening aspect of pushing these pawns forward.

15...g5? 16.♗g3 ♕g7 17.♗f5 ♕g6

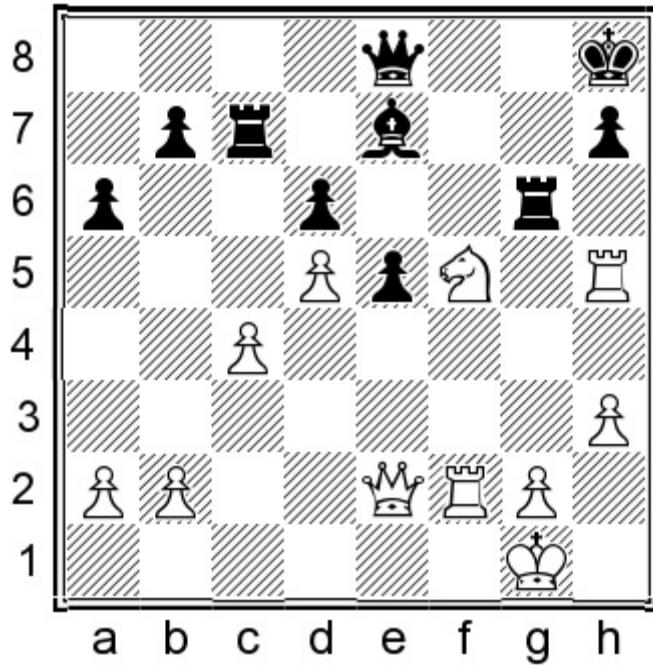


Again the question, how to continue?

This time Morphy's advantage is much bigger than in the previous game – close to winning, I would say. And White has a lot of attractive possibilities: for example, 18.♗d5 springs to mind immediately, maybe followed by c2-c4. I would even consider the somewhat lazy 18.♗xe5 fxe5 19.♗d5, trying to end up in a good knight versus bad bishop position.

Euwe says about this game that it shows Morphy as the perfect positional player.⁴⁸ At this point though, I guess most positional players would try to win this without too much complication, but Morphy, as always, likes to speed things up.

18.f4!? gxf4 19.♗xf4 ♔h8 20.♗h4 ♔f8 21.♗xe5 fxe5 22.♗f1 ♔e6 23.♗b5 ♔g8 24.♗f2 a6 25.♗xc7 ♔c8 26.♗d5 ♔xd5 27.exd5 ♔c7 28.c4 ♔e7 29.♗h5 ♔e8



30.c5!

The intro to a nice finale.

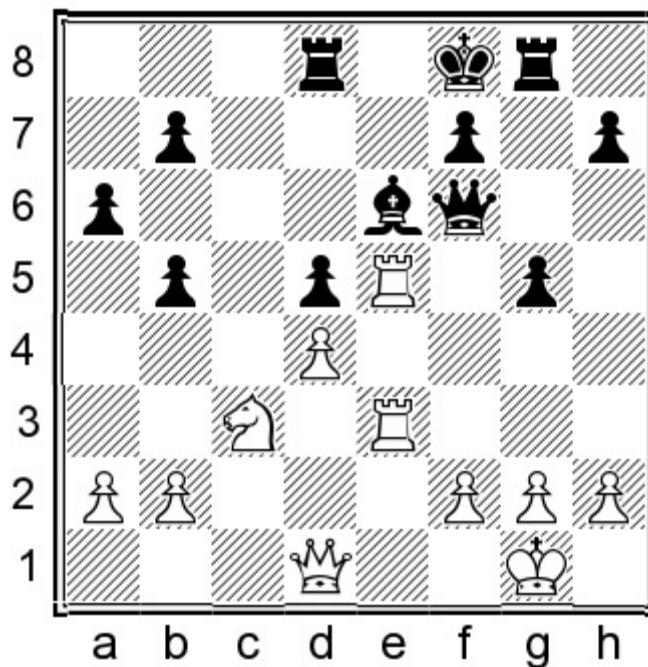
30...♝xc5 (Exercise no 65)

31.♝xh7+! ♕xh7 32.♛h5+ ♔g8 33.♝xe7+ ♔g7 34.♝f5+ ♔g8 35.♝xd6 1-0

The match with Anderssen was Morphy's last, and in the next chapter we will see if they belong to the same or to a different school of play.

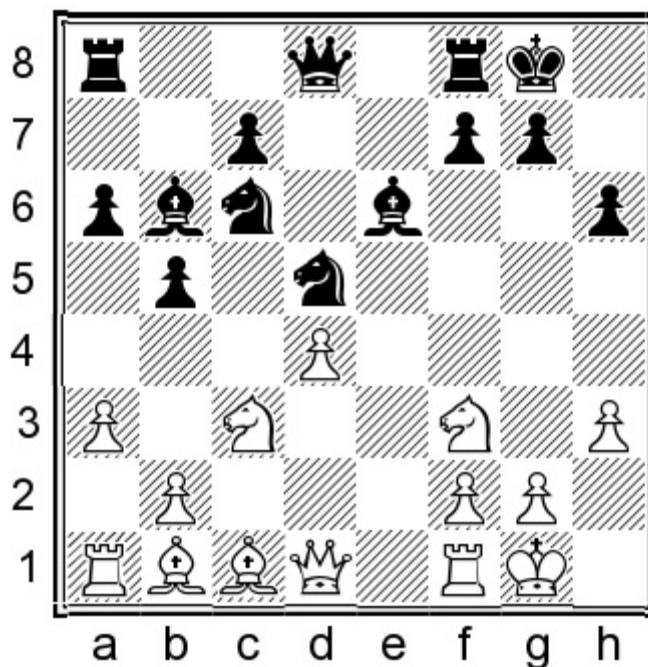
Exercises for Chapter 13

66 (go to the solution)

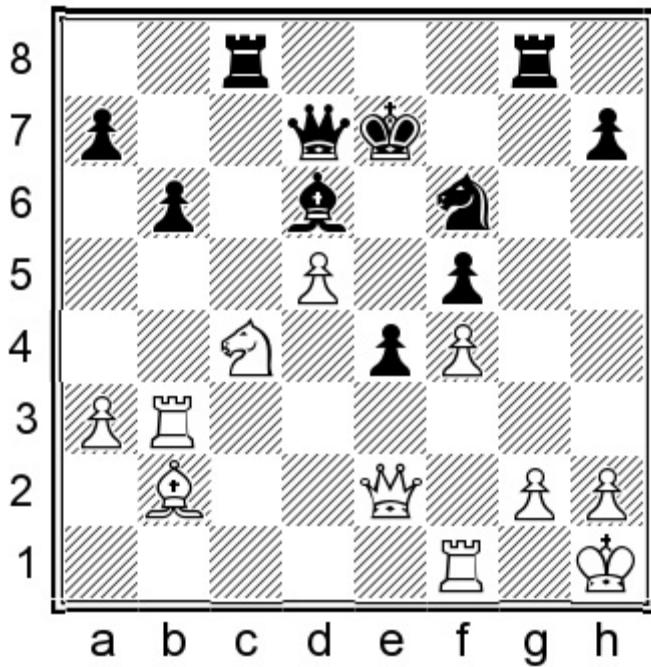


White to move

67 (go to the solution)



White to move



White to move

Who is better and what would you play as White?

13

Anderssen versus Morphy: stereotypes upside down

Anderssen (left) versus Morphy.

Looking at the appreciation of Morphy's play, we see that gradually his positional qualities become more accentuated. At the same time Anderssen ends up in a contraposition to Morphy.

After classifying them both as perfect attacking and combinational players, Euwe points out the difference: 'But Morphy was even more, he also was a perfect positional player. His superiority consisted in his set-up of the game, in noticing and rightly valuing the different general features of the position.' According to Euwe, Morphy won the match against Anderssen 'solely because of his better understanding of the general demands of the position'.⁴⁹ Euwe was not the first with this historical viewpoint, but after him it more or less became canonical and, as we saw, Kasparov joined this canon as well.



But it is not the only possible perspective. In *Secrets of Attacking Chess*, Mihail Marin describes how he started studying the games of Morphy and Anderssen from this historical point of view, but ended

with the opposite conclusion. After a comprehensive analysis of the sixth game of the match between the two, Marin writes:

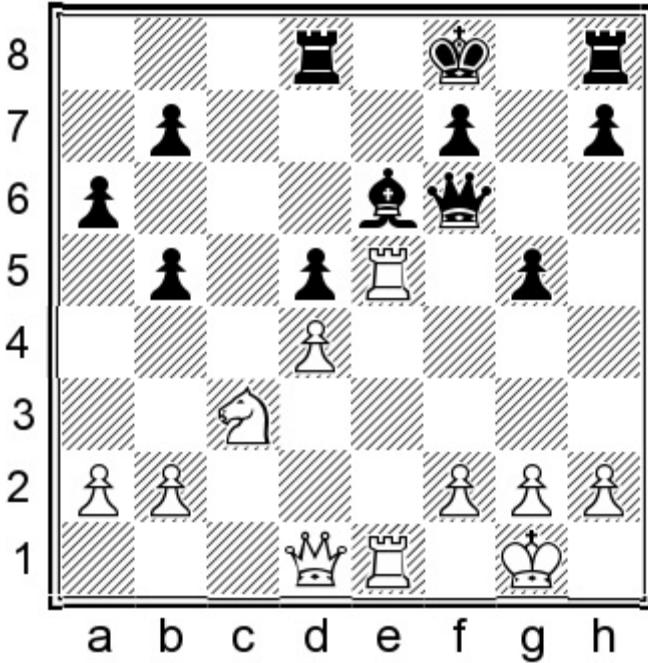
'A fantastic struggle! And yet, it offers an entirely different picture from the officially approved one. It appears that Anderssen's positional feeling was considerably better than Morphy's but [...] this was not sufficient compensation for the fact that his concrete handling of the game [...] was worse than that of his brilliant opponent. To put it in a simpler way, Morphy was just what he seemed to be at first glance: a brilliant attacking player with a pronounced concrete approach to the game. I believe that the whole theory built around his fantastic career, according to which his play had a deep innovative character, is largely exaggerated. A simpler and more plausible explanation for his outstanding successes is that Morphy mainly did what other people used to do before him, but in a much more accurate and efficient way. [...] I must confess that I needed a lot of courage to come up with such a conclusion. It is not easy to contradict a thesis unanimously approved by the highest authorities for more than a century. Chess is a logical game and therefore chess-players and commentators try to see a logical explanation for all the important historic events. In doing so, they sometimes tend to adjust the facts to the theory.'⁵⁰

I agree with Marin's analysis. Regarding his modest remark I think the 'highest authorities' deserve some respect, but on the other hand among chess historians there is an awful lot of copying of each other, and many of their verdicts are always based on the same small set of games. Of course, we must realize that today, with our databases, we have excellent access to all the games from the past, whereas those commentators from earlier days had much more limited access, depending on the books they did or didn't have.

Let's have a look at a few games from this match between Morphy and Anderssen (won 8-3 by the American) to illustrate the points made above.

After he had taken the lead, a small disaster happened to Anderssen in the third game.

Paul Morphy
Adolf Anderssen
Paris 1858



White to move

19. $\mathbb{Q}1e3$

White has sufficient compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but after 19... $\mathbb{Q}g7$ nothing serious would have happened yet. One might think that White wasn't really hiding his intentions with his last move, but nonetheless Anderssen didn't notice them.

19... $\mathbb{Q}g8??$ (Exercise no 66) 20. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 1-0

This is a terrible blunder for a strong tactician like Anderssen. In contrast, Morphy hardly ever had these kinds of tactical oversights; as Marin noted, he was more accurate. Of course, for Anderssen missing a tactic like this was also rather uncommon – maybe it was due to his sometimes hasty play. A few chapters ago we saw him allowing mate in one against Staunton. Clocks weren't in use back then, so no excuse can be found there.

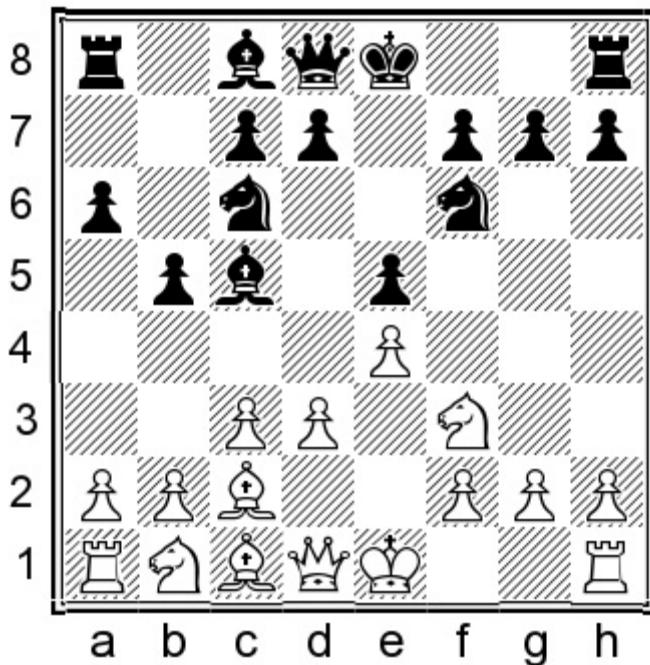
In *Modern Ideas in Chess*, Richard Réti talks about the difference between Morphy and Anderssen according to the common view sketched above:

'To the question: What was the secret of [Morphy's] success? The reply is that he had a wonderful talent for combinations. Anderssen possessed that talent no less than Morphy and had in addition more imagination than the latter. The deciding advantage in Morphy's favour was the fact that he was the first positional player.'

But Réti has a rather strange idea about the chess played in those days and he seems to think that Morphy somehow was the inventor of the principle of development. See his comments on Anderssen's moves in the next fragment from the fourth match game.

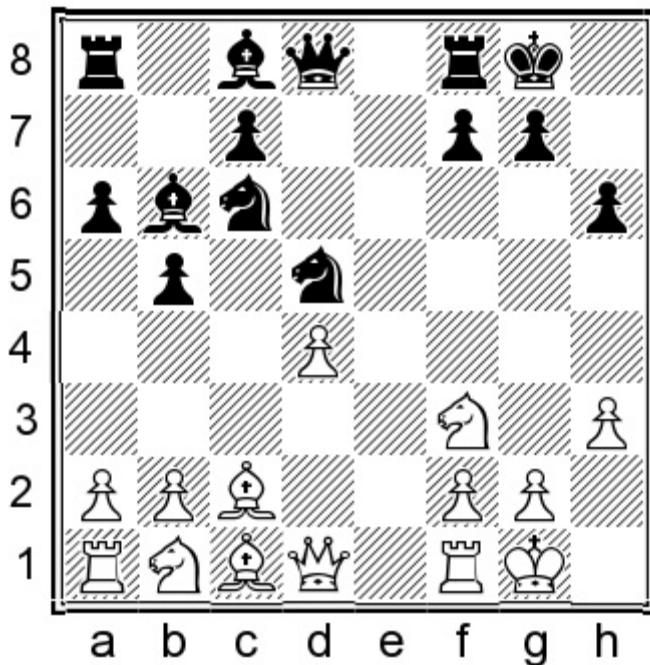
Adolf Anderssen – Paul Morphy Paris 1858

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♕a4 ♘f6 5.d3 ♘c5 6.c3 b5 7.♕c2



‘White had from now onwards a fantastic idea of attack. He wanted to effect a mate in h7. To conceive such a plan at that moment is not justified by any weakness in Black’s position, and seems, according to our modern views, to be almost ludicrous.’

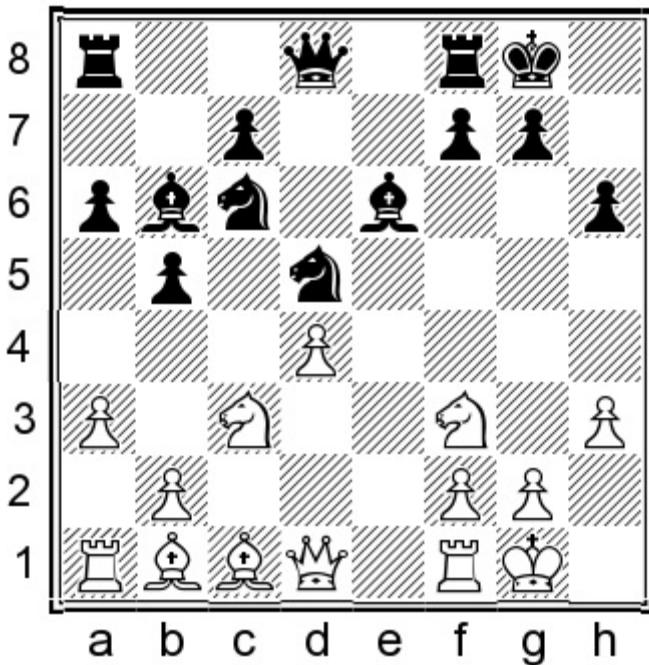
7...d5 8.exd5 ♘xd5 9.h3 0-0 10.0-0 h6 11.d4 exd4 12.cxd4 ♘b6



13.♘c3

‘Does Anderssen intend to make a developing move here? Certainly not. That it happens to be one is merely chance. It is essentially an attacking move which threatens 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$, 15. $\mathbb{W}d3$, whilst 14. $\mathbb{W}d3$ can at once be parried by Black with $\mathbb{Q}f6$.’

13... $\mathbb{Q}db4$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 15.a3 $\mathbb{Q}d5$



(Exercise no 67)

16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$

‘This also happens to be a developing move only, because with the protection of his pawn at d4 the threat involves the gain of a pawn by means of 17. $\mathbb{Q}xb5$ axb5 18. $\mathbb{W}c2$.⁵¹

Some very remarkable comments indeed! For one thing, had Anderssen, instead of 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$, continued his ‘ludicrous’ set-up with 16. $\mathbb{W}c2$! (precisely the idea Réti was trying to ridicule and even better than 16. $\mathbb{W}d3$), he would have been close to winning. On 16... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, 17. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ is decisive and after 16... $f5$, 17. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ is very strong (17... $\mathbb{W}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}a2$). That leaves nothing better than 16... $g6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$, with a healthy extra pawn.

But apart from this, the suggestion Réti twice makes that Anderssen can only develop his pieces ‘by accident’, as some side-effect of attacking ideas, is a rather bizarre insult. Réti’s *Modern Ideas in Chess* has been an influential book, but his description of some of the players from the past is extremely stereotyped.

The game Réti was commenting on was the fourth, but strangely enough the last diagram position had already occurred in the second game. Apparently in the meantime neither player had discovered White’s winning attacking possibilities.

Three times Anderssen started a game with 1.a3, and this is sometimes called ‘Anderssen’s Opening’,

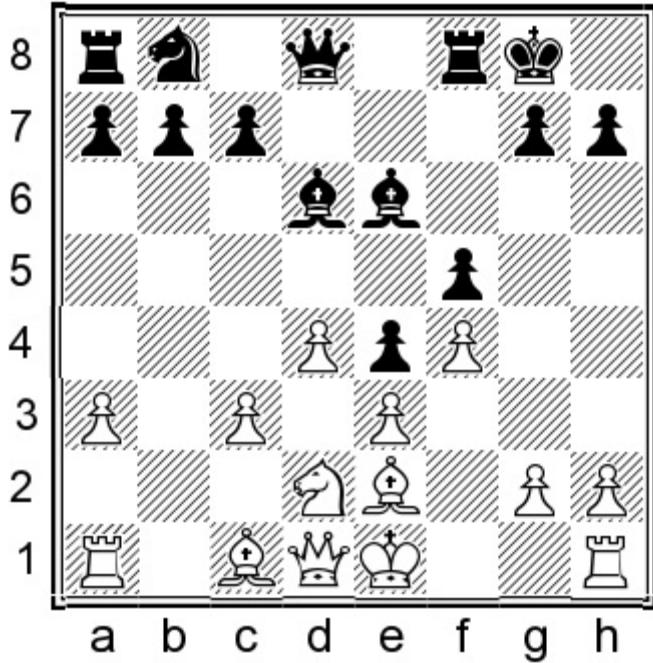
which makes him look a bit like a weird eccentric, but after 1...e5 2.c4 these games quickly transposed into an English Opening and eventually into a Sicilian with reversed colours.

Marin bases his conclusions on these three games. They ended in a tie, but, according to Marin, ‘the course of the games is in strong contradiction with the approved thesis that Morphy’s play was based on a sounder positional foundation. In fact, it was Anderssen who completely outplayed his brilliant opponent on strategic territory. As we shall see, Morphy managed to maintain the balance only by means of his greater practical abilities.’⁵²

Concerning the ‘approved thesis’ Marin mentions Neishtadt, Euwe and Kasparov as prominent supporters, but to this list Réti, as we have seen, can be added, and also Lasker, as we will see below. His role in the coming about of the standard view on the history of chess will be discussed in more detail later on.

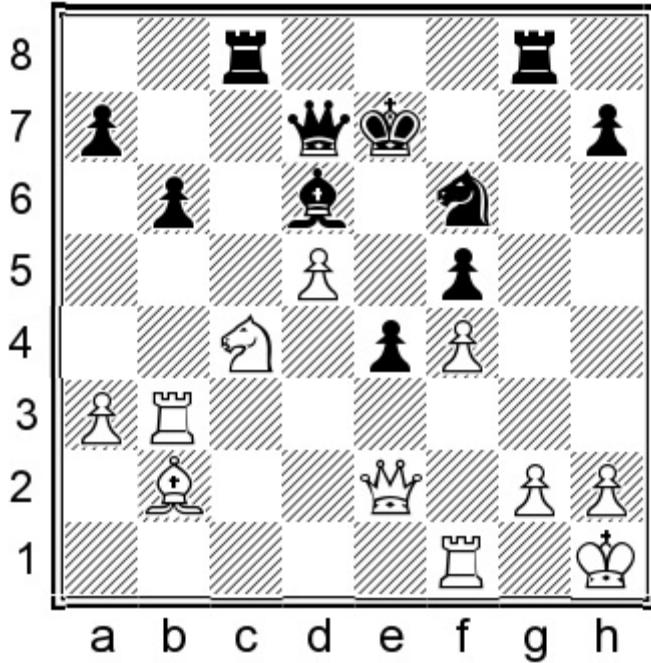
Adolf Anderssen – Paul Morphy Paris 1858

1.a3 e5 2.c4 ♜f6 3.♘c3 d5 4.cxd5 ♜xd5 5.e3 ♜e6 6.♘f3 ♜d6 7.♘e2 0-0 8.d4 ♜xc3 9.bxc3 e4 10.♘d2 f5 11.f4



All three games reached this or a very similar position. In the first one (the sixth match game) a critical position was reached after move 27.

11...g5 12.♘c4 ♜xc4 13.♘xc4 gxf4 14.exf4 ♜e8 15.0-0 ♜c6 16.♗b3 ♜d5 17.♗b1 b6 18.♗a2 c6 19.♗e2 ♜d7 20.♘e3 ♜e6 21.c4 ♜f6 22.♗b3 ♜f7 23.♘b2 ♜ac8 24.♘h1 ♜g8 25.d5 cxd5 26.cxd5 ♜d7 27.♘c4 ♜e7



(Exercise no 68)

I hesitated to give this as an exercise, since the position is rather complicated with no clear best move and a lot of attractive possibilities for White. But if you decided White is completely winning you earn full points. The main factor is of course Black's extremely vulnerable king.

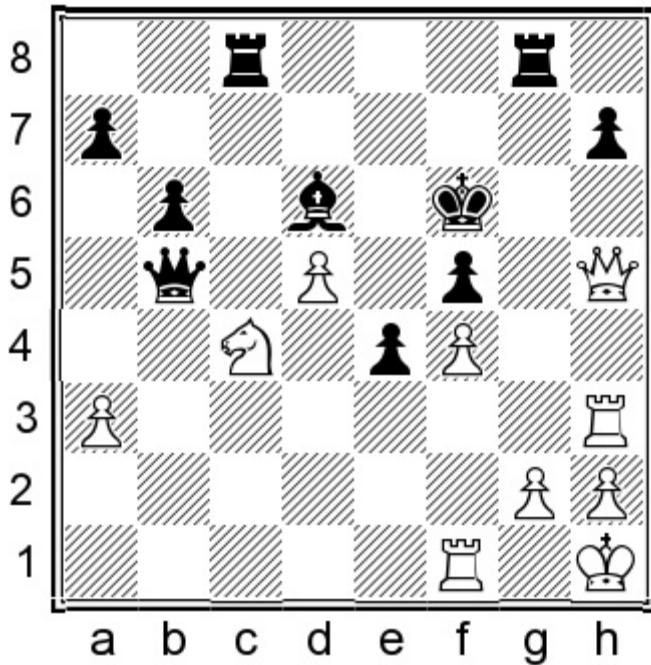
This position is presented in *Lasker's Manual of Chess*. Just like with Réti, the patronizing tone of Lasker's comments is remarkable: 'Anderssen, who in seeking combinations merely follows his instincts, does not guide himself by the form and nature of weaknesses and therefore does not discover the strongest line of play. Obviously, the h-file is a Black weakness, also the second and third ranks. On the other hand, the position of the White Knight, Queen and Rook on f1 in the same diagonal would invite $\mathbb{W}b5$, if only the Rook on b3 were away, for the Knight on c4 is insecurely posted, the pawn on d5 is weak. Therefore *not* 28. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ as indicated by a well known book on Morphy, but first evaluation of the Knight on c4: 28. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 29. $fxe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}cf8$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ (After 31... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ White would occupy the d- and c-files.) 32. $\mathbb{Q}h5$ and White wins easily by systematic attack on the weak Black Pawns. Instead of this winning line of play, White chose a much weaker procedure, failed again and again and at last lost the game.'⁵³

'... does not guide himself by the form and nature of weaknesses' sounds like a rather pretentious disqualification of someone who missed the best option in a very complex tactical position. But apart from that, Lasker's remarks are not completely correct. He gives a good (winning) line, but the alternatives he dismisses, 28. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ and 28. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$, the move played, are even stronger.

28. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 29. $\mathbb{W}b2+?!$

Yet this gives away a large part of the advantage and after a tense continuation of this struggle with some mutual mistakes Anderssen finally lost. It was not easy to see, but 29. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ would still be winning

because after the idea indicated by Lasker, 29... $\mathbb{W}b5$, White has 30. $\mathbb{W}h5!$ (*analysis diagram*).



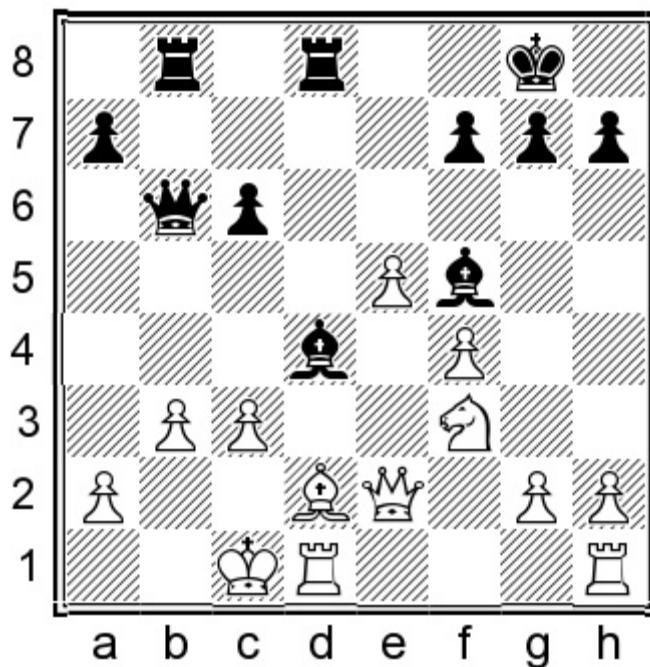
If Black now takes the knight White starts a winning streak of checks with 31. $\mathbb{W}h4+$.

29... $\mathbb{K}f7$ 30. $\mathbb{B}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 31. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $\mathbb{K}g8$ 32. $\mathbb{B}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 33. $\mathbb{B}d6$ $\mathbb{B}f7$ 34. $\mathbb{B}h3$ $\mathbb{W}a4$ 35. $\mathbb{B}c1$ $\mathbb{B}c5$ 36. $\mathbb{B}g3+$ $\mathbb{K}g7$ 37. $\mathbb{B}h3$ $\mathbb{B}h8$ 38. $\mathbb{B}xg7$ $\mathbb{B}xg7$ 39. $\mathbb{B}c3$ $e3$ 40. $\mathbb{B}xe3$ $\mathbb{B}xc4$ 41. $\mathbb{W}f6$ $\mathbb{B}c1+$ 42. $\mathbb{B}h2$ $\mathbb{W}xf4+$ 0-1

I have presented only a small fragment of this tense and complicated game, full of attractive possibilities (and full of possibilities to go wrong). In this game, finally, Morphy came out on top. But to blame Anderssen's lack of positional foundation for this, as Lasker is doing, is indeed 'adjusting the facts to the theory'. Lasker's theory! – for a big part, I guess, but more about that later.

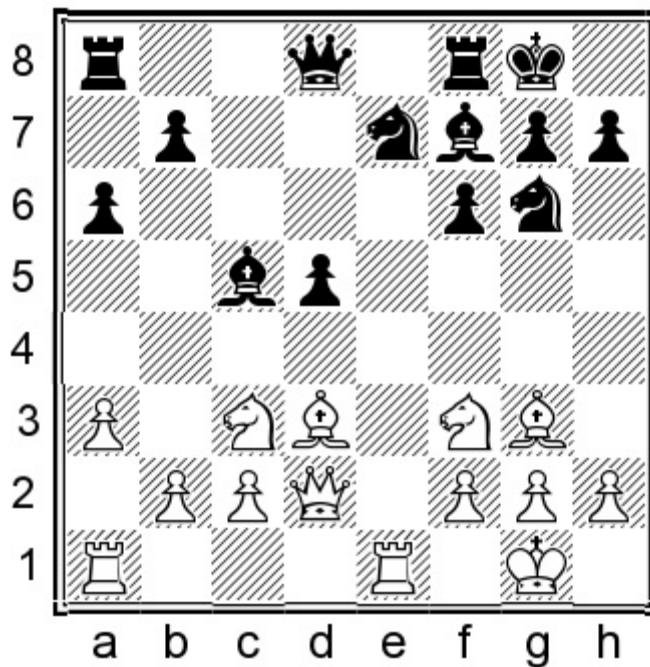
Exercises for Chapter 14

69 (go to the solution)



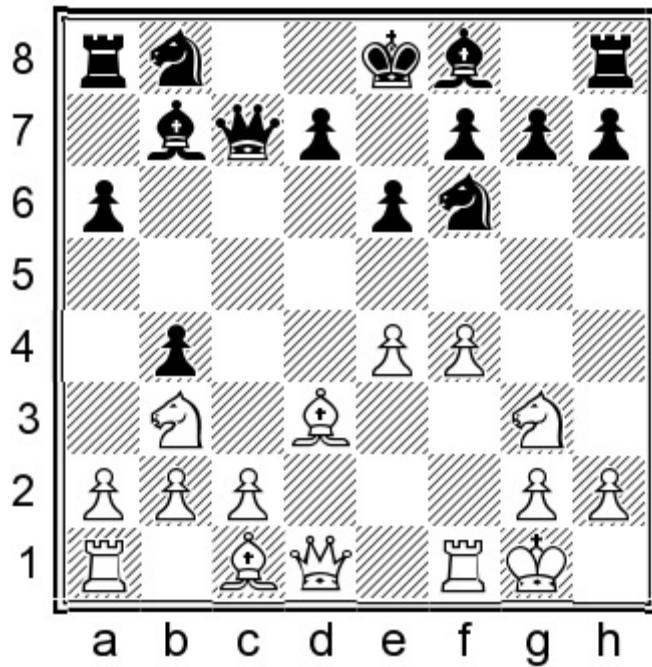
Black to move

70 (go to the solution)



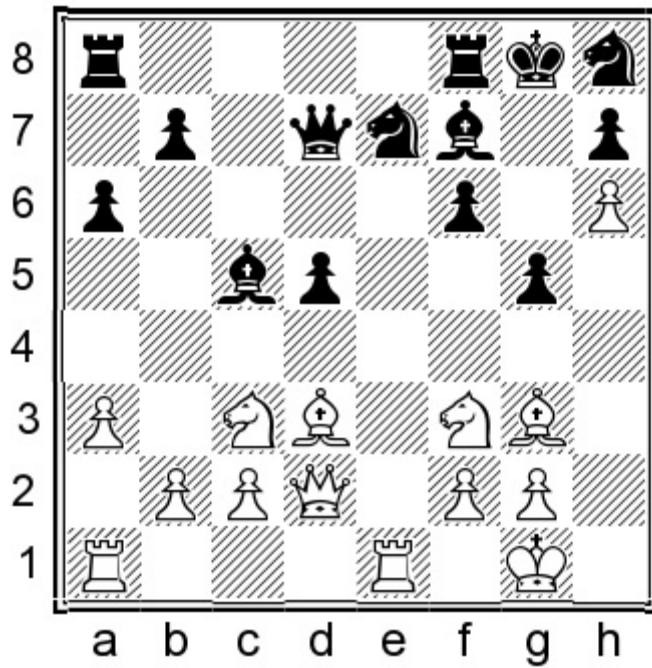
White to move

71 (go to the solution)



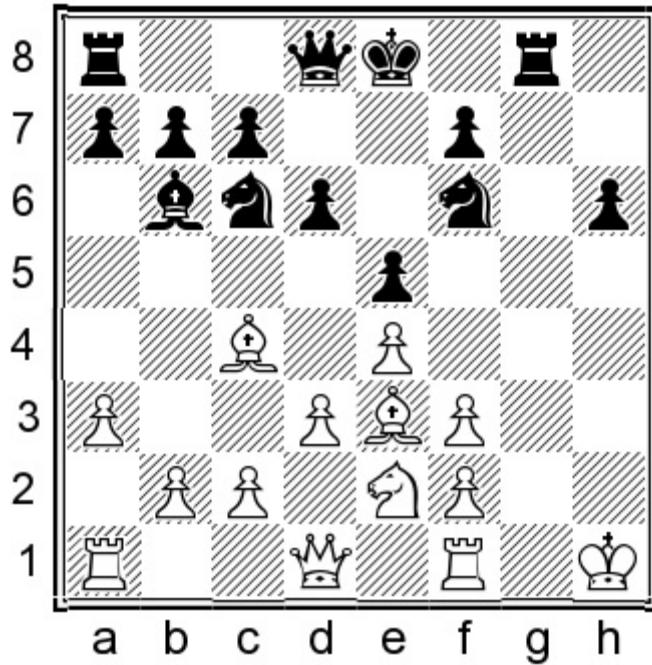
Black to move

72 (go to the solution)



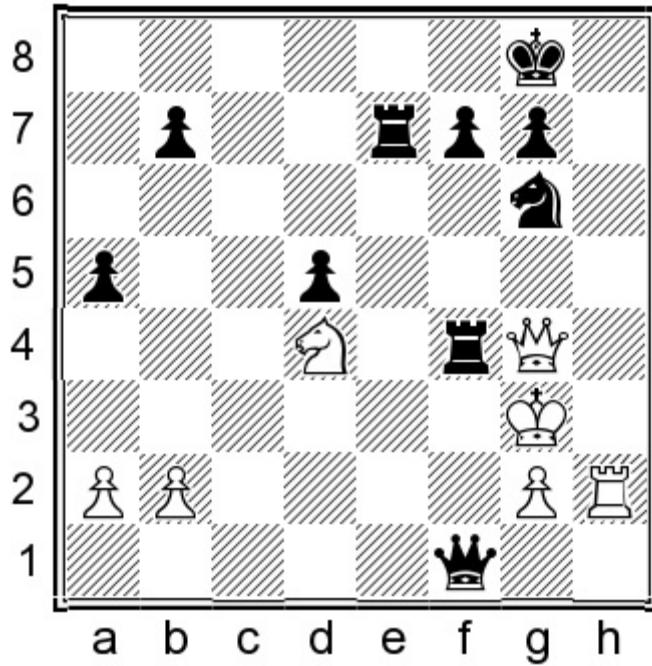
White to move

73 (go to the solution)



Black to move

74 (go to the solution)



White to move

In this game Black outplayed his opponent but missed his last swindle, and here White played 35. $\mathbb{W}c8+$ and announced mate in three. Do you maintain your dignity and resign?

14

The father of modern chess

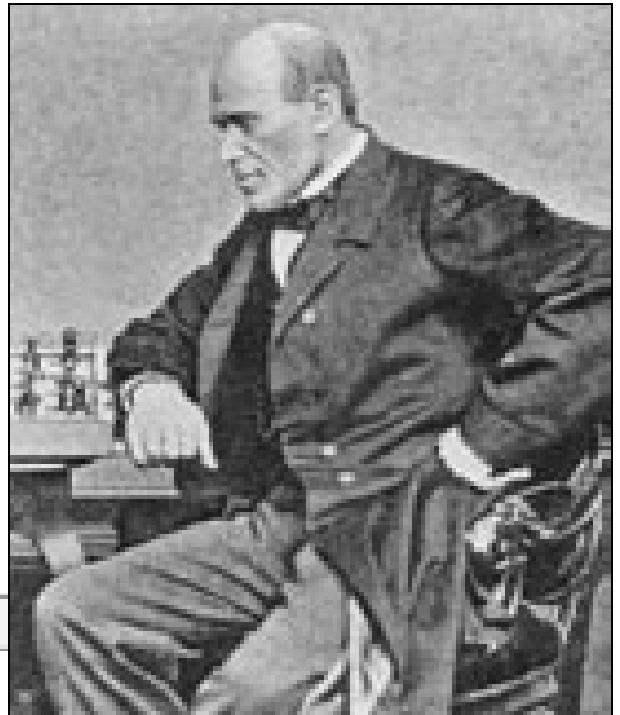
Adolf Anderssen

Looking at the differences and similarities between Morphy and Anderssen, I'm not sure Anderssen is more 'positional' than Morphy, as Marin suggests. He clearly was more experimental. But in the 19th century both players were often mentioned in the same breath and that seems more justified than the contraposition they were manoeuvred into later on.

The following beautiful game was played by Anderssen, but might just as easily have been played by Morphy. If you play it over you get the same 'blitzkrieg' effect as with a lot of Morphy's games (in particular, the blindfold game against Schulten, New York 1857, comes to mind).

Jacob Rosanes – Adolf Anderssen Breslau 1862

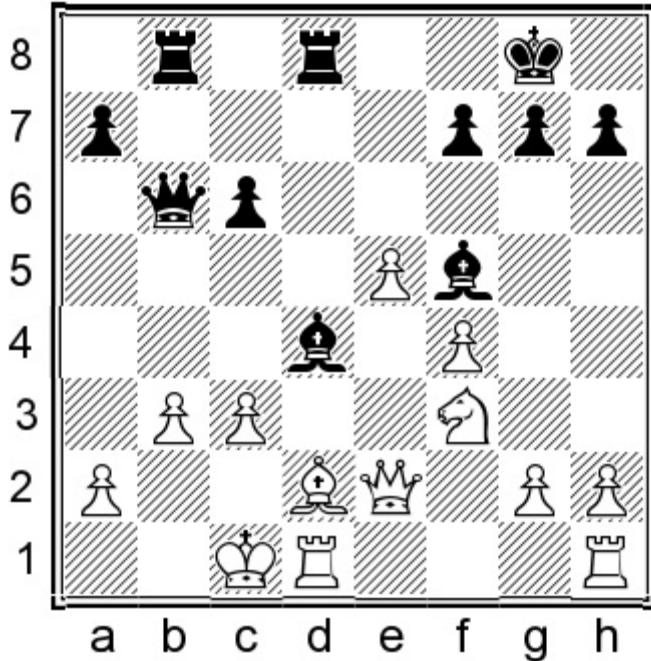
1.e4 e5 2.f4



Anderssen played several games against Rosanes. The most famous one is shown by Kasparov 'to demonstrate the dominating mood in the chess world in the pre-Steinitz era. [...] Conventional wisdom at the time assumed that White had an obligation to fight for the initiative at any price. That is why material sacrifice at an early stage of the game was simply a show of good taste, and to decline the opponent's kind material offer was not considered an honourable option.'⁵⁴

This 'honourable' attitude is often mentioned, but was it really dominant? In this game Anderssen has no problem not accepting the pawn. Okay, he did sacrifice a few of his own...

2...d5 3.exd5 e4 4.♗b5+ c6 5.dxc6 ♗xc6 6.♘c3 ♗f6 7.♗e2 ♗c5! 8.♗xe4 0-0 9.♗xc6 bxc6 10.d3 ♘e8 11.♗d2 ♗xe4 12.dxe4 ♗f5! 13.e5 ♘b6 14.0-0-0 ♘d4 15.c3 ♘ab8 16.b3 ♘ed8 17.♗f3



(Exercise no 69)

17... $\mathbb{W}xb3!!$ 18.axb3 $\mathbb{E}xb3$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}e3+!$ 0-1

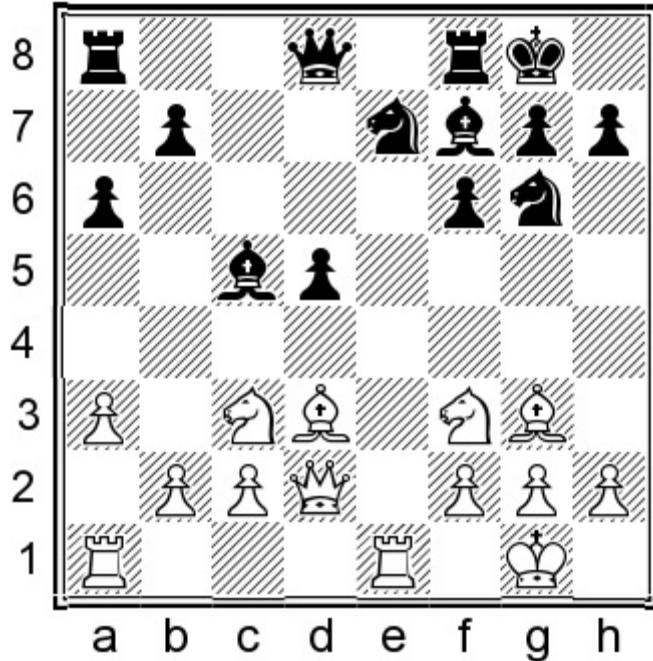
As mentioned, the image we have of players from the past is rather one-dimensional because the history books show the same small set of games over and over again. This is not completely without reason – they are often brilliancies – but it distorts a more complete view of the players in question.

For Anderssen those famous games are against Dufresne (Berlin 1852), the ‘Evergreen’, and against Kieseritzky (London 1851), the ‘Immortal game’. These were informal games. Coffeehouse chess! Both have brilliant finales, but the third famous game, mentioned above, against Rosanes (Breslau 1863) is as brilliant and is overall the most perfect of the three.

The reader not familiar with these games is well advised to look them up. However beautiful this small selection, it does some injustice to the image of Anderssen as a chess player. In this book we have already seen some less familiar games by him, some experimental Sicilian and English games from London 1851 and against Morphy, very modern in set-up, and also the positional walkover this book started with. And what to think about the next game?

Adolf Anderssen – Florent Guibert Paris 1860

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ e6 3.d4 d5 4.exd5 exd5 5. $\mathbb{Q}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 6.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ f6 9.dxc5 $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 0-0 11. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 12. $\mathbb{E}fe1$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 13.a3 $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}ce7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ a6



(Exercise no 70)

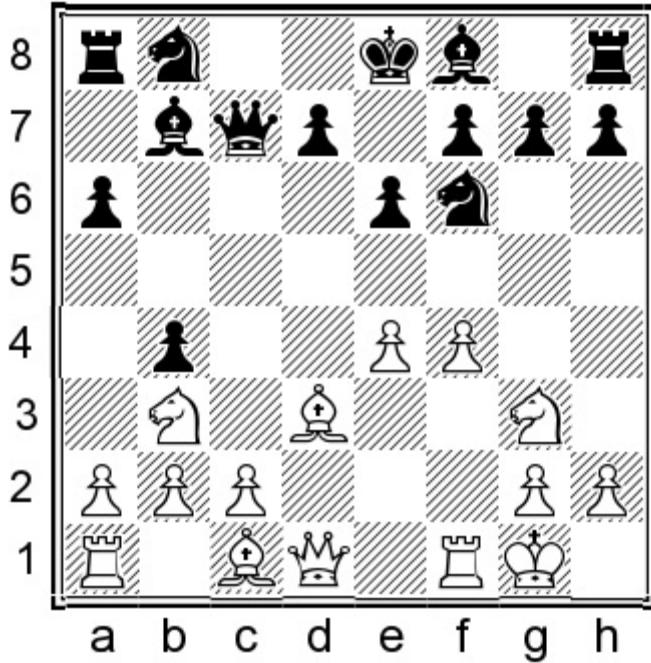
A relatively quiet position in which White is slightly better and has more than one decent option. If you see nothing special then 16. $\mathbb{R}ad1$ is just a good move. But I hope you at least considered Anderssen's next move. It's probably the best, but also a typical plan that should be in every stronger player's repertoire.

16.h4!

On this topic, 'the advance of the rook pawn', a whole book could be written. Just like with the Greek Gift, the $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ sacrifice or any other typical plan/tactic, almost every instance of the rook pawn advance is unique, but a lot of similarities often recur. There are already a number of books that spend at least a chapter on it. For example, in the recent book *Game Changer* it appears that AlphaZero too is a fan of the h2-h4 move. Unfortunately (for the credo of my book), AlphaZero seems to think you can learn to play chess perfectly without taking the slightest notice of chess history.

There is a wide variety of rook's pawn advances, and though it's tempting to give an exposé of them, I'll limit myself to one extra example. As in the present game this one is triggered by the somewhat unfortunately placed knight on g3. It's from a blitz game and it's a perfect illustration of the power of the advance.

**Igor Nataf
Garry Kasparov
Internet 1998**



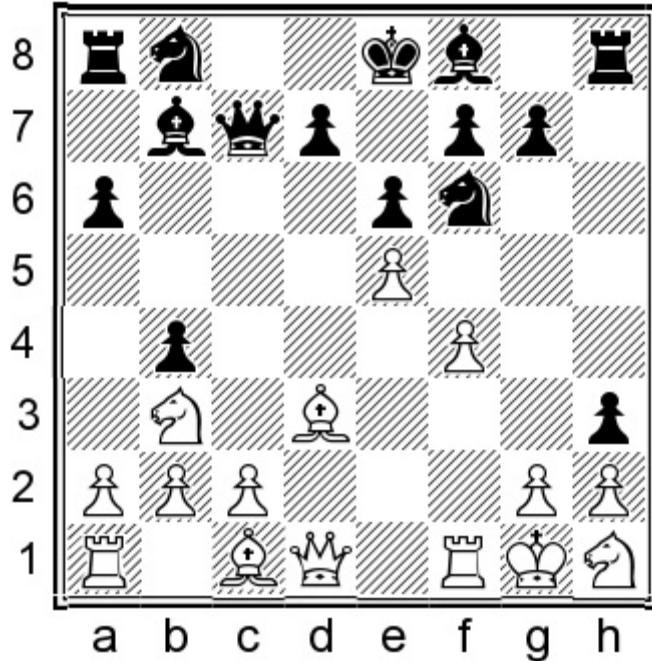
Black to move

(Exercise no 71)

11...h5!

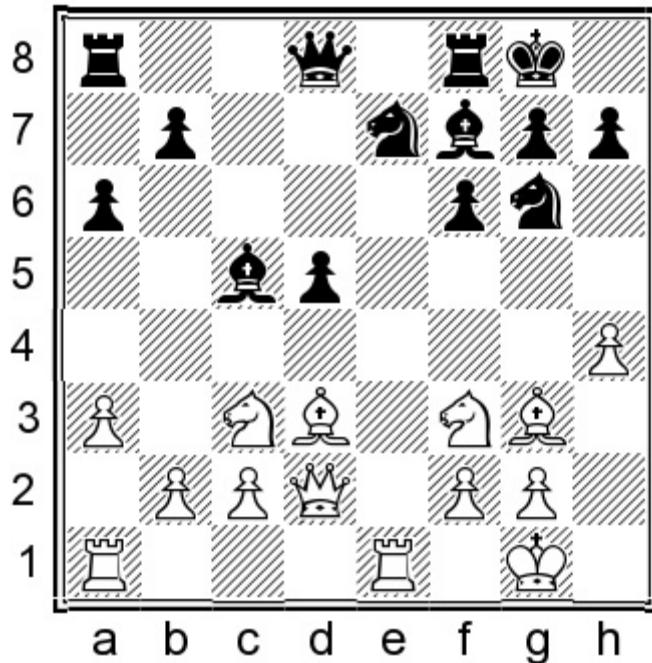
Probably the best choice for Black, although the differences are small. Amusingly, my engine's second choice in this position is 11...a5, starting the same plan on the other side of the board. Normal developing moves (11... \mathbb{Q} c6, 11...d6 or 11... \mathbb{Q} e7) or 11... \mathbb{W} b6+ first and then 12...h5 aren't bad either.

12.e5 h4! 13. \mathbb{Q} h1 h3!

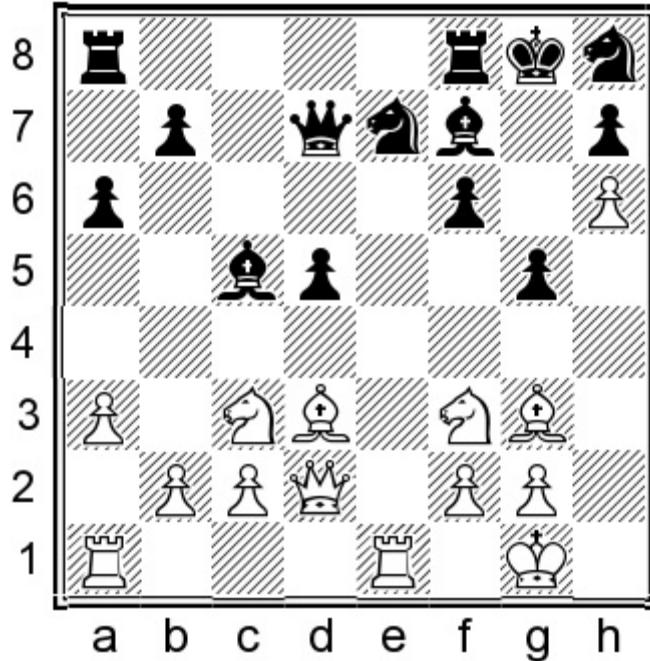


and White resigned. Three consecutive moves with the rook's pawn from a seemingly even position finished the game! White resigned rather early, certainly for a game of blitz, but the positionally desirable move 14.g3 fatally weakens the long diagonal, for example 14... $\mathbb{W}b6+$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ (or 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}c6$).

Let's return to our game.



16...Wd7 17.h5 Qh8 18.h6 g5

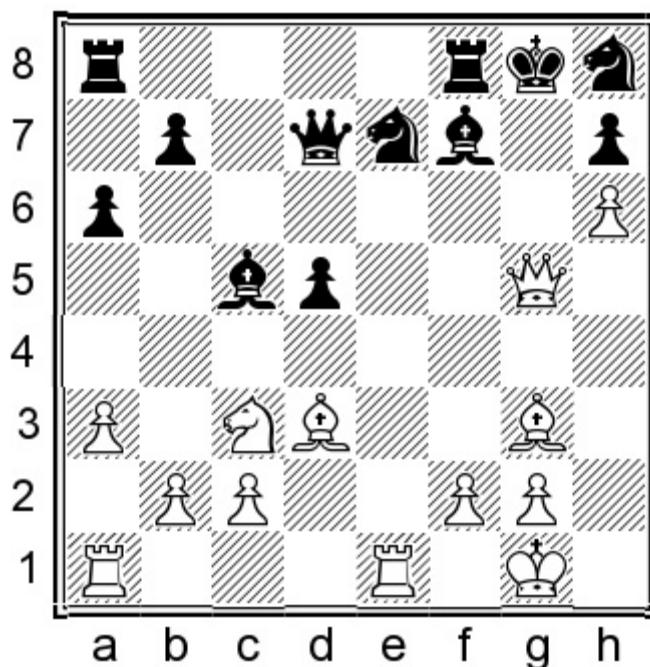


(Exercise no 72)

Steaming up to h6 is one of the objectives of the h2-h4 idea. This pawn is a thorn in Black's flesh and it contributes a great deal to all kinds of mating nets.

Now this is a really difficult exercise. I'm sure you looked at 19. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ and bravo if you decided on it. Maybe your choice was guided by intuition, maybe by 'the form and nature' of the black weaknesses and maybe (hopefully) you additionally had some good lines.

After 19...fxg5 20. $\mathbb{W}xg5+$ Black has three possibilities:



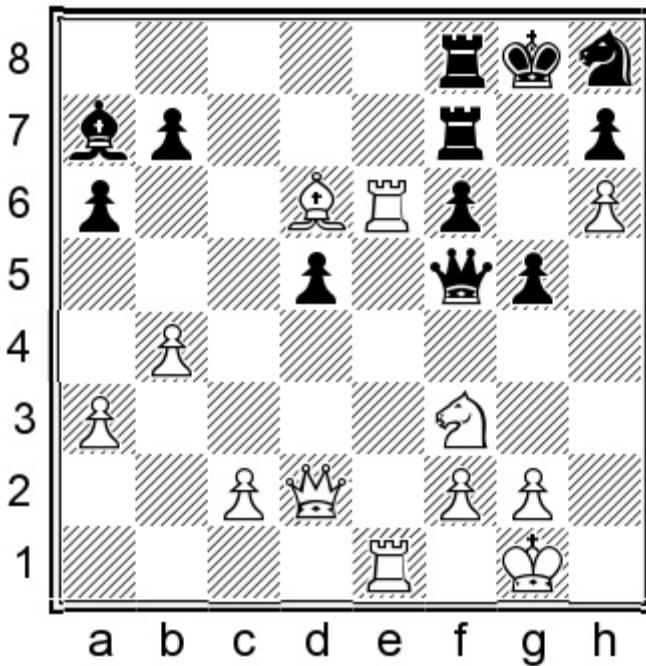
The easiest is 20... $\mathbb{Q}hg6$, which leads to a quick mate after 21. $\mathbb{W}f6$. After 20... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ White is happy to

have 21.b4!, regaining the piece. Most problematic, and maybe bothering Anderssen, was 20... $\mathbb{Q}eg6$. White can simply play on (with two pawns and positional compensation), but very strong (and high level calculation) would be the direct 21. $\mathbb{W}f6$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$!.

Another (slightly inhuman) sacrifice, 19. $\mathbb{Q}xh7$, to follow up with 19... $\mathbb{Q}xh7$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e4$, looks promising as well (because of the rather curious tactic 20... $\mathbb{W}c6$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xc5$ $\mathbb{W}xc5$ 22.b4!, winning the knight on e7).

I have already gone to lengths to undermine the image of Anderssen as a romantic attacking hero, but here comes the final blow: instead of sacrificing on g5 (or h7) he chose 19. $\mathbb{Q}e2$, starting to play against the isolani and the weak squares in Black's position!

19. $\mathbb{Q}e2$!? $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}ed4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 23.b4! $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}ae1$ $\mathbb{Q}af8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}7e6$ $\mathbb{Q}a7$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}d6$!



Winning material (27... $\mathbb{Q}d8$? 28. $\mathbb{Q}e8+$). Note how the h6-pawn is contributing to the mating possibilities.

27... $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 29.c4? g4?

29... $\mathbb{Q}f4$ with counterplay.

30. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 31.c5 $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 32.g3 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 33.c6 $\mathbb{W}h3$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ bxc6 35. $\mathbb{Q}1xe5$ fxe5 36. $\mathbb{W}g5$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ hxg6 38. $\mathbb{W}xg6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ 1-0

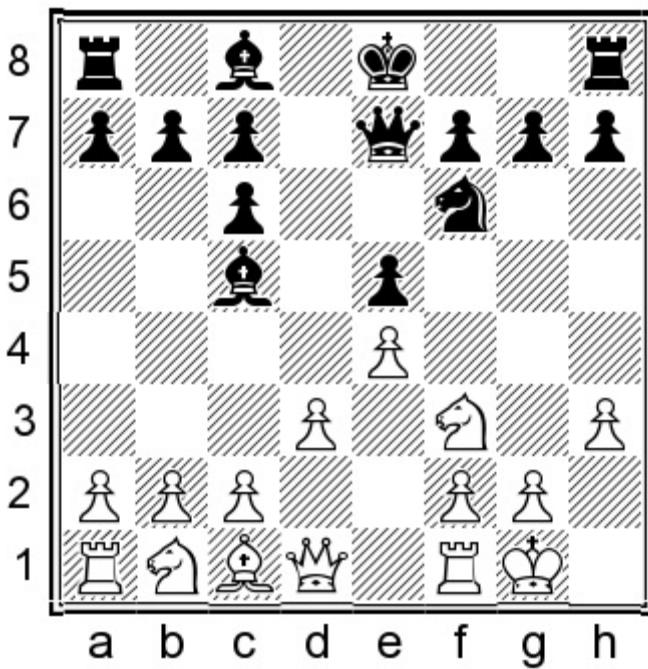
I did some small research on the origin of the h2-h4(-h5-h6) idea and Anderssen is a strong candidate to claim the honours. Seeing some typical tactical or positional idea I always wonder who was the first to play it, when it became part of common knowledge and how it evolved further. Traditional chess history writing largely ignores these developments on a more concrete level, preferring generalizations like 'Morphy demonstrated the power of quick development' or 'Steinitz taught us the importance of a

strong centre'.

In a recent Candidates final, Kramnik's win with black over Aronian was one of the highlights.

Levon Aronian – Vladimir Kramnik Berlin 2018

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 ♘c5 5.♗xc6 dxc6 6.0-0 ♖e7 7.h3



7...♗g8!?

Triggered by the move 7.h3, Black starts a kingside attack with the idea of opening lines with ...g7-g5-. Of course this whole idea is also well known to Aronian, so when playing 7.h3 he may have underestimated the dangers somewhat. Be it as it may, in this game Kramnik's attack worked out perfectly.

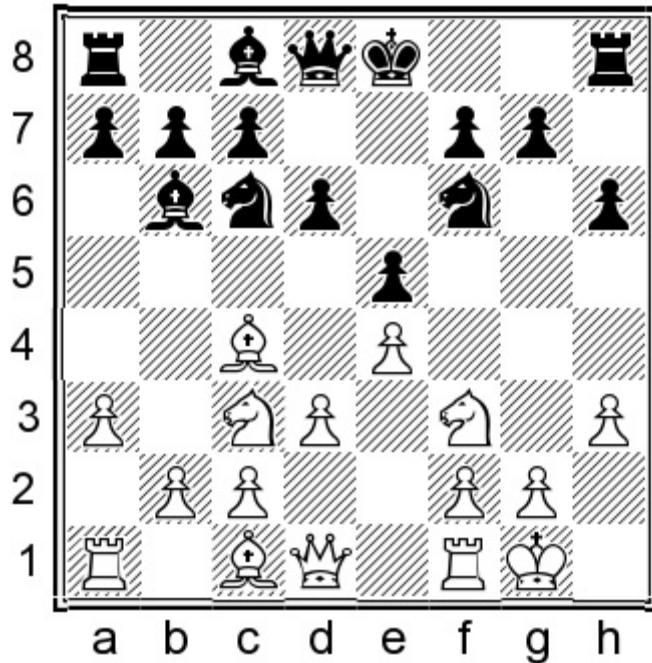
8.♗h1 ♘h5 9.c3 g5 10.♗xe5 g4 11.d4 ♘d6 12.g3 ♘xe5 13.dxe5 ♖xe5 14.♗d4 ♖e7 15.h4 c5 16.♗c4 ♘e6 17.♗b5+ c6 18.♗a4 f5 19.♗g5 ♖xg5 20.hxg5 f4 21.♗d1 ♖d8 22.♗c1 fxg3 23.♗a3 ♖d3 24.♗d1 ♘d5 25.f3 gxf3 26.exd5 ♖e2 27.♗e1 g2+ 0-1

In the history of chess, this attack has claimed many victims (including me). The important detail – White (in this case) playing h2-h3 when Black hasn't castled kingside yet – is easy to miss. The question of who was the first to realize this arises again. It must have been long ago, since in the old days they almost exclusively played those 1.e4 e5 openings.

I do have a candidate...

Hermanus Kloos – Adolf Anderssen Amsterdam 1861

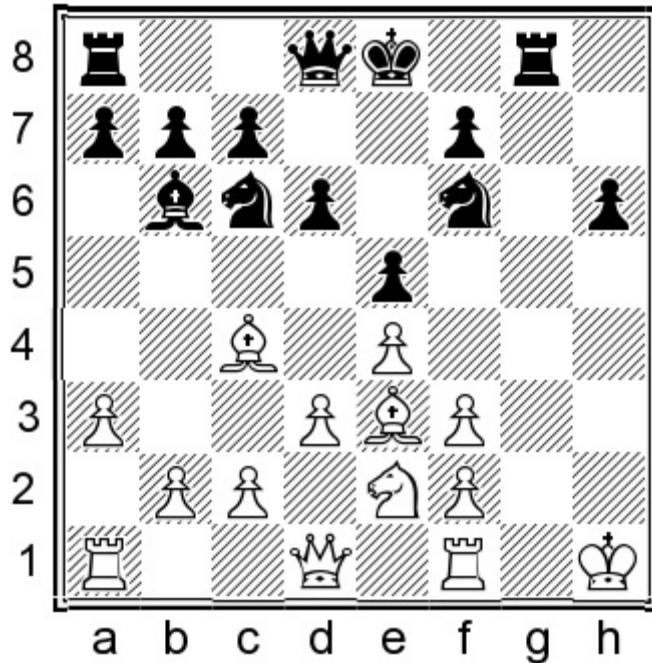
1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♘f6 3.♗c3 ♘c5 4.♗f3 ♘c6 5.d3 d6 6.h3 h6 7.a3 ♘b6 8.0-0



8...g5!?

Actually, though I couldn't find any, I guess there must be some earlier occurrences of this idea. Maybe Anderssen was inspired by the Paulsen-Morphy game, where we saw Black executing this advance in a slightly different position, having castled kingside already.

9.♕e3 g4 10.hxg4 ♕xg4 11.♗e2? ♕xf3 12.gxf3 ♜g8+ 13.♔h1



(Exercise no 73)

An easy exercise for a change. All moves with the ♜f6 are winning (though 13...♜d5, 13...♜h5 and the move played are the strongest).

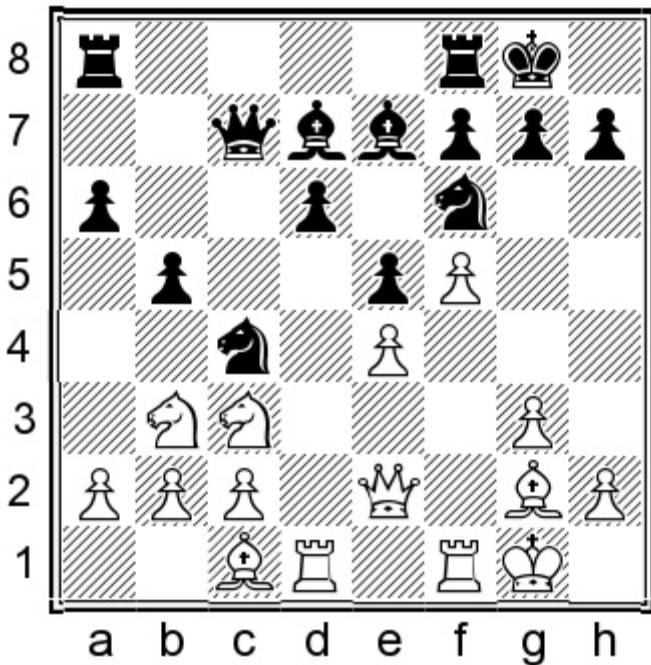
13...♜xe4! 14.♝g3 ♜h4+ 15.♝g2 ♜xg3+ 16.fxg3 ♜xg3+ 17.♚h1 ♜h3+ 18.♝g1 ♜xe3+ 19.♜f2 ♜xf2 mate.

After their match, Morphy travelled back to America and did not return to (serious) chess again. But Anderssen kept playing, and actually became more active, and until the end of his life in 1879 he was one of the leading players in the world. In 1866 he lost a match to Steinitz (about which more later), but he won the London 1862 tournament and the Baden-Baden 1870 tournament (ahead of Steinitz), the two strongest tournaments in this period.

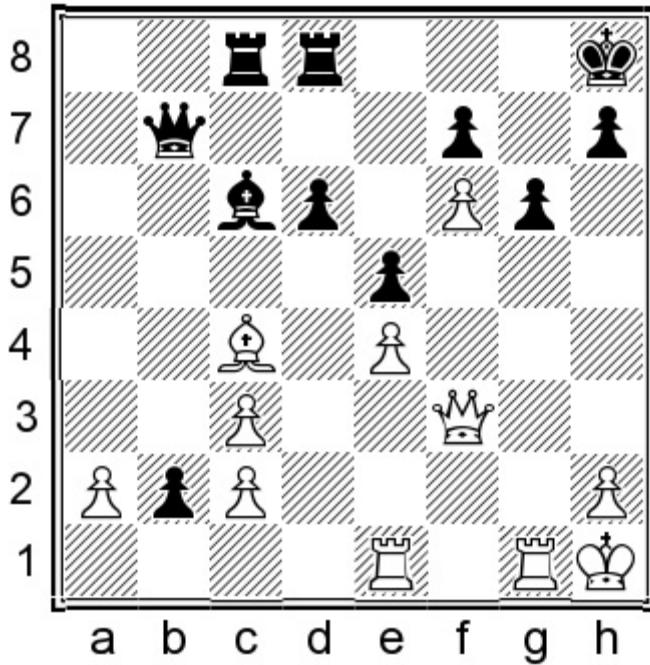
I will end this appreciation of Anderssen with a game from one of his last tournaments, Paris 1878. I'm in danger of using the word 'modern' too often, but this game really could have been played today. Black's play on the c-file, the manoeuvre ...♝e5-c4, the struggle around the d5-square and finally Black's triumph on the long diagonal: this is a model Sicilian game.

Joseph Henry Blackburne – Adolf Anderssen Paris 1878

1.e4 c5 2.♝c3 e6 3.g3 ♜c6 4.♝g2 ♜f6 5.♝ge2 a6 6.d4 cxd4 7.♝xd4 ♜c7 8.0-0 ♜e7 9.♝e3 0-0 10.♝e2 d6 11.♜ad1 ♜d7 12.♝b3 ♜e5! 13.f4 ♜c4 14.♝c1 e5! 15.f5 b5!



16.g4 b4 17.g5 bxc3 18.gxf6 ♜xf6 19.bxc3 ♜b5 20.♝f3 ♜fd8 21.♝h1 ♜b6 22.♝g1 ♜ac8 23.♝d2 ♜c6 24.♝e3 ♜c4 25.♝c1 a5 26.♝f1 ♜b7 27.♝e1 a4 28.♝xc4 axb3 29.♝h6 ♜h8 30.♝g5 ♜xg5 31.♝xg5 b2 32.f6 g6 33.♝gg1



33...b1=Q 34.Qd3 Q1b6 35.Qh3 Qxe4+ 36.Qxe4 d5 37.Qgf1 dxе4 38.Qh6 Qg8 39.Qg5 e3+ 40.Qg1 e2+ 41.Qf2 Qf3 0-1

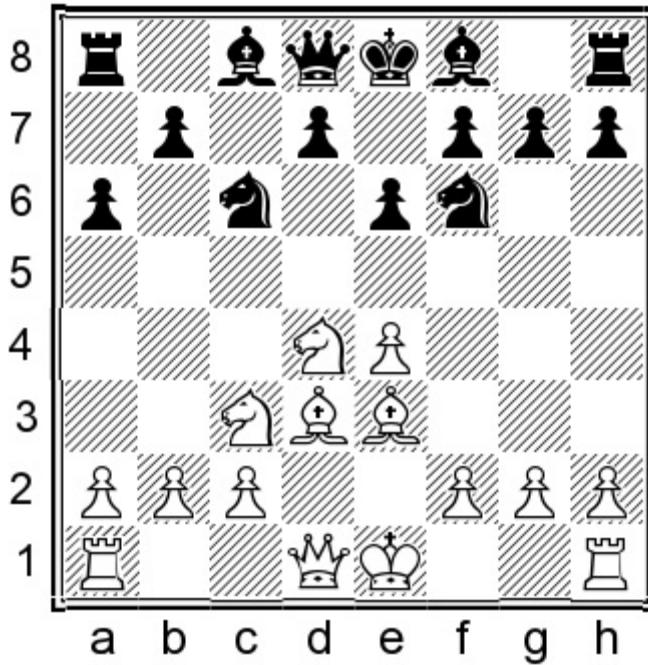
It is significant that even Bobby Fischer studied Anderssen's handling of the Sicilian. Savielly Tartakower once said that 'the most important novelties are hidden in the games of the old masters.' Fischer took this advice to heart and at the most important point in his career he employed an idea used by Anderssen almost a century before.⁵⁵

Boris Spassky

Robert James Fischer

World Championship match, Reykjavik 1972 (21)

1.e4 c5 2.Qf3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.Qxd4 a6 5.Qc3 Qc6 6.Qe3 Qf6 7.Qd3

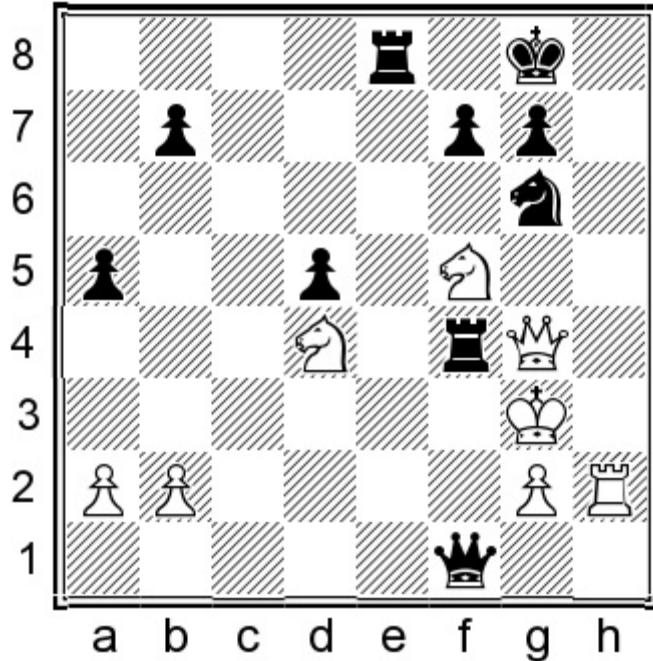


7...d5! 8.exd5 exd5 9.0-0 ♖d6

Black has equalized and went on to win this game and with it the world title.

In the game that inspired Fischer, Anderssen was less lucky. After he had equalized in the above way, he went on his way to the win as well, but just before he got there disaster struck – in a rather dramatic way, as related by an eye-witness, especially if you take into consideration that this tournament was held to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Anderssen’s chess career, and that because of this loss, he missed the first prize in the end.

**Carl Göring
Adolf Anderssen
Leipzig 1877**



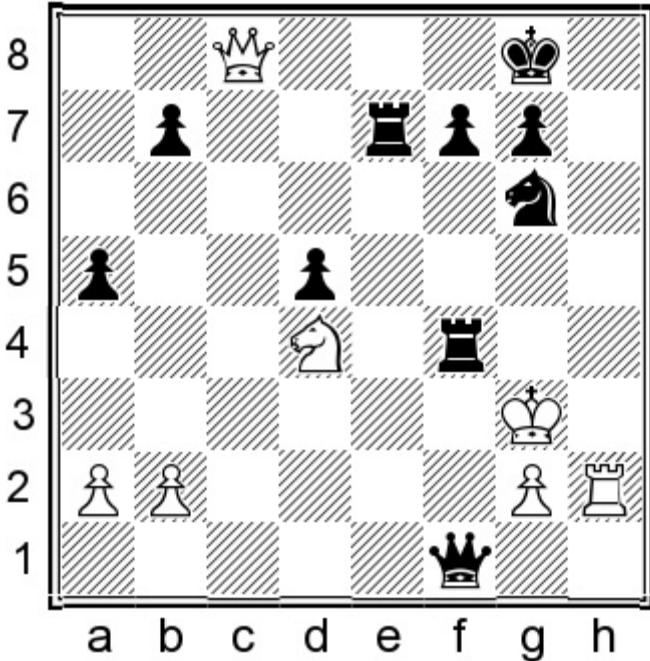
White to move

After his last move 33... $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ Anderssen maybe expected his opponent to resign, but Göring had a last surprise in store.

34. $\mathbb{Q}e7+!?$

Desperation, Anderssen must have thought. Now 34... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ was a simple win, to exchange queens after 35. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{W}xf4$ and win the endgame, or even better, keep the queens on with 35... $\mathbb{W}d3+$, winning in the attack.

34... $\mathbb{Q}xe7?! 35.\mathbb{W}c8+$



(Exercise no 74)

On executing this move, Göring announced mate in three.

‘Was? Mich mattsetzen?’ Anderssen said in disbelief, and with a shaky hand he grasped his knight.

35...♞f8??

‘Allerdings, Herr Professor!’

36.♝xf8+! ♜xf8 37.♜h8 mate.

It quickly turned out that with 35...♝e8! 36.♝xe8+ ♜f8, Black would still have been winning. On seeing this, Göring could not stop laughing. Quite understandably, it took Anderssen rather more time to see the fun of it.⁵⁶

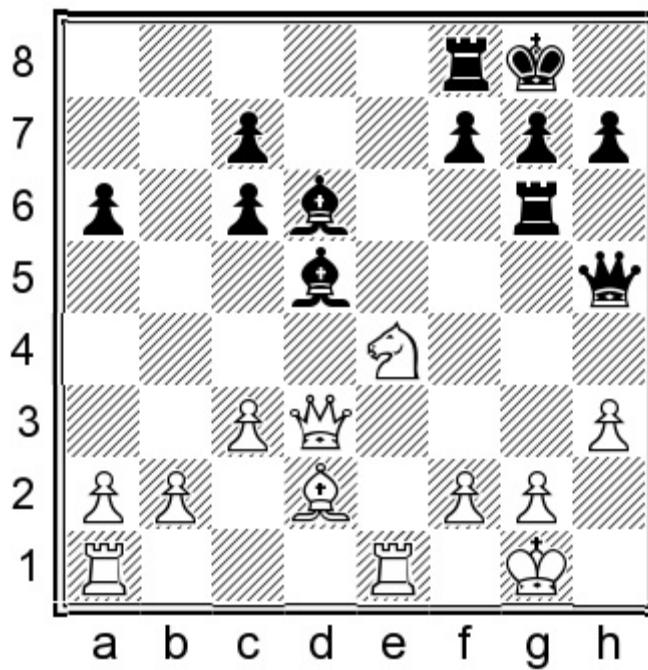
With the death of Anderssen in 1879, the Sicilian lost one of its strongest supporters (with only Paulsen left amongst the top players) and it took some fifty years before it slowly started to regain popularity, for one thing because the great proponent of the ‘modern’ school had a dislike of the Sicilian. In the *Modern Chess Instructor* it’s not even mentioned.

Those who think I’m cherry-picking to turn Anderssen’s reputation upside down are invited to play over the games from the serious tournaments he was in. I’m sure you will find out that this romantic, anti-positional ‘attack at all costs’ imago is a nonsensical caricature.

In *My Great Predecessors* Kasparov discusses Anderssen under the heading ‘Genius of combinations’. But he was a very versatile player, with lots of positional ideas and experimental openings. Although every chess player could be satisfied to be remembered for those three famous games mentioned previously, I think Anderssen deserves even better.

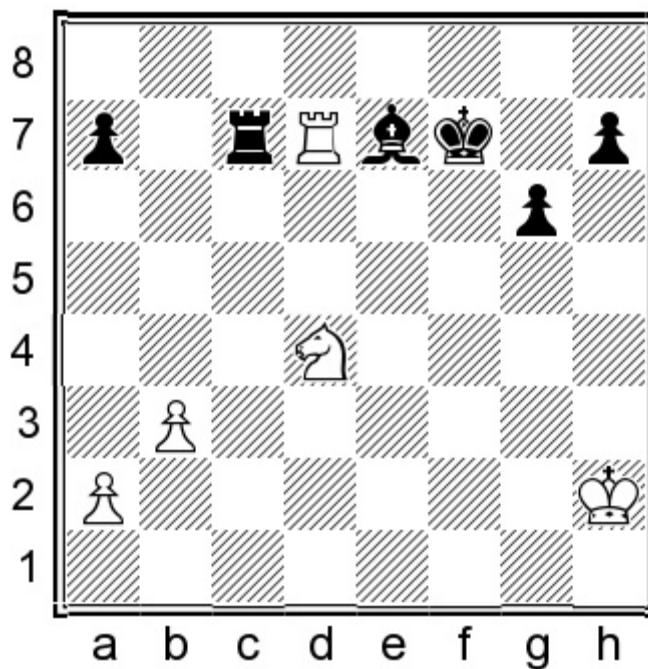
Exercises for Chapter 15

75 (go to the solution)

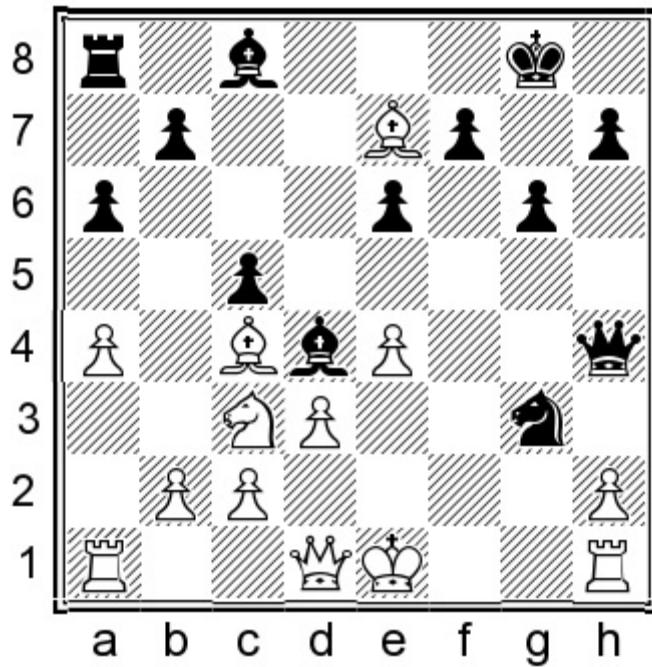


Black to move

76 (go to the solution)



White to move



Black to move

15

From the coffeehouse to the arena

In the second half of the 19th century, chess activity slowly expanded. The tournament in London 1851 was the first international event and it took a while before the next important tournament was organized, but those intervals became shorter with time. Also the number of published games gradually increased as well as the number of books, articles and columns on chess.

The second international tournament in London in 1862 was in several respects an important event. I have already mentioned the experimental opening play in this tournament. Also special was the first appearance of Steinitz in the international spotlight. But even more important were the improvements made in the playing modus and conditions. It was the first all-play-all event and the first with a form of time measurement.

We already saw Staunton complaining about opponents thinking forever, especially Williams, although a contemporary noted that ‘had the charge been perfectly true [...] which Mr. Williams utterly denies, [Staunton] would only have been beaten with weapons introduced by himself, and which he has long had the reputation of being an adept in using.’⁵⁷

Our heroes from the last few chapters, Morphy and Anderssen, were known to play rather quickly, but they too had to deal with contemplative adversaries occasionally. A contemporary of Anderssen notes:

'Anderssen himself complained bitterly over the slow play of Steinitz in their 1866 match. This drawn out sort of play, even on obvious moves, had made him nervous; he often jumped to his feet and went to an adjoining room with the request to a spectator to call him when it was his turn to move.'⁵⁸

In those days, without clocks and, in general, with rather rapid games, it might have been considered courteous to stay at the board while the game was in progress. The following observation about Morphy – always a gentleman at the board – who had to deal with the slowness of Paulsen, seems to suggest this. On one such occasion 'Morphy sat calmly looking on, without the slightest evidence of impatience' as Paulsen took two hours to make his move.⁵⁹ Steinitz's biographer Landsberger notes:

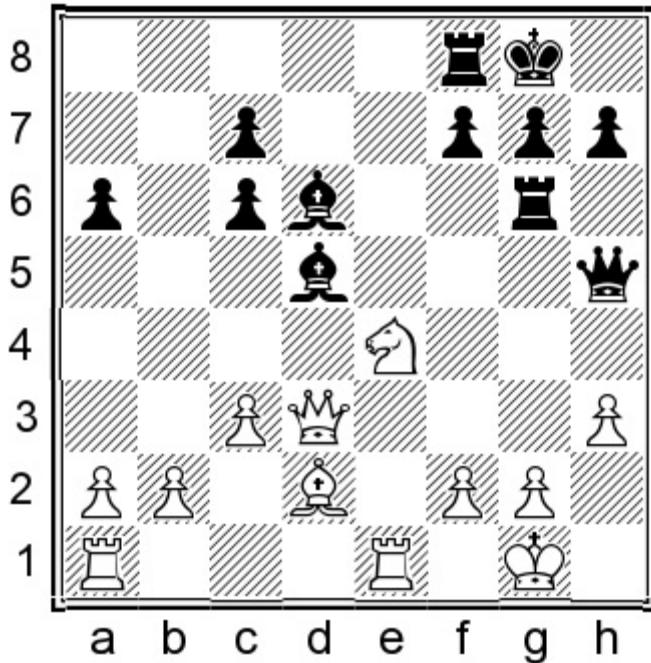
'Morphy sat calmly while Paulsen consumed 11 hours to his 25 minutes of their second game, but at one stage went [...] to the restaurant to take a glass of sherry and a biscuit. His usually equable temper was so disturbed that he crunched his fist and said "Paulsen shall never win a game of me while he lives", and he never did.' To which Landsberger adds the famous quote of the English player Henry Buckle: 'Sir, the slowness of genius is hard to bear, but the slowness of mediocrity is insufferable.'⁶⁰

The game Landsberger is referring to is the second game of the final of the first American Chess Congress, which might be called 'the game of the exchanged moves': 'In his second game with Paulsen, after the German had taken repeatedly 30, 45 and 50 minutes (and in some instances over one hour) upon his moves, Morphy became so thoroughly worn out that in his haste he made what should have been his second move first and was only able to draw a won game.'⁶¹

Louis Paulsen

Paul Morphy

New York 1857

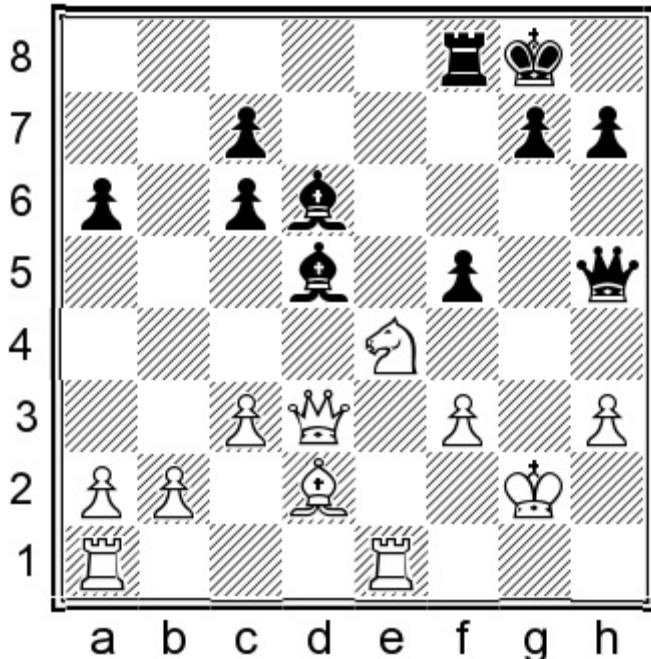


Black to move

(Exercise no 75)

Black has a tremendous attack and he could win without sacrificing; 21...f5 22.Qg3 Wh4, threatening 23...Qxg3 or 23...f4, was equally strong.

21...Qxg2+! 22.Qxg2 f5 23.f3



Now 23...fxe4 24.fxe4 (or 24.Qxe4 Wh6+ 25.Qh1 Qxf3) 24...Wh6+ 25.Qh1 Qf2 would have won straight away. Instead Morphy played the second move first, giving White a sudden possibility to

escape.

23... $\mathbb{W}g6+$? 24. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ h6 25.c4 $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 26.h4 $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 27. $\mathbb{W}c2$ hxg5 28.hxg5

Black is close to lost here but Morphy finally got away with a draw.

Time measurement was an enormous step in perfecting playing conditions. From this moment on, serious games in tournaments and matches started to become more or less uniform, with playing rates resembling those of our time. It's easy to underestimate the importance of setting a standard for what a serious game should look like.

But there are other factors that matter, such as a good playing venue and a silent public. In *Chess Praxis*, Staunton comments on the match between Morphy and Anderssen. It was played in Paris, which might have led to some bias against the German, and at the time Morphy was a celebrated person in Paris, looked upon as a wonder of human intelligence.

'[Anderssen] was asked if there were any disturbing influences of an external kind which militated against him, and how the spectators behaved. [...] As to the lookers-on, those nearest the table, as the proper witnesses and the honorary seconds, behaved irreproachably; amongst the other spectators, however, there were unmistakable, and sometimes very annoying exhibitions of sympathy for his opponent; signs of impatience were chiefly shown when the German took time for reflection; especially conspicuous in this respect was a certain bald-headed Italian, who usually contrived to place himself close to the American. To such influences may be attributed the turn in the sixth game of the match at move twenty-eight.'⁶²

The moment referred to is the moment discussed in a previous chapter with Lasker's comments (*Exercise 68*). Marin gave a comprehensive analysis of this game, and when you play this over from a book, you might involuntarily picture with it the tournament conditions we are used to today, but this was not how it was. It is more accurate to imagine yourself playing in the middle of a crowded pub.



Of course, also today you might occasionally be confronted with playing conditions that aren't perfect. Trying to imagine what it would be like to play in the days of Anderssen and Morphy, I remembered a report of a team match in my club's magazine some time ago, which was headed 'The Billiards Match'.

'On our way to Oss I told my teammates the playing venue was called the "Elpie Bar" and Wim Gerritsen's eyes started shining. Wim is after all a great billiards fan, and hearing this name he immediately got visions of a cafe with a beautiful billiard. So it was with subdued admiration that Wim took in the playing venue: a beautiful billiard with an electronic scoreboard and a few players with immaculate billiard costumes. Between this billiard and the bar, a number of tables was

crammed in with as many chessboards on them as possible.

To our great amazement, more and more men with billiard costumes entered the venue, and just a second after we had manoeuvred ourselves behind the boards, the billiard players started their match as well. Thanks to the loud voice of the billiards umpire we got excellently informed about the progress of this match. We almost started joining the ever growing number of fans in applauding when a local favourite had managed to score a carambole. The involvement of the chess players with the billiards happening was steadily increasing since it turned out that when the playing ball was situated on a certain place on the billiard, the opponent of Aad van Wieringen was kindly asked to give room to the billiards player, who only then was able to score a carambole.

Aad did not sustain this very long and refused to play on. An alternative room was offered to him, and manoeuvring arduously in-between the pastries he and his opponent took seat in the kitchen of the establishment. Aad did not manage more than a draw, though he tried with great effort to bring the full point in. Apparently a theoretically won rook endgame is in practice much more difficult to win, especially when your opponent is keenly looking at the pastries behind your back.⁶³

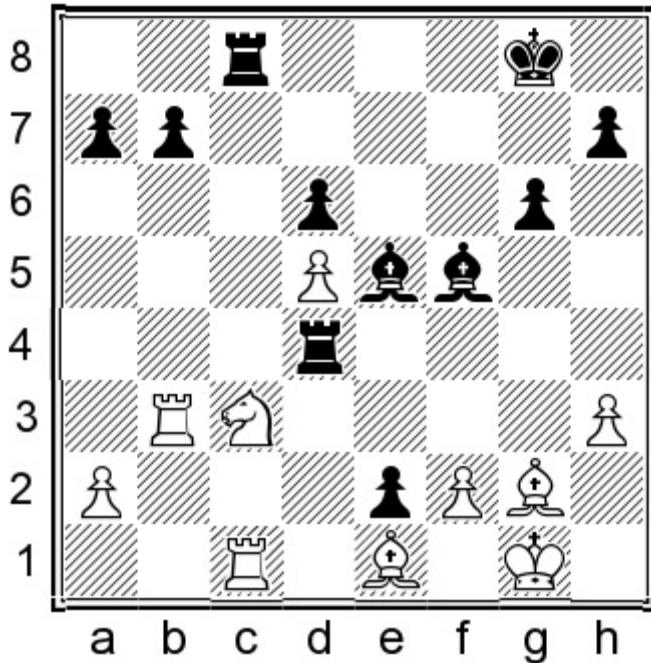
In the history of chess competition, playing conditions have constantly improved and in recent years several tournaments and matches have been played with the players visible to the public but isolated from the outside world by a noise-reducing pane of glass. Quite a difference compared to having some chess hooligan sitting side by side with your opponent, starting to grumble when you are pondering over your next move.

The next story from the World Championship match between Tal and Botwinnik is somewhere in between. It concerns the famous sixth game, in which Tal took a two-point lead. Concurring with the growing tension, the public became louder with every move.

Mikhail Botvinnik

Mikhail Tal

Moscow 1960



Black to move

Black has emerged with a winning position out of the complications that started with a spectacular knight sacrifice on move 21. His next move (28... $\mathbb{Q}f4$) didn't throw away the win, but he had a much better option, as Tal indicates in his book on the match:

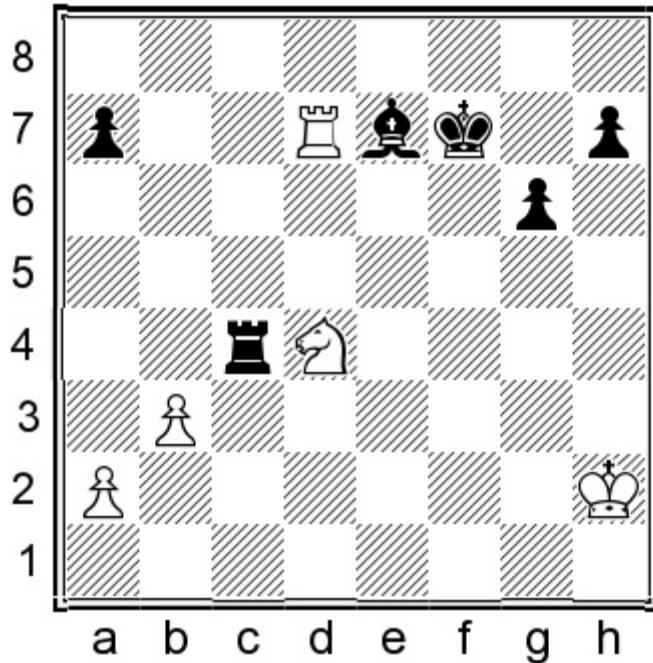
'Unfortunately Black missed a possibility to end the game quickly and beautifully by 28... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}bxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}d1$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}b2$. There were more than chess reasons for this: the noise in the auditorium had prompted the referees of the match to carry out their threat and move the game to a closed room. This of course turned out to be an extremely severe warning to the spectators and in the following games there was no need to take such measures, but one does not feel very pleasant when, with an hour remaining on the clock, one is politely asked to move into the wings in the very heat of the battle [...] in any case, I am not used to playing in 'nomadic' conditions.'

The audience at the Soviet Union championships of 1937 showed even greater involvement when local hero Archil Ebralidze was presented with a sudden opportunity.

Archil Ebralidze

Viacheslav Ragozin

Tbilisi 1937



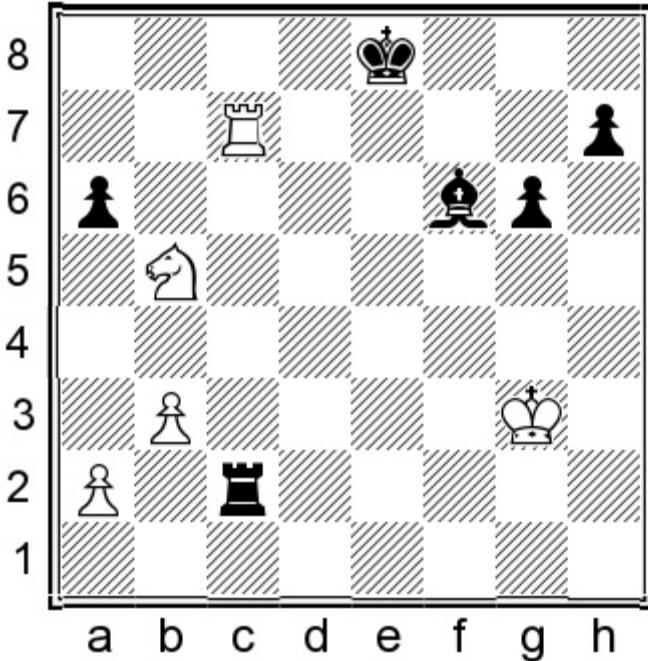
Black to move

Black can try to play for a win, but for that he has to give back his extra pawn on a7. Ragozin however saw a way to play on with that pawn.

40...♝c7? (Exercise no 76)

At first the public was merely amused by Ragozin's illusion but when Ebralidze kept thinking they became slightly worried. Some shouted 'Archil, take the rook!' but Ebralidze didn't react. Even louder cheers followed: 'Take the rook, Archil, take it!' Hearing these encouragements, Ebralidze got a bit irritated and mumbled something like 'That simple a thing I can see too, you patzers', and resumed his thinking. Finally he decided upon another move.

41.♜d5? ♜f6 42.♝b5 ♜c2+ 43.♚g3 a6 44.♜d7+ ♜e8 45.♜c7



Things already were beyond repair, but as a crude echo the bewitched c7-square decides the game – now there is a double attack.

45...Qe5+ 0-1

Botwinnik was in some respects ahead of his time as a professional, and in his preparations he also paid attention to more practical aspects. I believe it was for this match against Tal that he trained with the radio on and with his second blowing smoke at him, to be prepared for anything.

A story from earlier times shows that this could be useful preparation. It also demonstrates something we are used to see in other sports, but not in chess: home advantage. The match Harrwitz-Löwenthal 1853 was played in the London Divan and Harrwitz was the regular professional there. As a journalist noted, the public was clearly on his side:

‘As the match inclined decidedly in favor of Löwenthal, one man said, in my hearing, that he had sent an organ boy to play before the window, so as to distract the attention of Löwenthal, who was known to be very nervous. He also did not like smoking, and had stipulated beforehand that visitors should not smoke; but some of the Divan party made it a point to smoke as near to Löwenthal as possible, and I even saw one man light his cigar in Löwenthal’s candle and puff the smoke into his face.’

Finally, Löwenthal lost the match.⁶⁴ Lasker has been accused as well of bringing (cheap) cigars into battle but for obvious reasons this form of warfare definitely belongs to the past.

In the history of chess there are many more stories about bad playing conditions that in some cases may have influenced the results. For example, Chigorin complained heavily about the climate in Havana, where he played two World Championship matches against Steinitz (in later chapters we will see some games from them). He also suffered much from his smoking opponents as his daughter

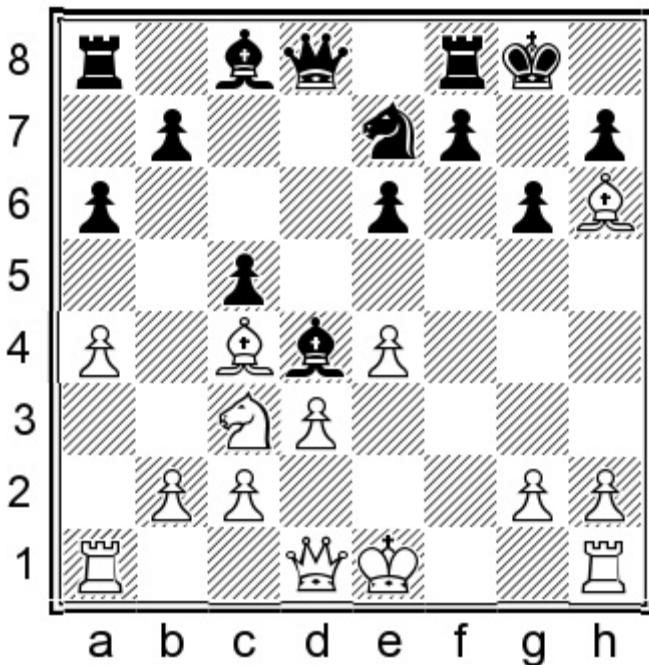
related: ‘Being a very nervous man, my father could never stand any smells and particularly the smell of cigars, while such serious opponents as Lasker, Steinitz and others wouldn’t let a cigar leave their mouths while they were playing. They enveloped my father in cigar smoke, which he couldn’t stand. He became stressed and made blunders.’⁶⁵

On the more modest level that I have been performing at throughout my career, the risk that the playing conditions are not optimal is a bit higher than at the top level. One occasion I have rather fond memories of is a match from the Dutch team championships in winter 1992. It was freezing cold and the journey out was quite an enterprise already. The playing venue was a rather forlorn former school building and because of a broken heating system it was just as cold inside as outside. In his report for our club magazine, my team-mate Anton van Rijn regretted not having brought his winter mittens, wondering how it would have been possible to write down the moves, castle and play in time pressure wearing them.

Maybe it was out of an urge to get it over with as soon as possible, but I managed to produce a very nice miniature. Remarkably my team-mate Heico Kerkmeester also won in 15 moves playing Black – with an Exchange French!

Mark van Schaardenburg – Willy Hendriks Zaanstad 1992

1.e4 c5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.f4 g6 4.♘f3 ♗g7 5.♘c4 e6 6.f5 ♘ge7 7.fxe6 dxe6 8.d3 0-0 9.♘f4 a6 10.a4 ♘d4 11.♘xd4 ♘xd4 12.♘h6



12...♘f5!

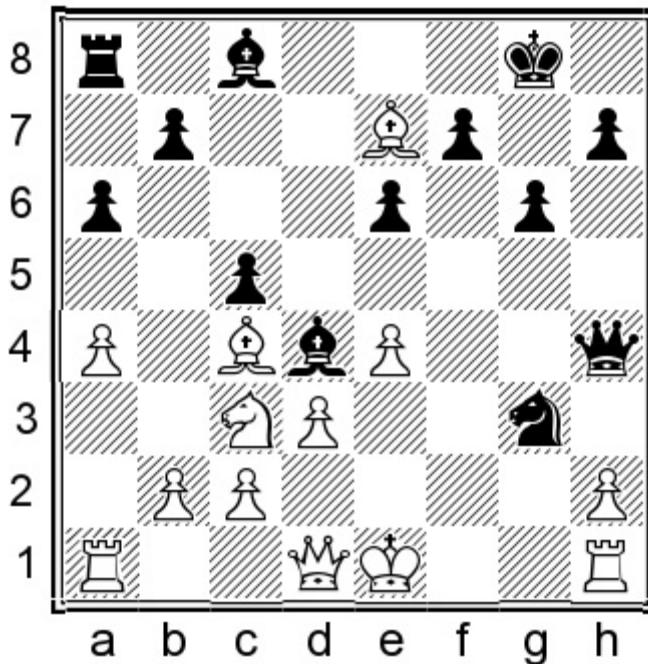
The start of a deeply calculated combination. Now White backed off with

13.♘f4

and lost quickly after

13...e5 14.Qxe5 Qe3 15.Qe2 Qxc4.

The critical line was 13.Qxf8 Wh4+ 14.g3 Qxg3!, which seems to win easily, but I noticed the smart defensive try 15.Qe7!.



(Exercise no 77)

Here I was happy to find the next magnet combination: 15...Qf2+! 16.Qxf2 Qxe4+ 17.Qe3 (or 17.Qg2 Wf2+ 18.Qh3 e5+) 17...Wf2+ 18.Qxe4 f5+ 19.Qe5 Wd4 mate.

A voluminous book could be filled with this type of stories, and I'm sure that my experience pales in comparison with many others. In the older days the playing conditions were generally worse than today, but gradually throughout history they have become better.

For one last example, during the match that serious competition more or less started with, La Bourdonnais-McDonnell, some spectators behaved rather impertinently. In one game, with a complicated position, an incidental visitor came to the board, shook the hands of the players, asked them all kinds of things, like who was to move and if it was their first game of the day, and even made some moves on the board.⁶⁶

London 1862 saw Steinitz entering the international arena. Until the end of the century he played a dominant role in the chess world. From around 1872 Steinitz started to develop his 'modern school'. In the next chapters we will have a look at how chess was played before Steinitz started to spread his new ideas.

16

Attack at all costs

Max Euwe

In books on the history of chess the term ‘Romantic chess era’ is used with some slight differences. Sometimes this era is supposed to have lasted from 1851 until 1870. Sometimes the match McDonnell-La Bourdonnais (1834) is mentioned as the starting point and the 1880s, with Steinitz explicitly advocating his ‘new school’, as the end. But the term ‘Romantic chess’ is also often used to characterize all the chess from the start of the present form of play (around 1500) until about 1880 – with the exception of Philidor.

I’m not sure who was the first to use the term ‘Romantic’ to describe the character of play in this period. After his famous win against Von Bardeleben at Hastings 1895, in the later days of his career, Steinitz commented, ‘Romanticism is not alien to me.’⁶⁷

Often Anderssen is depicted as the great hero of Romantic chess, but this is, as we have seen, a completely mistaken caricature. This raises the question of what Romantic chess looked like, supposing it ever existed at all. Take a look at the following characterizations.

‘Prior to the early days of international tournament chess in the middle 19th century, there was no such thing as defence in terms of a deliberately adopted strategy. Going over to defence was a sure sign that you had been outplayed and were now in for suffering. It was to be avoided by throwing your lot in with counterattack – no matter how promising or ill founded.’ (Robert Byrne)⁶⁸

‘I call the period 1820-1870 the ‘age of Attack’ because most players began the game by seeking an attack on the enemy king. [...] Defensive play was so poor that these attacks often succeeded.’ (David Hooper)⁶⁹

‘In the good old days of Morphy and Anderssen, everybody played brilliant chess. There was – to speak with some poetic license – only one style of play, and that was to attack and keep attacking. You either won gloriously or you succumbed to a counterattack and lost gloriously. Defence was an unknown art to these gallant knights.’ (Irving Chernev)⁷⁰

‘Around 1850 playing for the attack was taken as axiomatic. One didn’t wonder anymore why to play for the attack because this was, according to the ideas of those days, a consequence of the nature of the game.’ (Max Euwe)⁷¹



A portrait gallery of the Romantic chess style might look like the following: attack at all costs; gambit play and sacrificing; strong in the attack – weak in the defence; no deep (positional) plans; open play and a chivalrous attitude. And, on a different level, the contraposition between inspiration, intuition, the spark of genius versus a cool scientific attitude can be added.

If we take a look at the strong international tournaments prior to Steinitz starting to develop his theories – London 1851, London 1862, Paris 1867, Baden-Baden 1870 and Vienna 1873 – I find it really difficult to recognize the picture painted above. Maybe the Romantic type of play was dominant in the coffeehouses, but not many games played in these settings have been recorded and left to us. Looking at the serious games between the stronger players in the international tournaments, they make the same balanced impression as the games of today's players, albeit at a lower level.

'Attacking at all costs' and the combination of 'brilliant attacks and weak defence' seem to be the quintessence of Romantic chess. It sounds nice but it becomes a bit puzzling if you think about it longer. Suppose you have a chess club with all players being strong at attacking and weak at defending: what would the games look like?

Of course there was a lot of weak defensive play in those days – but also a lot of weak attacking play. The simple fact is that the stronger players were good at both and the weaker players bad at both.

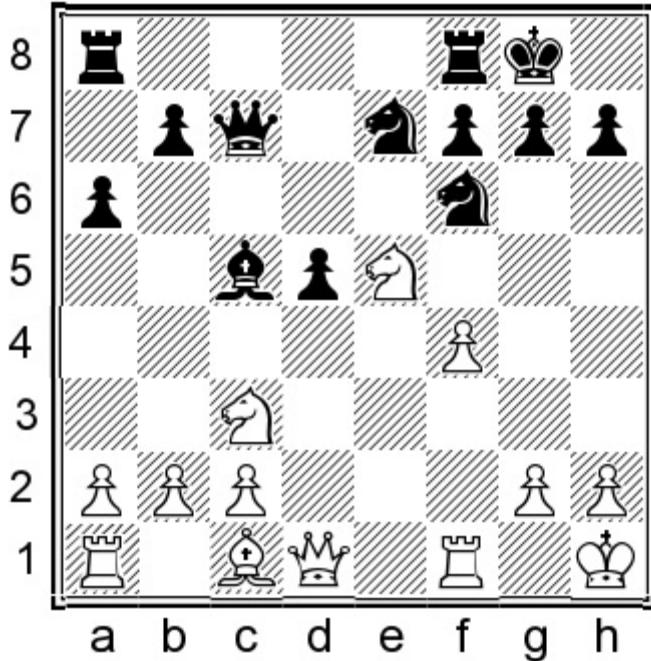
If you look at it on an individual level, every way to improve your attacking play will simultaneously improve your defensive play. Your attacks can only become stronger if you take into account the good defences. The lines you calculate will become more to the point if they take into account the strongest replies. If your brilliant attacking skills consist of ' $\mathbb{Q}xh7+$ and hope for the best', on average not much will come of it.

I would gladly show you some examples of this 'attack at all costs' strategy and of these feeble defences that crack under a minimum of pressure, but they are hard to come by. Well, perhaps the next two games come near.

Szymon Winawer

Ignatz Kolisch

Paris 1867



White to move

The players in this game finished respectively second and first in the strong Paris 1867 international tournament, with Steinitz coming third.

White's opening hasn't been a success. The best he can do is try to complete development with 14.♘d2, or even better,

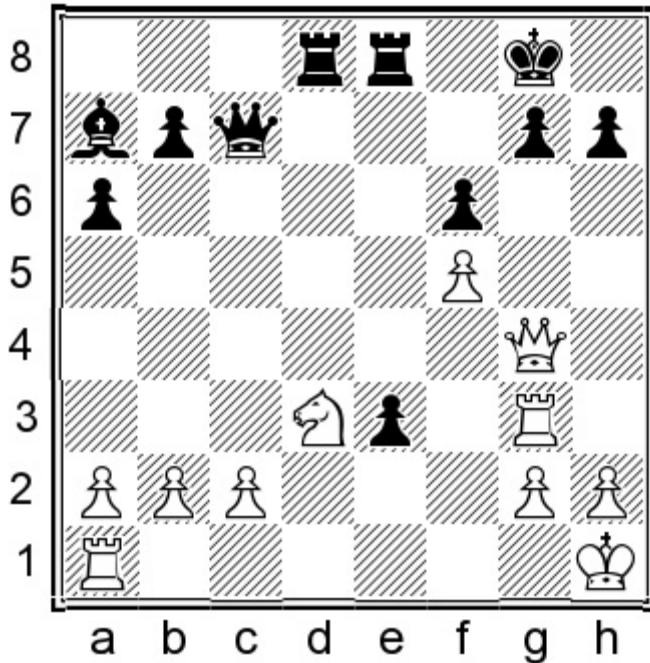
first 14.♗d3 followed by ♘d2 and bringing the a-rook into play. With his next move Winawer seems to go for the offensive.

14.♗f3?!

Is White trying to make the impossible happen or is this just a not-so-good move in a difficult position? Jules Arnous De Rivière, who also participated and wrote the tournament book, gives the following comment: 'Winawer starts the attack too early; he should have first brought his queenside pieces into play. Black has the better pieces and the isolated pawn is easy to defend.'⁷²

Maybe Winawer's play shows some romantic inspiration, but De Rivière's comment is very sensible and down to earth. It demonstrates that the stronger players of those days did not believe in attacks that could turn the tables.

14...♜ad8 15.♘d3 ♜a7 16.f5 d4 17.♘e2 ♜ed5 18.♘ef4 ♜fe8 19.♘xd5 ♜xd5 20.♗g3 ♜e3 21.♘xe3 dxе3 22.♗g4 f6



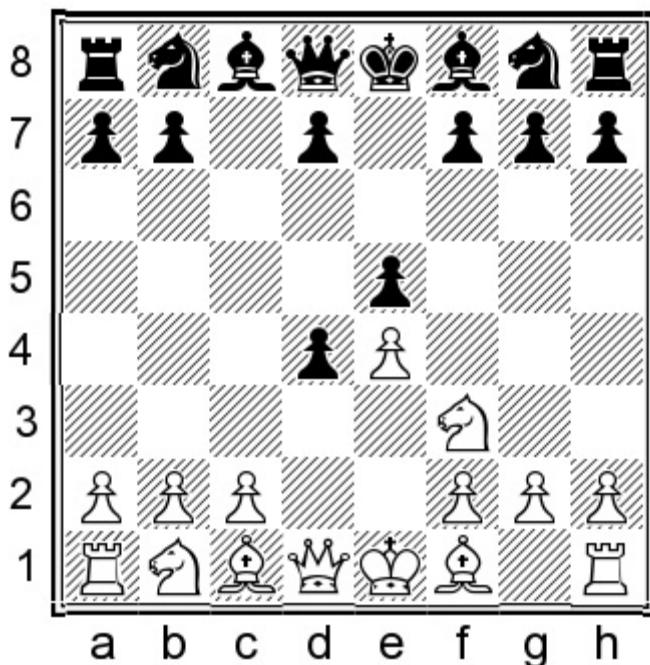
White's attack has led to nothing and thanks to his strong passed pawn Black won easily.

The next game is between two of the strongest Russian players of the time. Von Jaenisch is the author of one of the more influential textbooks of the 19th century.

This game is a rather crazy affair. It shows some bad defence and some attacking at all costs, but White had to do something after blundering a piece on move 4.

Ilia Shumov – Carl von Jaenisch St Petersburg 1851

1.e4 c5 2.d4 cxd4 3.♘f3 e5



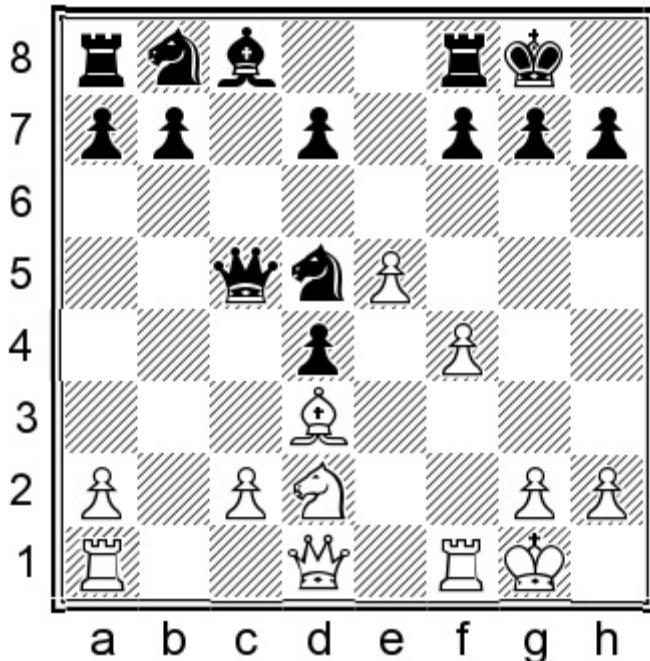
4.♘xe5?

Shumov apparently hadn't paid attention to Greco's lessons. Or was this on purpose? I find that hard to believe, but judging by his subsequent play, material balance was not much of a guiding principle for Shumov.

4...♝a5+ 5.b4!?

Adding an Evans-style pawn to the knight deficit.

5...♝xb4+ 6.♝d2 ♜xd2+ 7.♞xd2 ♜xe5 8.♝d3 ♜f6 9.0-0 0-0 10.f4 ♜c5 11.e5 ♜d5

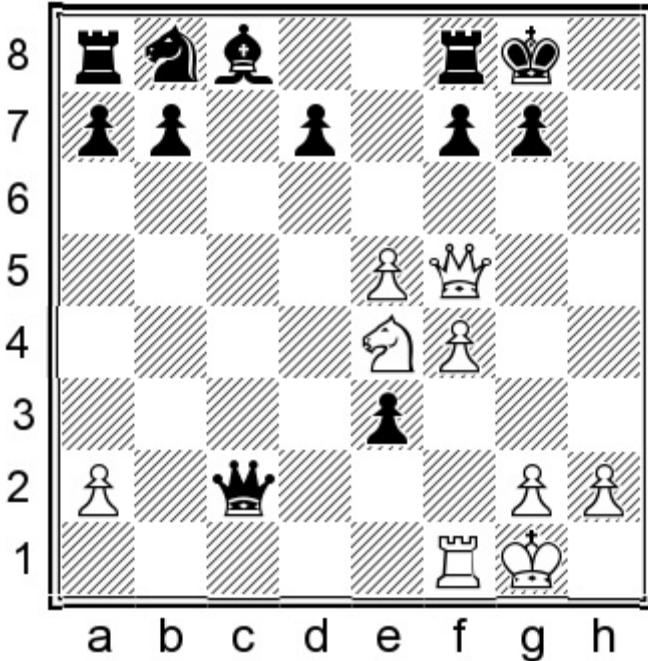


White has managed to get something of an attack going and after 12.♝h5 things are not so clear. But this is too slow for Shumov's taste.

12.♝xh7+!? ♜xh7 13.♝h5+ ♜g8 14.♞e4 ♜xc2

Black plays his role and takes everything that crosses his path; 14...♝b6 was more prudent.

15.♜ae1 ♜e3 16.♜xe3 dxе3 17.♝f5



White has added an extra exchange to the stakes and his remaining pieces are very menacing.

Now was the moment for Black to defend by giving something back. After 17... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ he has the better chances. For his greediness Black gets punished with a mating attack.

17... $\mathbb{Q}e2?$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f6+!$ $gxf6$ 19. $exf6$

and White soon won.

I have to admit this is not much; those who have better examples of Romantic chess are welcome to show them.

Perhaps it can be found in the coffeehouses of those days. However, the stronger players in this period could not simply impose their will on the opponent. When you become stronger you automatically become more positional in the sense of ‘playing according to the needs of the position’. For the romantic idea of ‘making the impossible happen’ the level of play had advanced too much, at least between players of about equal strength.

Attack and defence are connected to White and Black. The openings Black can choose from are traditionally called ‘defences’. One might expect that in the Romantic period, with its weak defensive play, the advantage of the first move (the initiative, the privilege to start the attack) would count for a great deal. But in the tournaments mentioned above (536 recorded games) the white players only managed to score 51%. This is even below the percentage white players score throughout the complete history of chess, which is around 55%.

If you look more closely at those games, you will quickly see that they are not played in an ‘attack at all costs’ style. The King’s Gambit and the Evans Gambit were popular (respectively 41 and 40 games) but the Ruy Lopez (76 games) had already surpassed these gambits in popularity.

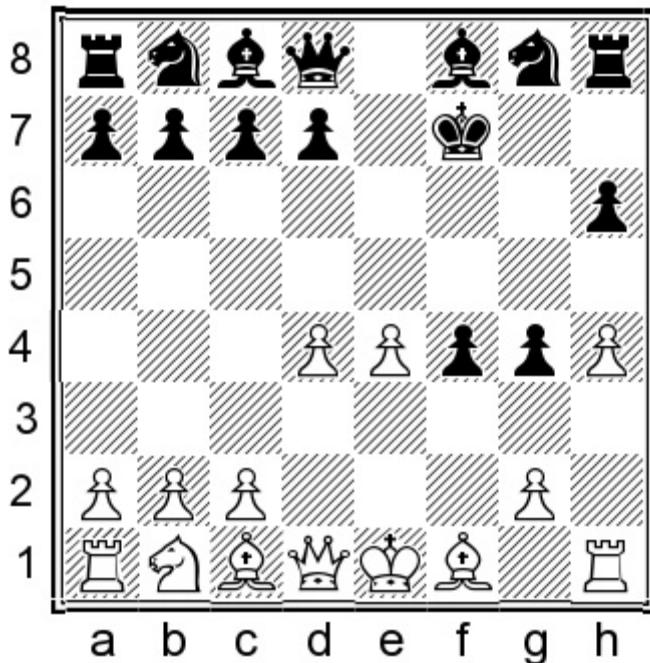
In the course of history we have come to the conclusion that both gambits may not be the best way for White to open a game but they are not that bad either. You are not burning all the bridges behind

you.

The King's Gambit

The King's Gambit had been the focus of attention from the early days of modern chess. In the second half of the 19th century there was already a lot of good theoretical knowledge on this opening and consequently it was played at a rather high level.

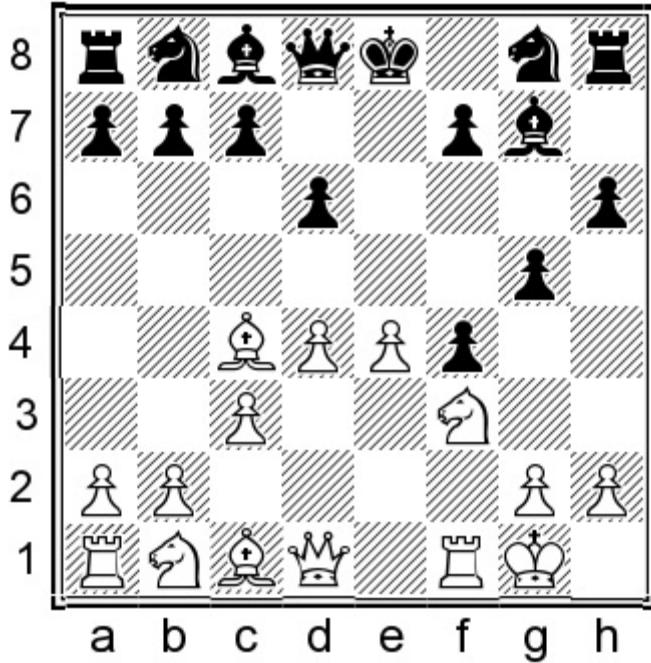
In a later chapter I will discuss the issue of how strong the players of the past were. One question that pops up in these discussions is about teleportation. To be able to make a comparison, one of the old guys should be teleported to our time or, vice versa, one of us should be teleported into the past. In the second category, a rather nightmarish scenario is to suddenly find yourself 150 years back in time, in a smoky coffeehouse, the noisy crowd gathering around your board. There is no clock, but they seem to think it's about time for you as Black to make a move and your opponent seems to know all the ins and outs of the position.



They played the King's Gambit at a high level because players and theoreticians had investigated the possibilities for attack *and* defence. And they found decent defensive measures, which is why the King's Gambit, even before Steinitz, was losing popularity.

As early as 1845, Von der Lasa concluded that Black can favourably hold on to the gambit pawn and the lines he gave are more or less still the main lines today.

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.♘f3 g5 4.♗c4 ♗g7 5.d4 d6 6.0-0 h6 7.c3



Tassilo von Heydebrand und der Lasa

Von der Lasa states that in this position Black is doing okay and that his best continuations are 7... $\mathbb{Q}c6$ and 7... $\mathbb{Q}e7$; both moves have remained the top choices over the years. The diagram shows one of the main reasons for the King's Gambit's relatively early decline in popularity. Black's pawn on f4 is not just an extra pawn, it also considerably hampers White's queenside development. Getting rid of this pawn is a major theme in a lot of (sacrificial) variations in the King's Gambit, but Black has been holding his own in this struggle over the years. We will have a look at the Steinitz Gambit later on, which is essentially trying to get the same nice centre and regain the f-pawn, albeit by making another concession, i.e. having to move the king to e2.

In 1865, one of the leading players, Gustav Neumann, published a book (together with Berthold Suhle) titled *Die neueste Theorie und Praxis des Schachspiels*. It contains 329 analysed games from the years 1857 to 1864, classified according to opening. I can't see anything 'romantic' in this book; on the contrary, it looks very much like today's opening books, with an objective search for the truth and with equal attention to attacking and defensive possibilities.



Regarding the King's Gambit, Neumann shares Von der Lasa's verdict:

'Not only the permanent possession of an extra pawn decides in favor of Black, but above that there is the important factor that Black's pawn chain on the kingside hampers White's play very much and often will be able to advance further to initiate a successful counter attack. For the gambiteer it is especially inconvenient

that his queens bishop will be longtime obstructed.⁷³

Neumann also prefers the Ruy Lopez to the King's Gambit as White's best try for an opening advantage and he notes that the stronger players in his days share this preference:

'These lines of play [...] have therefore gotten out of fashion lately and are only rarely employed by the elite players at least [...] On the contrary nowadays Lopez's attack is preferred when one wants to play a primarily solid game, especially in serious contests, where most players shun the risk of a gambit.'⁷⁴

The Romantic era, or Romantic attitude, is often depicted in contrast to the following period, the scientific one. Steinitz is considered to be the one who introduced the scientific method into chess and he often used the word 'scientific' in connection with his 'new school'. But if you look at what Von der Lasa said about the analysis above, you already have a perfect example of the scientific attitude in the development of chess theory.

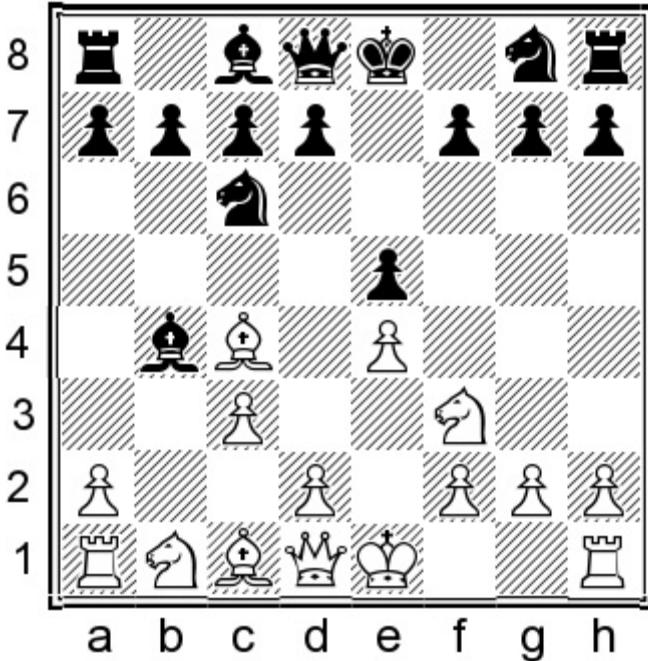
'With regard to Chess theory in general, I must [...] remark the system of investigation made use of in this science [...] resembles in many respects mathematical examinations; nevertheless, he who expects to see an equal strictness of demonstration in a position on the Chessboard, as he is entitled to find in a geometrical construction, will be greatly mistaken: we have no scale by which to measure the strength of a position, we can only discover the legitimate result by continuing the game while we endeavour always to make the best move on both sides. One trial follows the other; and the whole method is subjected to frequent inaccuracies, but leaves the student, however, with a persuasion of the real and unalterable truth. [...]

Respecting the King's Gambit [...] our task will be to prove that the Pawn may be kept without encumbering the second player's position, and we shall then come to the conclusion that Black ought to win. Of course such investigations are applicable only to those methods of attack already known, and prove by no means prejudicial to future discoveries; but until the attacks have been improved our arguments must hold good.'⁷⁵

The Evans Gambit

As a player, Captain Evans did not play a prominent role in his day (the first half of the 19th century), but his gambit turned out to be one of the distinguishing elements of the chess played in the 19th century, together with the King's Gambit. Morphy, Anderssen and Chigorin were amongst its biggest supporters.

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.b4 ♗xb4 5.c3



You might characterize the Evans Gambit as a ‘pure’ gambit. The pawn that White sacrifices (the b-pawn) is not the most important one. In return White gets (at least) one extra move in the struggle for the centre with c2-c3 and d2-d4. Also the half-open b-file ($\mathbb{B}b1$ or $\mathbb{W}b3$) and especially the option to play $\mathbb{Q}c1-a3$ (see Morphy’s games) might come in handy. Some initiative for a pawn: that’s why I used the term ‘pure’, for example in comparison with the King’s Gambit, where the extra pawn on f4 determines the character of the play.

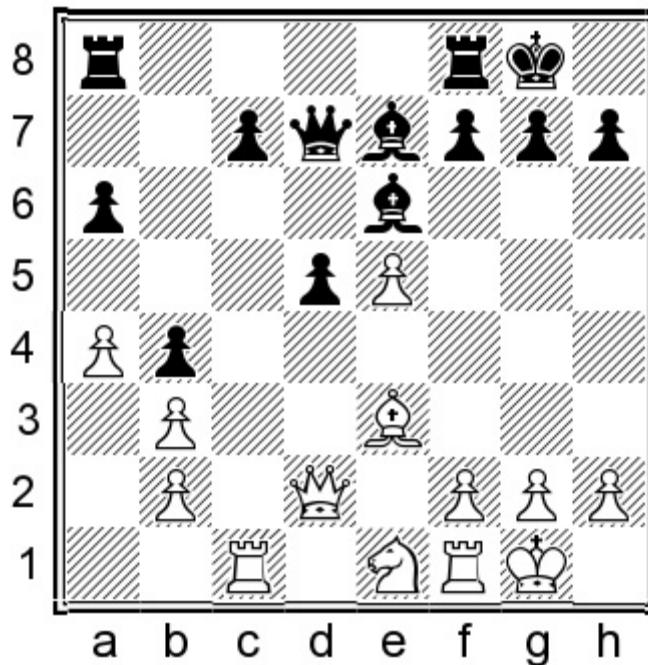
Just like the King’s Gambit, the Evans Gambit was the subject of a lot of theoretical investigation and discussion, and accordingly it was played at a rather high level. In the book mentioned, Neumann dedicates more than 70 pages to it, again with a purely objective attitude, with equal attention to the attacking and defensive possibilities. Neumann concludes that there still is no definitive theoretical verdict, which makes the choice a matter of personal preference and style of play:

‘The attack of Ruy Lopez has, in comparison with the Evans gambit, the advantage of its fundamental solidity, whereas the latter gives rise to more lively and interesting attacks. A preference for the one or the other of those two ways of playing will always depend upon the individual talent.’⁷⁶

Neumann seems to slightly prefer White’s side of play in the Evans, but in the Baden-Baden tournament of 1870, at which we will take a closer look in the next chapter, he defended the Black side in three games, with great success, winning them all. Looking at Chernev’s quote above, that ‘defense was an unknown art to these gallant knights’, I think the only conclusion can be that, though it sounds nice, it is complete nonsense.

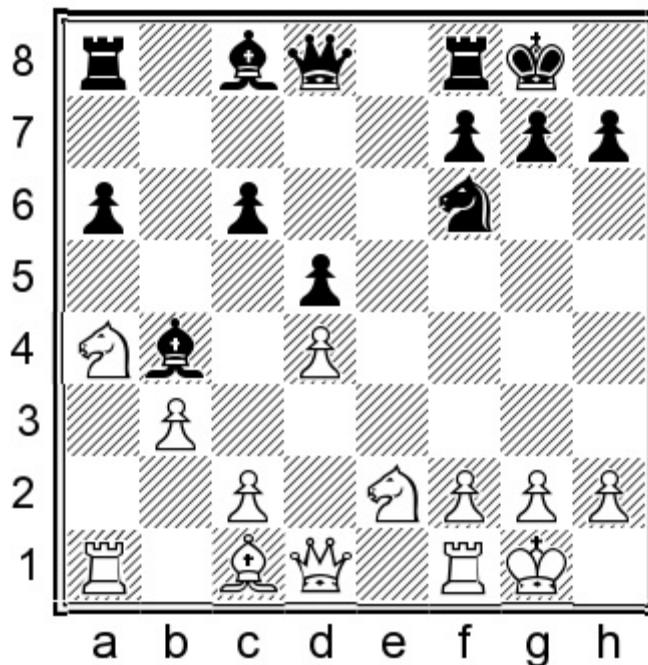
Exercises for Chapter 17

78 (go to the solution)



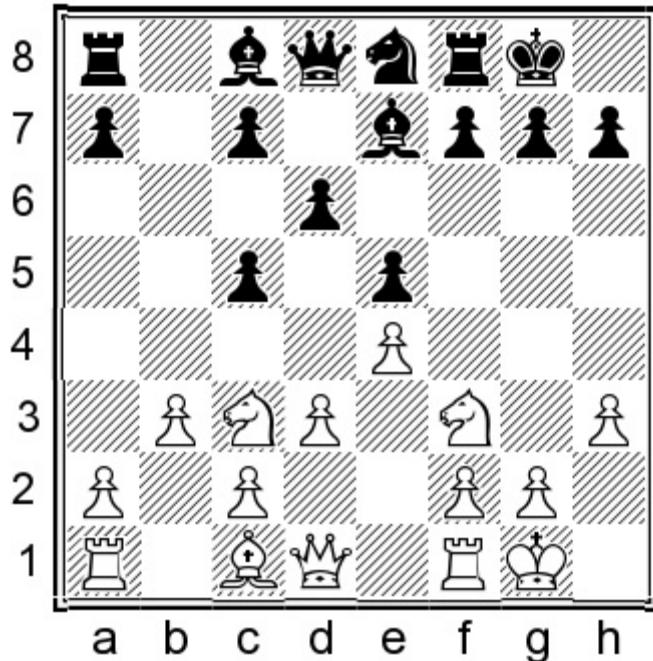
White to move

79 (go to the solution)



White to move

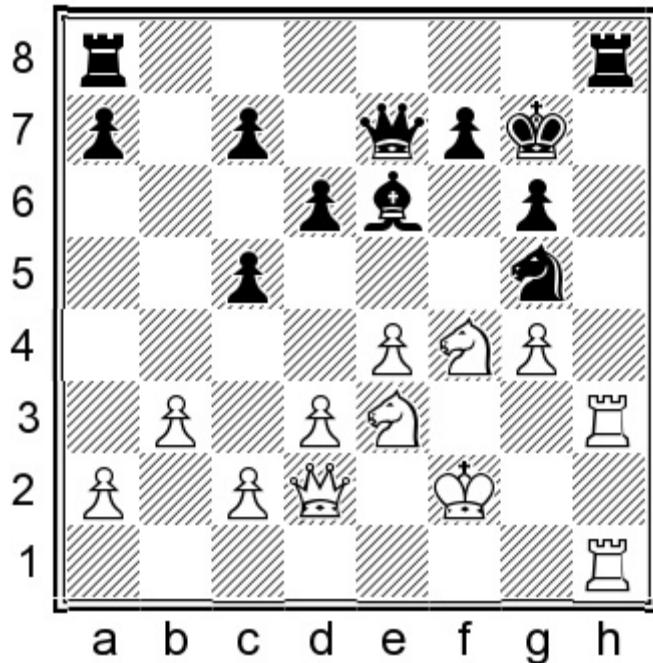
80 (go to the solution)



White to move

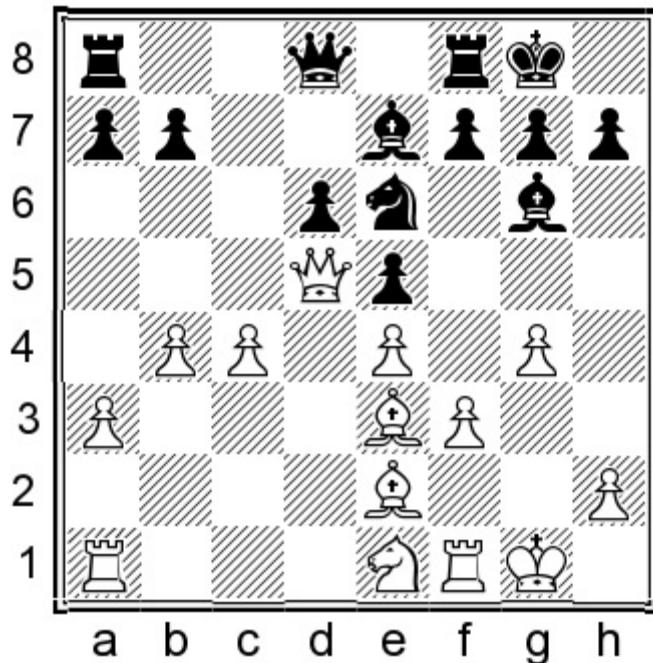
Black has just played 9...♝e8, preparing ...f7-f5. Would you play 10.g4 or do you prefer some other move?

81 (go to the solution)



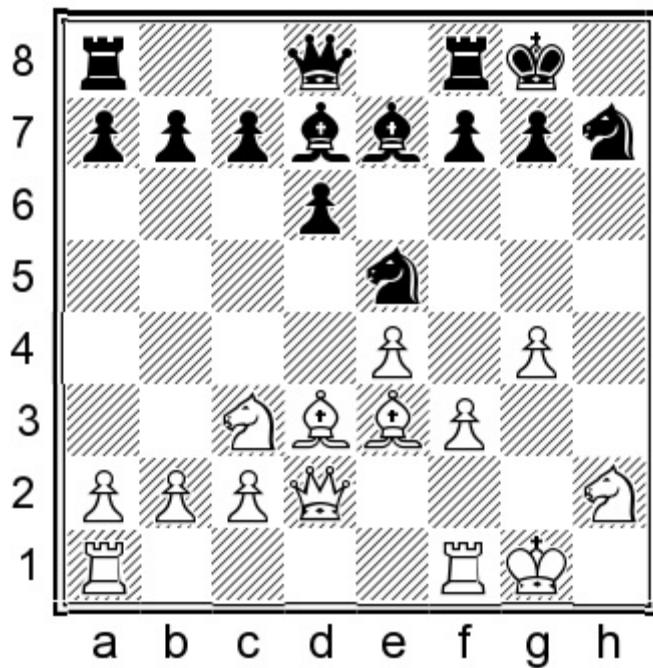
White to move

82 (go to the solution)



Black to move

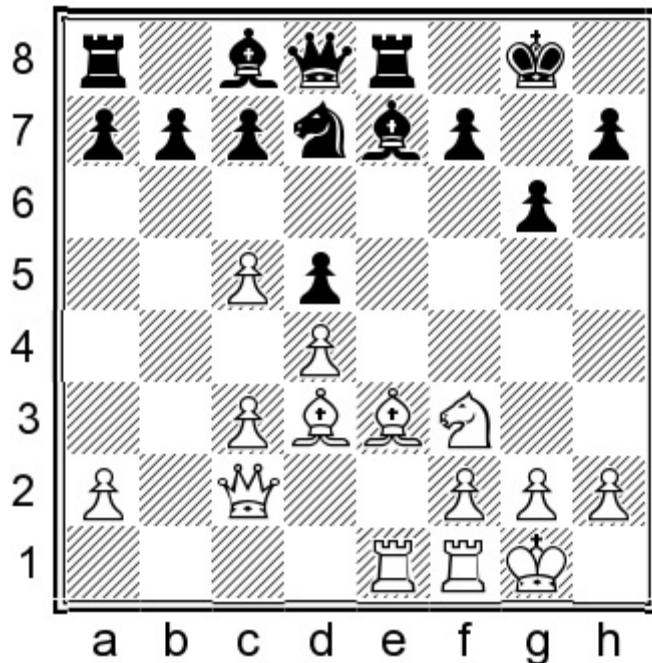
83 (go to the solution)



Black to move

After some preparations ($\mathbb{Q}e2$) White might go for f3-f4. Would you play 14...g5 or do you prefer some other move?

84 (go to the solution)

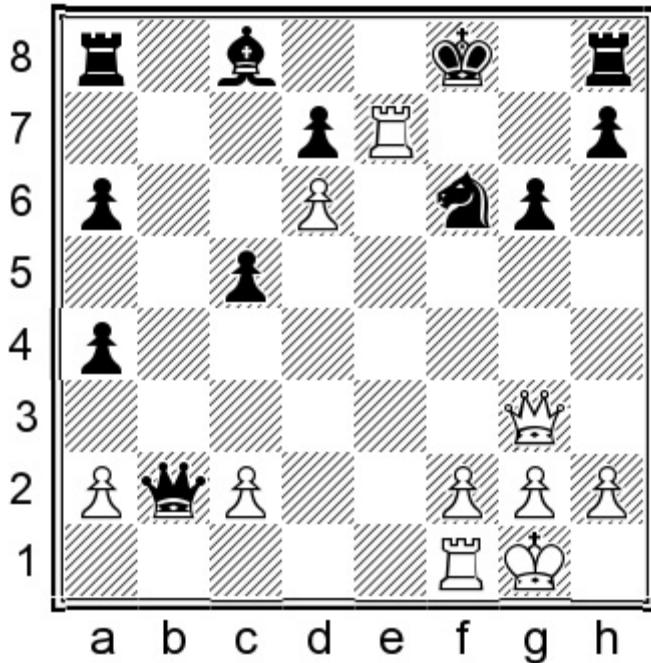


Black to move

What should Black do?

- A) Continue developing with 13... $\mathcal{Q}f6$ or 13... $\mathcal{Q}f8$.
- B) Attack White's pawn chain with 13...b6.
- C) Solidity first: 13...c6.
- D) Black should not miss out on the opportunity to start kingside play with 13...f5.

85 (go to the solution)



White to move

17

The art of positional play before Steinitz

French soldiers in the Franco-Prussian war.

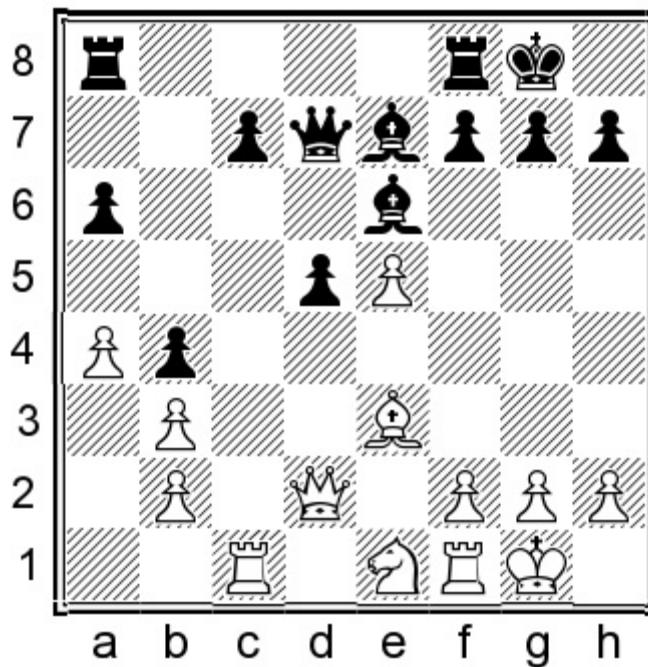
The tournament in Baden-Baden in 1870 can be classified as the first ‘super tournament’ in history. Only top players were invited to this double round-robin event. It started with 10 players but Adolf Stern dropped out after four rounds because he was mobilized for the Franco-Prussian war, which had just broken out. This war came very near, the gun roar could be heard in the playing hall and it was a small wonder that the tournament wasn’t interrupted prematurely. Anderssen clinched victory with 11 points out of 16, just ahead of Steinitz with 10½ and Neumann and Blackburne with 10.



To give you an impression of the level of positional play in those days I have made a small selection on the theme of ‘weak squares’ or ‘weak colour complex’, with this tournament as a starting point. This is an aspect of positional play that was later emphasized by Steinitz, but before that it wasn’t unknown to the stronger players. In earlier chapters we have already seen several players exploiting weak squares (of the same colour), for example La Bourdonnais and Staunton in the French.

Although he only played four games, Stern did manage to produce a textbook example of our theme.

Adolf Stern



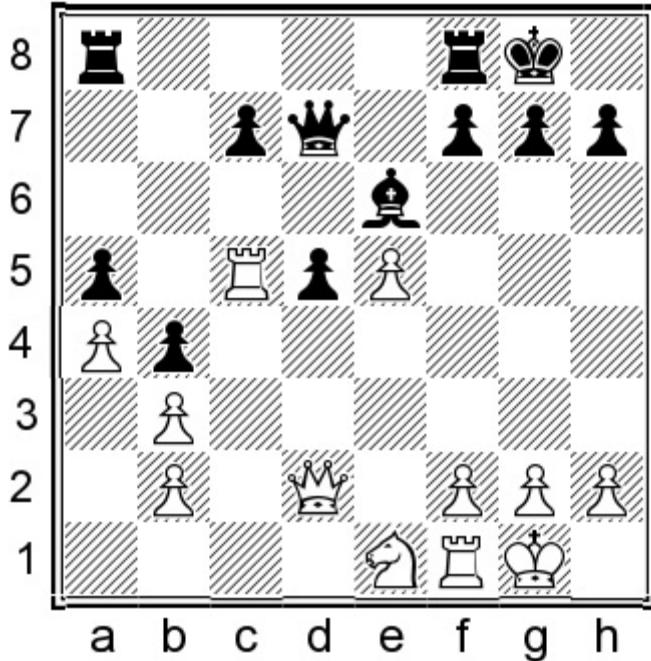
White to move

(Exercise no 78)

16.♗c5!

Black's pawn structure on the queenside is rather shattered and especially the dark squares are weakened. This is a good moment to exchange Black's (defending) dark-squared bishop, a procedure that is in the toolkit of every stronger player of today, leaving White with the dream scenario of good knight versus bad bishop.

16...♝xc5 17.♝xc5 a5



And now 18. $\mathbb{Q}f3!$ to follow up with $\mathbb{Q}d4$ would have given White a winning advantage, but the move played, 18. $\mathbb{W}d4$, finally brought Stern the win as well (that is to say: officially he lost on time on move 20 – a bit strange but these were the early days of playing with a time limit – but after both players agreed to continue he won ‘off the record’).

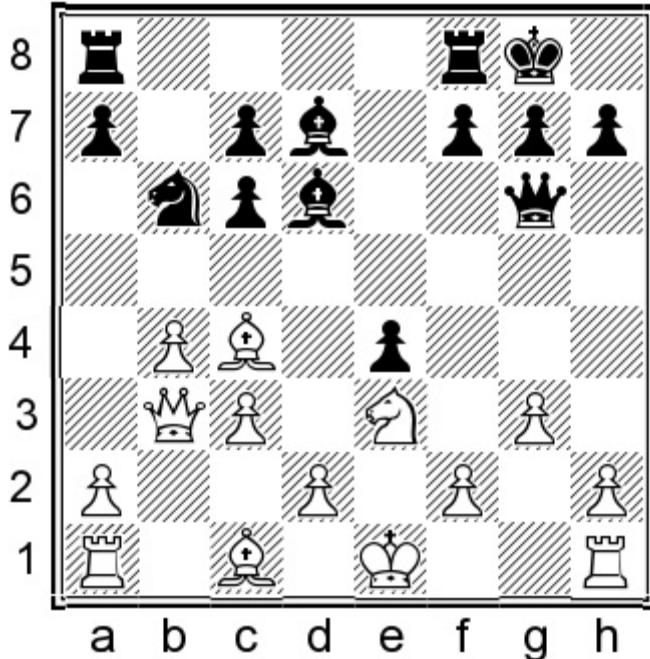
In the next game we see Neumann in a textbook example of domination of the light squares. His opponent was a talented player who died young of tuberculosis. Unfortunately, Neumann also had to end his career prematurely, because of severe mental illness.

Cecil de Vere – Gustav Neumann Baden-Baden 1870

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.c3 d5 4. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ dx e 4 5. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{W}d5$ 6. $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ bx c 6

In an earlier game (see below) Steinitz took back with the knight.

8. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 9.g3 $\mathbb{W}g6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 11.b4 $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 13. $\mathbb{W}b3$ 0-0 14. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$

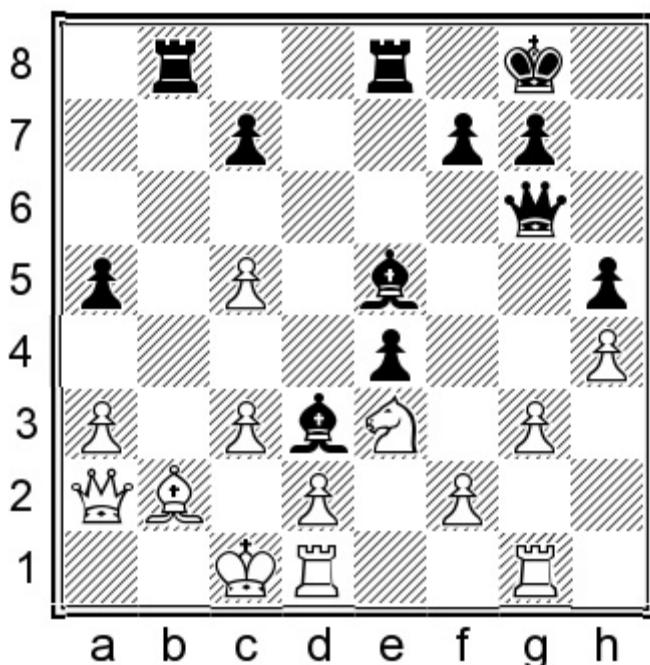


Black's pawn structure is somewhat damaged, but White is badly developed and the bishop on c1 in particular has difficulties getting into play. With almost all his pawns on the dark squares White is probably well advised to keep his light-squared bishop on the board (for example with 15... $\mathbb{B}e2$) and/or try to develop. De Vere seems to be unaware of the positional dangers (or simply tries to make the best of his difficult position):

15.h4?! $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ 16. $\mathbb{W}xc4$ h5 17. $\mathbb{B}b2$ $\mathbb{E}fe8$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d4$ a5 19.a3 $\mathbb{E}ad8$ 20. $\mathbb{E}g1$ c5

White seems to be playing checkers: all his men are on the dark squares now.

21.bxc5 $\mathbb{B}e5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}c4$ $\mathbb{E}b8$ 23.0-0-0 $\mathbb{B}b5$ 24. $\mathbb{W}a2$ $\mathbb{B}d3$



This is what you can call domination of the light squares. All Black has left to do is double on the b-file.

25.g4 ♜b7 26.gxh5 ♜c6 27.h6 ♜eb8 28.♗xg7+ ♜xg7 29.♗g1 ♜xh6 30.♘f5 ♜e6 31.♗xg7+ ♜h8

White resigned.

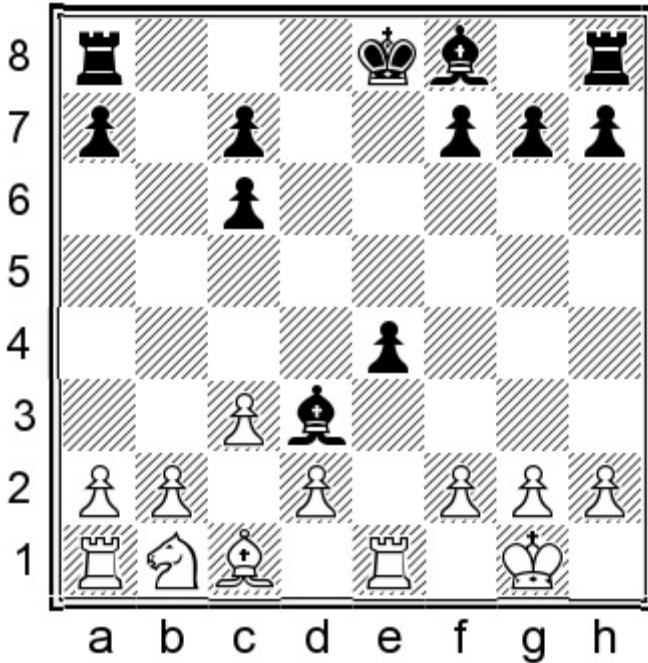
Neumann might have been inspired by the following game of Steinitz from Dundee 1867, a tournament which Neumann won with 7½ out of 9, a half point ahead of Steinitz.

George Fraser – William Steinitz Dundee 1867

**1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♜c6 3.♗b5 ♜ge7 4.c3 d5 5.♗xe5 dxe4 6.♗a4 ♜d5 7.♗xc6 ♜xc6 8.♗xc6+ ♜xc6
9.♗xc6+ bxc6**

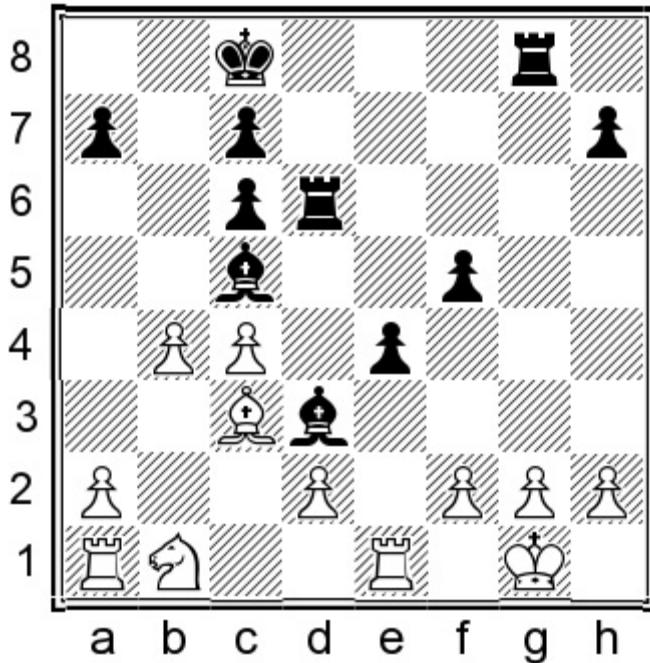
Here the flurry of exchanges on c6 have resulted in an endgame with White's light-squared bishop already off the board, and with the bishop pair for Black – as we will see later on, his appreciation and handling of the pair of bishops is one of Steinitz's main contributions to our understanding of the game.

10.0-0 ♜a6 11.♗e1 ♜d3



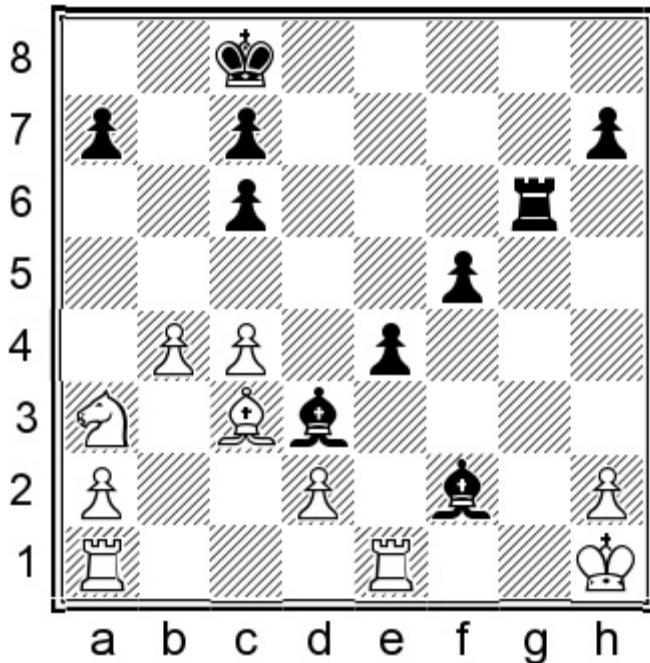
Note the similarity to the previous game. The bishop on d3 of course is a monster.

12.c4 f5 13.b3 ♜c5 14.♗b2 0-0-0 15.♗xg7+ ♜hg8 16.♗c3 ♜d6 17.b4



Allowing a very nice combination (which actually was already possible at the previous move), slightly reminiscent of the famous Paulsen-Morphy sacrifice (New York 1857). The pair of bishops shines.

17...Bxg2+! 18.Qxg2 Bg6+ 19.Qh1 Bxf2 20.Qa3



It seems that White is holding on. The next shot had to have been foreseen by Black.

20...e3! 21.h4 e2

Despite his extra rook White is helpless.

22.Qe5 Bg4 23.Qh2 f4 24.Qc2 f3 25.Qf6 Bxc2

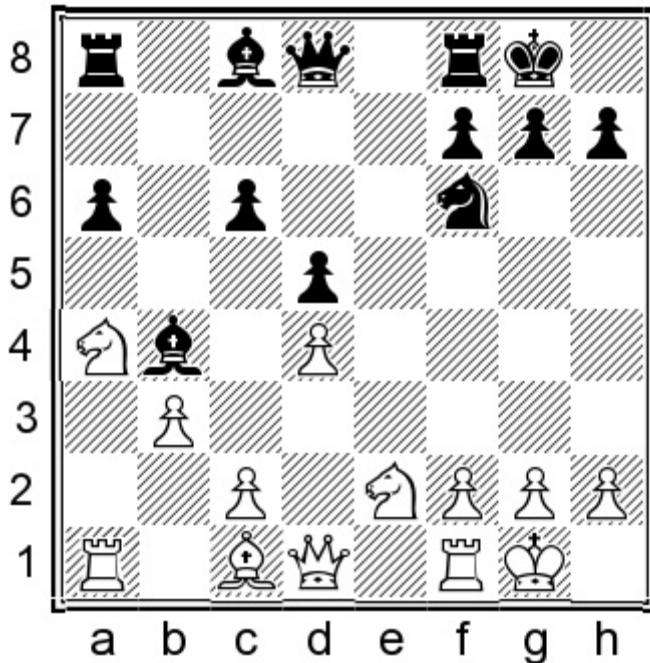
And White resigned.

In previous chapters we have already seen Anderssen handling weak squares. Here are two more examples, to further strengthen his new appreciation as the father of modern chess.

Adolf Anderssen

Joseph Henry Blackburne

Baden-Baden 1870



White to move

(Exercise no 79)

13.♘a3!

Black's pawn structure is slightly damaged and he is weak on the dark squares. As in the Stern game above, this is a fine moment for exchanging the dark-squared bishops. Other sensible moves also give White an advantage, but I hope you at least considered 13.♘a3.

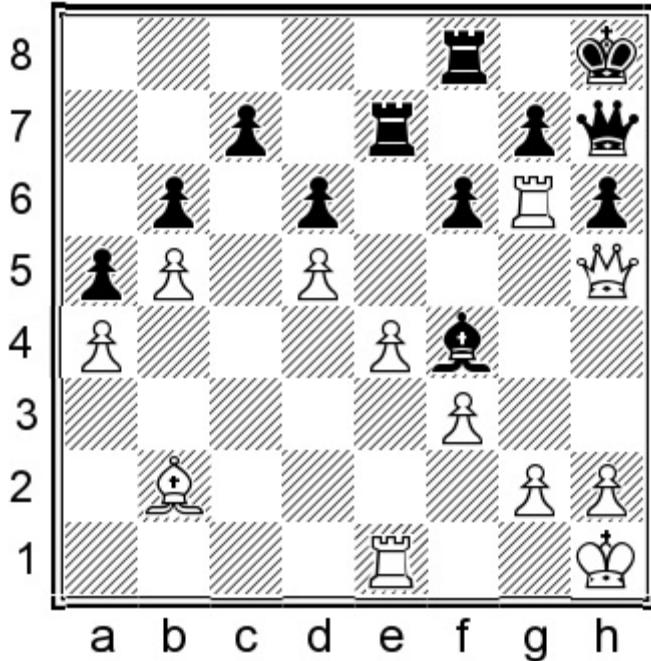
13...♗xa3 14.♕xa3

White is slightly better and later won this game.

Adolf Anderssen

Samuel Rosenthal

Baden-Baden 1870



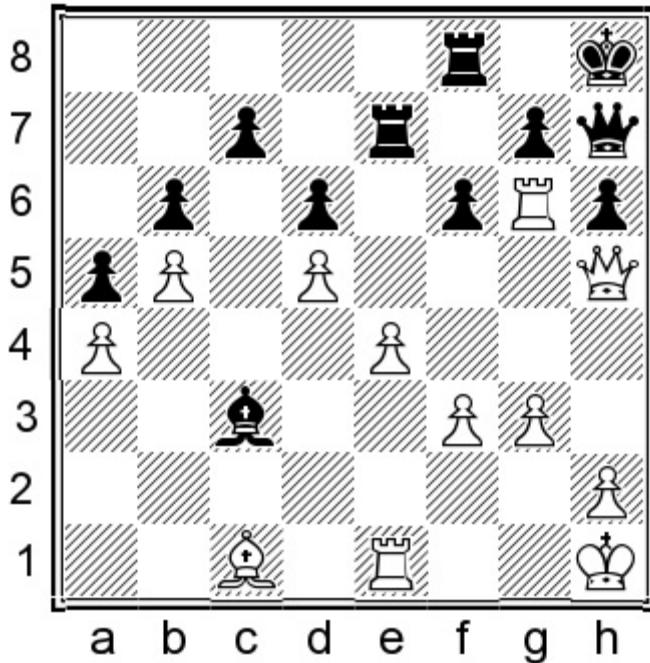
White to move

White has the better pawn structure – the backward pawn on c7 is very ugly – and dominates the light squares. Theoretically he has a good versus bad bishop, and had Black’s bishop been inside his pawn chain, for example on d8, this would have been an important factor. But even now, White’s bishop has the better prospects. It’s not clear what to think about the rook on g6: it is slightly vulnerable (and actually will cost White the game). The kingside play that White initiates would have given him a clear advantage had it been prepared with a move like $\mathbb{E}e2$ or $\mathbb{E}d1$ or $\mathbb{Q}c3$.

29.g3? $\mathbb{Q}e5!$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}c1$

Also after 30. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 31. $\mathbb{W}g4$ h5 the white rook is trapped, thanks to the unlucky move 29.g3.

30... $\mathbb{Q}c3!$



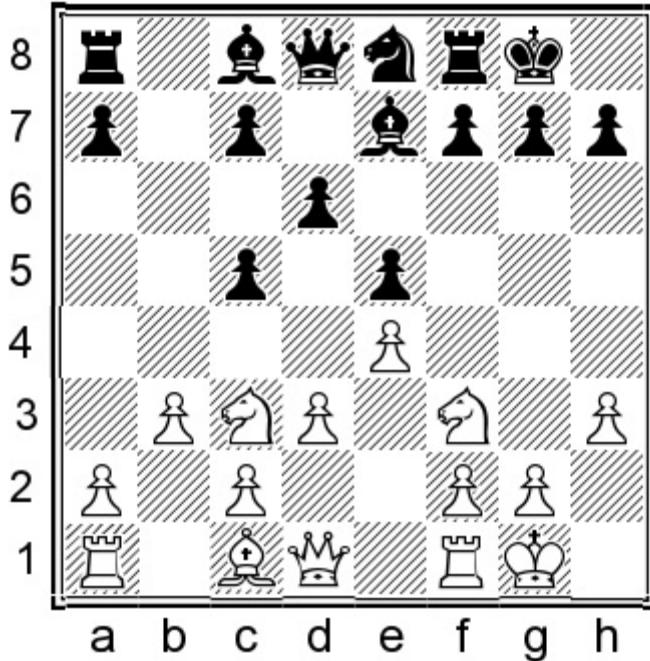
This is why 29.g3 should have been prepared. Black now threatens the rook on e1 and trapping the other rook with 31... $\mathbb{E}e5$ followed by 32...h5. With the rook on say d1, White would have time for 31. $\mathbb{Q}f4$.

31. $\mathbb{E}e3$ $\mathbb{E}e5$ 32. $\mathbb{W}g4$ h5 33. $\mathbb{W}d7$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 34. $\mathbb{E}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 0-1

A question every chess player is occasionally confronted with is, ‘how weakening will this pawn move turn out to be?’. As we will see later, Steinitz developed extreme caution on this issue. In the next few games this question had to be answered.

Szymon Winawer – Johannes Minckwitz Baden-Baden 1870

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ d6 5. $\mathbb{Q}xc6+$ bxc6 6.h3 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7.0-0 c5 8.d3 0-0 9.b3 $\mathbb{Q}e8$



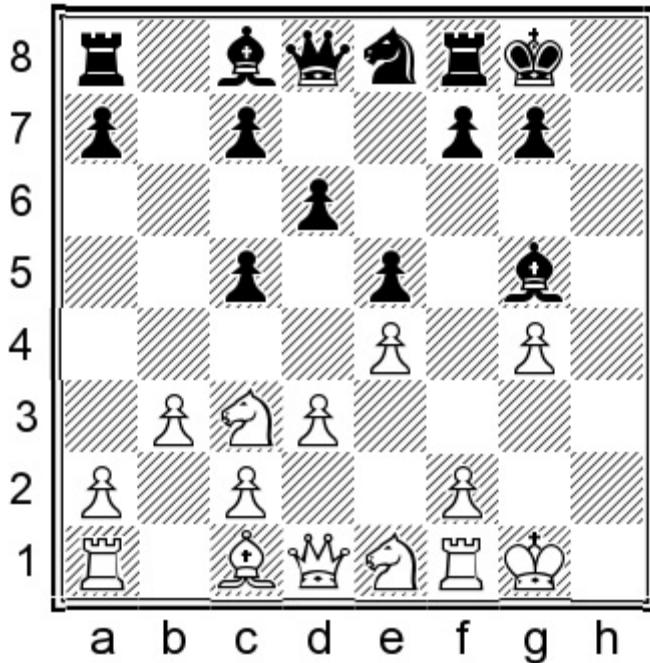
(Exercise no 80)

With his last move Black made his intentions clear to continue with the ‘delayed Philidor set-up’ with ...f7-f5. An excellent idea, and it is not easy for White to find a sensible plan. Trying to play c2-c3 + d2-d4 will take too much time, but seeking counterplay on the queenside with 10.a3 to follow up with b3-b4 is an idea (Anderssen’s choice in a subsequent game). Another option is adopting the Philidor plan with 10.♘h2 or 10.♘d2, to follow up with f2-f4. Preventing ...f7-f5 with g2-g4 looks a bit suspect:

10.g4?! h5

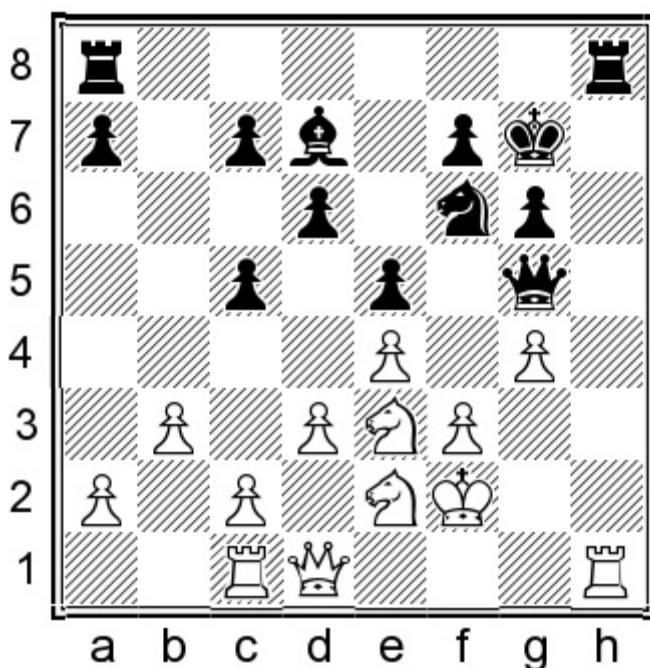
Another option was 10...c6, with the idea of ...♗e8-c7-e6, to address White’s weaknesses on the dark squares.

11.♗e1 hxg4 12.hxg4 ♗g5!?



Just like Anderssen's $\mathbb{Q}a3$ against Blackburne, the ... $\mathbb{B}e7-g5$ manoeuvre, to exchange the bad bishop for the good one (the defender of the dark squares), is a standard idea in many openings, for example in the Sveshnikov Sicilian, which has been regaining popularity since Carlsen used it as his main weapon in the 2018 World Championship match against Caruana. But those were the days in which these typical plans were being developed.

13. $\mathbb{Q}g2 \mathbb{Q}xc1$ 14. $\mathbb{B}xc1 \mathbb{W}g5$ 15. $f3$ $g6$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 18. $\mathbb{B}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{B}h8$

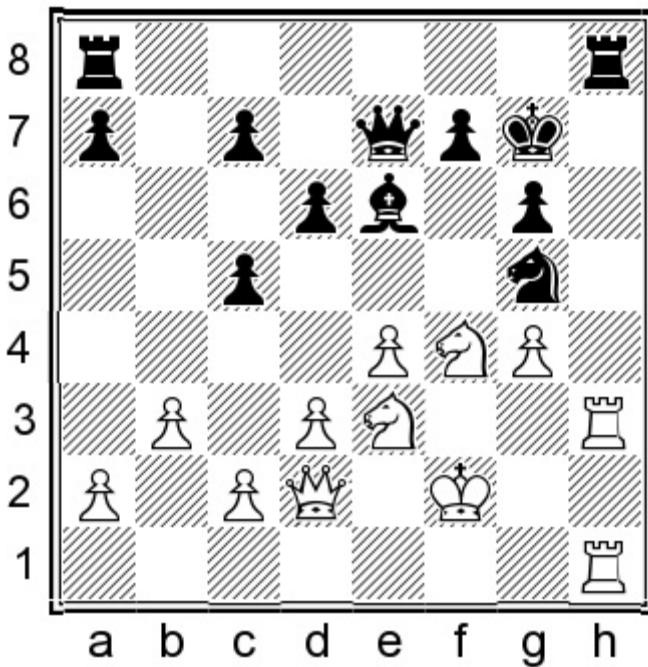


Black's play on the dark squares looks fine, but in the last few moves his pieces have been positioned a bit unfortunately, which is pinpointed by White's next move, threatening 21. $\mathbb{Q}f5+$.

20.♘d2! ♘h7

A sad necessity, but now White takes control of the h-file.

21.♖h3 ♕e6 22.♖ch1 ♕e7 23.f4 exf4 24.♗xf4 ♘g5



(Exercise no 81)

Black still seems to be doing fine, were it not for the next small combination:

25.♕c3+!

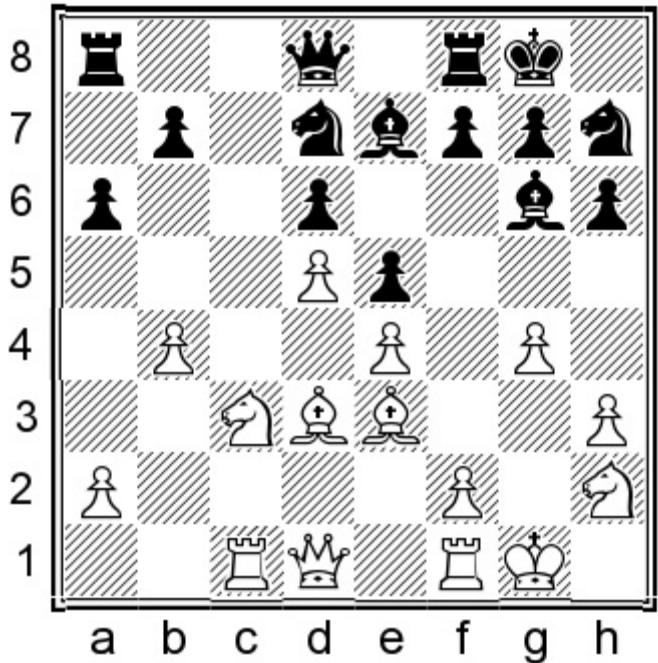
And Black resigned since 25...♔f6 loses a rook on h8 and 25...f6 fails to a knight fork on g6 after the exchanges on h8. First 25.♖xh8 and then 26.♕c3+ would have been equally good.

Although it did not work out well in this game, the ...♔e7-g5 manoeuvre was not a bad idea. Minckwitz was one of the first but not *the* first player to use this idea, I found a handful of examples from an earlier date. The oldest comes from a pair who we've already met.

Moheschunder Bannerjee

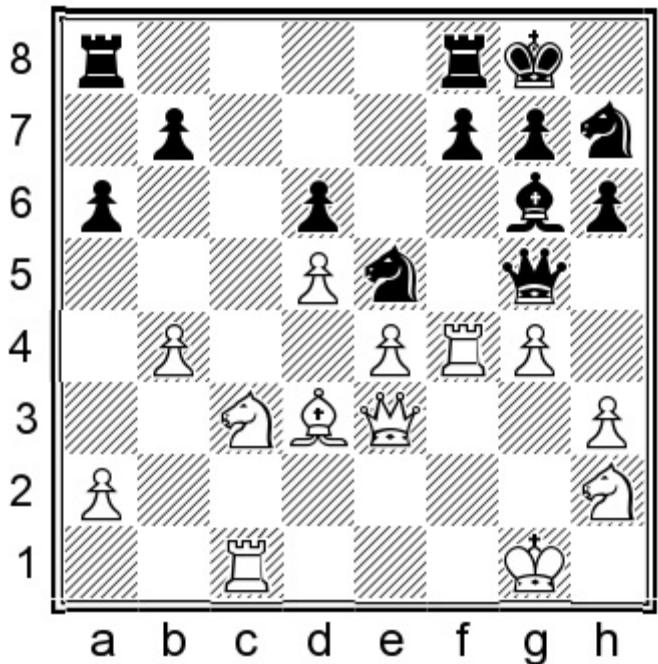
John Cochrane

Kolkata 1855



Black to move

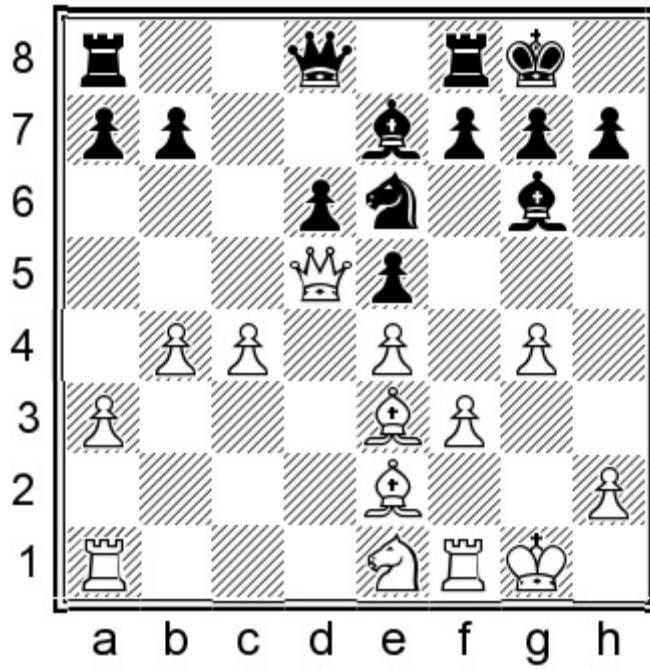
17... $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ 18. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 20.f4 exf4 21. $\mathbb{W}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$



Black has a big advantage thanks to his beautiful control of the dark squares and later won this game.

This was one out of the long series of informal games between these two players. The first serious game in which our manoeuvre appeared was from the London 1862 tournament. The Italian playing Black was one of the best players of those days, and though he mainly had a reputation as a strong tactician, here he shows some original strategic insight.

John Owen
Serafino Dubois
London 1862



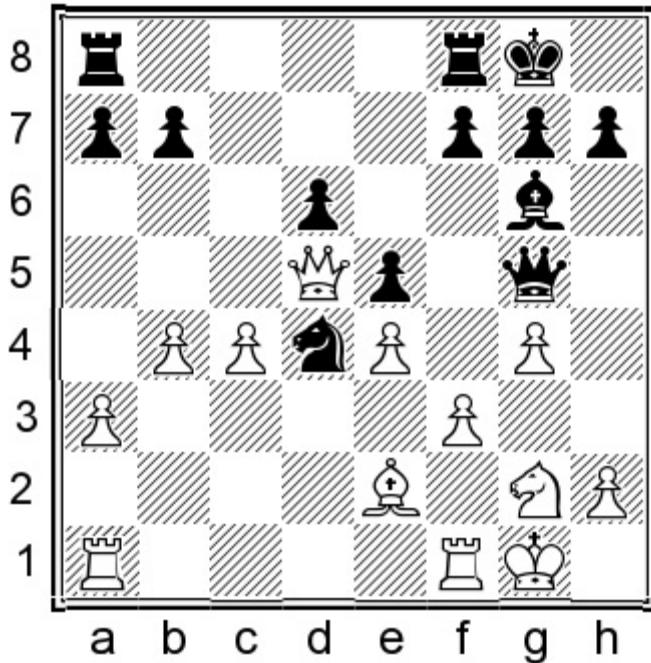
Black to move

(Exercise no 82)

17... $\mathbb{Q}g5!$

Another idea was 17...h5, hoping for 18.h3, further weakening the dark squares and making 18... $\mathbb{Q}g5$ even stronger.

17... $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{W}xg5$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$



With a clear advantage for Black, although the game later ended in a draw.

We saw La Bourdonnais in his match against McDonnell introduce the ... $\mathbb{Q}d7-b5$ manoeuvre in the French and one might argue that this ... $\mathbb{Q}e7-g5$ idea is an exact copy of that one, only mirrored on the kingside. I think players might differ in how they experience this. To me these moves don't feel the same at all and I guess they aren't stored as neighbours in my brain. So it seems only natural to me to appreciate both manoeuvres as independent discoveries. But for others, those dark square/light square or queenside/kingside differences aren't that meaningful, and those players may be more apt to recognize mirrored positions as identical.

Gerard Welling told me an anecdote, from some time ago at his club, of two young but already quite strong players, who played a complete game with the board a quarter turned, both not noticing anything strange. It was a Benko Gambit, hence with a dark-squared bishop on a6 and a light-squared one on g7. I've played kingside fianchettos as Black all my life and I'm sure that having to play with a light-squared bishop on g7 would short-circuit my brain.

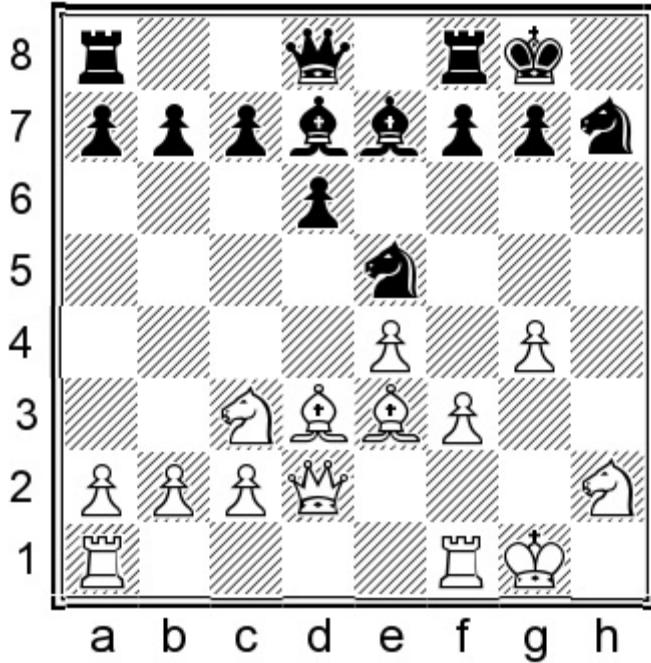
Only some weeks ago something similar made me smile. One of my pupils, already a decent player, had to move his king early in the game, from e1 to d1. Some moves later he saw a very strong move, which solved all his problems: he castled (long) kingside!

The next exercise comes from one of Morphy's rare losses. As discussed before, Morphy did not have a preference for slow positional play, but on the other hand, he rarely made anti-positional weakening moves. This game is an exception.

Samuel Boden

Paul Morphy

London 1858



Black to move

(Exercise no 83)

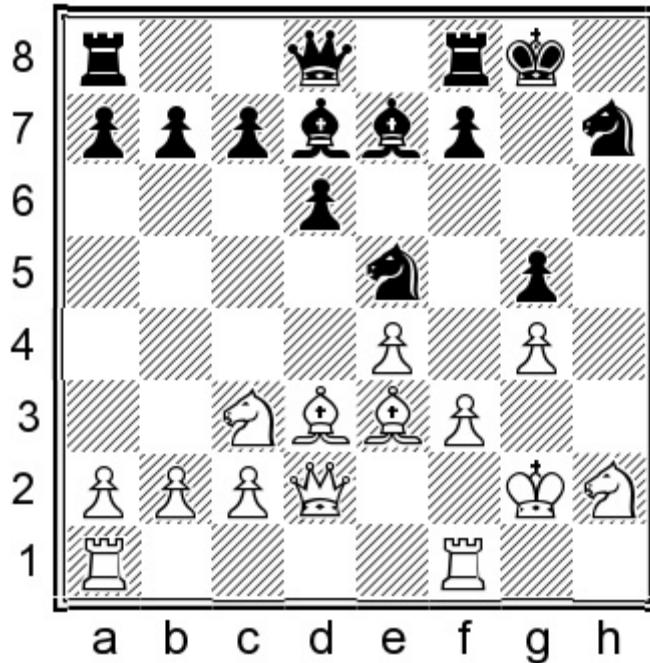
Black is facing a difficult decision. If White were to move, 15.♕e2 followed by f3-f4 would leave Black in a seriously cramped position. The move 14...♝g5 that we saw in some of our previous games is not a good idea here, as after 15.f4 ♝xd3 16.cxd3 Black again gets pushed back.

Maybe best would have been 14...♝xd3, followed by something like ...c7-c6, but White's position is easier to play.

I hope you did not agree with Morphy's choice, since that is asking too much of Black's position:

14...g5? 15.♔g2

15.♖f2 followed by ♖f1-g3 might have been even better.

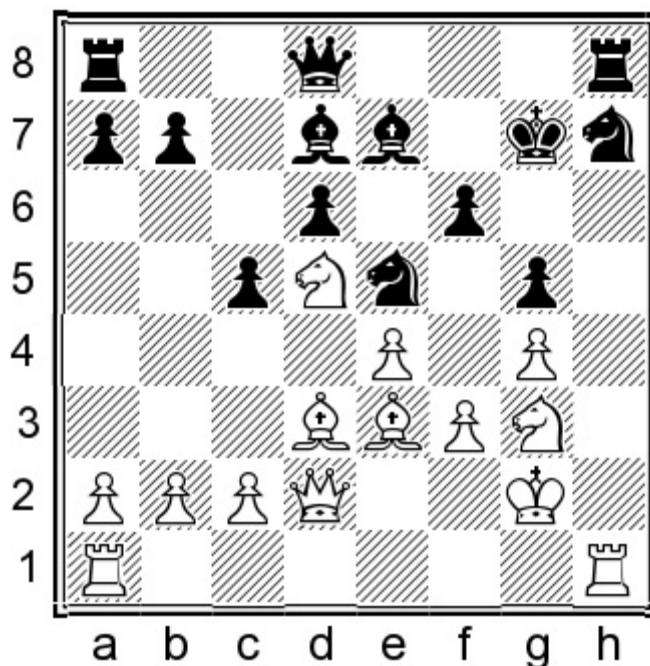


As if one move of the type wasn't enough, Morphy now throws the next pawn forward.

In *Die neueste Theorie und Praxis des Schachspiels*, Neumann adds a few comments to this game. About the next move he says: 'This leaves Black's d-pawn backward and above that it allows White's queens knight to permanently install itself on d5. These abuses lead to the loss of this game.'⁷⁷

This quote nicely illustrates the positional understanding of the stronger players before Steinitz started to advocate his theories.

15...c5? 16.♕h1 ♔g7 17.♗f1 ♕h8 18.♗g3 f6 19.♗d5



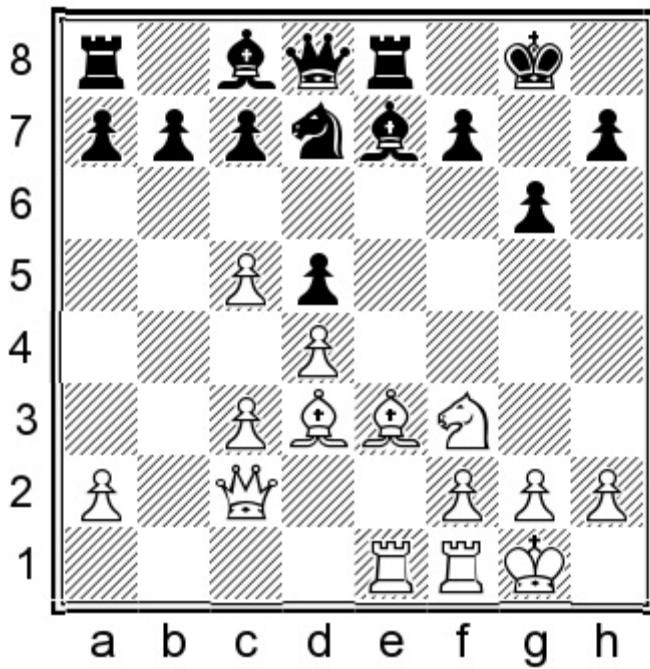
Thanks to all the weaknesses on the light squares, White has a decisive advantage and he later managed to win this game.

Let's return to our Baden-Baden tournament. Weakening pawn moves were also the main theme in the two duels between De Vere and Paulsen.

Louis Paulsen

Cecil de Vere

Baden-Baden 1870



Black to move

(Exercise no 84)

An exercise of a type you rarely encounter in a chess book, but probably more often in your games: a clearly worse position (I hope you noticed that) with no easy solutions. Black is severely lagging behind in development, so moves like 13... $\mathbb{Q}f8$

or 13... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ suggest themselves, although in both cases Black has to worry about 14. $\mathbb{Q}e5$.

A solid choice would be 13...c6 and just waiting to see what White will come up with.

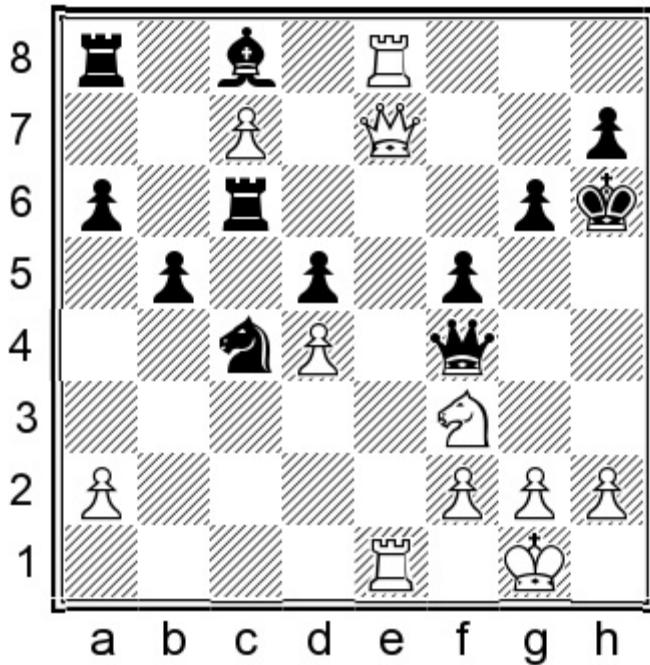
The standard way of attacking White's pawn chain with 13...b6 is very ambitious, but White is not going to comply with Black's intentions: he will answer with 14. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ or 14.c6; after 14.cxb6?! axb6, maybe followed by ... $\mathbb{Q}a6$, Black suddenly is doing fine.

I'll be generous: everyone earns points if they did not chose the move from the game.

13...f5?

This extra weakening is way too much for Black's position to bear. Paulsen now crashes through with a series of powerful moves:

14.c4! c6 15.cxd5 cxd5 16.♗b5! ♜f8 17.♔h6 ♜f7 18.c6 ♗b6 19.c7 ♜d6 20.♔e8 ♜f6 21.♔f4 ♜xf4
22.♗xe7 ♗c4 23.♗fe1 a6 24.♗e2 b5 25.♔c6! ♜xc6 26.♗e8+ ♔g7 27.♗e7+ ♔h6

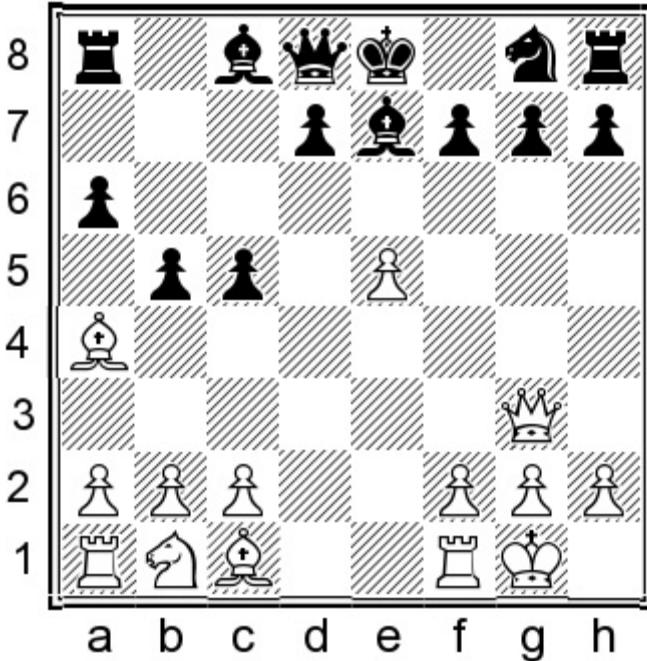


28.♗xh7+! ♔xh7 29.♗1e7+ ♔h6 30.♗h8 mate.

De Vere struck back in the next game. Although he fell for a typical Spanish trick, he went on to make the best of it.

Cecil de Vere – Louis Paulsen Baden-Baden 1870

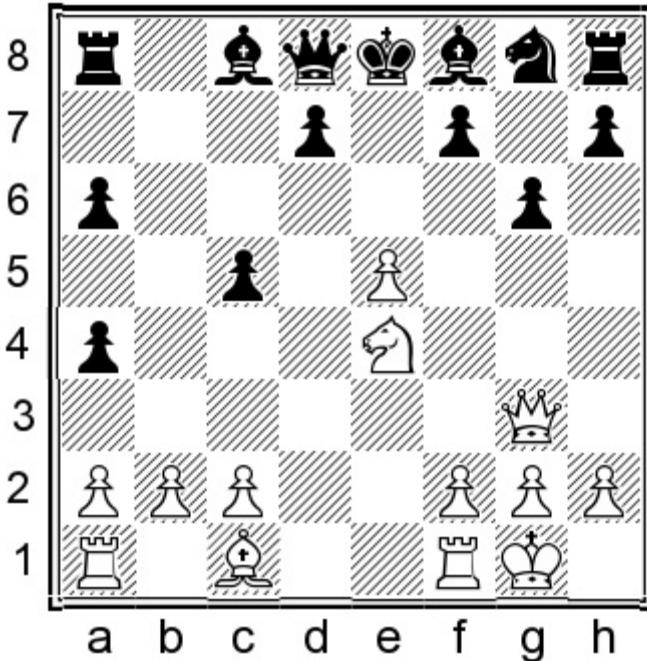
1.e4 e5 2.♗f3 ♗c6 3.♗b5 a6 4.♗a4 ♗f6 5.d4 exd4 6.0-0 ♔e7 7.♗xd4? ♗xd4 8.♗xd4 c5 9.♗d3 b5
10.e5 ♗g8 11.♗g3



Probably you have seen (or experienced) this way of losing the Spanish bishop before. But with his king still in the centre and his bad development, Black's defensive task is by no means easy.

11...Qf8?! 12.Qc3 bxa4 13.Qe4 g6?

This weakening of the dark squares does not feel good. After 13...Wb6 White still had to prove his compensation for the piece.

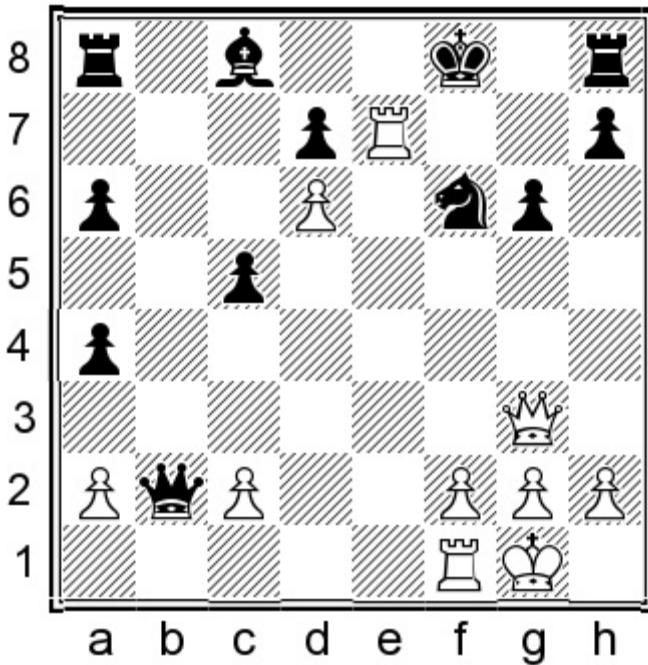


14.Qg5!

In combination with the next move, White's attack on the dark squares becomes irresistible. Now

14... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ fails to 15. $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 16. $\mathbb{W}f4$ (and they only play 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ in your dreams).

14... $\mathbb{W}b6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ 16. $exd6$ f6 17. $\mathbb{Q}ae1+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{W}xb2$



(Exercise no 85)

20.c3!

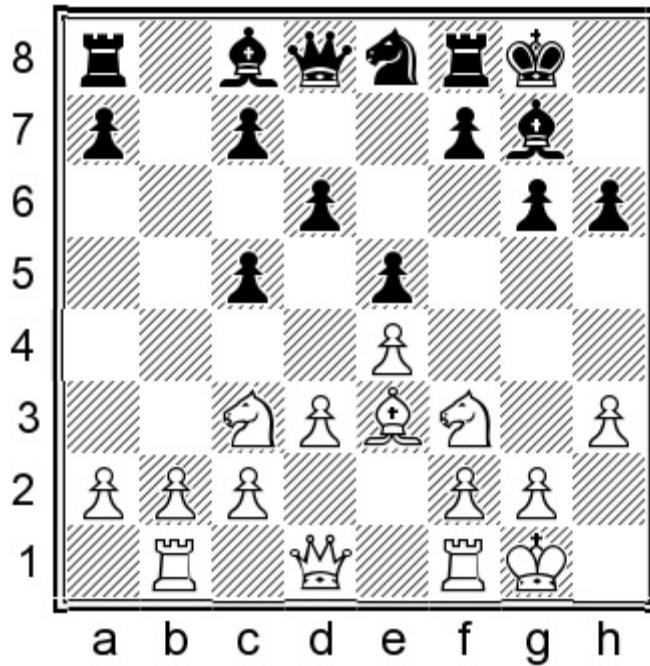
The finishing touch: a very fine quiet move, keeping the black queen out of the defence. On 20... $\mathbb{W}c2$ White has 21. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{W}f5$ 22. $\mathbb{W}h6+$.

20... $\mathbb{W}d2$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e5$ 1-0

In this chapter we have seen only a small selection, but if you play over all the games from the serious tournaments of (roughly) the period 1850 to 1875 you will see that the development of many different elements of positional play was already in full swing.

Exercises for Chapter 18

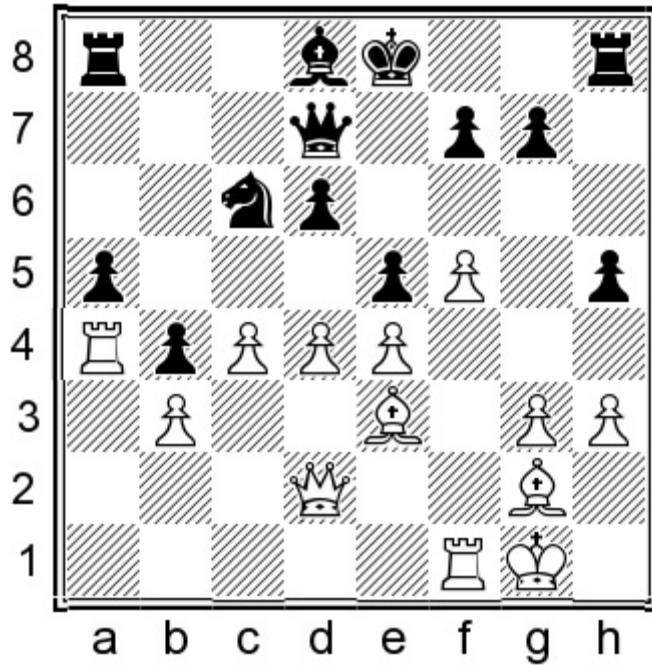
86 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

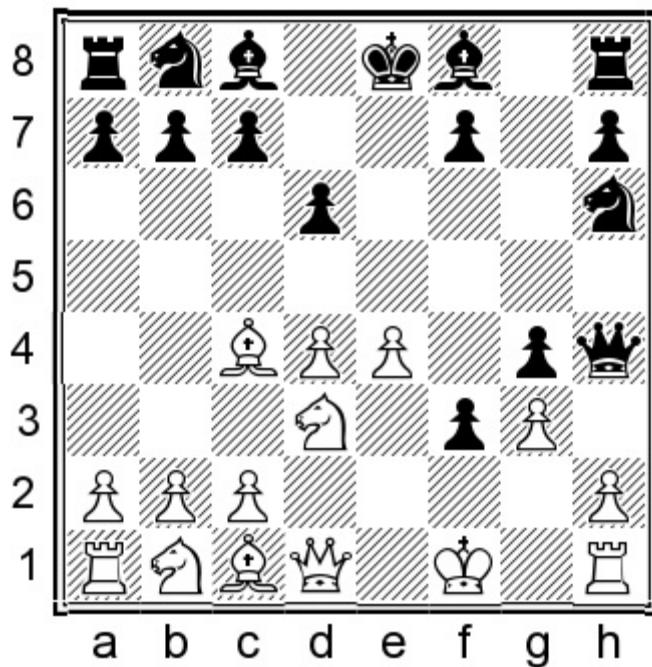
Black has just played 11...Qe8, preparing ...f7-f5. Would you play 12.g4 or do you prefer some other move?

87 (*go to the solution*)



Black to move

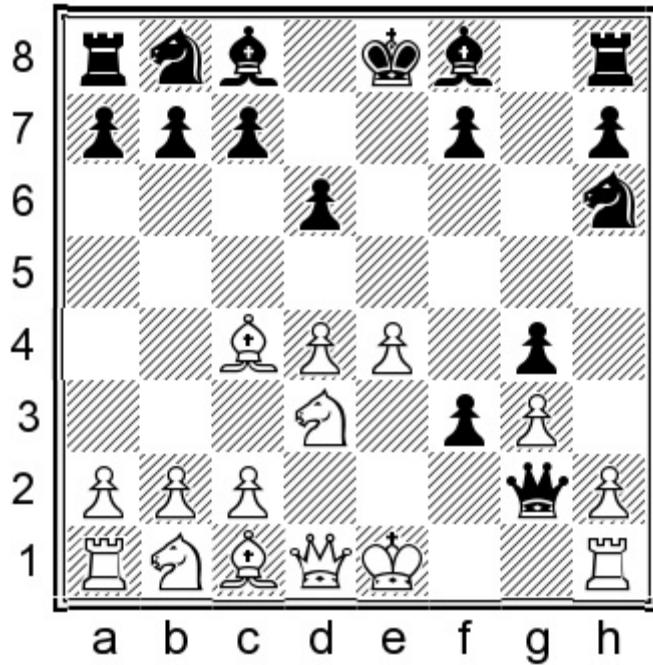
88 (go to the solution)



Black to move

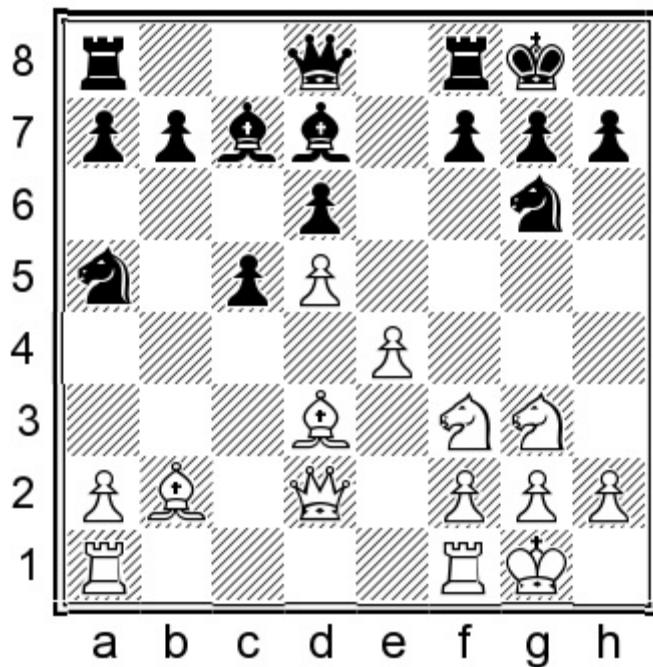
How do you evaluate this position?

89 (go to the solution)



White to move

90 (go to the solution)



White to move

18

The sword in one hand and the olive branch in the other

This book focuses on the way chess-playing has developed, rather than on the players at the board. But since Steinitz is such a central figure to the main themes I will say a bit more about him. This will also help in understanding his role in the theoretical debates in the coming chapters.

William Steinitz (1836-1900) came from Prague and moved for his studies to Vienna, where he started to play very actively and soon made some reputation. On the occasion of the 1862 tournament he went to London, where he stayed to start a life as a chess professional. In 1883, he left London for the USA because the climate became increasingly hostile towards him. Dislike of strangers played a role, as well as aversion to him as a professional chess player. But he also played his own part in the affairs that made him decide to leave. For those who want to delve deeper in the extensive literature on this subject: his biographer Landsberger tends to defend Steinitz in all cases, while Harding has a better eye for Steinitz's own role. I will confine myself to the following description of Steinitz's character by two other biographers, Isaak and Vladimir Linder:

'Steinitz could not be characterized as a sweet person. He did not know how to accommodate, was not diplomatic, always did what he deemed necessary, said what he thought was right, and frequently made enemies. [...] However, he was always honest and noble.'⁷⁸

Steinitz was a prolific writer, who over the years had several newspaper columns and magazines, and much of the fighting took place in these articles and those of his opponents. About his writing style it was noticed that 'where Staunton's pen was dipped in gall, Steinitz's pen was dipped in vitriol.'⁷⁹ Steinitz himself said that 'like the Duke of Parma, I always hold the sword in one hand and the olive branch in the other.'⁸⁰

The match with Anderssen

With Steinitz building up his reputation as the strongest player on British soil, the question arose of how he would do in a match against Anderssen, who was considered the world's strongest player after winning London 1851 and 1862. That is, the world's strongest active player, since Morphy was still alive. The match was organized by British chess fans and took place in London in the summer of 1866. Officially this was not for the World Championship, but by winning it (8-6), Steinitz laid claim to being the world's number one chess player, and on later occasions he presented this match as the beginning of his reign.

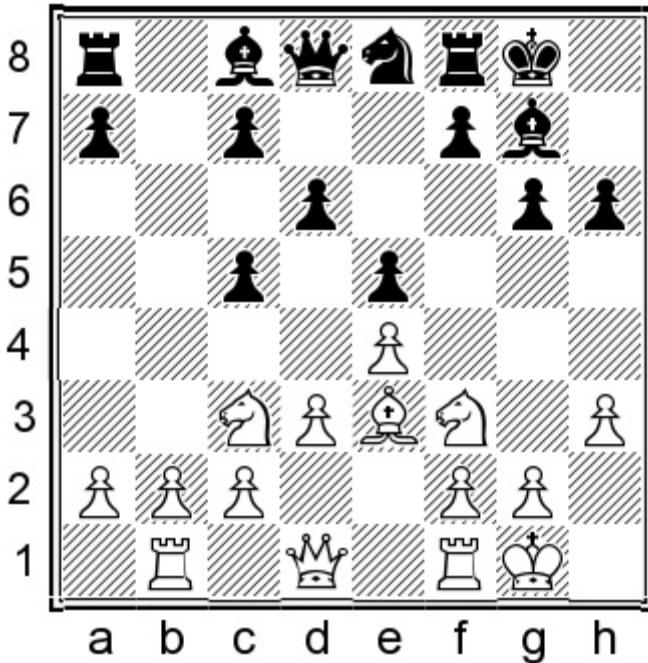
In the thirteenth game, with the score at 6-6, following in the footsteps of Philidor brought Steinitz a crucial point.

Adolf Anderssen – William Steinitz London 1866

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 d6 5.♗xc6+ bxc6 6.h3 g6 7.♗c3 ♗g7 8.0-0 0-0 9.♗g5 h6 10.♗e3



c5 11.♗b1 ♜e8



(Exercise no 86)

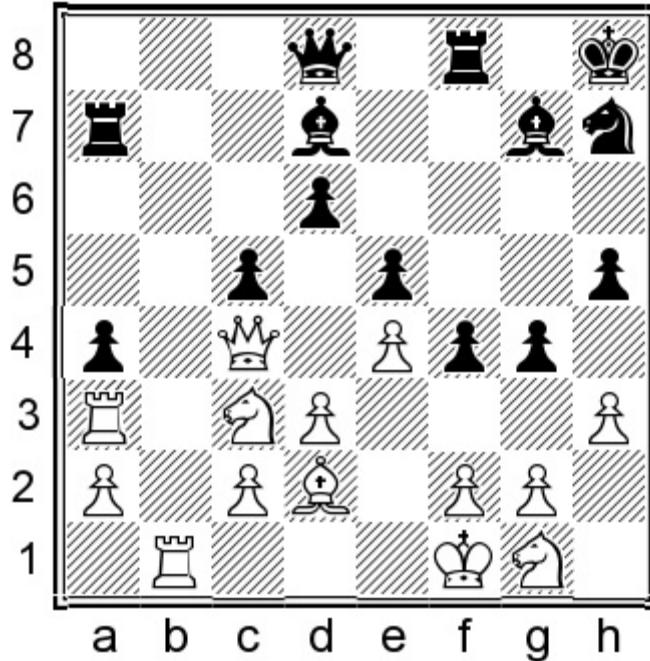
White has given up the pair of bishops early, a typical preference of Anderssen (see also his game against Paulsen in the next chapter) but against Steinitz he didn't fare well with this set-up.

There are some small differences compared to the position in the previous chapter, where Minckwitz played ...♝e8 to prepare for ...f7-f5; 12.g4 would be very weakening now, and moreover it doesn't help to prevent ...f7-f5, which would be an excellent answer.

White has several sensible moves. Anderssen's choice, seeking counterplay with 12.b4, is good, but anticipating ...f7-f5 with 12.♝h2 is another idea, and if 12...f5 13.exf5 gxf5 then 14.f4 gives White a decent position. This will look familiar to most readers, especially those with King's Indian experience, but back then this was still terra incognita.

In this game, White's play on the queenside did offer him some chances, but after a tense struggle, Steinitz's strategy prevailed:

12.b4 cxb4 13.♗xb4 c5 14.♗a4 ♜d7 15.♗a3 f5 16.♗b1 ♔h8 17.♗b7 a5 18.♗b1 a4 19.♗d5 ♜c8 20.♗b6 ♜a7 21.♔h2 f4 22.♗d2 g5 23.♗c4 ♜d8 24.♗b1 ♜f6 25.♔g1 ♜h7 26.♔f1 h5 27.♗g1 g4

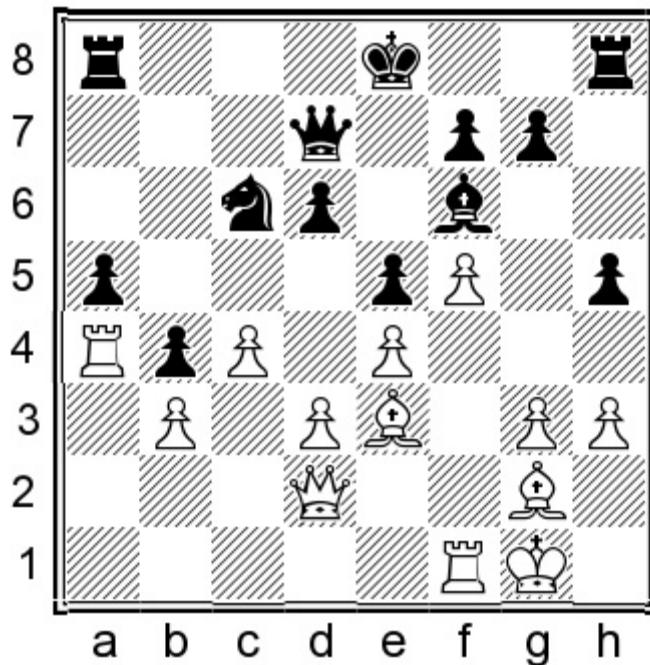


To quote Kasparov from an earlier chapter: ‘Here it is, Philidor’s dream!’ Apart from that, several of White’s pieces have gone astray. Black won after some more moves.

There was one more game with a predominantly positional character, with in this case Anderssen showing some fine manoeuvring.

William Steinitz – Adolf Anderssen London 1866

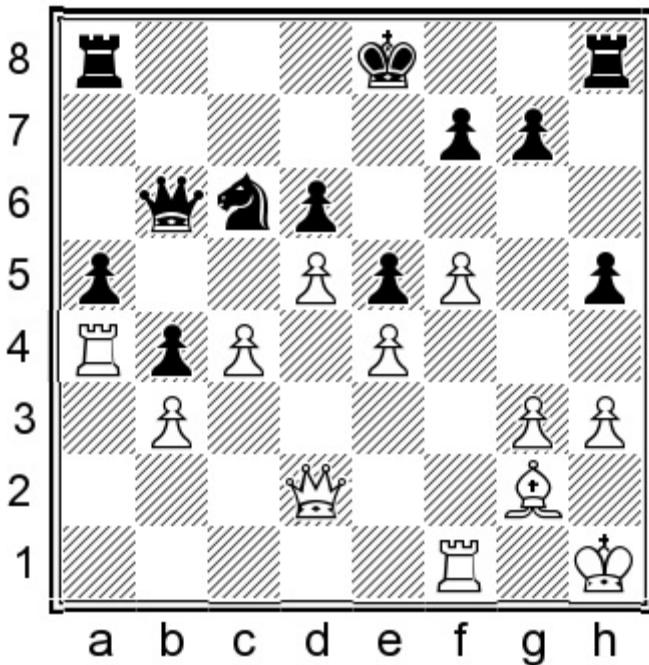
1.e4 c5 2.g3 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ e5 4. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}bc3$ d6 6.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7.f4 h5 8.h3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}c8$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 11.f5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 12.c4 $\mathbb{W}d8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 14.d3 $\mathbb{W}d7$ 15.a3 a5 16.b3 b5 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ b4 18.axb4 cxb4 19. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xa4$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 21. $\mathbb{W}d2$



21...♝d8!?

Black's position is a little shaky, but if he can manage to exchange the bishops he might end up in a good knight versus bad bishop scenario. It is not that easy to accomplish this exchange, but with his next move White offers a helping hand.

22.d4? (Exercise no 87) 22...♝b6! 23.d5 ♜a7 24.♝xb6 ♜xb6+ 25.♔h1



With the bishops exchanged, Black already has the better position and now he must choose the best square for the knight; 25...♞d4 is simple and strong, but the move played is even more ambitious: with the knight on c5 the queenside majority can start moving (25...♞b8 has the same idea).

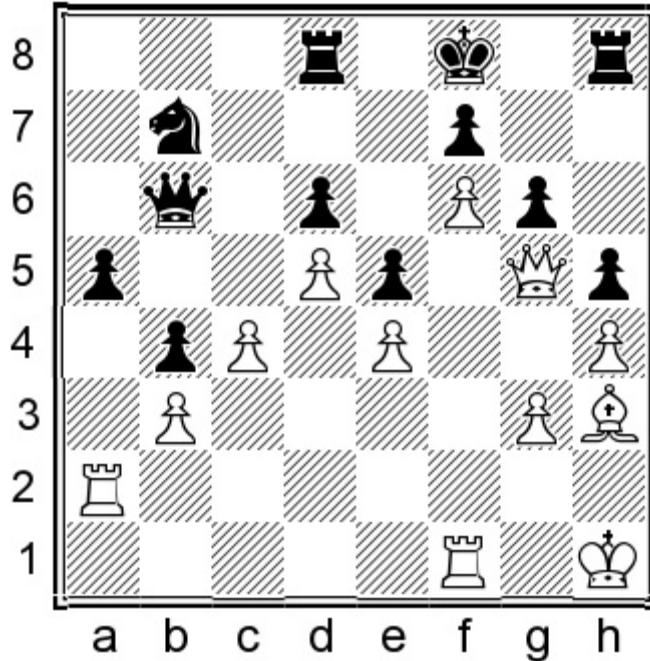
25....♞d8!?

Now White should have taken quick action because the black knight arriving at c5 spells disaster; 26.c5 or first 26.f6 g6 and then 27.c5 seems obligatory or, at the latest, c4-c5 at move 28.

26.♛g5 ♔f8 27.f6 g6 28.h4? ♞b7 29.♝h3 ♜d8

29...♞c5!..

30.♜a2

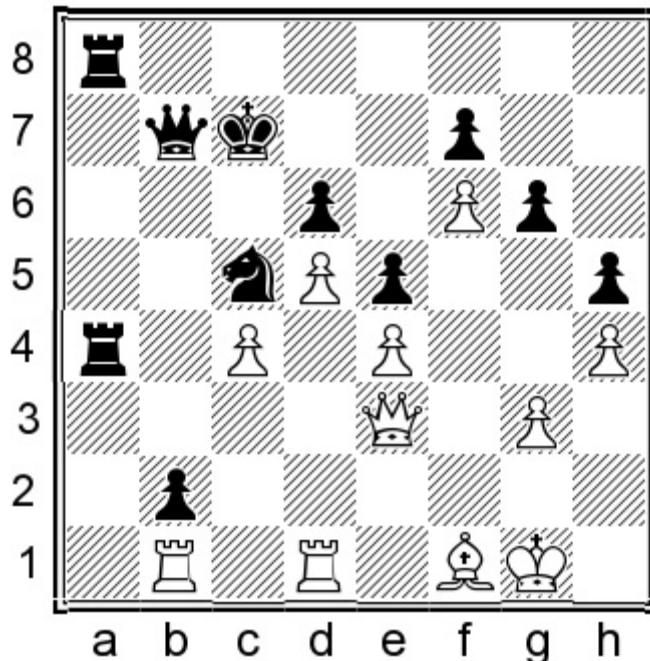


With the knight coming to c5 and the potential passed pawn on the queenside, Black has a big advantage and he has several good moves, for example 30... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ or 30... $\mathbb{W}d4$.

However, Black still has a small issue with his rook on h8 being out of play. Trying to get the rook into play by ... $\mathbb{Q}f8-g8-h7$ is not possible because of White's attacking possibilities with $\mathbb{Q}f5$ or $g3-g4$. Therefore Anderssen frees the rook with a king march in the other direction.

A century later, Petrosian became famous for marching his king from the one to the other side, see Petrosian-Unzicker (Hamburg 1960) and Petrosian-Peters (Lone Pine 1976).

30... $\mathbb{Q}e8!$ 31. $\mathbb{E}d1$ $\mathbb{E}a8$ 32. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 33. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{W}b7$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ a4 36.bxa4 b3 37. $\mathbb{E}aa1$ b2 38. $\mathbb{E}ab1$ $\mathbb{E}xa4$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{E}ha8$



Petrosian would be proud. Black won after a few more moves.

Regarding positional chess, these two wins, one by Steinitz and one by Anderssen, were about it for the match, and this was largely due to the choice of openings. Anderssen played the Sicilian twice as Black and the Ruy Lopez once as White, but all the rest were King's Gambits (five games, Steinitz playing White) and Evans Gambits (six games, Anderssen playing White). This gave the match a truly 'Romantic' character. Even the reporters commenting in the English newspapers were surprised by this 'risky' choice of openings.

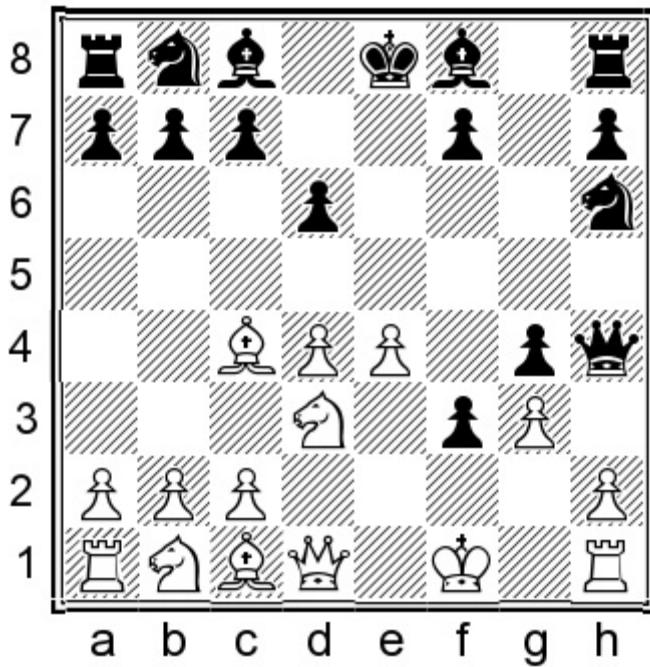
It has been suggested that this was under the influence of the backers, the chess enthusiasts who provided the funds. Although the stronger players were already moving away from the riskiest openings, the public in general had a much more 'romantic' idea of how the game should be played and preferred bloody battles to long manoeuvring.

Be that as it may, this choice of openings gave the match a peculiar character, with to modern eyes rather uncommon positions.

Against the King's Gambit, Anderssen chose one of the more risky variations with 4...g4. In four games the next position arose.

William Steinitz – Adolf Anderssen London 1866

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.♘f3 g5 4.♗c4 g4 5.♘e5 ♖h4+ 6.♔f1 ♘h6 7.d4 d6 8.♗d3 f3 9.g3

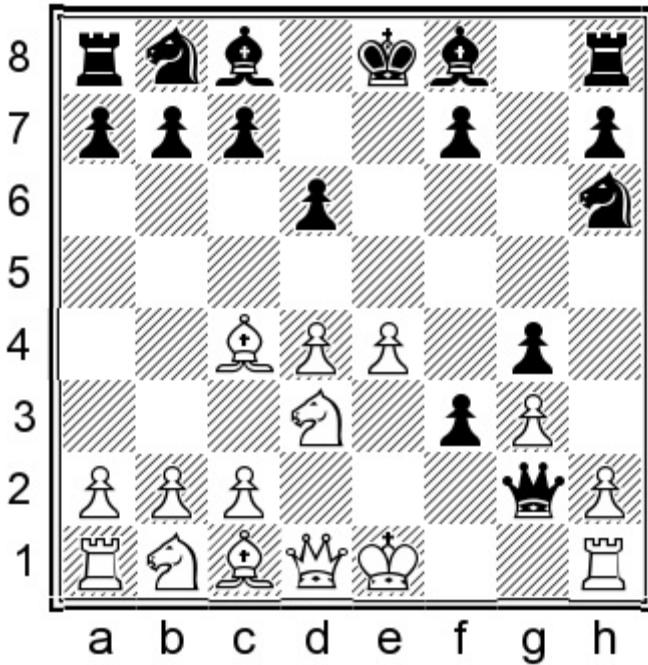


(Exercise no 88)

Your evaluation was asked for, and if I let my engine run for some time it says -0.41 (for 9...♖f6), and bravo to those who came within a tenth of this margin, but the answer 'I have no clue' is also approved.

In the first of those four games, Anderssen continued with the dubious 9... $\mathbb{W}h3+$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ and then, in view of the threat 11. $\mathbb{Q}f4$, trapping the queen, quickly returned with 10... $\mathbb{W}h5$.

Incidentally, the position after 10. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ had already occurred in Greco's collection. One of his miniatures shows that 10... $\mathbb{W}g2$ is ill-advised.



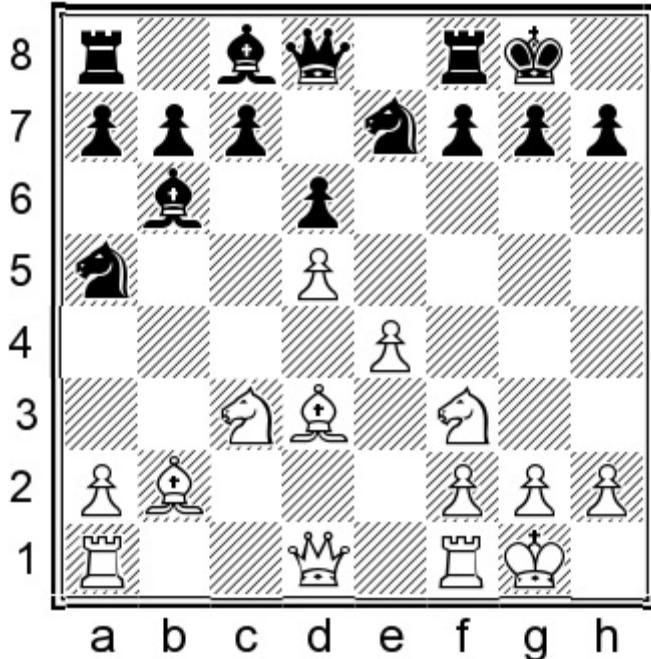
(Exercise no 89)

With 11. $\mathbb{Q}f2!$ followed by 12. $\mathbb{Q}f1$, White traps the queen.

From the Evans Gambit there were five games resulting in the next position (or a very similar one).

Adolf Anderssen – William Steinitz London 1866

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 4.b4 $\mathbb{Q}xb4$ 5.c3 $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 6.d4 exd4 7.0-0 d6 8.cxd4 $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 9.d5 $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ 0-0 12. $\mathbb{Q}c3$



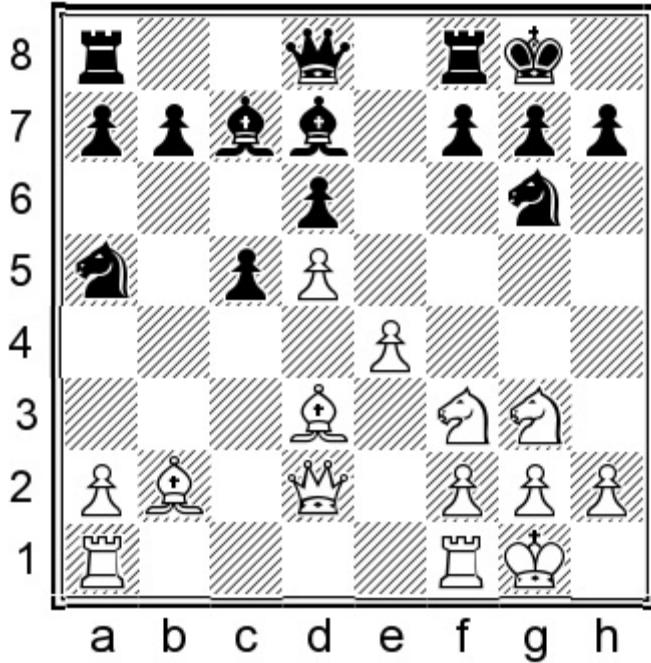
A typical position from one of the main lines. The extra pawn does not tell greatly for the time being, but Black will start moving his queenside pawns in due course. The placement of the knight on a5 has its drawbacks. On the kingside White enjoys a lot of extra space and his bishops point menacingly towards the black king.

Chances are about equal.

In the seventh game Steinitz allowed some typical tactics.

12...Bg6 13.Qd2 Qd7 14.Qe2 c5 15.Qg3 Qc7?

‘A strange mistake in a player so well acquainted with the openings as Mr. Steinitz. 15...f6, as recommended by Mr. Paulsen, is absolutely essential at this point, to prevent the advantageous sacrifice of White’s bishop,’ an English newspaper commented.⁸¹



(Exercise no 90)

16.♗xg7!

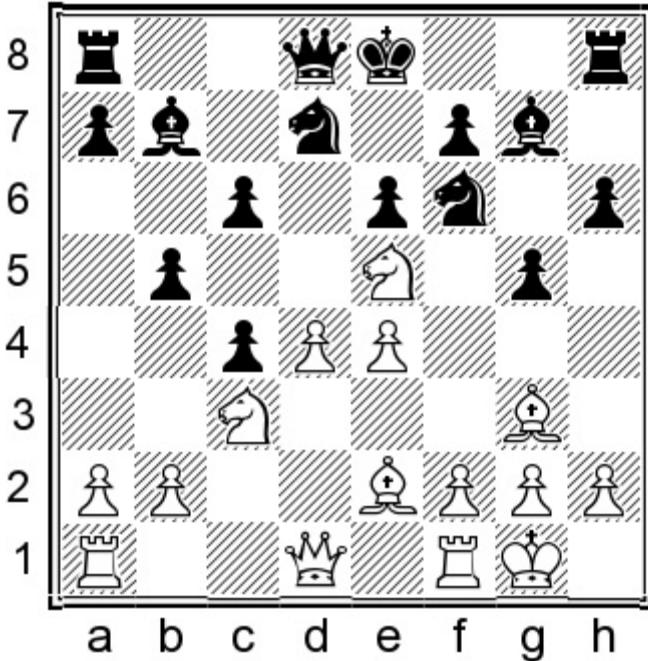
A killing blow. After 16...♝xg7 17.♗h5+ ♛h8 18.♕h6 ♜g8 19.♗g5! Black has to give the queen to avoid mate.

Black chose 16...f6 17.♗xf8 ♜xf8 and lost some moves later.

Though it is not my everyday cup of tea, the first position from the Evans Gambit resembles a fairly ‘normal’ position and it would not take too much time to figure out what is going on. But the position from the King’s Gambit can really be called exotic.

Those openings were played at a high level and actually it is not correct to call this ‘anti-positional’ chess, but neither opening has (entirely) stood the test of time and that’s why playing over these games gives us a slightly detached feeling.

Today, though, we still play positions that are as unbalanced as those King’s Gambits – sanctioned by the engines, of course. For example, the next position from the Slav is rather exotic as well (and rather similar to the King’s Gambit),



... especially since 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ has become the main move (to follow up with e4-e5 and $\mathbb{Q}c3-e4-d6$).

The impression that chess from former times gives us depends partly on the choice of openings. Slowly, openings that are still the main choices today, like the Ruy Lopez and the queen's pawn openings, moved to the fore. This opened up new areas – if not for a more positional style of play, then at least for much more variation in positional play.

After beating Anderssen, Steinitz did well in the next big tournaments (Paris 1867 and Baden-Baden 1870), but missed out on winning first prize. Only after winning the strong Vienna 1873 tournament (after a play-off with Blackburne) could Steinitz claim to be the number one. Around this time he started to develop his 'modern school' theories. Over the next nine years, Steinitz was active as a writer, but he played no tournaments and only one match, in 1876, beating Blackburne 7-0.

It is often suggested that in this period Steinitz's style changed dramatically, from attacking in the Romantic style to positional in the modern style, but I find it difficult to see that big a change. Anyway, in those years Steinitz started to present his new theories, and they form the subject of the coming chapters.

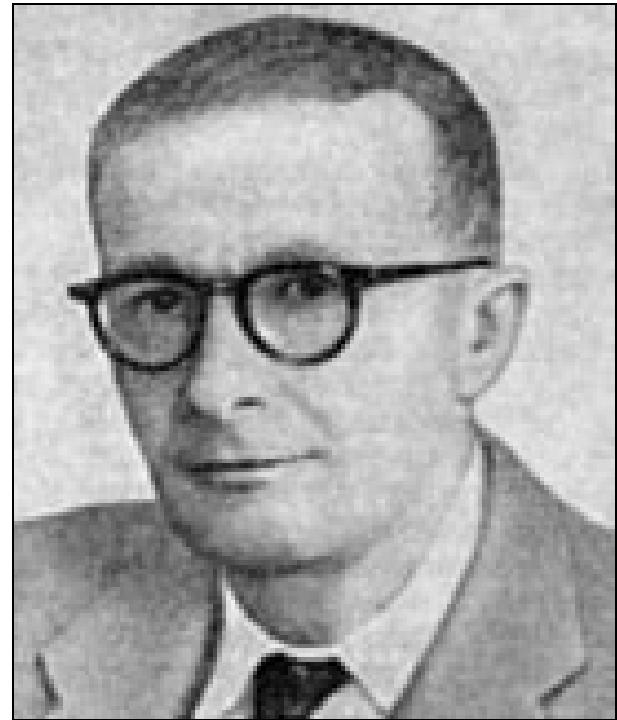
19

The Great Steinitz Hoax

Cecil Purdy

In all standard textbooks, William Steinitz is presented as the one who discovered or developed the theory of positional play. In the next chapters I will take a look at three different aspects: the theory of balance, the elements of positional play and the style of play that resulted from the theory.

To summarize the theory in a few sentences: the starting position is more or less in balance, and an advantage can only be attained as a result of mistakes by the opponent. Those advantages can consist of different elements: things like better pieces, better pawn structure, safer king, etcetera. The balance cannot be (positively) turned around by attacking play that has no basis in the position. Therefore a style of play is advised that, based on the important elements in the position, slowly tries to ‘accumulate small advantages’. Only when the scales are tilted because of mistakes made by the opponent, a rigorous attack is justified.



In 1978, the Australian correspondence grandmaster Cecil Purdy published an article with this chapter’s title. It’s an interesting article, well worth reading completely, but to summarize it very briefly, Purdy’s main claim is that what we know as Steinitz’s theory was actually invented by his successor, Lasker.

‘A gigantic delusion has beset the chess world for almost half a century – not only the rank and file of the chess world but its leading writers, who have spread the delusion further and further. [...] The delusion is that William Steinitz formulated certain chess principles, which have become known as the Steinitz principles or the Steinitz theory. The truth is that these principles were indeed formulated, but solely by Emanuel Lasker.’⁸²

Purdy’s article went by relatively unnoticed. A few authors came forward to rescue Steinitz’s reputation. Among them was Hans Ree, who was initially very enthusiastic about this rather sensational revelation, but soon came to realize it was too good to be true. In an article in *New In Chess* magazine, Ree draws attention to a few places in Steinitz’s oeuvre where Steinitz develops elements of positional theory that were apparently missed by Purdy.⁸³

Nonetheless, I think Purdy has some good points, although not exactly for his main claim that Lasker invented what has been ascribed to Steinitz. However, we will see later that Lasker did add a few things of his own, to say the least.

In a lot of books we get a comprehensive and detailed description of Steinitz's theories, but the strange thing is that we rarely find any quotation of Steinitz (and many references to Lasker). Purdy made every effort to find the place where Steinitz had written down his main points, but couldn't find anything. You might expect Steinitz's main work, *The Modern Chess Instructor*, to be the place for a comprehensive exposition of his theory. Steinitz does write quite a few things about his 'new school' in that book, but it seems to differ from what later has been presented as his theory.

According to the chess historian Ruurd Kunnen,

'There is no systematic exposition of Steinitz known on the principles of the new style of play. We learned these later from Lasker and Euwe.'⁸⁴

Another historian, David Hooper, says:

'Although Steinitz never articulated the theory in one comprehensive explanation, much of it is found in the quoted comments and by implication in some of his annotations.'⁸⁵

So we are left with a few interesting questions. What did Steinitz exactly mean with his 'modern school'? Which elements of it are really new? And what have subsequent authors, especially Lasker, made out of it?

20

The concept of balance

The core of Steinitz's theory is supposedly formed by his ideas on balance. I give David Hooper's representation of them, but with his caveat that there is not one single place in Steinitz's oeuvre where it is comprehensively brought together.⁸⁶ Hooper also adds that the seventh paragraph is attributed by Lasker to Steinitz, although he could not find the source for this in Steinitz's works.

1. At the beginning of the game the forces stand in equilibrium.
2. Correct play on both sides maintains this equilibrium and leads to a drawn game.
3. Therefore a player can win only as a consequence of an error made by the opponent. (There is no such thing as a winning move.)
4. As long as the equilibrium is maintained, an attack, however skilful, cannot succeed against correct defence. Such a defence will eventually necessitate the withdrawal and regrouping of the attacking pieces and the attacker will then inevitably suffer disadvantage.
5. Therefore a player should not attack until he already has an advantage, caused by the opponent's error, that justifies the decision to attack.
6. At the beginning of the game, a player should not at once seek to attack. Instead, a player should seek to disturb the equilibrium in his favour by inducing the opponent to make an error – a preliminary before attacking.
7. When a sufficient advantage has been obtained, a player must attack or the advantage will be dissipated.'

Players of today might think most of these postulates are rather evident, but supposedly, in the days of Steinitz this was a revolutionary set of ideas. In *Schicksalmomente der Schachgeschichte* it is even characterized as a Copernican revolution.

This story has been told so many times that you might take it for granted without much further ado. But can it really be that this concept of balance, which seems so natural and self-evident to us today, was a mind-blowing idea some 150 years ago?

Hooper adds to the above list that

‘The principles of paragraphs 1 to 7 may well have been understood intuitively by some masters of an earlier time.’ In particular he mentions Louis Paulsen: ‘A pioneer of defensive play, Paulsen practiced with success what he preached and he may be regarded as the true progenitor of the theory.’

Earlier, I criticized the way in which often a caricature is made of so-called Romantic chess, and here we have another good example. Looking at their books and analyses, I see no reason to believe that the players of those days would question the basic point of this theory (the third paragraph): that chess is a game of balance that can only change because of mistakes made.

If you look at game analyses, for example from the book by Neumann and Suhle, you will see they look just like analyses of our time, with discussions on the pros and cons of a position or a move, and evaluations of moves like ‘losing the advantage’ or ‘turning a bad position into a lost one’. Just one example, the first game from this book:

Adolf Anderssen – Louis Paulsen London 1862

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.d3 d6

‘We believe that the defence 4...d6, which Paulsen chooses here, is safer than the formerly common 4....♗c5. It cannot be denied that White gets the more free and easy play; though Black after 5.♗xc6 gets the two bishops against bishop and knight, which in general is considered advantageous, in this case they don’t have much room to become active, whereas White’s queens knight can become very strong. We don’t however think this advantage is decisive.’

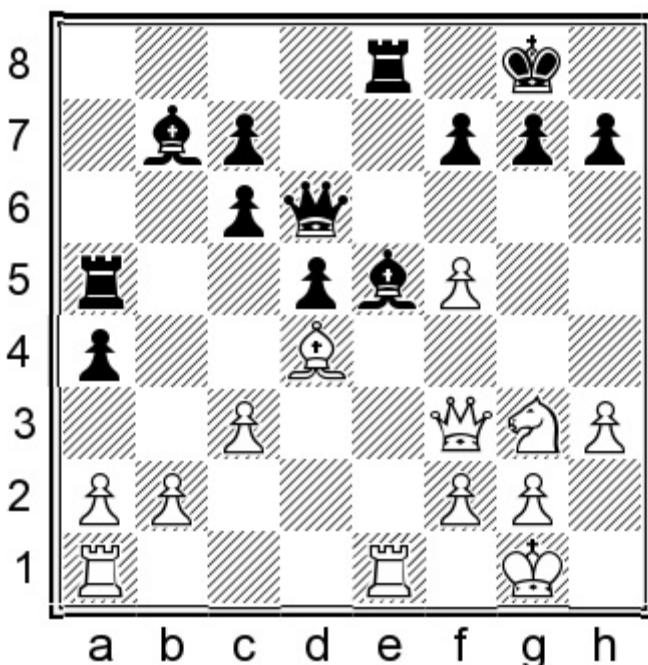
5.♗xc6+ bxc6 6.h3 ♘e7

‘Not the best move. Black’s play gets hampered by this.’

7.♗c3 0-0 8.0-0 ♘e8 9.d4 exd4 10.♗xd4 ♘b7 11.♗e3 d5 12.♗f5 ♘f6 13.♗c5 ♘d6 14.♗e1 ♘e8 15.♗g4 ♘xf5 16.exf5 ♘d7 17.♗f3 a5 18.♗e2 a4 19.c3 ♘a5

‘A mistaken combination, which shows itself already at move 22.’

20.♗d4 ♘d6 21.♗g3 ♘e5



22.f6 ♘xf6 23.♗h5 g5 24.♗e2(?)

'Here White already had a win at hand; he should have played 24.h4, after which Black would have been lost, because after 24...h6 there would follow: 25.hxg5 hxg5 26. $\mathbb{E}xe5$ $\mathbb{E}xe5$ 27.f4 $\mathbb{W}xf4$ 28. $\mathbb{E}f1$ $\mathbb{W}xg3$ 29. $\mathbb{W}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xe5+$ $\mathbb{W}xe5$ 31. $\mathbb{W}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 32. $\mathbb{E}f7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 33. $\mathbb{W}g8+$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 34. $\mathbb{W}h7+$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 35. $\mathbb{W}h3$ mate.'

24... $\mathbb{W}h8(?)$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ f6 26. $\mathbb{W}h5$ $\mathbb{E}xe5$ 27. $\mathbb{E}xe5$ fxe5 28. $\mathbb{W}e8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g7$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ 1-0

Not a perfect analysis – though the line with 24.h4! is nice and Black is indeed going wrong with 19... $\mathbb{E}a5$, the move 21... $\mathbb{Q}e5$ is not identified as losing – but from this one, as well as from the rest of the book, you don't get the impression that these commentators have a fundamentally different view on balance of position than we do.

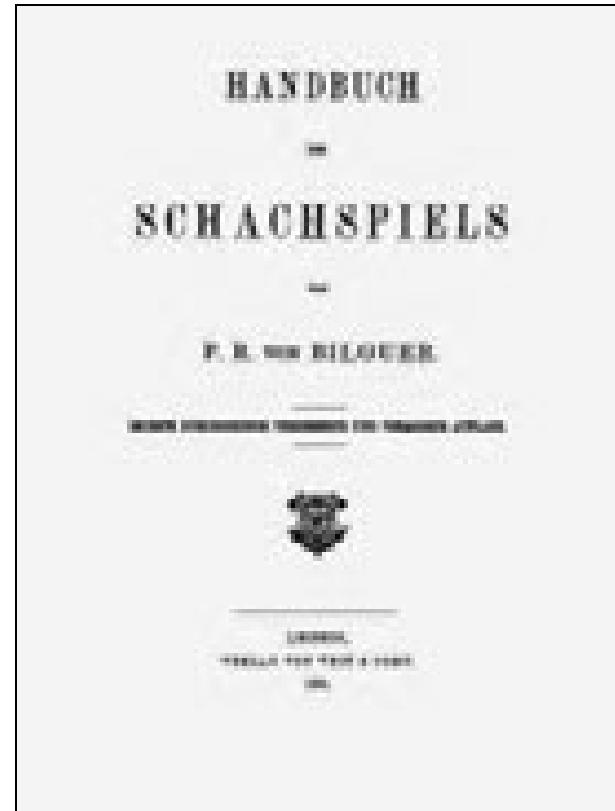
In the influential textbooks of those days it is also hard to find anything opposing the idea of chess as a game of balance or a lot of promotion for the 'vom ersten Zug an auf Matt' mentality. For example Von der Lasa in the *Handbuch des Schachspiels* (also known as the Bilguer) states:

'As soon as you become better versed in our game, you will see that the win in a game cannot be achieved in just a few moves if the opponent is playing attentively, since the one player has exactly the same army and the same means at his disposal as the other [...] from this it follows, that it is not possible to play from the beginning for mate (supposing the opponent doesn't make decisive mistakes), but on the contrary that it is essential to develop your pieces well and after that to make use of your opponent's mistakes or to keep your position in good shape or improve it gradually, to finally be able to deliver the mate.'⁸⁷

In another textbook, published just before the London 1851 tournament, the strong British player Samuel Boden (see the win against Morphy in Chapter 17 – his only one to be fair, since he lost the match 7½-2½), expresses these ideas in similar words:

'Therefore, the attack and defence being played with equal skill, the first move has no real inherent advantage, beyond its ensuring one's not having to play early a servile defence, and its giving a player the chance of adopting his own opening, whichever he may like best. [...]

Every student will perceive the importance of rapidly developing his forces – of bringing them out into active play. In order to frame a good attack, in correct play, the whole of the pieces should be in the field, that the attack may not break down for want of sufficient force to maintain it. Do not therefore make premature



assaults on the adverse King, whilst half your men are at home.' And adding the note: 'Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, as to others, such as may arise in case of very erroneous play on the part of the defence. [...]

With regard to the attack and defence in the opening of a game, we shall further remark [...], that the advantage of having the attack rarely lasts beyond the commencement of the game, unless the adversary commit some error in the defence. [...] The point at which the advantage of the move should cease, is sometimes fixed at about the fourteenth move, but this is as likely to be error in any given case as not; for such period, as we have said, is advanced or retarded according to the system of defence chosen.'⁸⁸

Those old guys knew far more than I ever expected! Not only did they realize that the advantage of the opening move is rather small, some of them already knew exactly at which move its effect has been exhausted.

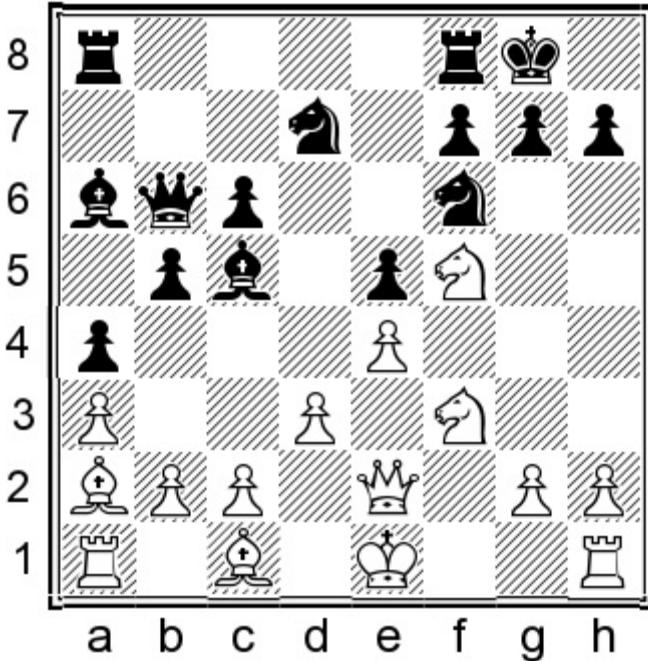
There can be discussion about the value of the first-move advantage – and there has been plenty in history, with the idea that the initial position is winning for White as the most extreme standpoint – but, apart from that, I think that almost all players, before or after Steinitz, agreed on the first three paragraphs. But the next four are not that self-evident. It is not very clear what is meant by 'attack' in these paragraphs, but no matter what the precise definition, I think these claims simply do not hold true.

When you play a gambit, you have to play for the attack to get something out of it. But also without having sacrificed anything there are a lot of equal positions where you can start an attack or, also very commonly, where both players start their own attack. With correct play by both sides these attacks lead to new forms of equilibrium.

William Steinitz – Adolf Anderssen Baden-Baden 1870

1.e4 e5 2.♘c3 ♜c5 3.f4 d6 4.♘f3 ♜f6 5.♗c4 c6 6.fxe5 dxe5 7.♗e2 ♜bd7 8.d3 b5 9.♗b3 a5 10.a3 ♜b6 11.♗d1 a4 12.♗a2 0-0 13.♗e3 ♜a6 14.♗f5

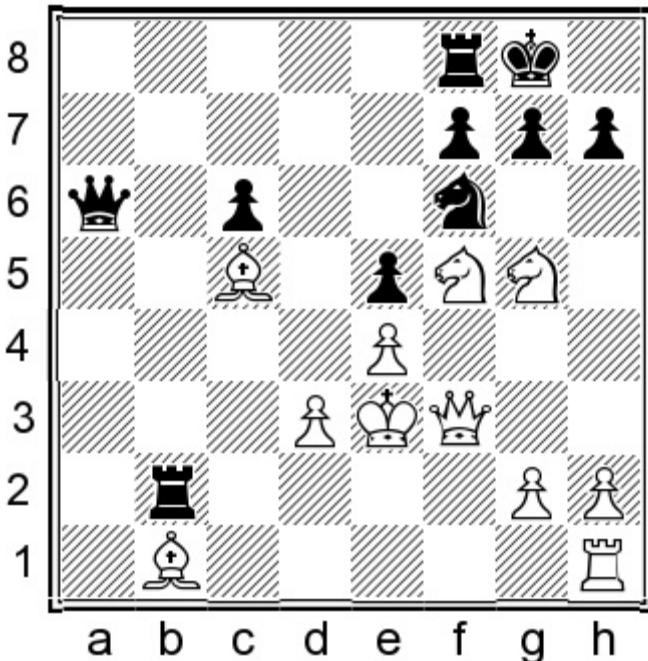
One more game from the Baden-Baden tournament from 1870. Anderssen edged out Steinitz by half a point thanks to his 2-0 win in their mini-match. Both games were extremely tense.



The position above is from the type mentioned: chances are probably about equal, but both players have to go for their attacking chances. White has nice possibilities on the kingside, with the half-open f-file, the knight on f5 and the bishop on a2 and other pieces that can easily join the attack, whereas Black's pieces are far away on the queenside. It is not easy to see how Black in the long run can cope with White's superiority on the kingside, so he should seek counterplay on the other side.

So much for the example. The rest of the game does not really show mutual correct play, leading to a new balance...

14...b4 15.axb4 ♜xb4+ 16.c3 ♜a5 17.♘g5 ♜ad8 18.♗f3 ♜b6 19.♗b1 a3 20.b4 ♜xb4 21.cxb4 ♜xb4+ 22.♗e2 a2 23.♗d2 ♜b5 24.♗xa2 ♜c5 25.♗xa6 ♜xa6 26.♗b4 ♜b8 27.♗xc5 ♜b2+ 28.♗e3



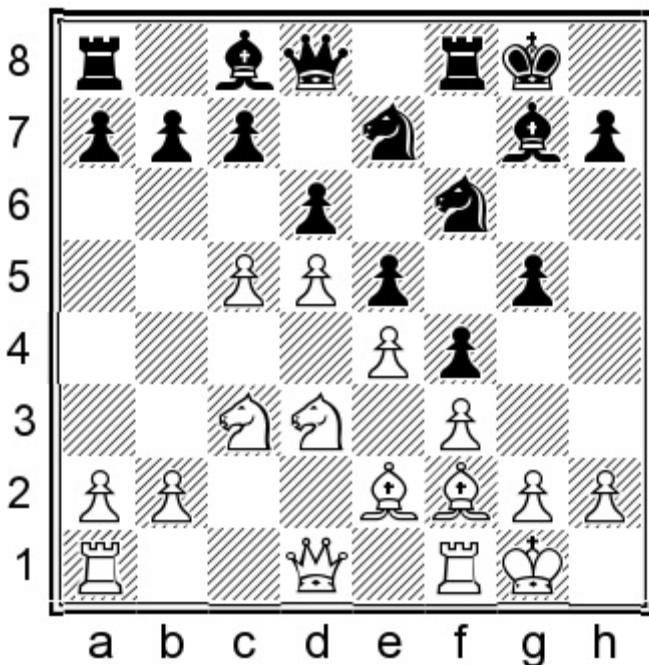
Crazy things have happened, with Anderssen answering every setback with new investments. At move 27 Steinitz finally cracked under the pressure.

28... $\mathbb{W}a5!$ 29. $\mathbb{B}d1 \mathbb{W}xc5+$ 30.d4 exd4+ 31. $\mathbb{Q}f4 h6$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}h3 \mathbb{E}e8$ 33. $\mathbb{W}d3 g5+$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}f3 g4+$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}g3 \mathbb{E}xe4$ 36. $\mathbb{W}f1 \mathbb{W}e5+$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}h4 gxh3+$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xh3 \mathbb{B}b3+$ 39.g3 $\mathbb{E}f4$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}xh6+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 41. $\mathbb{W}c4 \mathbb{E}h4+$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}g2 \mathbb{E}xh2+$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}xh2 \mathbb{W}xg3+$ 44. $\mathbb{Q}h1 \mathbb{W}h3+$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}g1 \mathbb{E}g3+$

And White resigned.

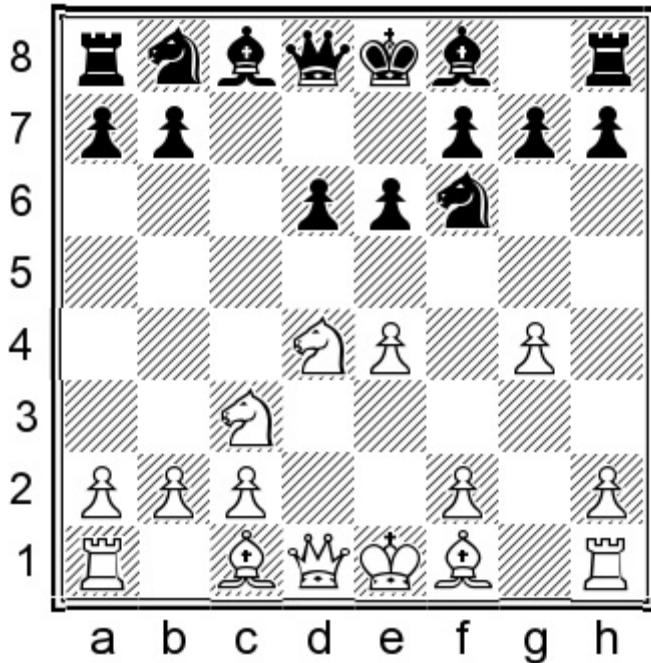
A similar situation arises from a lot of openings, with both players going for their own attack. The King's Indian directly comes to mind – for example, the classical main line:

1.d4 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 2.c4 g6 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}g7$ 4.e4 d6 5. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ 0-0 6. $\mathbb{Q}e2 e5$ 7.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 8.d5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}e1 \mathbb{Q}d7$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}e3 f5$ 11.f3 f4 12. $\mathbb{Q}f2 g5$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 14.c5



The Open Sicilian more often than not sees White attacking vigorously from the beginning, although he hasn't obtained an advantage. Just one example: the Keres Attack in the Scheveningen Variation:

1.e4 c5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ d6 3.d4 cxd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4 \mathbb{Q}f6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3 e6$ 6.g4



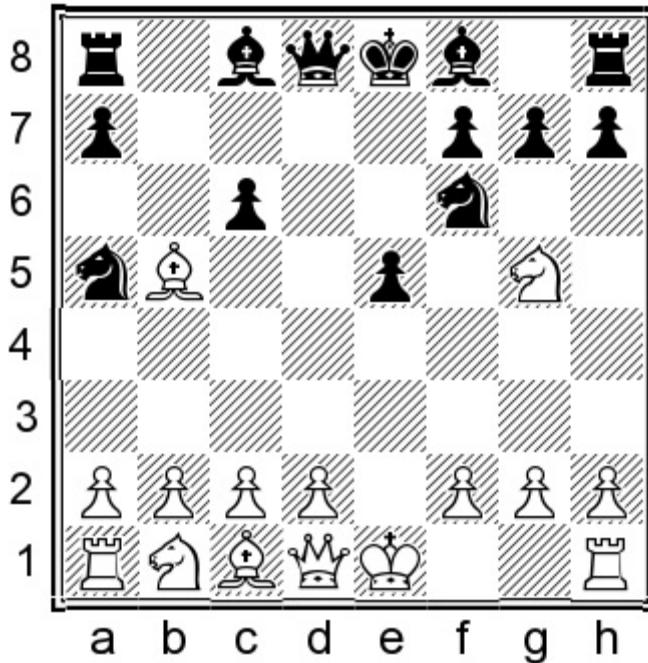
White plans to chase away the knight with g4-g5 and follow up with further pawn advances on the kingside.

If you attack from an equal position and the opponent makes no mistakes, the best you can hope for is to keep the balance, but there is no logical necessity to end up worse. Nor do I see the logical necessity that makes a gambit something that as a matter of principle should end up wrong.

As we have seen, the two main gambits of Steinitz's day, the Evans Gambit and the King's Gambit, are not White's best way to strive for an advantage (though not terribly bad either).

But another gambit criticized by Steinitz, the Two Knights Defence, still has a very good reputation:

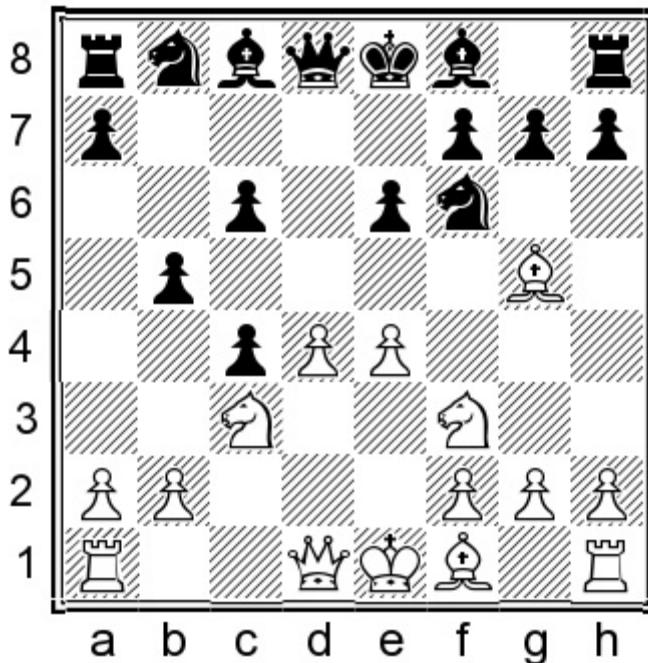
1.e4 e5 2.Qf3 Qc6 3.Qc4 Qf6 4.Qg5 d5 5.exd5 Qa5 6.Qb5+ c6 7.dxc6 bxc6



We will return to this position later on, since it was part of the famous telegraph match between Steinitz and Chigorin.

In the previous chapter I showed a position from the Slav. There are several gambit lines in the Slav, with White permanently giving up the c4-pawn.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♘f3 e6 5.♗g5 dxс4 6.e4 b5



This line and other Slav gambits look a bit like a mirrored King's Gambit. They are fully playable for White and are still main lines today.

There are also situations where you are worse and your best option is to attack, for example to escape

with a perpetual check.

Many more instances of justified attacks where you have no advantage can be given. Most games show both players combining attack with defence (and with ‘manoeuvring’). One could object that I’m giving examples of positions that are maybe about equal but very unbalanced, and argue that the ‘local’ advantages justify the attack. This is true, of course, but such a nuanced interpretation would make the paragraphs 4 to 7 almost meaningless, saying something like ‘do not attack when there is nothing to justify an attack’. Every player who attains a certain level comes to understand that you need some active pieces and some potential targets for an attack. I don’t think the theory of Steinitz was meant to address beginners whose main strategy is to bring only the queen into play and then hope it will hoover through the opponent’s position.

The statement in paragraph 7 is sometimes called ‘Steinitz’s rule’, but as Hooper indicated, it might be an addition by Lasker. In a later chapter we will see him becoming rather ecstatic about it.

The idea that an advantage will disappear if you don’t act upon it has often been hailed as a brilliant discovery, but I fail to see why. For one thing (though that looks like trying to find fault with everything), there are many types of advantage that do not need ‘attacking’ to materialize.

But more importantly, I wonder who will feel addressed by this revelation. We don’t have to worry about the Romantic players before Steinitz: since they presumably attacked no matter what, they certainly did so when they had the advantage. Actually it sounds at best to be advice for a beginner whose main strategy is to sit and wait for the opponent to hand over his material all by himself. For all chess players – before and after Steinitz – it is so natural to try to use the activity of their pieces that they need not be encouraged at all ‘to do something’ when they have the advantage. That this truism has so often been glorified cannot be explained otherwise as through Lasker’s influence; we will see later why this idea was especially valuable to him.

Inspiration

In its modest version, the theory of balance looks like a scientific law. Steinitz did like to call his theories scientific. It stands in contrast to the ‘Romantic’ view, that inspired play might ‘of itself’ create a winning position.

I don’t know if before Steinitz there were many players upholding this idea: that the inspired genius could overcome the limits set by the position. I have difficulty in believing this. As soon as you become better versed in our game, you develop some feeling for the balance and the possibilities in a position. Can you be a strong player and at the same time believe you are not bound by the basic laws of (chess) nature?

Steinitz was often criticized for his ‘dull’ play and has been characterized as ‘the man who killed brilliant chess’. But those longing for the days of the magic of Morphy and Anderssen were often rather unskilled amateurs, who may have believed that an inspired attack could overthrow a balanced position. The stronger players in those days (including Morphy and Anderssen) certainly did not believe in magic in this sense.

When it comes to magic in more recent chess history, the name of Mikhail Tal immediately springs to mind. ‘The magician from Riga’ was his honorary title. ‘You must take your opponent into a deep

dark forest where $2+2=5$, and the path leading out is only wide enough for one' is a famous quote by him, expressing a spark of romanticism. Tal was a genius in complications, but I don't think he held superstitious beliefs.

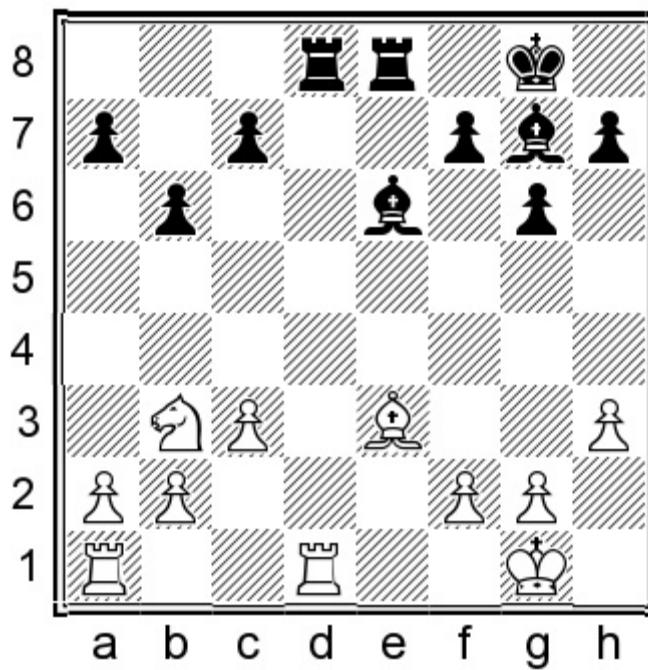
My team-mate from long ago, Friso Nijboer, had the habit of thinking extremely long on certain moves and I sometimes had the impression that he believed that by the sheer power of his thinking he could change the evaluation of the position. And sometimes he did manage amazing things. But this was more likely a case of overoptimism than superstition.

When I'm in a bad position, I tend to use too much time as well. Not being satisfied with the outcome of any of my alternatives, I keep looking for something better. Unfortunately, this procedure rarely has the desired effect – on the contrary, after surviving the first crisis often time pressure later on in the game does the trick. I admire players who in difficult positions manage to take the hard decisions quickly – if there is nothing better, then let's get it over with.

A lot has been written about the concept of balance. Actually I do not know if Steinitz considered it his most important and novel contribution. Or considered it novel at all. There are better candidates, I guess.

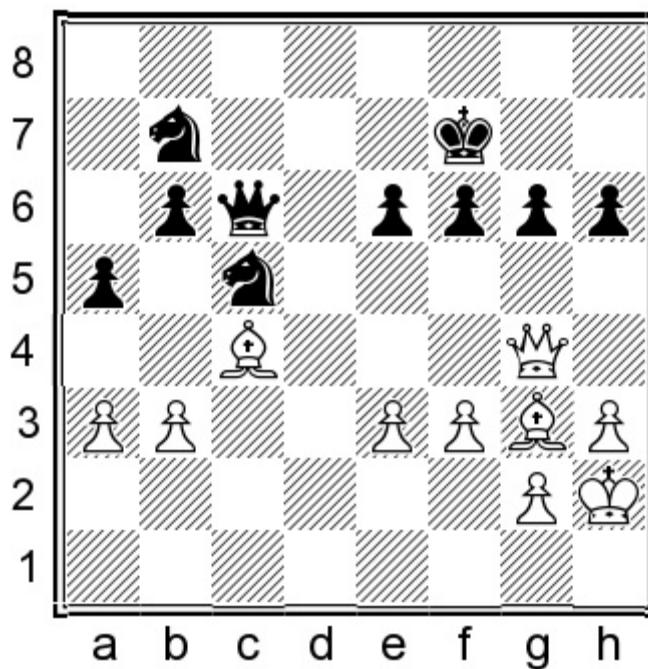
Exercises for Chapter 21

91 (go to the solution)



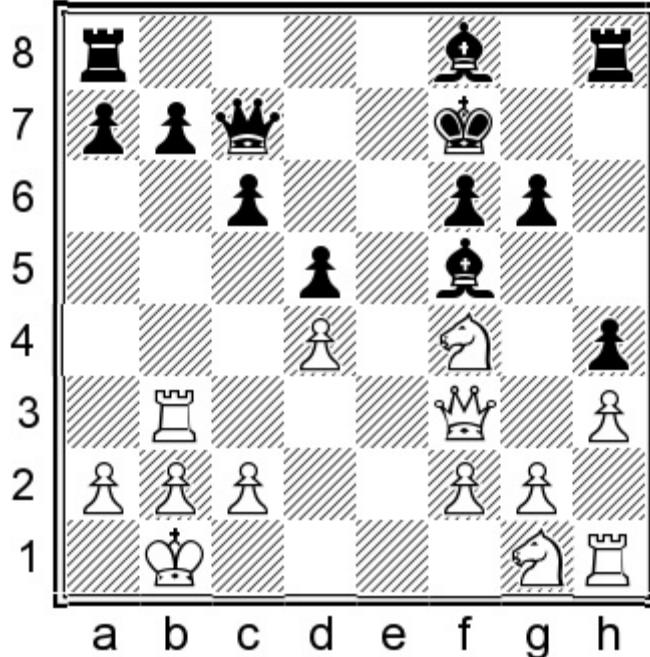
Black to move

92 (go to the solution)



White to move

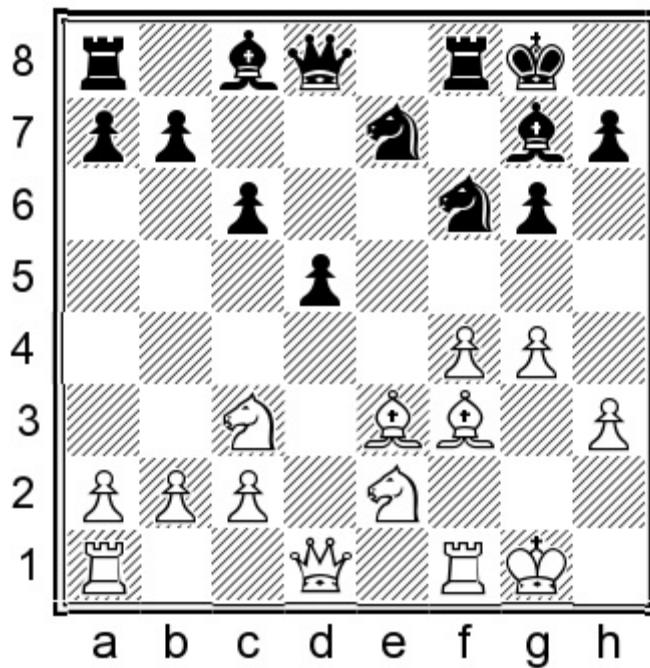
93 (*go to the solution*)



Black to move

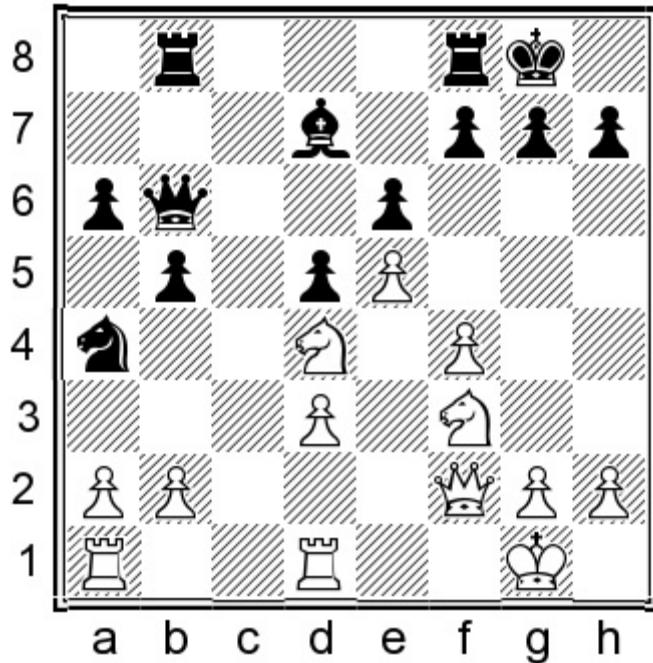
Black can force a draw by repetition through 17... $\mathbb{Q}e4$ 18. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 19. $\mathbb{W}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e4$. Seize this opportunity?

94 (*go to the solution*)



Black to move

95 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

21

The elements of positional play

The second important part of what is commonly presented as Steinitz's theory is formed by 'the elements of positional play', sometimes simply called Steinitz's elements. On an evaluation of these elements (or advantages) a plan of action should be based. There are different lists of 'Steinitzean' elements, which can be explained by the fact that Steinitz never made a comprehensive list of them. A typical example may contain:

- material advantage
- king safety
- lead in development
- control of a file, rank or diagonal
- bishop pair
- good and bad bishops
- piece out of play
- space advantage
- control of the centre
- weak pawns, doubled pawns, isolated pawns

passed pawns

weak (or strong) squares

pawn majority on the queenside

All these elements were known before Steinitz. There is no place where Steinitz lists those elements together, nor can I find a place where Steinitz claims that these were his invention. If there is a ‘Great Steinitz Hoax’, as Purdy claims, then I think it is not Lasker attributing *his* inventions to Steinitz, but rather the fact that some theories that have been attributed to Steinitz (the principle of balance and the positional elements) were at the time already well known. Hooper says,

‘The kind of advantages referred to are greater mobility, better pawn formation, and many others, most of which were known before Steinitz’s time’.⁸⁹

This doesn’t mean that Steinitz had no theory, or style of play, of his own, which he called the ‘modern school’. What this looked like we will see in the next chapters.

In his influential work *The Chess-Player’s Handbook*, Staunton addresses almost all of the elements mentioned above. Other textbooks of the time have similar lists. And even further back in time, La Bourdonnais had already written about the different pieces and their relative values, mentioning almost everything in the above list. For example, about the knight he says:

‘A knight posted in the opponent’s position and supported by a pawn is extremely effective when it cannot be driven away by pawns or pieces.’⁹⁰

I want to single out two elements to which Steinitz has made valuable contributions. These are the pair of bishops and the subject of weak (or strong) squares.

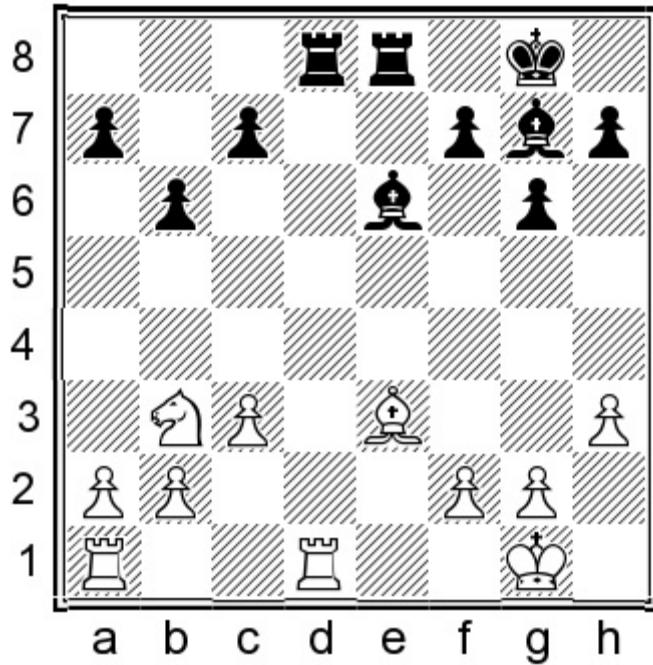
Throughout the history of chess theory, the relative value of the pieces has been an important point of research and discussion. Already quite early, the value of the pair of bishops (versus two knights or knight and bishop) has been acknowledged, though I don’t know who was the first to express the superiority of the pair of bishops. The appreciation for the pair of bishops has only grown over the years. If you ask an engine’s evaluations of a position, you will see that, *ceteris paribus*, the pair of bishops will bring you somewhere near 0.5 extra point.

Though he was not the first to recognize its importance, Steinitz was certainly a master in handling the pair of bishops and there are many fine examples of him exploiting it, like the game against Fraser in Chapter 17. A more famous one is the following:

Berthold Englisch

William Steinitz

London 1883



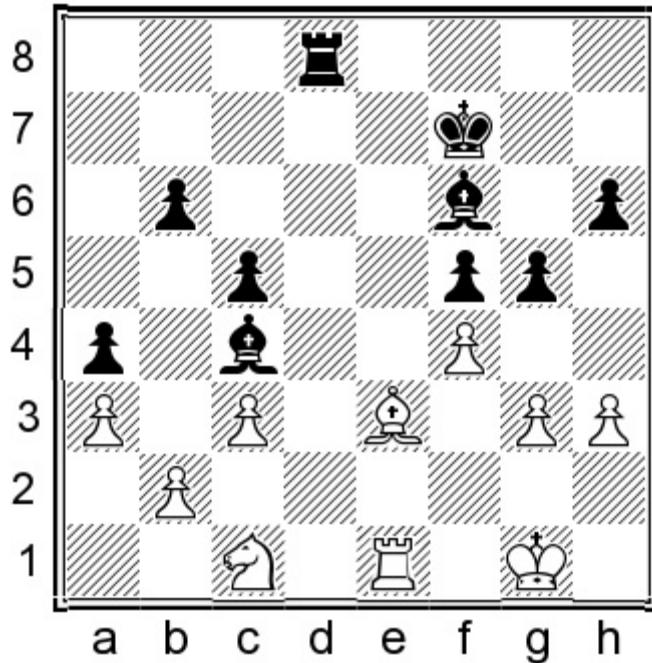
Black to move

(Exercise no 91)

19...c5!

Taking away the d4-square from the white pieces. The rest of this game is a good example of slowly steamrolling White off the board. While advancing his pawns on both sides of the board, Black has to take care that the white knight doesn't get some good squares.

20.♕g5 f6 21.♕f4 ♔f7 22.f3 g5 23.♗xd8 ♗xd8 24.♗e3 h6 25.♗e1 f5 26.f4 ♕f6 27.g3 a5 28.♘c1 a4 29.a3 ♕c4



Domination!

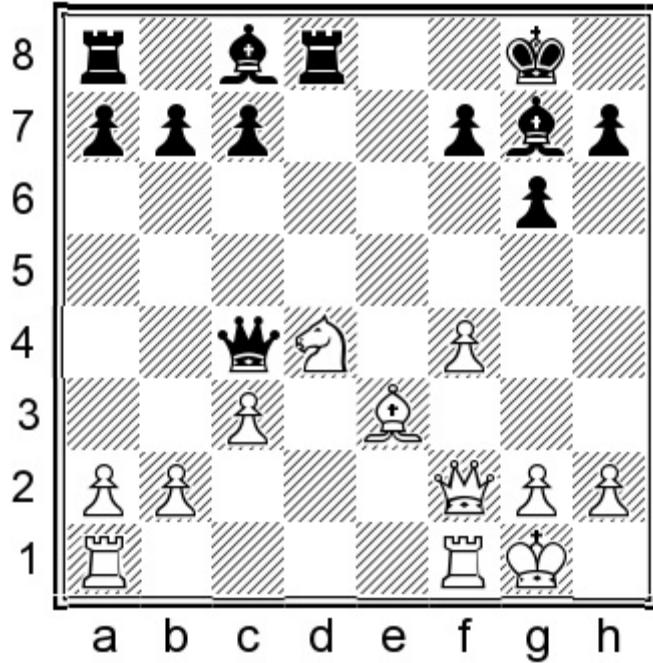
30. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $gxf4$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $hxg5$ 33. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 34. $h4$ $gxh4$ 35. $gxh4$ $\mathbb{Q}e8+$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$
 37. $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xe2$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 40. $c4$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $f4+$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $f3$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 0-1

In a game ten years earlier, Steinitz used exactly the same move. This time in the middlegame, though the strategy he followed was the same: taking away more and more breathing space from the knight, while not allowing it to suddenly find a nice outpost for itself:

Samuel Rosenthal

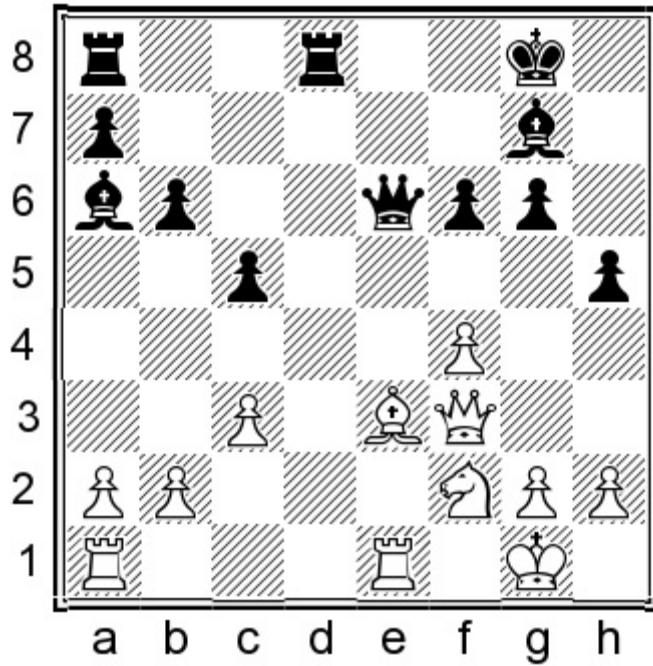
William Steinitz

Vienna 1873



Black to move

16...c5! 17.Qf3 b6 18.Qe5 We6 19.Wf3 Qa6 20.Efe1 f6 21.Qg4 h5 22.Qf2



Louis Paulsen

In line with the strategic idea, Black chased away the knight (20...f6 and 21...h5) without giving it any prospect of greener pastures.

22...Wf7 23.f5 g5 24.Ead1 Qb7 25.Wg3 Ed5 26.Exd5 Wxd5 27.Ed1 Wxf5 28.Wc7 Qd5 29.b3 Ee8
30.c4 Qf7 31.Qc1 Ee2 32.Ef1 Wc2 33.Wg3 Wxa2 34.Wb8+ Qh7 35.Wg3 Qg6 36.h4 g4 37.Qd3 Wxb3
38.Wc7 Wxd3 0-1

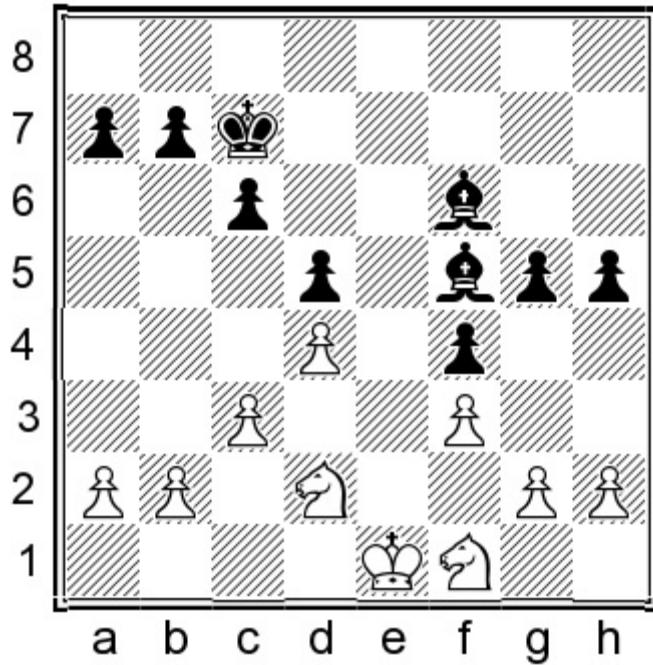
In the following lengthy quote, Chernev refers to the above game, while trying to demonstrate that the intellectual ownership of this typical strategy belongs to Paulsen instead of Steinitz. Apart from that, his description of how the Steinitz/Tarrasch school ended the Romantic style is a nice example of the conventional view on chess history.

'Louis Paulsen, one of the earliest masters to discover something about position play, was little appreciated in his lifetime, and less later. [...] The popular concept is that Steinitz is the father of the modern school of strategy, the discoverer of the elements of position play. Tarrasch then refined these theories of Steinitz and fashioned a technique based on principles by means of which a player could be guided in the conduct of his game. Admittedly, this is more dependable than awaiting the caprices of inspiration.'

Generally, this is true, but Paulsen made one important contribution in the field of endgame strategy which is attributed to Steinitz. He was the first to discover the superiority of two bishops to two knights in the ending! In the game [Hannah-Paulsen] he anticipates by eleven years the Vienna, 1873, encounter between Rosenthal and Steinitz, about which Réti says, "This is perhaps the oldest game in which we find the practical application of the theory *created by Steinitz* [italics mine] to demonstrate the advantage of the two combined Bishops." [...] As we shall see, Paulsen keeps his Bishops for the ending and plays according the precept, driving the Knights off from good squares with his Pawns and obtaining more space for his Bishops.⁹¹



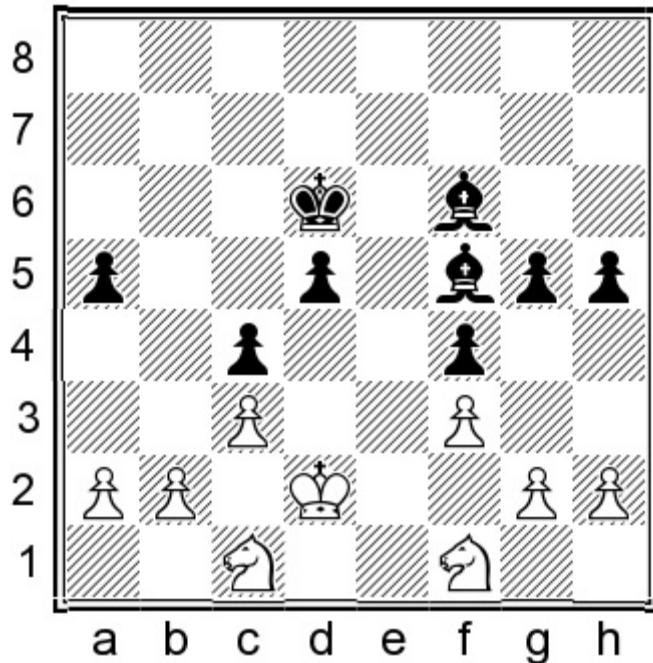
**James Hannah
Louis Paulsen
London 1862**



White to move

This is the ending Chernev was talking about. At this point Black is already close to winning.

25. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ b6 26. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ a5 27. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ c5 29. dx c 5+ bx c 5 30. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ c4 31. $\mathbb{Q}c1$



Watch the knights! Black continued his strategy with 31...g4 and later won the game.

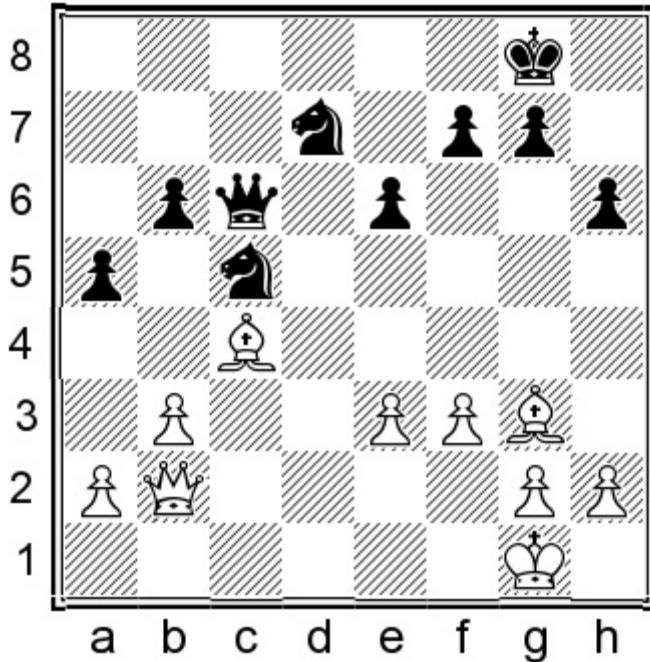
In modern chess, there is an abundance of examples of strong pairs of bishops. For example, in the Marshall Attack in the Spanish, Black often easily secures a draw with just the pair of bishops as compensation for the pawn.

When I wrote this I was following the 2019 Vugar Gashimov Memorial, which was convincingly won by Magnus Carlsen with 7/9. Coincidentally, in a game I was following live, the pair of bishops played the leading part. Just as in the Paulsen game, the bishops are facing a pair of knights.

Alexander Grischuk

Veselin Topalov

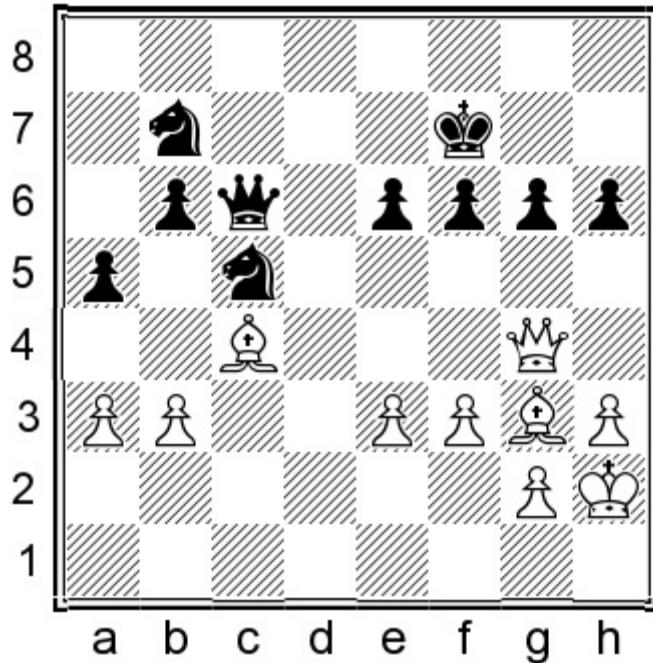
Shamkir 2019



White to move

I tuned in at this point and wondered if White would be able to make something out of the bishop pair. I guessed that White was a bit better, but later saw that my engine already thinks it is getting close to +1.

31.♗e2 f6 32.♗b5 ♗d5 33.♗c4 ♗c6 34.♗b2 ♔f7 35.h3 ♘b7 36.♗d4 ♔e7 37.♗g4 ♔f7 38.♔h2 ♘dc5 39.a3 g6

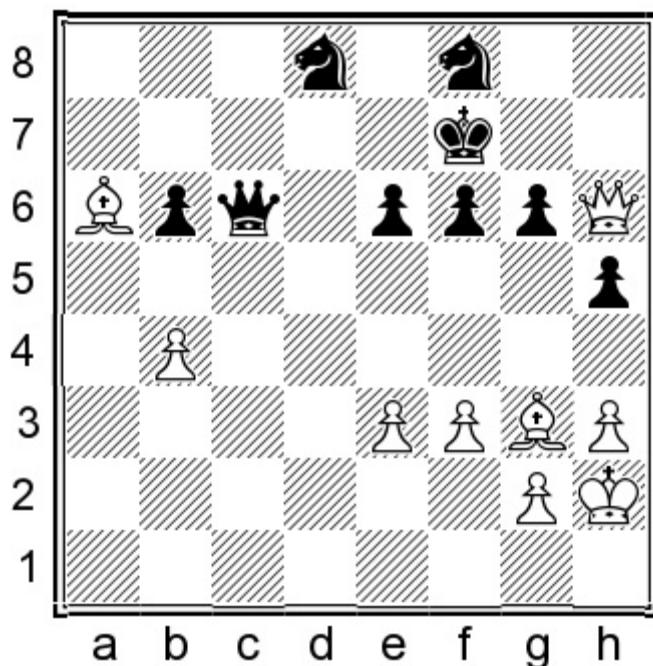


(Exercise no 92)

40.b4!

Black's position has quickly deteriorated and with this move, using Steinitz's (or Paulsen's) technique, Black's best knight gets pushed back. And to make things even worse, Black is forced to insert the move ...h6-h5, since the direct retreat with (40...axb4 41.axb4) 41... $\mathbb{Q}d7$ fails to 42.b5 and the black queen cannot keep e6 covered.

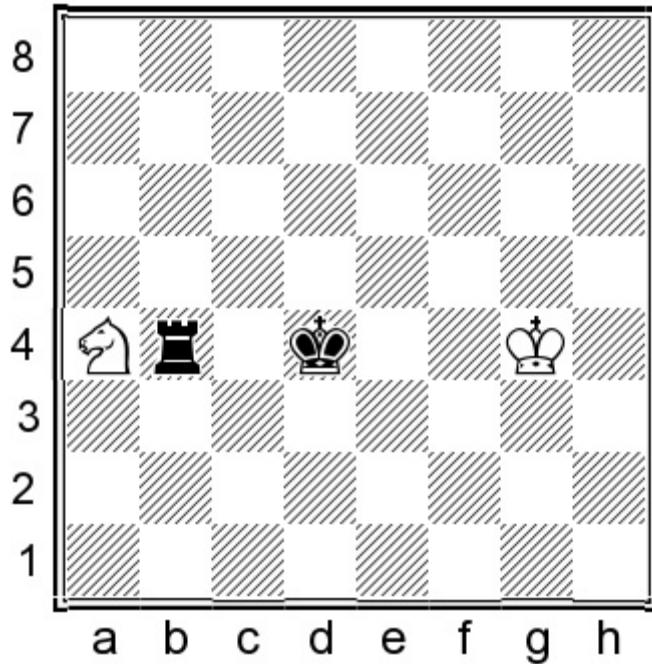
40...axb4 41.axb4 h5 42. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 43. $\mathbb{Q}a6$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 44. $\mathbb{W}h6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$



One more picture. Now the knights resemble those of Paulsen's opponent. White won after some more moves.

The mystery of the lost moves

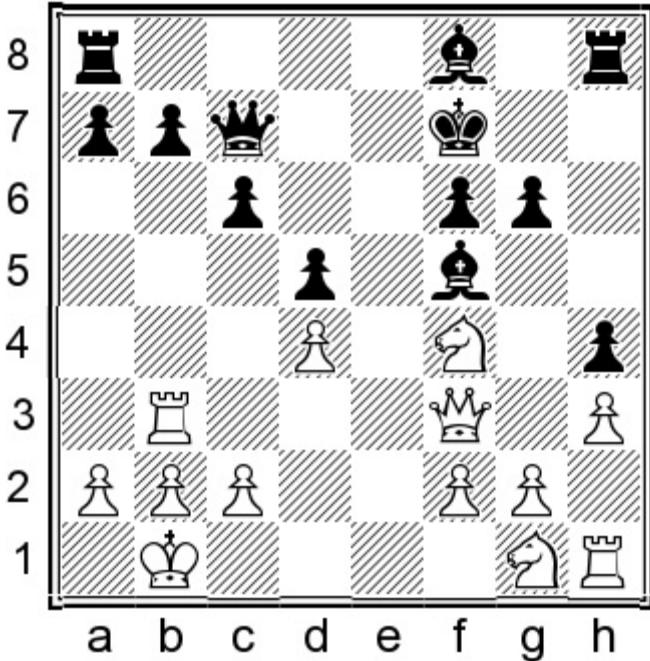
One of the games with Steinitz demonstrating the power of the bishops is rather remarkable in another respect. Euwe gives this game in *The Development of Chess Style*.



This was the nice final position. Euwe gives 96... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ as the last move, but my database says it was move 124. How to explain the difference?

Gustav Neumann – William Steinitz Baden-Baden 1870

1.d4 f5 2.e4 fxe4 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ c6 5. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ exf6 6. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ d5 7. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 8. $\mathbb{W}e2+$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 9.0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 10. $\mathbb{W}f3$ g6 11. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ h5 13.h3 h4 14. $\mathbb{Q}3e2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd3$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f4$



(Exercise no 93)

Strong play has given Steinitz a winning advantage: the bishops are completely superior to the knights who already suffer from lack of good squares. Black's king might look a bit exposed (a typical feature of Steinitz's play we'll have a closer look at later on), but White has no real prospects of starting an attack against it.

17...♝e4 18.♛g4 ♜f5

Here Euwe adds a peculiar comment: '[the repetition] has neither benefitted nor harmed: White's queen has to return to f3 and Black is then to move for the second time in the same position. He could therefore force a draw by repetition if he wants. Of course he declines the honour. When playing with a clock, a repetition like this allows a few quick moves, which spares thinking time.' After this Euwe lets the game continue with 19.♛f3 ♜d6.

Is Euwe deliberately fooling the reader here, or was he relying on an already amended copy of this game? I'm afraid that his adding of those comments suggests the first. Anyway, the fact is that Steinitz did not repeat moves just once, but no fewer than six times, gaining 12 moves.

This was one of the first tournaments with time measurement, and the rules about repetition that Euwe is referring to simply did not exist at the time. Before time measurement there was no need for such rules, and it was actually this game that made clear that they were needed. Neumann complained heavily about Steinitz's (mis-)behaviour, turning this already long game into a marathon, though Steinitz was only making use of a lacuna in the rules.⁹² A welcome one for him, since he liked having his time to think.

Steinitz clearly was fond of his newly invented trick – in this game he used two more opportunities for prolonged series of repetition, again polished away in Euwe's version. The series between moves 33

and 40 is, strangely enough, ended by Neumann, probably out of annoyance. Having spoiled a completely won position, Steinitz repeats the position no fewer than eight times, between move 85 and 101, before starting a final winning attempt. That might even have ended the other way around, but finally Steinitz managed to win a drawn ♕+♝ versus ♔+♞ endgame.

19.♔f3 ♔e4 20.♔g4 ♔f5 21.♔f3 ♔e4 22.♔g4 ♔f5 23.♔f3 ♔e4 24.♔g4 ♔f5 25.♔f3 ♔e4 26.♔g4 ♔f5
 27.♔f3 ♔e4 28.♔g4 ♔f5 29.♔f3 ♔d6 30.♗ge2 a5 31.♗g1 a4 32.♗e3 ♘ae8 33.g3 ♔e4 34.♔g4 ♔f5
 35.♔f3 ♔e4 36.♔g4 ♔f5 37.♔f3 ♔e4 38.♔g4 ♔f5 39.♔f3 ♔e4 40.♔g4 ♔f5 41.♗xe8 ♘xe8 42.♔f3 ♘a5
 43.♗c1 ♘a6 44.♗c3 b5 45.g4 ♔c8 46.♗d1 b4 47.♗e3 b3 48.a3 bxc2 49.g5 f5 50.♗xc2 ♘c4 51.♗g2
 ♘e2 52.♗ge1 f4 53.♗d1 ♘e4 54.♗g2 ♘b3 55.♘c3 ♘xc3 56.bxc3 ♘xh3 57.f3 ♘e8 58.♗xh4 ♘h8
 59.♗g2 ♘h5 60.♗ge1 ♔f5 61.♗b4 ♔d7 62.♗g2 ♔e6 63.♗ed3 ♔f5 64.♗b2 ♘h1+ 65.♔c2 ♘a1
 66.♗xa4 ♘xa3 67.♗c5 ♘xc5 68.dxc5 d4 69.cxd4 ♘xf3 70.d5 ♘g3 71.♗f2 f3 72.dxc6 ♔e6 73.♔d2 ♔e4
 74.♗f1 ♘g2+ 75.♔c3 ♘e2 76.c7 ♘e3+ 77.♔d2 ♘e2+ 78.♔d1 ♘b3+ 79.♔c1 ♘e6 80.♔c2 ♘c8 81.♔d1
 ♘g4 82.c6 ♔f4 83.♗d4 ♘e8 84.♗d2 ♘c8 85.♗d3 ♔g3 86.♗g1+ ♔f4 87.♗f1 ♘g3 88.♗g1+ ♔f4 89.♗f1
 ♘g3 90.♗g1+ ♔f4 91.♗f1 ♘g3 92.♗g1+ ♔f4 93.♗f1 ♘g3 94.♗g1+ ♔f4 95.♗f1 ♘g3 96.♗g1+ ♔f4
 97.♗f1 ♘g3 98.♗g1+ ♔f4 99.♗f1 ♘g3 100.♗g1+ ♔f4 101.♗f1 ♘e8 102.♔c4 ♘g3 103.♗xf3 ♘xf3
 104.♗xf3+ ♔xf3 105.♔d5 ♘a8 106.♔e5 ♘e3 107.♔f6 ♘c8 108.♔xg6 ♔f4 109.♔f6 ♘xc7 110.g6
 ♘xc6+ 111.♔f7 ♔f5 112.g7 ♘c7+ 113.♔f8 ♔f6 114.g8=♗+ ♔e6 115.♗h6 ♘h7 116.♗g4 ♘h4 117.♗e3
 ♘e4 118.♗d1 ♘f4+ 119.♔g7 ♘f3 120.♔g6 ♘e5 121.♔g5 ♘d4 122.♔g4 ♘f1 123.♗b2 ♘b1 124.♗a4
 ♘b4 0-1

As a writer, Euwe was primarily a teacher, not a historian, which might explain this amusing case of history falsification. It definitely shows a rather patronizing attitude, not untypical for those days (the early 1960s).

Weak squares

In previous chapters, we have already seen several players exploiting weak squares: Greco, La Bourdonnais, Staunton and Anderssen, to name a few. In the chapter on Baden-Baden 1870 we saw a growing awareness of the importance of this aspect of positional play and we also saw Neumann explicitly condemning a move (15...c5 by Morphy) because it allowed a beautiful outpost for a White knight on d5. I also gave La Bourdonnais's fitting description of this phenomenon.

So, Steinitz clearly was not the ‘inventor’ of this aspect of positional play, but he did add some theory to the subject and it played an important role in his preferred style of play.

In *The Modern Chess Instructor* he writes:

‘But [...] it has been proven beyond any doubt that [...] the mere weakness of any square on any part of the board [...] will cause great inconvenience and trouble and very often will be fatal.

In the middle of the game such points will generally be occupied by a hostile piece that will exercise a menacing attitude, and will be extremely difficult to dislodge. [...] A game will generally be lost when such a vantage ground can be taken by the opponent on the kingside or in the centre before the exchange of several pieces has been effected, but such weak squares are also dangerous in the ending.’⁹³

Different terms are used nowadays to address this subject, depending on the perspective: weak square, strong square, outpost. The word Steinitz uses is ‘hole’. I vividly remember a colourful opponent from blitz sessions in my youth who regularly cried out with great joy (and a heavy Amsterdam accent) ‘Gatenkaas!’ (Swiss cheese with holes).

Again from *The Modern Chess Instructor*: ‘The latter term, which is now generally accepted as a technical definition, was first used by the author in *The International Chess Magazine* of November 1886 [...]. The ‘hole’ means a square on the third or fourth rank (sixth or fifth rank for Black), in front of a pawn after the two adjoining pawns have been moved or captured.’⁹⁴

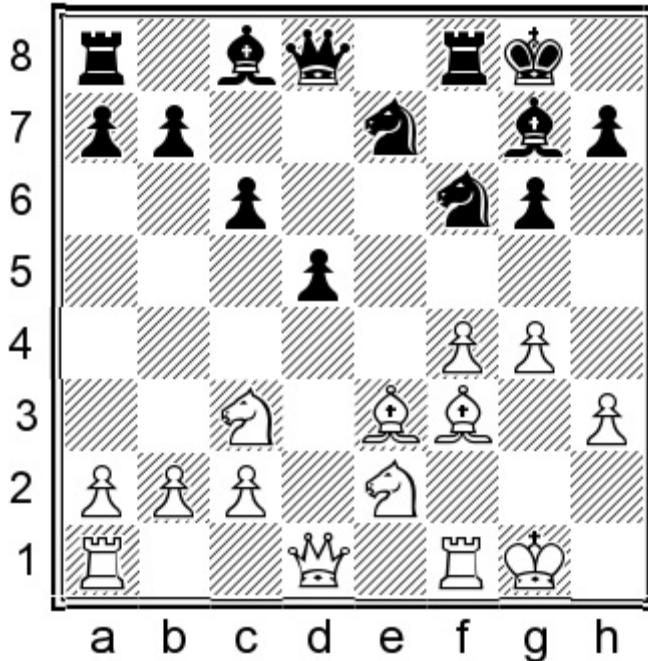
This definition is somewhat limited; today a broader definition would be used, at least for the concept of a strong/weak square. Such a square can be a good one on the fourth and even on the third rank (you can, for example, have a knight on a strong square in your own half of the board, not only on the opponent’s half, as in Steinitz’s definition). Also, it does not need to blockade a pawn. And finally, as an extra option, the adjoining pawns, apart from being moved or captured, can be blockaded or immobilized as well.

The next example shows Steinitz undermining White’s pawn structure to obtain a strong square on f5. In his own definition it would not classify as a hole, but it surely does ‘cause great inconvenience and trouble’.

George Mackenzie

William Steinitz

New York 1883



Black to move

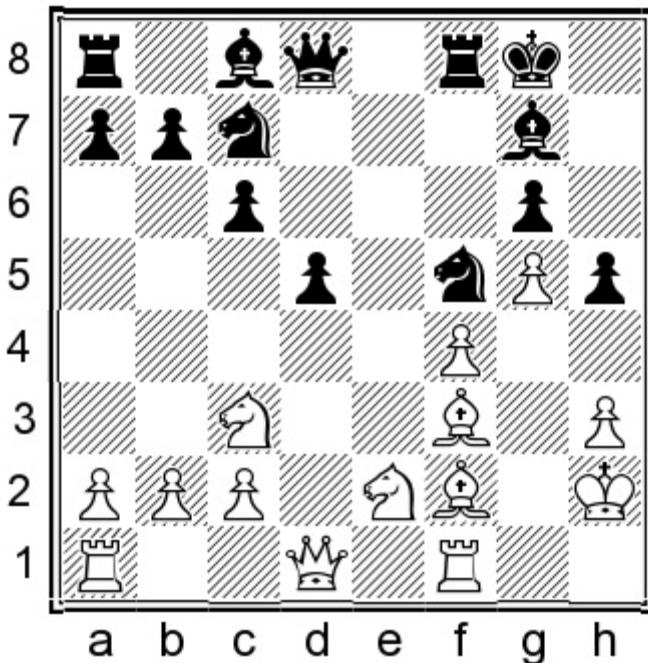
(Exercise no 94)

White has just played 15.g4. The pawn duo f4/g4 looks nice, but Steinitz seizes the chance to shoot ‘a hole’ in it.

15...h5!

With his next move White complies with the positional disaster. No better was 16.gxh5 $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ gxh5 with Black gaining a pawn *and* control of the light squares. Better was 16. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ to keep the structure intact. Then 16... $\mathbb{Q}xg4$! 17.hxg4 d4 looks good for Black, although a bit messy. I guess Steinitz intended to play like this, since the engine’s first choice, 16... $\mathbb{W}d7$!, is slightly inhuman, consistently aiming to force White to play g4-g5.

16.g5 $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$

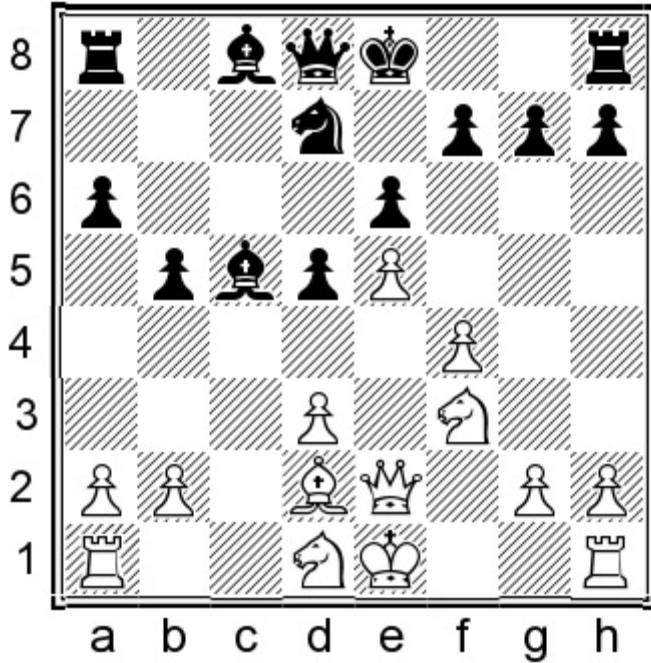


Watch the beautiful knight on f5.

19. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}fe1$ $\mathbb{W}c7$ 21.h4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{Q}ae8$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ b6 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ d4 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 0-1

One might expect that Steinitz habitually won his games by positional means like this, but I had difficulties finding more examples on this theme. There is of course the next well-known game, which I decided to show anyway because a better example of the Swiss cheese strategy is difficult to find.

William Steinitz
Alexander Sellman
Baltimore 1885



Black to move

White has lost some time manoeuvring, so Black is doing okay for the moment. But the rest of the game shows he had little feeling for his weak dark squares and for his bishop on c8 becoming a very bad piece.

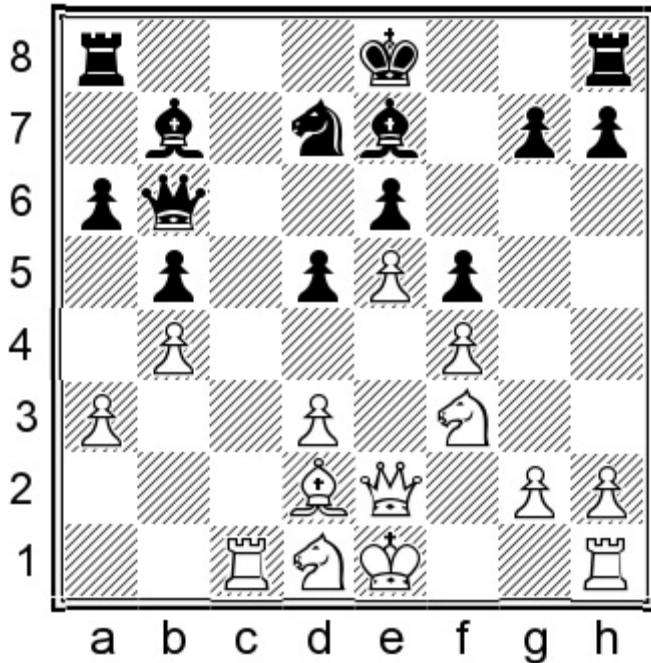
12...Wb6?

Kasparov notes: ‘12...b4! was a must in this position, stopping White’s plan, conquering space on the queenside and preparing a proper development of the light-squared bishop after ...a6-a5 and ...Qa6.’

12...Wb6? 13.b4! Qe7 14.a3 f5?

Kasparov: ‘The decisive mistake – Black himself kills any potential of counterplay with this move. Worthy of attention was 14...d4!? 15.Wf2 Qb7 opening the bishop.’

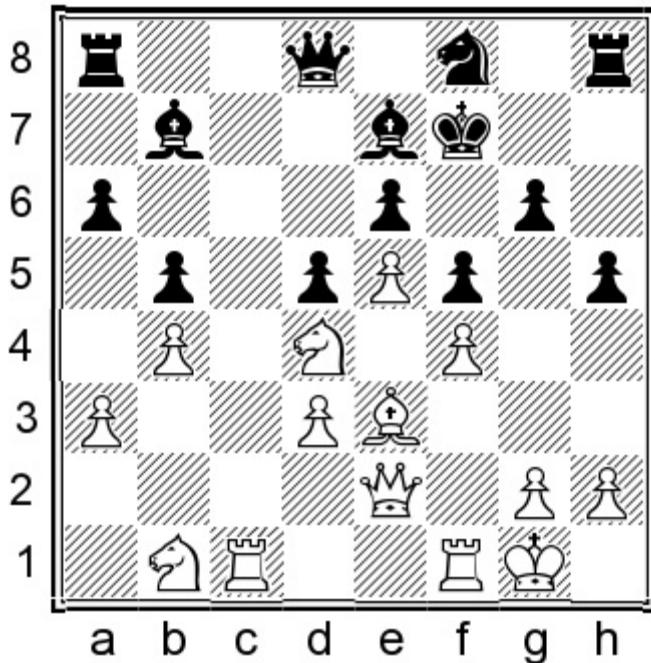
15.Qc1 Qb7



16.Qe3

Not giving Black another chance for ...d5-d4.

16...Wd8 17.Qd4 Qf8 18.0-0 h5?! 19.Qc3 Qf7 20.Qb1! g6?!



Completing his strategy, Black says goodbye to the last remaining dark squares. The rest of the game is a model demonstration.

21.Qd2 Qd7 22.Q2b3 Qc8 23.Qa5 Qa8 24.Qxc8 Wxc8 25.Qc1 Wb8 26.Qc2 Qd8 27.Qac6 Wb7 28.Qxd8+ Wxd8 29.Qc7 Wb8 30.Qf2! Wb6 31.Qf3 Wxc7 32.Qxc7 Qe8 33.Qg5 Qf8 34.Qc5 Qd7

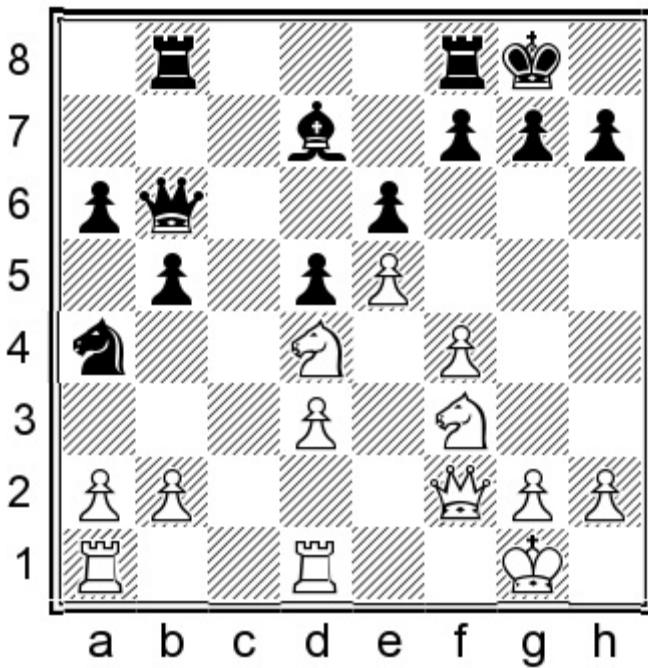
35. ♜d6 1-0

Today, everybody playing the French is aware of these dangers to the dark squares and the light-squared bishop, but sometimes even the strongest players come just one move short of disaster.

Viswanathan Anand

Evgeny Bareev

Dortmund 1992



White to move

(Exercise no 95)

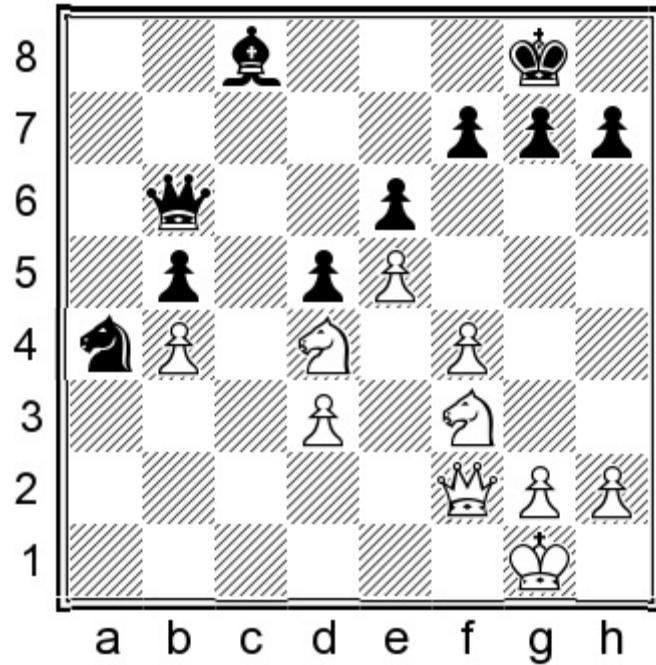
18.b4!

Anand knows his classics. Had it been Black's turn, he would have played 18...b4 himself, with a decent position. White's weaknesses on the c-file look a bit scary, but Black is unable to make use of them.

Not bad would have been the normal move 18.♖ac1, although it gives Black the chance to play 18...b4.

The aggressive 18.g4!? has its merits too.

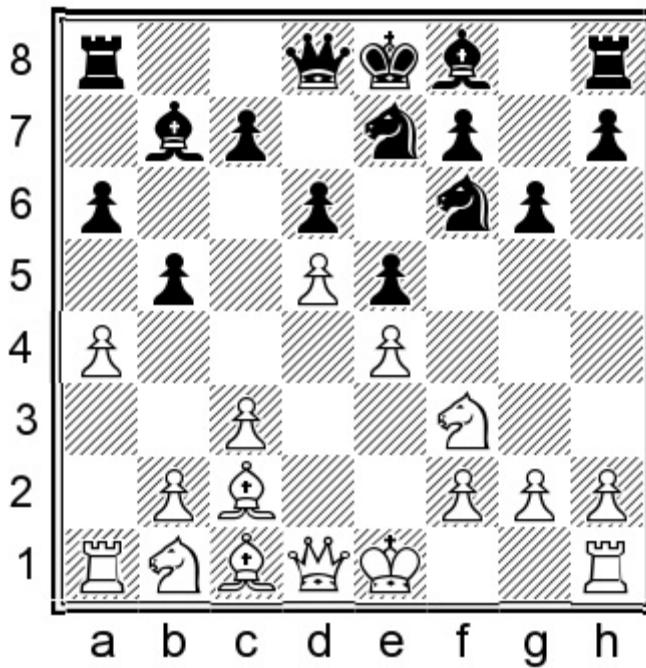
18.b4! a5 19.a3 ♜fc8 20.♖dc1 axb4 21.axb4 ♜xc1+ 22.♖xc1 ♜c8 23.♖xc8+ ♜xc8



The rooks have been exchanged, but the problem of the bishop and the weaknesses on the dark squares have not been solved and White went on to win this game.

Exercises for Chapter 22

96 (*go to the solution*)

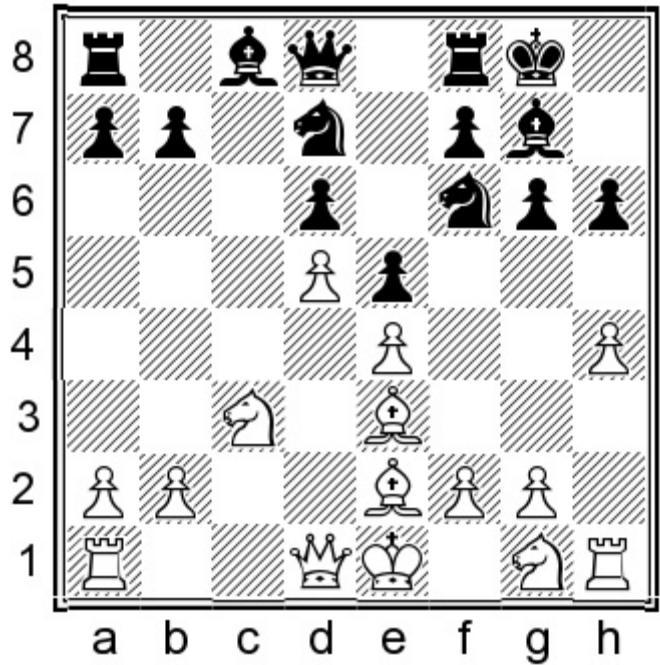


Black to move

What do you think about 10...bxa4 ?

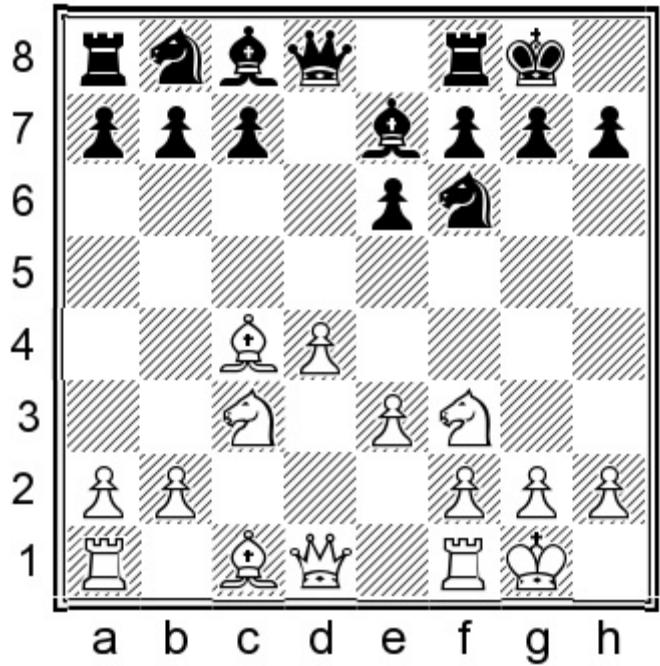
- A) ‘White now gets, as frequently in the Lopez, a short-lived attack which has no chance of success against a careful defence.’
- B) ‘We have no doubt that in a correspondence game the weakness of Black’s position on the queenside would make his game untenable.’

97 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

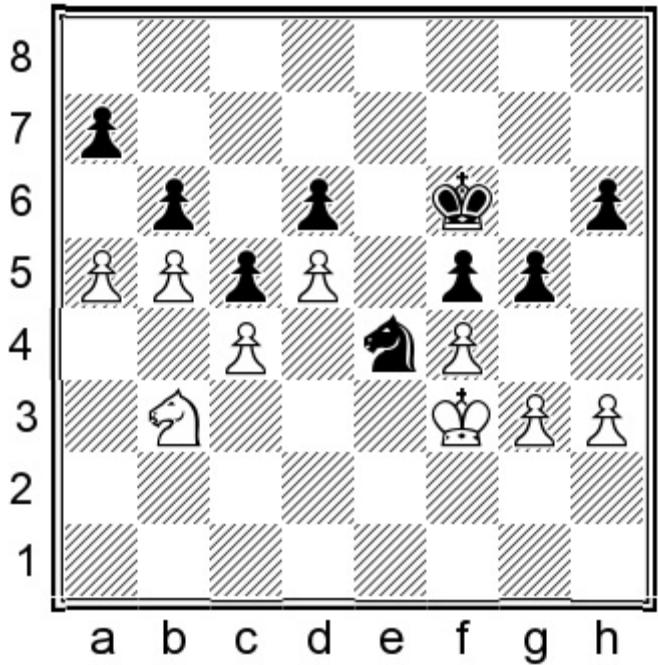
98 (go to the solution)



Black to move

Is there something wrong with 7...b6 ?

99 (go to the solution)



White to move

22 Of the dead, nothing but good

Zukertort (left) versus Steinitz.

To my mind, one of the most remarkable pieces in the history of chess literature is the obituary Steinitz wrote after the passing of Johannes Zukertort (1842-1888), his great rival in the 1880s. To understand its tone it is necessary to say a bit more about one of the greatest quarrels in chess history, which has become known as ‘the Ink War’.



In-between Vienna 1873 and Vienna 1882 Steinitz played no serious tournaments and only one match against Blackburne, but in his chess columns he closely followed all the major events. In his analysis he was very outspoken. He not only praised the successful players for their strong play but also elaborated on their (supposed) shortcomings.

In 1881 Steinitz’s critical remarks on the match that Zukertort won against Blackburne went down badly, and Zukertort (and/or his ‘spokesman’ Leopold Hoffer) responded, accusing Steinitz of analytical mistakes. This was the start of a public exchange of arguments, accusations, insults and challenges that quickly took a very ugly turn. A lot has been written about this ‘war’ and I will not delve much deeper into it, since it had only passingly to do with technical chess matters.

Steinitz returned to the tournament arena in 1882, winning the strong Vienna tournament together with Winawer and ahead of Zukertort. But in 1883 Zukertort had his greatest success, winning the

London tournament, ahead of Steinitz, after a remarkable series of 22 out of 23, securing victory with three rounds to go. Zukertort's most famous combination, against Blackburne, stems from this tournament. Now it was clear that Steinitz's claim to be the number one was no longer undisputed, so a match between the two rivals seemed unavoidable. It took, however, until 1886 before this first match for the World Championship came to be – too late for Zukertort, who was suffering from a bad constitution and collapsed during this match, finally losing 12½-7½. Afterwards, Zukertort was a broken man and he died two years later.

But I'm not sure that, in better health, he could have won the match. Anyway, as Golombek notes:

'[I]ndeed it is arguable that in skill and ability [Zukertort] was the equal of Steinitz, but that he was handicapped by being physically weaker. It is unfortunate, but nevertheless one of the hard facts of life among chess masters, that physical matters played an all-important role in something which ideally speaking, should concern and depend upon the mind only.'⁹⁵

I will give some lengthy quotes from the obituary Steinitz wrote after the passing of Zukertort, because it relates to some of the subjects of this book. But above all it shows the great fighting spirit of Steinitz, who, bent over Zukertort's grave, scores the last points.

Naturally, Steinitz started with an overview of Zukertort's career and some praise for his achievements, but then comes the following:

'But in the interest of truth and justice, we feel bound to record our opinion, that in point of genius he never was the equal of Anderssen, nor perhaps the superior of some living players whom he defeated. He had, no doubt, an excellent position judgement, but this was more the outcome of routine than of intuitive perception. [...] But though he had a remarkable faculty of assimilating and perhaps correcting other people's ideas, we feel sure that he was very deficient in originality. We noticed this defect especially in his analysis as well as in his attempted practical application of the principles of 'the modern school'. He knew of course as much as had been published about them, but when he had to take the initiative of developing a new idea, or else of applying an old one in a novel situation, he mostly went astray in a manner which showed that though he had acquired some good knowledge of position according to the new maxims, he had not fully entered into the spirit of the modern theories. His lack of appreciation was shown for instance when in his matches against Rosenthal and Blackburne, he would persist in playing and theoretically advocating the advance of both the a- and b-pawn to their third squares in the Queen's Pawn Opening [...] Though we repeatedly pointed out the strategical weakness of such a disposition of Pawns, Zukertort as long as he was victorious, owing to his superior tactics, would not become convinced until, at last, Blackburne successfully adopted our advice in his game against Zukertort at Berlin [...], and from that moment, Zukertort dropped at any rate the advance of P-QR3 which he had so stoutly supported in practice and in his writings previously.'

During his visit to America he was reported to have said about his own play that he amalgamated in his practice the principles of the old and of the modern school, and as far as we could judge from the games of his last match against Steinitz, his chief failures were due to such an attempt, which also bears out our criticism that he did not fully comprehend the spirit of the reform which has taken place in the conduct of the game. [...]

We could recite numerous more instances, but we think the above will be sufficient to show that we have taken some pains in arriving at our judgement about his general style, which in fact had not been much separated from the maxims of the old masters from whom he had received his early training. We have only to add on this subject that our remarks are made in the interest of general instruction to students of the game who might otherwise be misled as regards the tendencies of modern improvements.⁹⁶

Steinitz then concludes this *in memoriam* with some positive notes, but what a remarkable piece of writing this is. And all for the benefit of the diligent student of chess, evidently! One could call this a death blow, but for the fact that Zukertort had already passed away. He had not only taken all his ideas from Steinitz, but he had also failed to apply them properly.

Maybe Steinitz was, in writing this *in memoriam*, inspired by William Potter, one of the strongest English players of the time, who wrote the following on the occasion of Staunton's death, in 1874:

'And now what was Staunton as a man? An old maxim has it that we must speak nothing but good of the dead. That may be all very well for epigraph writers, whose trade it is to engrave lies on marble, but, for ourselves, we repudiate any such doctrine, considering it to be ethically unsound. [...] We have, therefore, very little hesitation in saying that, in our opinion, the deceased often acted, not only with a signal lack of generosity, but also with gross unfairness toward those whom he had suffered defeat, or whom he imagined likely to stand between him and the sun.'⁹⁷

Steinitz and Potter were good friends for some time, but, to stay on topic, this didn't last.⁹⁸ I don't know all that was said about Potter when he died (in 1895), but one small tribute led, through some remarkable coincidences, to one of the most beautiful positions in the history of chess, as we will see in Chapter 34.

It is interesting that Steinitz emphasizes the point that Zukertort did not really belong to 'the modern school'. That might be an answer to Zukertort's claims that actually he himself was the true representative of the modern style of playing chess.

Chernev notes that,

'Zukertort disputed Steinitz's claim to the exclusive authorship of that theory! Zukertort viewed his own style as the ideal blend of the old combinative school with the modern positional trend [...]; he never indulged in the wild eccentricities favoured by Steinitz. He could therefore say with justice that he not only

understood position play, but actually applied it in his own games, whereas Steinitz, so the argument would run, recommended the positional style but often went counter to it in his own games.⁹⁹

Some people may at times think or worry about what will be said about them when they are gone, but being held accountable for something like combining a3 and b3 in the Queen's Pawn Opening is not my greatest fear. Steinitz mentions this seemingly minor detail because it is in line with his theory on pawn play and his advice to keep those pawns at home as much as possible. In a paragraph I didn't quote, Steinitz also criticizes Zukertort severely for holding on to his IQP openings in their World Championship match.

A third concrete point Steinitz mentions has to do with his ideas about weakening pawn moves as well:

'Another instance of his shortcoming in analytical judgement may be found in his remark to Black's 10th move in the second game between himself and Steinitz, in the London International Tournament of 1883. We have no doubt that in a correspondence game the weakness of Black's position on the queenside would make his game untenable. Yet Zukertort seemed to be more than satisfied with his position all through, after winning the game by some weak moves on the part of the opponent.'

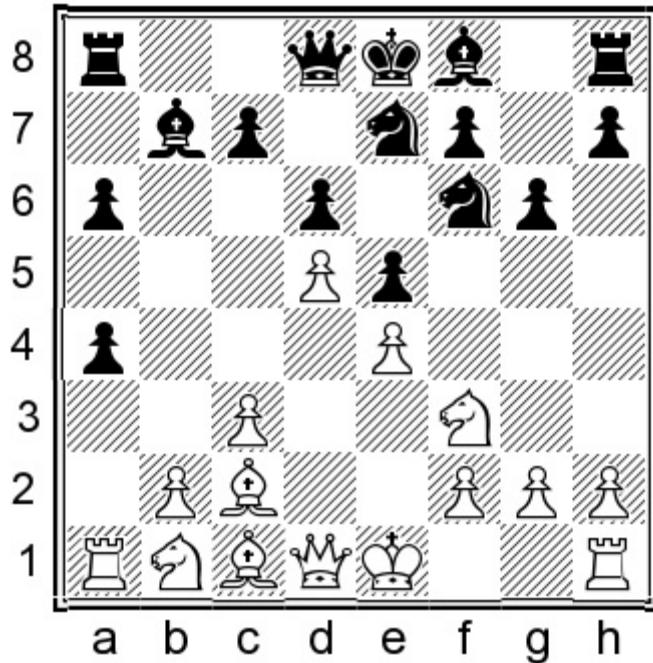
(Note that Steinitz is talking here, as above, in the third person about himself, which sounds a bit strange today.) You probably recognized this quotation from the exercise this chapter started with.

William Steinitz – Johannes Zukertort London 1883

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5

In the introduction to the Ruy Lopez in *The Modern Chess Instructor*, Steinitz, after mentioning the few occasions he used this opening himself, continues: 'Nevertheless, we have come to the conclusion, after careful analysis, that this form of opening is no exception to the general rule, inasmuch as the pinning of the knight by the bishop in the early part of the game cannot be of any advantage.' History repeats itself: like Philidor before him, Steinitz had some very strong opinions on today's mainstream openings.

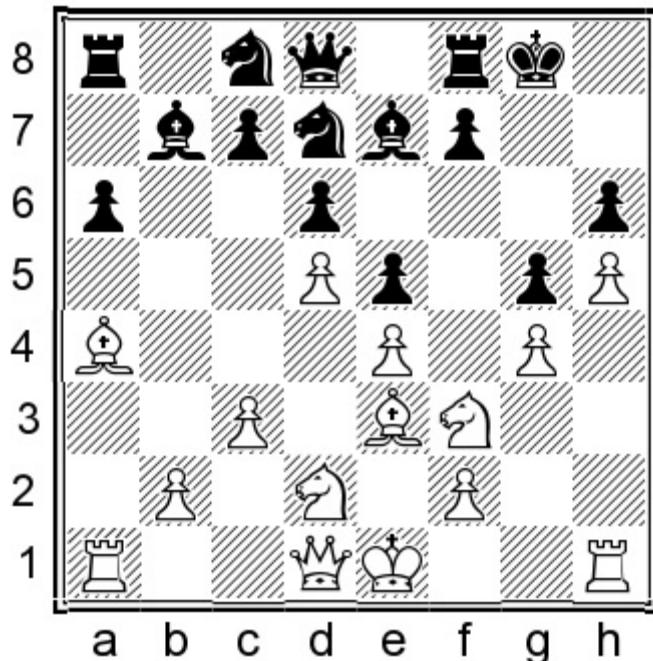
3...a6 4.♗a4 ♘f6 5.d3 d6 6.c3 g6 7.d4 b5 8.♗c2 ♘b7 9.d5 ♘e7 10.a4 bxa4?



(Exercise no 96)

I gave you two quotations to choose between. Zukertort's opinion that White only has 'a short-lived attack which has no chance of success' is nonsense, I hope you saw his structural weaknesses on the queenside are serious. Maybe Steinitz's verdict 'untenable' goes a bit far, but it is certainly closer to the truth.

11.♕xa4+ ♔d7 12.h4 h6 13.h5 g5 14.g4 ♖c8 15.♕e3 ♔e7 16.♗bd2 0-0



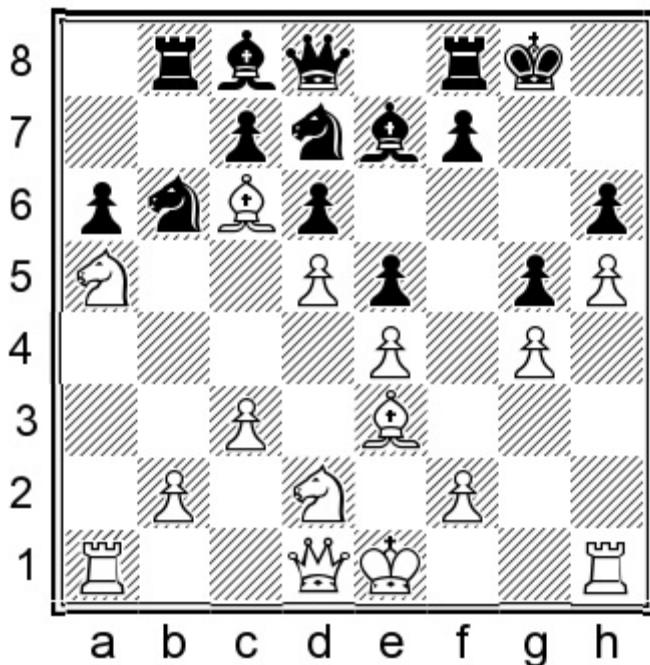
Considering the fact that the players had no knowledge whatsoever regarding King's Indian structures, Steinitz's play on the kingside is remarkably strong. Zukertort comments on this as merely 'creating a

block on the king's side, thus preventing the breaking up of his centre by the advance of Black's f-pawn.' But he doesn't notice that White has a considerable positional plus on this side, since his knights can reach the weak square f5 whereas the black knights can't reach f4.

17.♘c2?

A passive move Steinitz later regretted. Zukertort comments: 'Mr. Steinitz proposes in his annotations to this game 17.♘c4 instead of the text move. The move may be better, but White would derive no advantage from it, e.g. 17.♘c4 ♘cb6 18.♗a5 ♘c8 19.♘c6 ♗e8 20.♘c2 ♘f6 21.♗h2 ♘d7 or 21...♘c4.'¹⁰⁰

At the end of Zukertort's line White still has a large advantage, but even better would be 19.♘c6. After 19...♗b8 20.♗d2 a dream position arises.

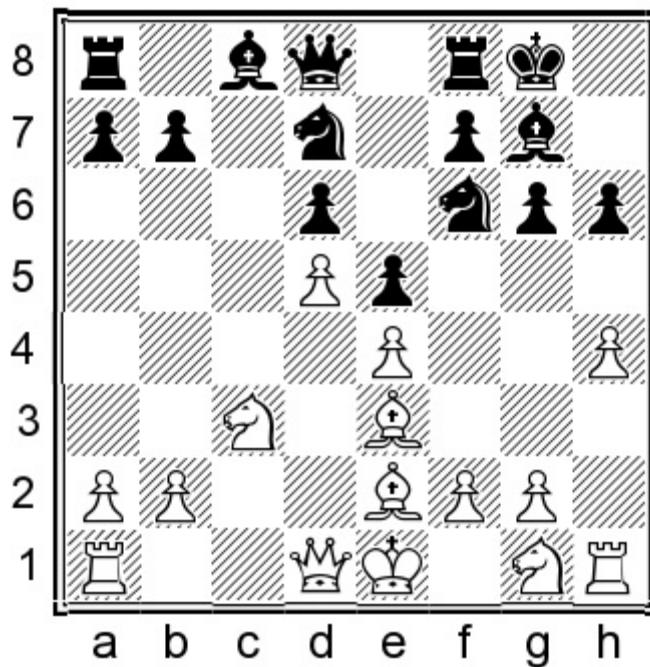


Because of all the 'holes' in Black's position, White is completely winning. On the queenside White has already occupied the strong squares, with a lot of promising follow-up plans, like b2-b4 and c3-c4, and on the kingside White has the option of manoeuvring a knight towards f5. Meanwhile Black has nothing left but to witness how White will finish him off.

I guess Zukertort wasn't completely unaware of his positional problems, but because of the acerbated relationships, he wasn't willing to grant Steinitz even the least. However, as we have seen, Steinitz got the last word.

After the move played, a tense struggle followed, with Zukertort finally emerging victorious.

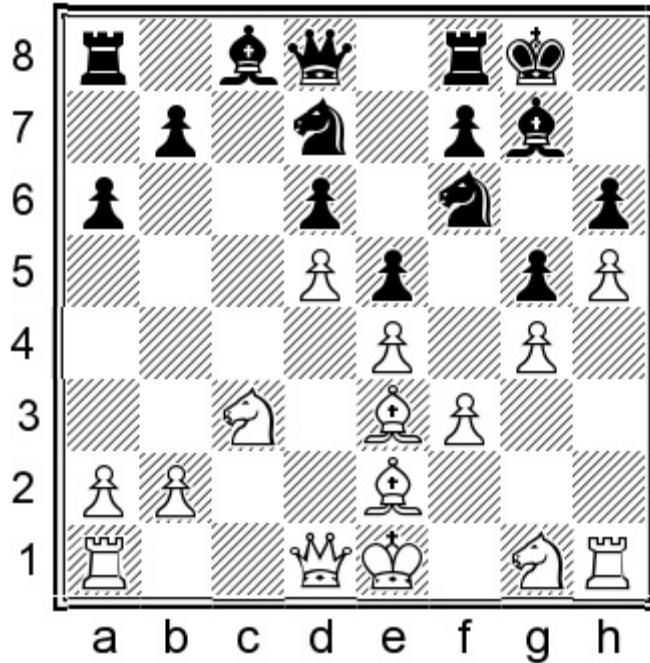
The opening of this game reminded me of a positional walkover by Petrosian. In his recent book *The King's Indian According to Tigran Petrosian*, Igor Yanvarjov quotes Petrosian saying 'The King's Indian feeds my family!'.



White to move

(Exercise no 97)

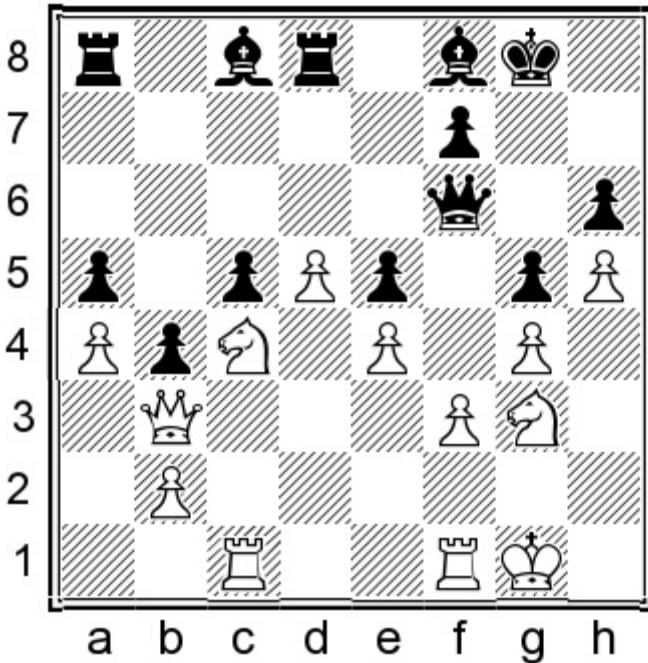
11.h5! g5 12.f3 a6 13.g4



The same set-up on the kingside as chosen by Steinitz – a huge success for White, because on the side where normally Black has the upper hand (aiming for ...f7-f5 at some point) now White is the only one

with options (as explained above, the possibility of planting a knight on f5). Black therefore starts actions on the queenside, but alas, on this side also White has the better prospects.

**13...b5 14.a4 b4 15.Qb1 a5 16.Qd2 Qc5 17.Qxc5 dxc5 18.Qb5 Qb7 19.Qe2 Qe8 20.Qxe8 Qxe8
21.Qc4 Qa6 22.Qb3 Qf6 23.Qc1 Qf8 24.Qg3 Qc8 25.0-0 Qd8**



To get an impression of how things can go wrong in certain openings, these grandmaster versus amateur games are more illuminating than the even battles at the highest level.

**26.Qg2 Ra7 27.Qf2 Qh7 28.Qfc2 Wa6 29.Qxe5 Qc7 30.Qc4 Qg7 31.Qd3 Qg8 32.Qd2 Qe7 33.e5 Qxe5
34.Qxe5 Qxe5 35.Qxa6 Qxa6 36.Qxc5 Qc8 37.Qxa5 f5 38.gxf5 Qxf5 39.Qxf5 Qxf5 40.Qb5 Qdf8
41.d6 Qxb5 42.axb5 Qf7 43.d7 1-0**

Throughout this book we have seen a growing awareness of the importance of weaknesses in the pawn structure. With his theory of holes, Steinitz was, as far as I can see, the first to lay a claim to conceptualizing this aspect of positional play. But his principal idea – that every pawn move is weakening – led to an extremely cautious handling of the pawns, which in turn led to a very defensive style of play with a preference for cramped positions.

Early criticism of Steinitz focused merely on this defensive and restrained style of play. Murray notes that:

‘During the long championship of Steinitz a great change came over the style of play adopted by the leading players, and the attractive methods of the period 1830-60 were dropped in Tournaments and matches. This new method of play, generally known as the Modern School, is usually associated with the name of Steinitz, though he was not the sole originator and not the most successful exponent of it. [...] The Modern School is essentially safety play. [...]

‘The Pawn is now regarded as strongest at home, and weaker the more it is advanced, because in its advance it leaves behind it ‘holes’ or squares which cannot be guarded by Pawns. [...] The Modern School is dull and unenterprising in comparison with the school which it has displaced, but “it keeps the draw in hand”, and is supposed to pay better in matches and tournaments.’¹⁰¹

Harsh words – though I’m not sure Murray was strong enough a player to be able to judge the merits of Steinitz’s play.

Above we saw Chernev talking about Steinitz’s eccentricities, and his ideas on pawn play certainly go with them. Take a look at some of the advice in *The Modern Chess Instructor*:

‘The center pawns, namely the e-pawn and the d-pawn [...] are the only ones that ought to be moved in the early part of the game for various reasons. In the first place, as long as the three pawns on each wing remain unmoved, there is no weak square or a “hole” on the side which takes that precaution.

In the next place, it is a great advantage for the ending to have as many pawns as possible unmoved on their original squares, for it is often most important to be able to gain a move by having the option of pushing a pawn one or two squares.

As a rule it is unadvisable to advance any pawn beyond the fourth square, for the further a pawn is advanced into the hostile camp the sooner he becomes liable to capture or inconvenient attack especially in the end. At the utmost a pawn may be sometimes advanced to the fifth (fourth) rank when he can be well supported on each side by so-called chains of pawns that cannot be broken up, but it is rarely good play to advance a pawn to the sixth (third) rank.’

And a few pages later, summing up:

‘Thus it may be repeated in general that in most openings only the e-pawn and d-pawn should be maneuvered in conjunction with a rapid development of the minor pieces, and though the f-pawn and c-pawn may also sometimes assist, it is at least useless and often compromising to move the h-pawn or g-pawn on either side in the early part of the game.

[...] but as a rule the fight in the center in conjunction with the f- and c-pawns will be sufficient, and at least the option of moving one or two squares ought to be reserved for the ending for the other pawns.’¹⁰²

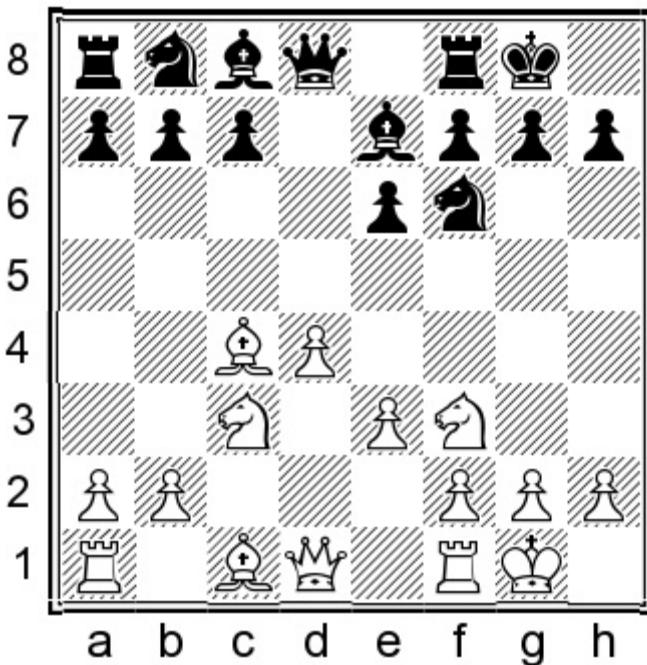
Steinitz made some exceptions, and in the above game we saw him rather unconcernedly pushing forward his pawns on both sides, but these are the principles that form the essence of his modern school, together with his ideas about the role of the king.

There is more than one bad piece of advice in the above, but the most striking is the one about keeping four pawns at home because of possible tempo issues in the endgame. These (reserve) tempo issues do occur very rarely (maybe once in every thousand games – just a wild guess) so to adjust your complete strategy to them seems to be very ill-advised.

Steinitz was rather stubborn, and even as late as Hastings 1895, when I don't think there was anybody left that believed in these rigid rules of keeping your pawns at home, he held on to his ideas.

Emanuel Lasker – Richard Teichmann Hastings 1895

1.d4 d5 2.♘f3 ♘f6 3.c4 dxc4 4.e3 e6 5.♕xc4 ♘e7 6.0-0 0-0 7.♘c3



(Exercise no 98)

The Hastings tournament book had a nice format, with all participants in turn commentating on the games of the others. Steinitz analysed this game and after Black's 7...b6 he remarked: 'Opposed to the principles laid down in the *Modern Chess Instructor*. The two wing pawns on either side ought to be kept unmoved as long as possible.'

Black played the opening slightly inaccurately, but if a natural move like ...b7-b6 is 'opposed to the principles' then so much the worse for these principles, one would think. I hope you didn't search too long for something in the above position: the simple answer was 'no'.

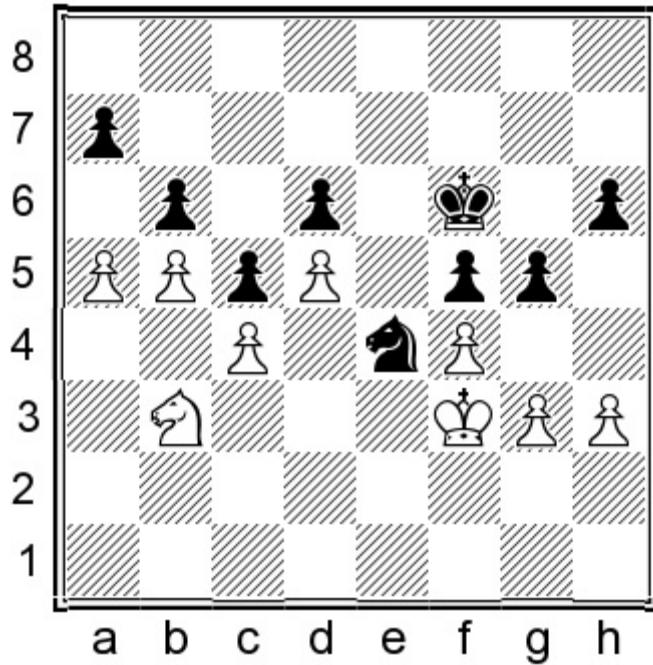
Although far advanced pawns may become weak, in the endgame they can be a big asset as well. The power of far advanced passed pawns is evident, but also without passed pawns, having more advanced pawns often constitutes a big advantage, for when they become passed pawns, as a result of mutual pawn hunting or a sacrifice, they are already close to promotion.

Just one example:

Peter Ypma

Stefan Bekker

Training game, 2010



White to move

(Exercise no 99)

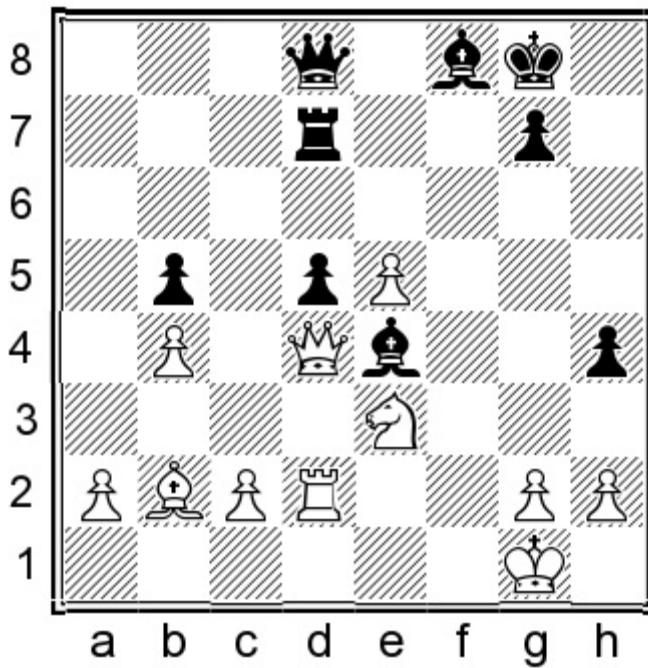
34.a6!

The kings and knights are about equally active but White's pawns on the queenside are far more advanced and that decides the issue. White now threatens $\mathbb{Q}b3-a5-c6$ and there is no good defence against it.

A position diametrically opposed to Steinitz is nicely expressed in the maxim 'Pawns increase in value as they advance'.¹⁰³ Tarrasch was thinking in this direction when he slowly freed himself from Steinitz's theories.

Exercises for Chapter 23

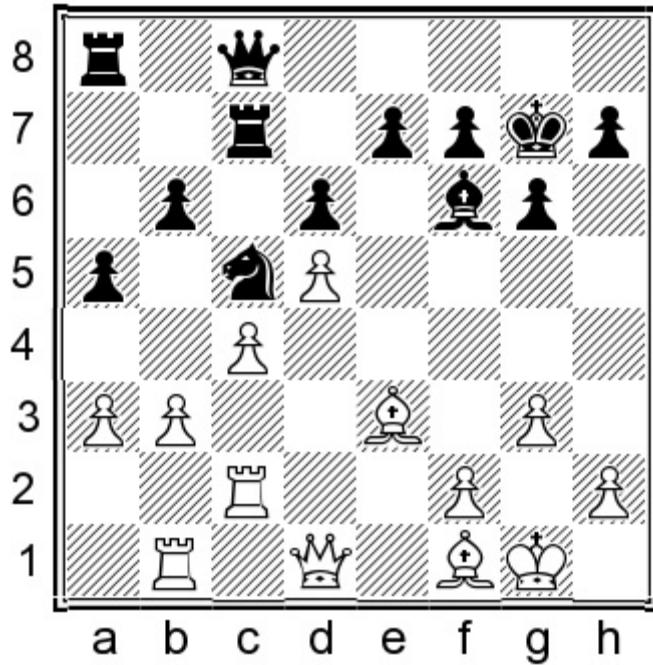
100 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

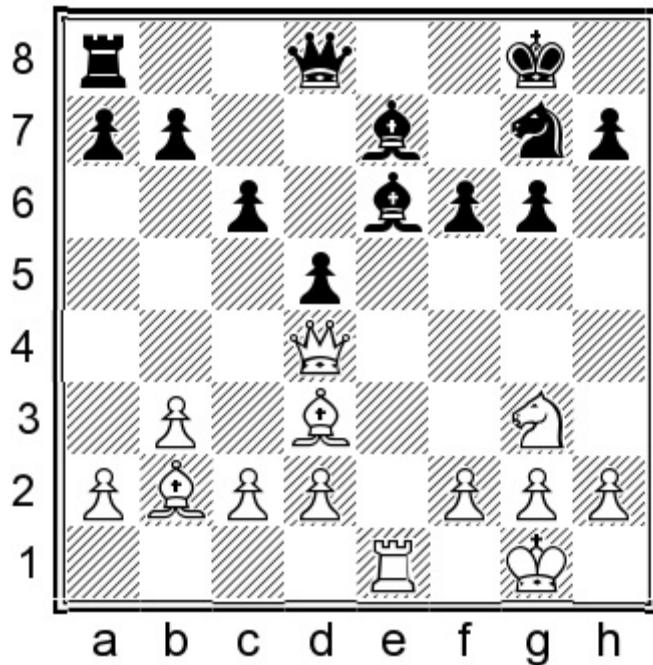
Though he is two pawns up, White was a bit worried about Black's plan to play ...h4-h3. Prevent it with 29.h3 or just let it happen and answer 29...h3 with 30.g3 ?

101 (*go to the solution*)



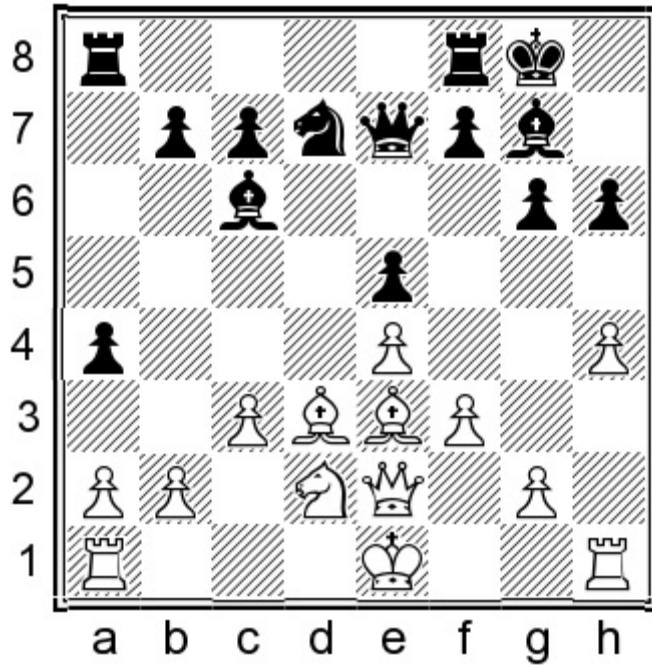
White to move

102 (go to the solution)



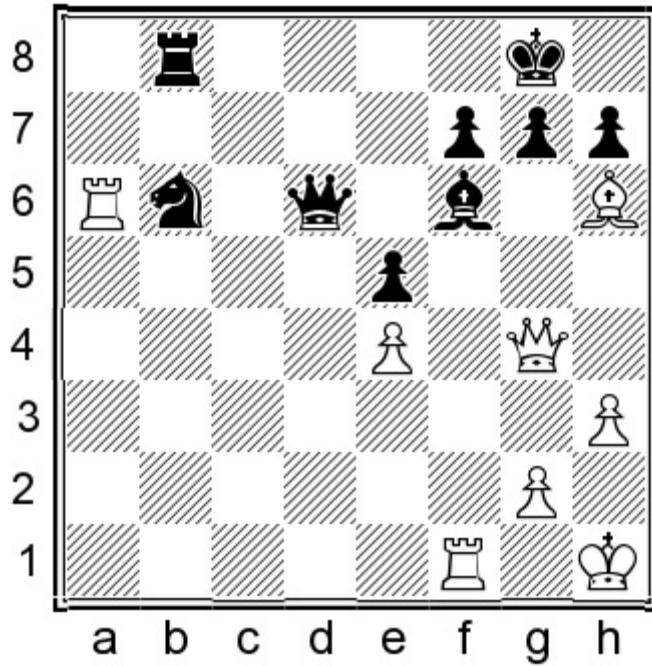
White to move

103 (go to the solution)



White to move

104 ([go to the solution](#))



White to move

23

Before the endgame, the Gods have placed the middlegame

Far advanced pawns, passed or not, can form a big trump in the endgame, but also in the middlegame. The famous dictum by Tarrasch that heads this chapter is actually a reaction to Steinitz's maxim that

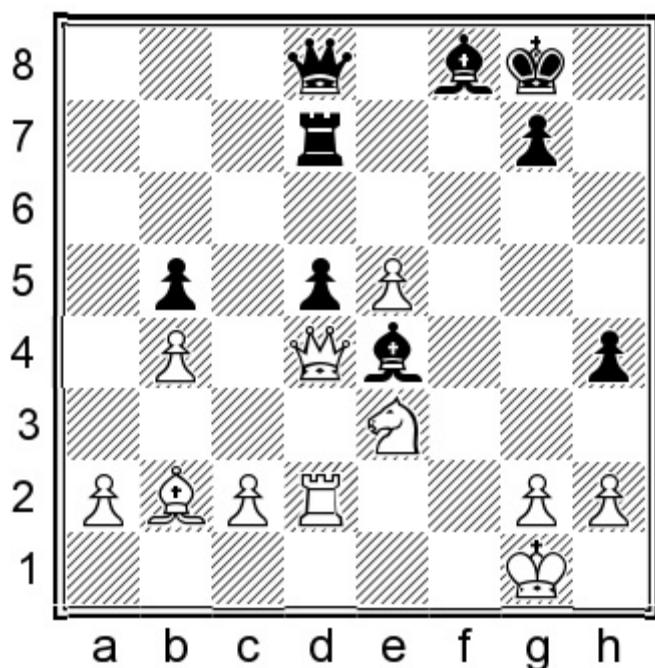
'at the utmost a pawn may be sometimes advanced to the fifth (fourth) rank when he can be well supported on each side by so-called chains of pawns that cannot be broken up, but it is rarely good play to advance a pawn to the sixth (third) rank.'

Tarrasch's *Dreihundert Schachpartien* (1895) was the first major work to appear after Steinitz's *The Modern Chess Instructor*, but it only occasionally refers to Steinitz's ideas. However, Tarrasch's playing style and teachings are generally looked upon as a corrective to Steinitz's theories or at least to the eccentric parts of it.



Almost all references to Steinitz in *Dreihundert Schachpartien* concern his ideas on the restrained handling of pawns.

Siegbert Tarrasch
Johannes Metger
Nurnberg 1888



White to move

(Exercise no 100)

Black already has sacrificed two pawns for which he has no real compensation; only some small attacking chances are left for Black. But apart from that, the issue that Tarrasch brings up is very interesting.

'In this type of position Steinitz recommends not to prevent the advance of the rook-pawn with h2-h3, because this would leave the g3-square weak, but instead to just let the pawn get to h3 and then move the g-pawn. [...] After the course of this game as well as my other experiences, I cannot agree to Steinitz's point of view. Indeed will the advanced pawn be weak in the endgame, but before the endgame, the Gods have placed the middlegame, and there the pawn forms a lasting threat to the defender, since it supports mating attacks very effectively.'

The game continued 29.a3 h3 30.g3, and though White didn't have too much trouble bringing the point home in the remainder of the game I think Tarrasch's judgement is to the point. Though not necessary, safer would have been 29.h3, preventing the further advance of the h-pawn.

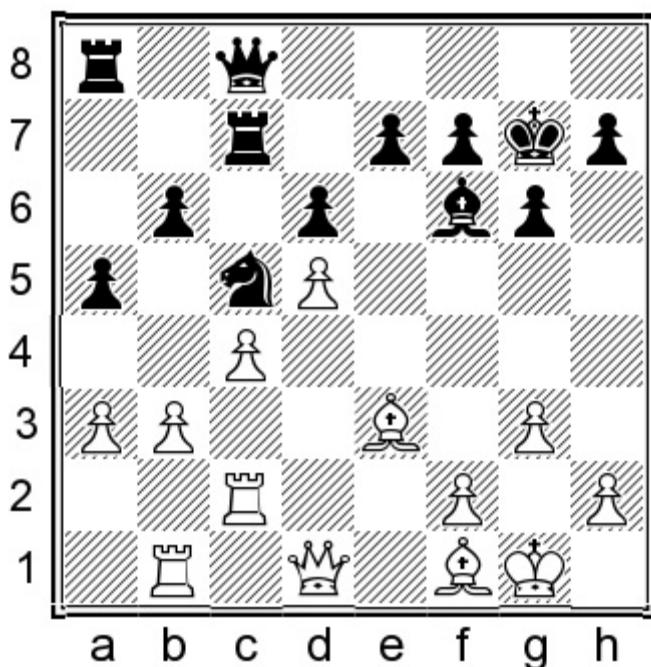
In an earlier chapter we saw Anderssen pushing his h-pawn to h6 with great effect. That game might have been the premiere of this idea. Since then, players are occasionally confronted with the question of how to deal with the advance of the rook pawn, as did Tarrasch in the position above.

The next game is a good example of the pros and cons of the different answers to h2-h4.

Tomasz Markowski

Zbynek Hracek

Lublin 2009



White to move

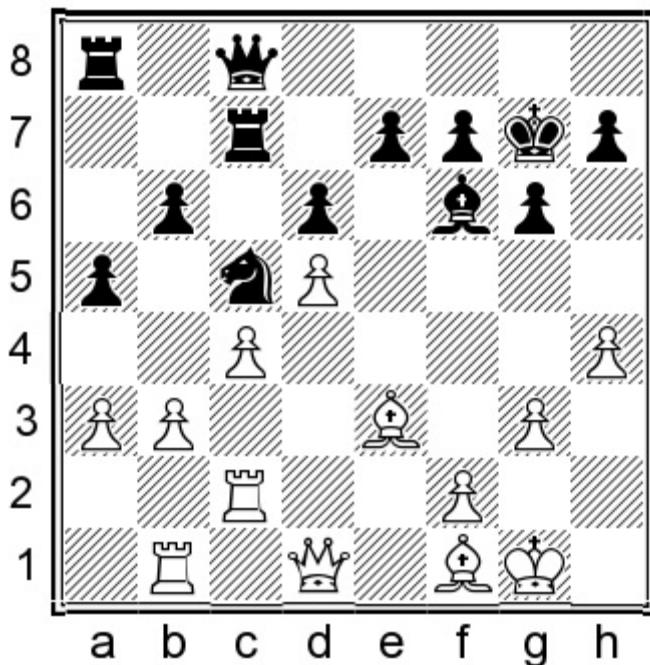
(Exercise no 101)

White has a nice advantage and Black has little else to do but wait. Nearly all moves keep this advantage intact, which is not ideal for an exercise, and the engine even thinks that passing on the move doesn't do White's chances much harm.

Apart from manoeuvring, White can directly start his major plan on the queenside with 32.b4; after 32...axb4 33.axb4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ White has the nice follow-up 34. $\mathbb{Q}h3$, but Black can hold on with 34... $\mathbb{W}d8$ (and after 35. $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ the b-pawn is covered).

This direct execution of the queenside plan clears things up a bit for Black, so it seems smarter to keep all options alive. I hope you took White's next move into consideration, putting some pressure on the other wing, thereby creating the so-called 'second front' (*1 point* for considering 32.h4!).

32.h4!



Now Black has three ways of dealing with White's threat of further advancing the h-pawn: obstruct it with 32...h5, play 32...h6 to answer 33.h5 with 33...g5, or do nothing. The last option allows 34.h5, after which White has for the rest of the game the pleasant choice between h5-h6 (building a mating net as in Anderssen's game) and h5xg6. Also, 33...h6 34.h5 g5 gives White nice options, like $\mathbb{Q}f1-e2-g4$, eventually followed by f2-f4. That leaves the move played as best, though White retains different attacking possibilities on the kingside.

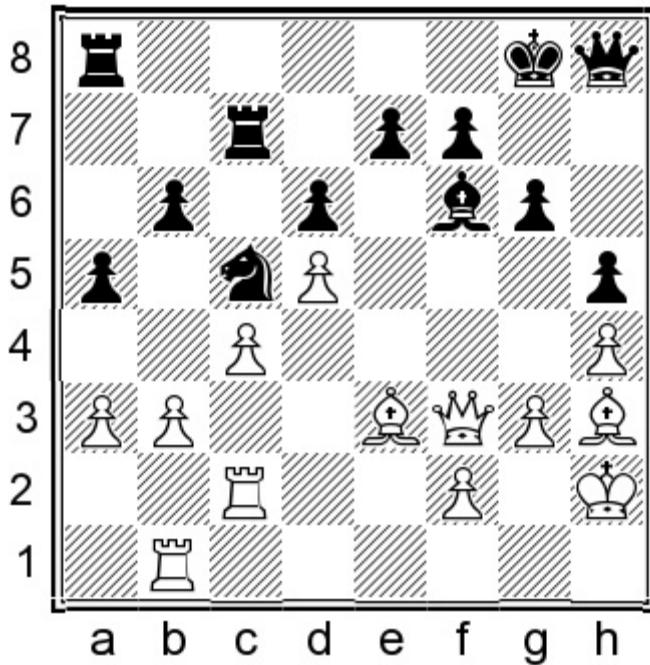
32...h5 33. $\mathbb{Q}h2!$

White's second idea behind 32.h4. The light-squared bishop comes into play.

33... $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 34. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $\mathbb{W}h8$

This looks a bit odd, but if the queen stays on the queenside White might start operations on the kingside, for example with g3-g4.

35.♘f3 ♔g8



With the black queen gone slightly astray, this is a good moment to start an action on the queenside.

36.b4 axb4 37.axb4 ♡a4 38.♖b3

White has a big advantage though he later let the win slip out of his hands.

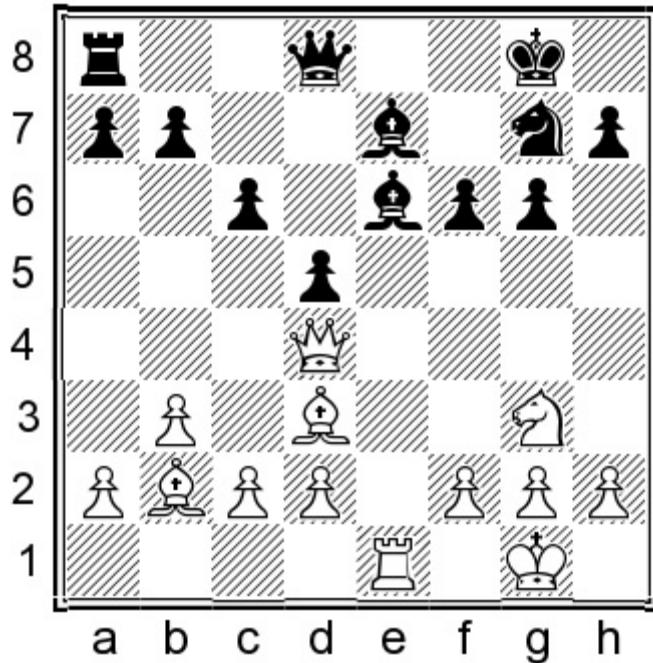
Considering Steinitz's advice on handling the pawns, one might not expect to see him in positions like the above, but strangely enough the opposite is true: Steinitz loved to play h2-h4 and he did add quite a few things to the understanding of its merits. Maybe his advice was meant for lesser mortals only. Two of his most famous attacks – the 4th game in the 4th World Championship match against Chigorin and the 2nd in the 5th World Championship match against Lasker – were initiated by the move h2-h4.

In the previous chapter we already saw him using the h2-h4 idea against Zukertort in their London encounter. In their World Championship match a few years later Steinitz employed it several times as well. Two examples:

William Steinitz

Johannes Zukertort

World Championship m 1886 (6)



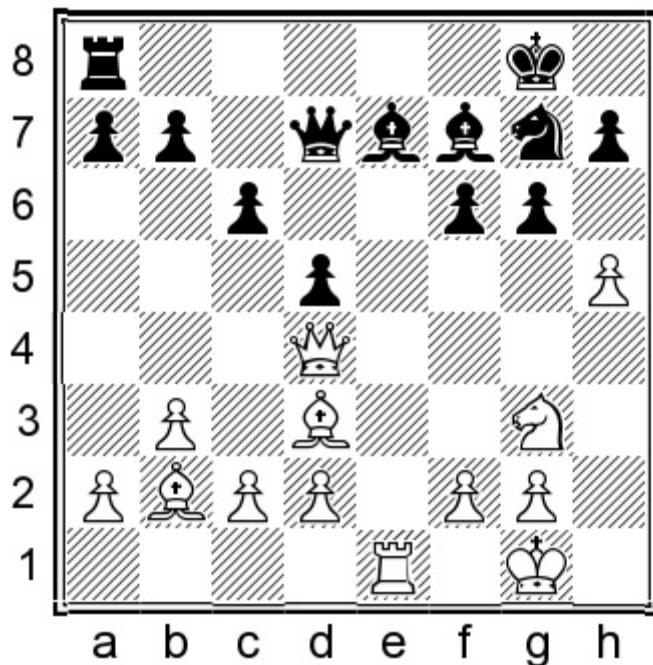
White to move

(Exercise no 102)

20.h4!

An excellent move. This adds a lot to White's pressure on Black's kingside. Here Black cannot prevent h4-h5.

20...Qd7 21.h5 Qf7



White can keep both options ($h5\times g6$ and $h5-h6$) alive, though the latter possibility was, as a rule, rejected by Steinitz himself. But taking directly on $g6$, as played, makes sense: after (22. $hxg6$) 22... $h\times g6$ very annoying would be 23. $\mathbb{W}h4$ (eventually followed by $\mathbb{W}h6$), so Black has to settle for a damaged pawn structure.

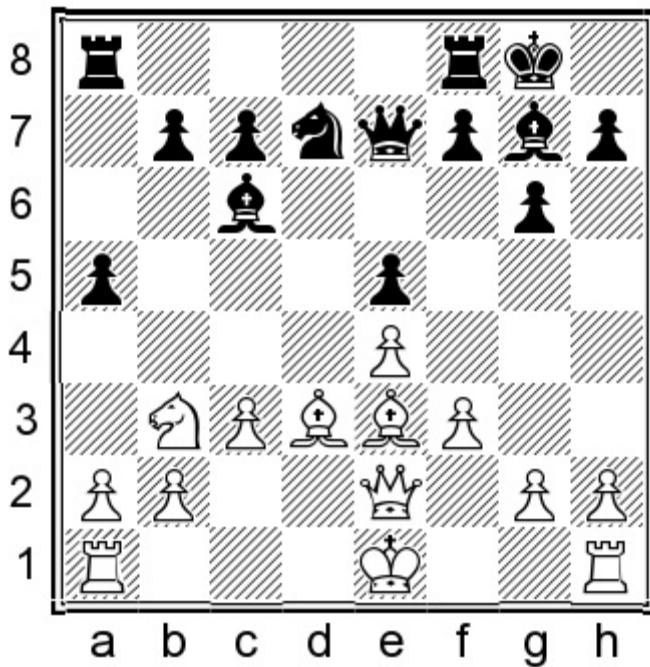
22. $hxg6$ $\mathbb{Q}\times g6$ 23. $\mathbb{W}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 24. $\mathbb{W}f4$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 25. $\mathbb{E}e3$

White has a clear advantage; in a later chapter we will return to this position.

William Steinitz

Johannes Zukertort

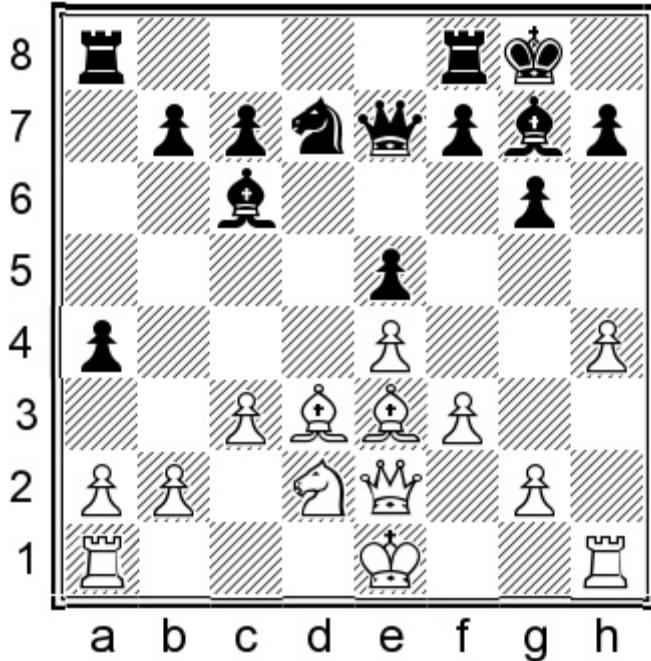
World Championship m 1886 (16)



White to move

Triggered by the knight on $b3$, Black has already set his a -pawn in motion. White could have continued quietly with 15.0-0, but instead he adds to the tension with a similar operation on the kingside, getting ready for a struggle with opposite-side castling.

15. $h4$ $a4$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}d2$



Here Black has a choice between the three options mentioned before: 16...h5 is possible, and though 17.g4 looks a bit scary, Black still can play 17... $\mathbb{Q}f6$. White's position isn't that solid either. Allowing White's h4-h5 and starting his own initiative with moves like ... $\mathbb{Q}c5$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ seems perfectly playable as well. However, just as in the game from the previous chapter, Zukertort chooses the third and worst option:

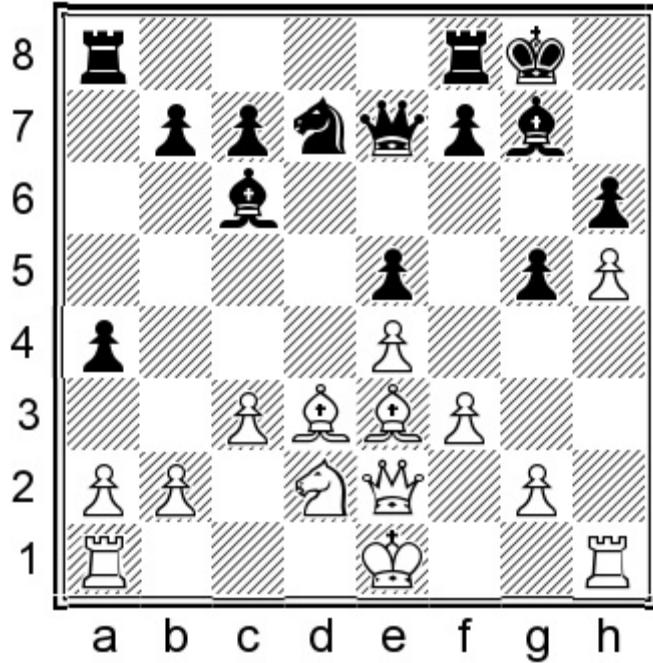
16...h6

(Exercise no 103)

17.h5!

As we have seen before. White fixes the pawn structure on the kingside in a favourable way.

17...g5



A rather serious hole has appeared on f5 and Steinitz directly aims at it. Trying to reach the dream scenario, by exchanging the light-squared bishops first with 18.♗b5, looks tempting as well.

18.♗f1 ♗c5 19.♗c2 ♖fd8 20.♗g3 ♗d7 21.0-0-0

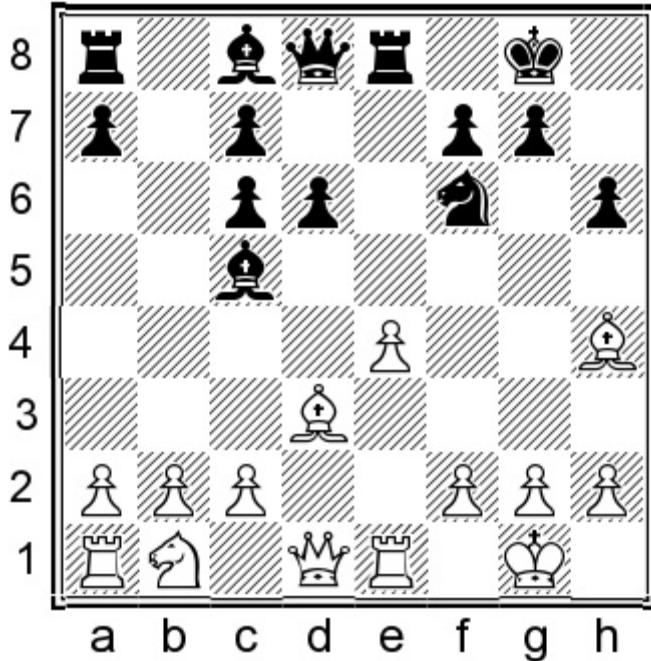
White is a bit better and later won this game.

Let's return to Tarrasch's comments on Steinitz.

Siegbert Tarrasch

Emil Schallopp

Hamburg 1885



White to move

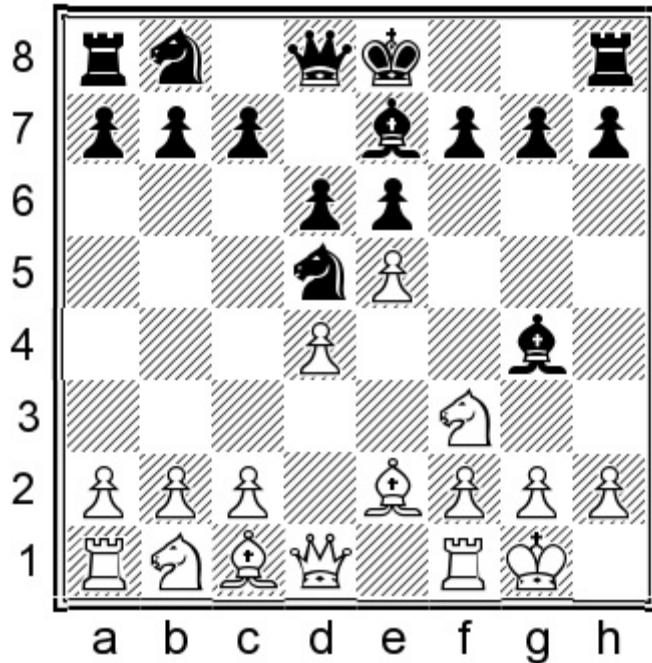
11.h3

‘Being brought up in the school of the older masters, I used to play this move quite often at the time. Later on, under the influence of Steinitz’s theory, I timidly avoided it, partly out of fear for the disgrace, but after I emancipated myself from Steinitz, I started to use it again every time it seemed appropriate to, without further worries.’

Indeed, it would be ill-advised to abstain from the move h2-h3 in a position like the above purely out of a general fear for weaknesses. Of all the pawns, the rook pawns have the least defensive duties (they do not interfere with diagonal attacks and they guard squares on only one file). With relatively few worries they can be pushed forward.

A good reason to play h2-h3, apart from guarding or attacking g4, is that it provides *luft* for the king. I guess that in history, rather quickly after castling was introduced to the game, the back rank mate ‘became popular’ and consequently the advice to provide *luft* to the king, better sooner than later, was firmly established.

In many games, there comes a time, mostly later in the middlegame after lines have been opened and minor pieces exchanged, when these back-rank issues start to play a role. Having been able to get in h2-h3 (or ...h7-h6) at a suitable moment before, might save you a full tempo later. An example from Alekhine’s Defence:



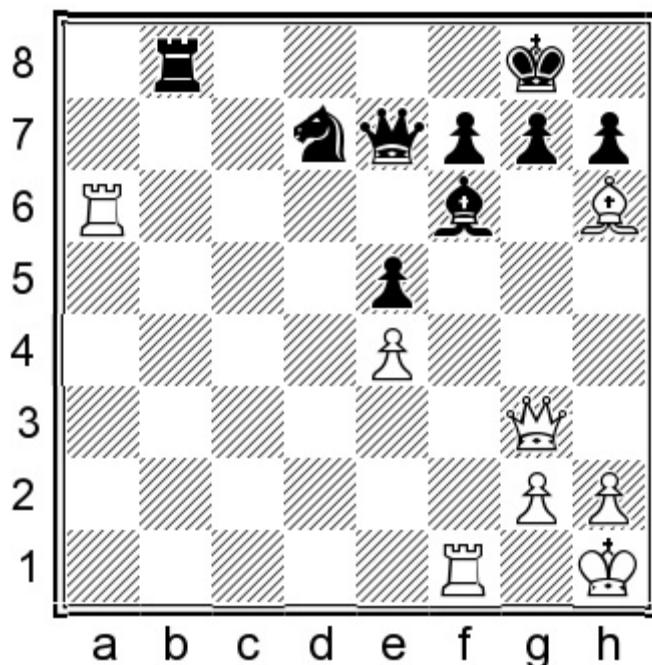
If you don't mind Black exchanging on f3 (and there is indeed no need to mind it here) then this is a good moment to play 7.h3. After 7... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ the tempo won might prove useful later in the game. The weakening effects are rather small (especially since Black will probably castle kingside).

Just one example of the type of late middlegame position mentioned, in which the back rank becomes an issue to reckon with:

Petr Haba

Jiri Lechtnsky

Karlovy Vary 2005

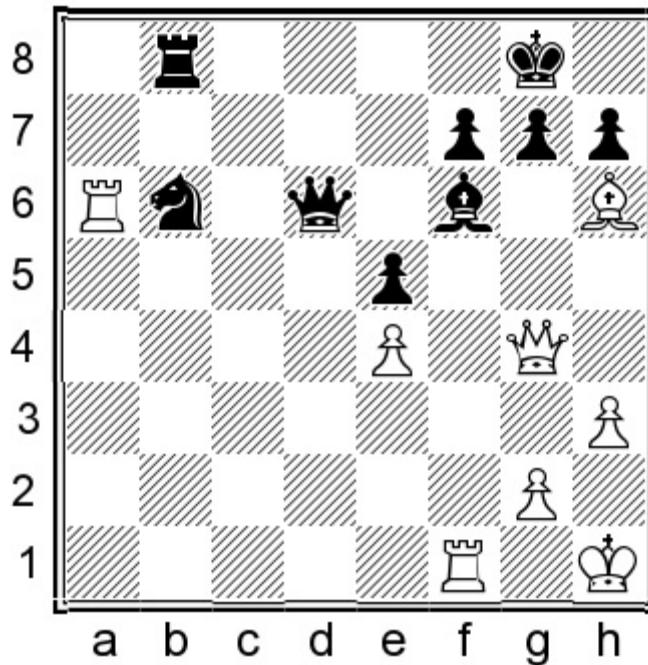


White to move

27.h3!

The perfect moment for this quiet move. With the impatient 27... $\mathbb{Q}xf6?$ White would dig his own grave as after 27... $\mathbb{W}xf6!$ suddenly Black is winning thanks to White's weak back rank. Now 28. $\mathbb{E}xf6$ is threatened, and apart from that Black has his own back-rank problems that are difficult to solve.

27.h3! $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 28. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{W}d6$



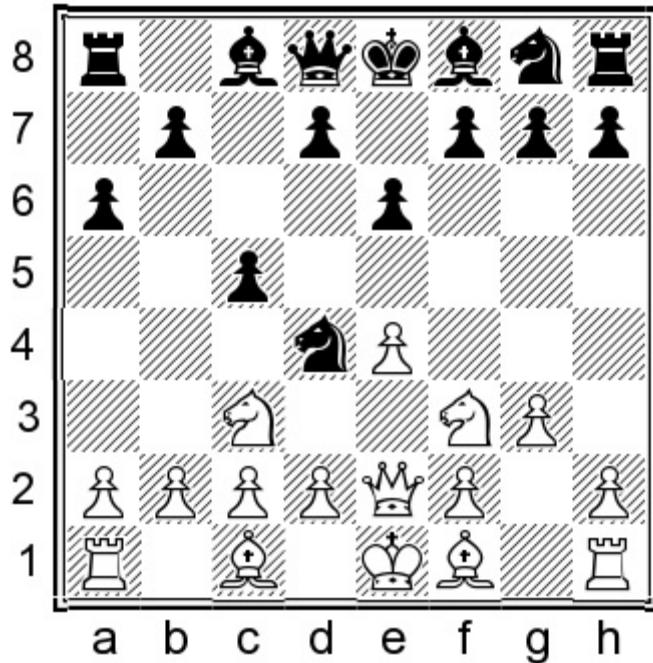
(Exercise no 104)

29. $\mathbb{E}xf6!$ 1-0

A nice finish. After 29... $\mathbb{W}xf6$ there is 30. $\mathbb{E}xb6!$ $\mathbb{E}xb6$ 31. $\mathbb{W}c8+$.

The few other instances where Tarrasch refers to Steinitz are also enlightening.

Mikhail Chigorin
Siegbert Tarrasch
St Petersburg 1893



White to move

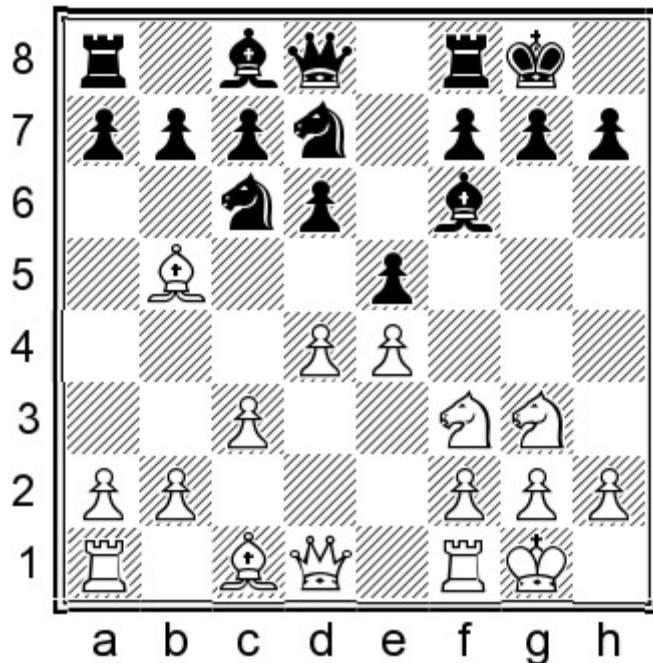
6.Wd3

'One can see that Chigorin has learned much from Steinitz, maybe too much. Anyway, it would have been more natural to retreat the queen to d1 and continue the game with d2-d3, ♔e3, ♔g2 et cetera.'

Siegbert Tarrasch

Mikhail Chigorin

St Petersburg 1893



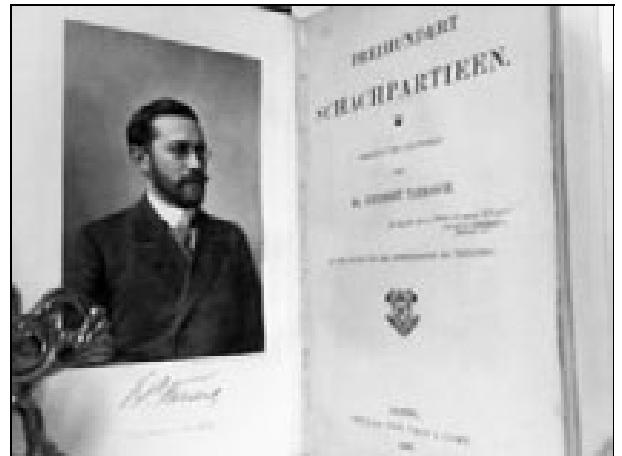
Black to move

9...♝db8

‘Black continues to play in Steinitz’s baroque style, and it was only because I played this game rather uninspired, which clearly can be seen from what follows, that he could play against me like this without getting punished.’

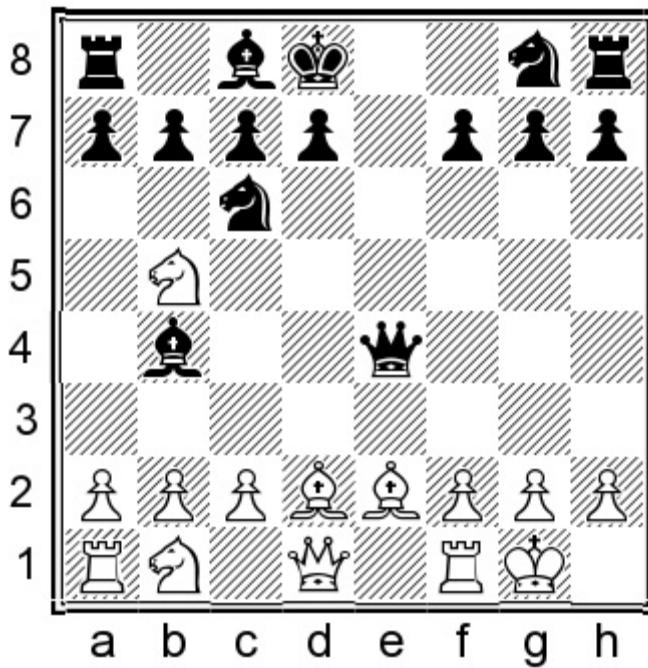
After the romantic chess era Steinitz claimed to start a scientific one, but here we see Tarrasch classifying him as ‘baroque’. What exactly he meant by this I’m not sure – probably it addresses the artificial character of some of Steinitz’s manoeuvres. It does contrast with the classical style, which a few decades later was brought to its peak by Capablanca, but I guess that Tarrasch would also have felt comfortable with ‘classical’ as a description of his own style.

Siegbert Tarrasch’s book *Dreihundert Schachpartien*.



Exercises for Chapter 24

105 (*go to the solution*)

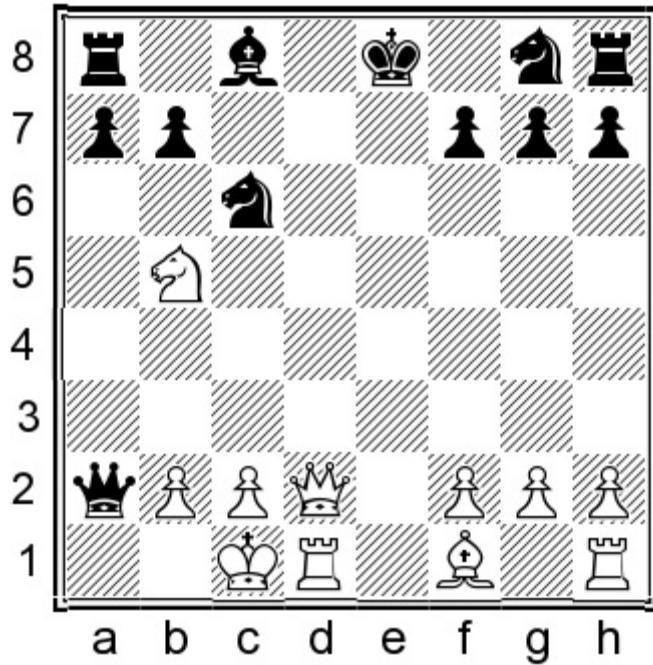


Black to move

How do you value White's compensation for the pawn?

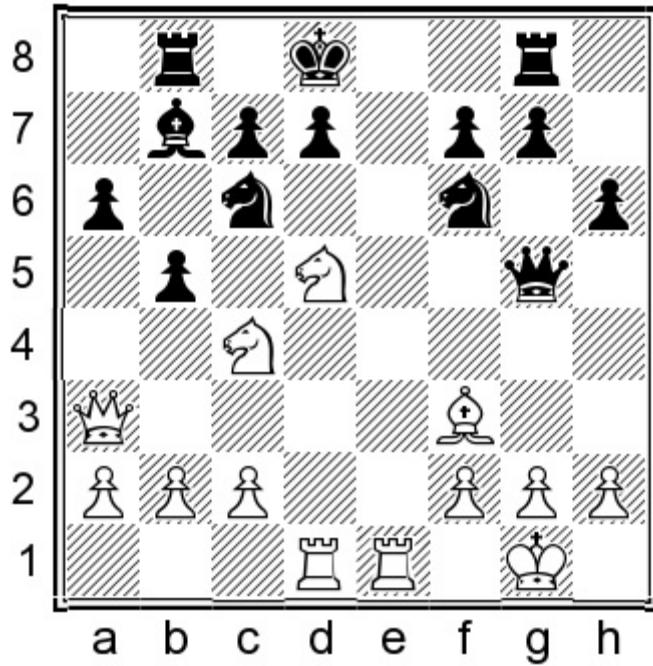
- A) As good as none.
- B) Some vague attacking chances.
- C) Sufficient.
- D) More than enough.

106 (*go to the solution*)



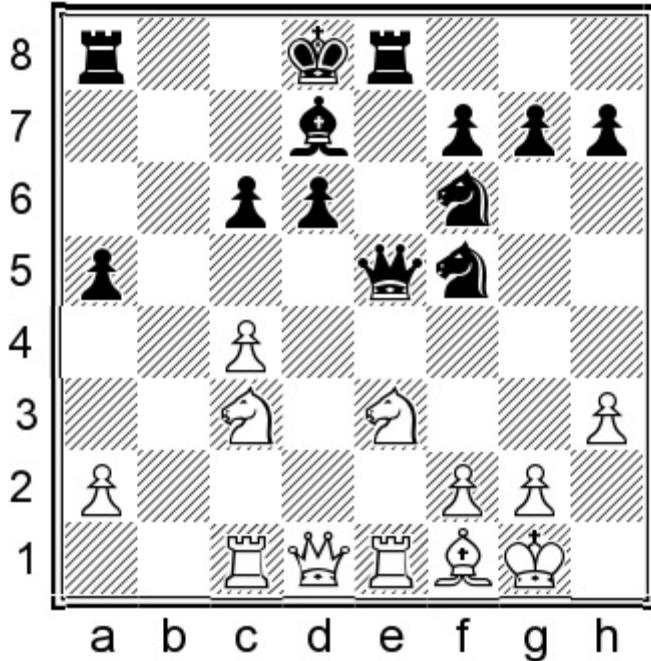
White to move

107 ([go to the solution](#))



White to move

108 ([go to the solution](#))



White to move

24

A pawn is worth a little trouble

In my student years I was a member of a strong club (SMB Nijmegen) and after the weekly competition a bunch of young players used to continue the evening in a pub nearby. The analysis of the games was often heated, and most players and attendees would suggest and support all kind of sacrificial attacks. Luckily we also had Joost Marcus in our midst, a bit older and more experienced than the rest, who was always happy to play the part of defender, took every pawn and piece sacrificed, and, needless to say, was often successful in repelling all the wild attacks.

Probably most people prefer the attacking role to the defensive one, but you can't become a strong player by neglecting the latter. Every now and then you have to do some 'pawn grabbing', otherwise you will be fooled around with. But where some players reluctantly take the pawn, the real pawn grabber enjoys the task ahead of him. In the words of Steinitz: 'When in doubt, take a pawn. A pawn is worth a little trouble'.¹⁰⁴

If Yasser Seirawan, former world elite player and nowadays a regular analyst at the top tournaments,

The only known likeness of Alexandre Deschapelles.



starts a new line by saying to his co-host ‘You know Jennifer, I’m a pawn grabber’, you can feel he enjoys the role.

In the old days, with the Evans and King’s Gambits still being main-stream openings, nobody had to make a special effort to be on the side trying to defend an extra pawn. But Steinitz made this role the hallmark of his playing style. Around 1870 he ‘came to the conclusion that combinational play, though it sometimes yields beautiful results, cannot ensure stable success’, and that ‘one needed much less effort for a strong defense’.

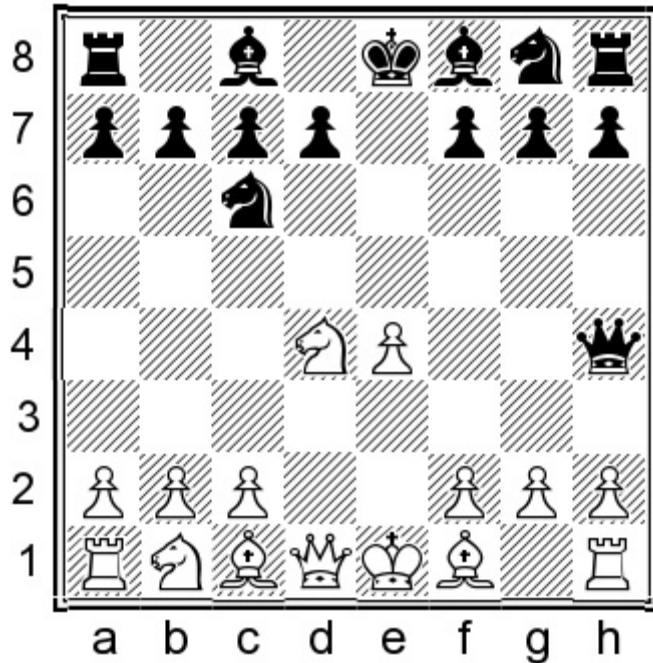
As Robert Byrne put it:

‘There are times when what is needed is the argumentative, stubborn anti-gambit attitude made famous by Wilhelm Steinitz [...]. He went out of his way to provoke the opponent to attack, and, reeking of contempt and crusader’s zeal, devoted himself to consolidating some of the most hideously unconsolidated positions ever seen on a chessboard.’¹⁰⁵

Mikhail Botvinnik summarized Steinitz’s style of play by saying that ‘the basic philosophical idea of the “new school” was to accept all sacrifices, to give the opponent the (mostly unwarranted) chance to attack, and then to exploit a material advantage or the opponent’s positional weaknesses, which accumulated in the process of the fierce attack.’

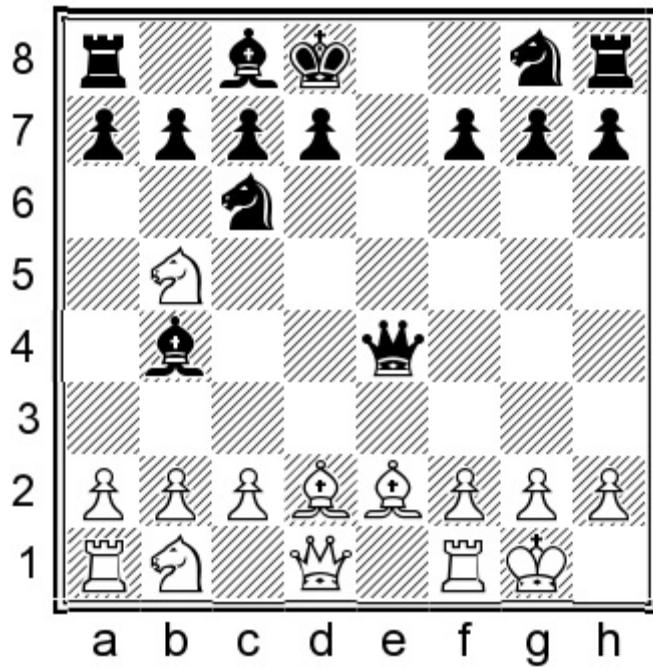
One of the opening systems Steinitz was very fond of is the Scotch with 4... $\mathbb{W}h4$, and this preference clearly shows that he was not just a pawn grabber (as a ‘necessary evil’), but decidedly an active pawn hunter. This is one of those puzzling choices that Steinitz repeatedly made. If you supposedly want to play positional chess (accumulating small advantages) and, for a change, your opponent doesn’t play a gambit but a solid opening like the Scotch, why not go for a positional battle rather than, instead, for such extravagant complications?

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.d4 exd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}h4$



In the database I can find 19 games with Steinitz playing this position, the great majority being games in serious competitions. In 13 of these games Steinitz placed his king on d8, mostly after moves like the following:

5. $\mathbb{Q}b5 \mathbb{Q}b4+$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}d2 \mathbb{W}xe4+$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}e2 \mathbb{Q}d8$ 8.0-0



(Exercise no 105)

I will address Steinitz's ideas on the role of the king in the next chapter, but here we already have a nice example of what Steinitz's 'modern school' was all about. The above position arose in one of the two games played by correspondence from 1872 to 1874 between the Westminster Chess Club and the

Wiener Schachgesellschaft. These two correspondence games have great importance, as Steinitz later called them the first to show ‘the analytical development of modern chess’.¹⁰⁶ Undoubtedly, Steinitz was mainly referring here to this Scotch Game.

The line-up for the London team quickly changed for slightly mysterious reasons. Finally only Steinitz and Potter were playing. The other members of the London team, Löwenthal, Wisker, Horwitz and Blackburne, had withdrawn shortly after the start. According to the *Chess Player’s Chronicle*, illness and business obligations were the reasons for this. Landsberger, however says:

‘All of the English players except Steinitz and Potter dropped out; none of them could grasp and comprehend the game Steinitz played’.¹⁰⁷

In his biography, Landsberger seems to be somewhat biased in favour of Steinitz regarding the more controversial matters. I don’t know what happened, but it is rather insulting to suggest that these strong players could not ‘grasp and comprehend’ Steinitz’s play. My guess is that at least some of them simply didn’t want to accede to Steinitz’s preferred style of play. ‘I’m not gonna play this crap’ looks like a perfectly valid argument in my opinion.

In an earlier correspondence game between two clubs (Paris and Pest), starting in 1842, something similar happened. Alexandre Deschapelles, in his best days (the first two decades of the century) maybe the world’s strongest player, and undoubtedly no less difficult a character than Steinitz, opted for the Greco Counter Gambit (also known as the Latvian Gambit). When his team-mates refused to play this rather dubious opening, Deschapelles angrily challenged them all to a match in which he would play the gambit. Nothing, however, came of that and he left the team, deeply affronted.¹⁰⁸

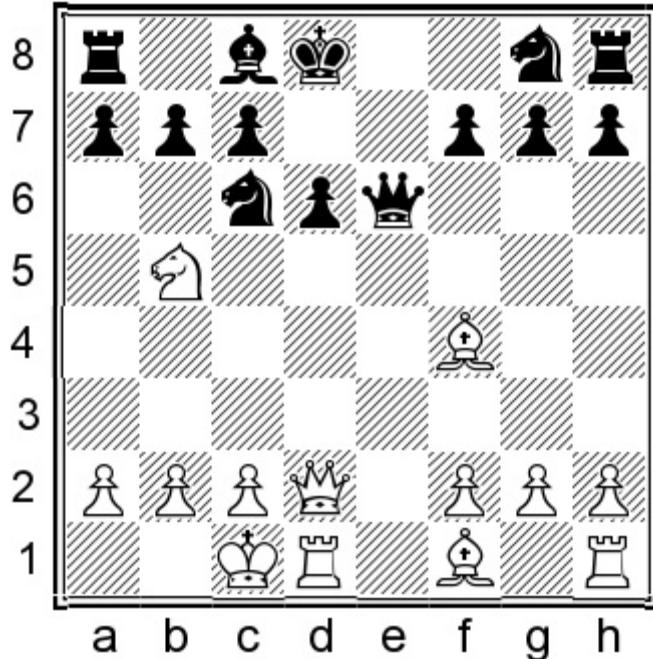
Deschapelles, by the way, is also known for his remarkable claim to have learned chess and become the world’s best player within the space of just two days.¹⁰⁹ One might expect this record to stand for eternity but alas, quite recently some guy seems to have accomplished this feat in half the time.¹¹⁰

To return to our Scotch 4... $\mathbb{W}h4$ variation: in those 19 games Steinitz managed to score 13-6, which strongly supports his reputation as an expert in defence. In the position of Exercise 105 White has more than enough compensation for the pawn and I guess that most players would find it easier to play the attacking side, but Steinitz apparently thought that ‘less effort’ was needed for the defence.

Let’s start with a miniature (an informal game) that shows the dangers of the black set-up. The white player has some fame as a problem composer (there even is a problem theme named after him, a device to make two pieces mutually interfere), but not as an over the board player. Actually, in the Megabase there is only this one game of his to be found, mating the world number one in 17 moves. Not bad for a single game record.

Walter Grimshaw – William Steinitz London 1878

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.d4 exd4 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{W}h4$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{W}xe4+$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4+$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 8. $\mathbb{W}xd2$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$
9.0-0-0 $\mathbb{W}e6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ d6

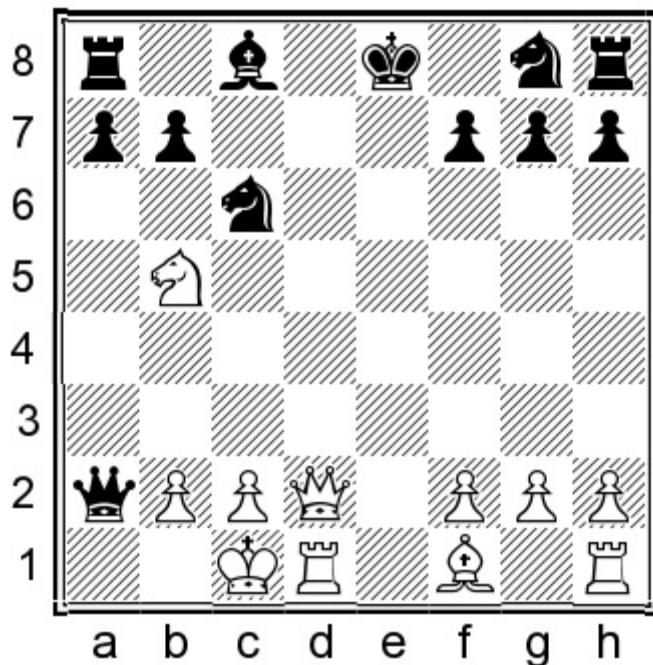


Things have already gone completely wrong and White can choose how to finish Black off. The classical device with a king stuck in the centre – opening lines – works out perfectly fine.

11.♗xd6! cxd6 12.♗xd6

White threatens a discovered check as well as ♗c4.

12...♔xa2 13.♗b5+ ♔e8



(Exercise no 106)

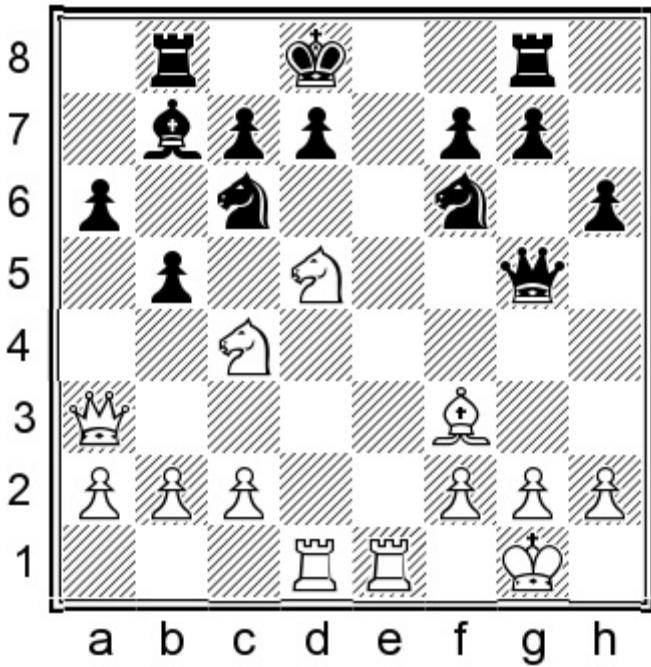
Now White mates in four, with a nice blockading motif in it. For a problem composer (as for you I hope), this is of course not a problem at all.

14. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 15. $\mathbb{W}d6+!$ $\mathbb{Q}ge7$ 16. $\mathbb{W}d8+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 17. $\mathbb{W}xd8$ mate.

Blackburne left the London team early in the match against Vienna. He might have regretted this, because if he had stayed he could have gained some valuable insights into Steinitz's ideas in the Scotch with 4... $\mathbb{W}h4$. In the period between Vienna 1873 and Vienna 1882, Steinitz played (for various reasons including health issues) only one serious event: a match against Blackburne. This turned into a nightmare for the latter, who got whitewashed 7-0.

In all his three games playing White, Blackburne was confronted with Steinitz's pet variation in the Scotch. In the first, Blackburne had a completely winning position and in the second an as good as winning advantage, while in the third a finger slip spoiled his opening plans. Kasparov shows the second game as an example of Steinitz's defensive powers; here I want to show the critical moment from the first game.

**Joseph Henry Blackburne
William Steinitz
London 1876**



White to move

(Exercise no 107)

Again, Black's king is stuck in the centre and as a consequence his rooks are out of play whereas all White's pieces are extremely active.

It has often been noted that having more than one win doesn't necessarily make your task easier but,

on the contrary, might easily lead to confusion. Here White has several winning lines, but none of them is simple, although the best two score around a huge +6 in engine terms. Besides that, Blackburne was in slight time pressure, which is a bit strange considering the fact that the players had the luxury of two hours for 30 moves (and a subsequent hour for every 15 moves) – not on the clock but in sandglasses, in this case. And, after exceeding this limit, you still got five minutes extra before you really lost the game.

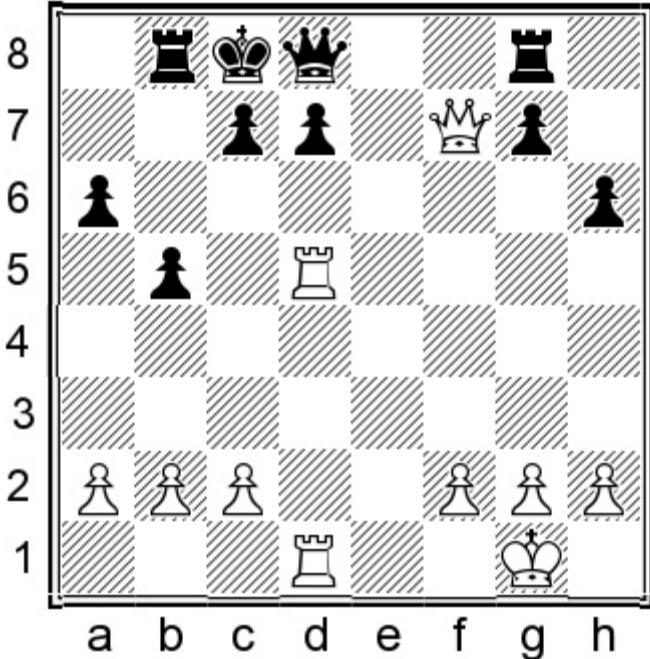
The move Blackburne played is good enough for a big advantage. Directly after the game he showed the alternative 24. $\mathbb{Q}e5$, to which he had devoted most of his remaining time, and indeed this should be winning after 24... $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 25. $\mathbb{W}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}cb6+$ $cxb6$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}xb6+$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 28. $\mathbb{W}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 29. $\mathbb{W}xb8+$.

But the strongest (and most beautiful) lines, 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ and 24. $\mathbb{Q}d6$, were apparently overlooked by the players and later commentators.

After 24. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd7+$! $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 26. $\mathbb{W}d3+$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ White has the finishing touch 27. $\mathbb{Q}e5+!$. On 26... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ there is 27. $\mathbb{Q}g4+$.

A bit simpler is 24. $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ $cxd6$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ (after 25... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ Black has to give up his queen) 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ and next d7 falls.

24. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 25. $\mathbb{W}e7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xf7$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}exd5$



White is of course still close to winning, but Blackburne even contrived to lose this game. In this match the games were adjourned for dinner after about 30 moves and in the English chess press it was suggested that the reason why Blackburne spoiled several games was due to his fondness of having a glass (or two) during this break.¹¹¹ As he said himself once:



'I find that whisky is a most useful stimulus to mental activity especially when one is engaged in a stiff and prolonged struggle. [...] Speaking for myself, alcohol clears my brain and I always take a glass or two when playing.'¹¹²

At the time, however, the hostility of some chess journalists towards Steinitz was already manifest and they preferred to look for excuses on the part of Blackburne rather than praise Steinitz for his strong play.

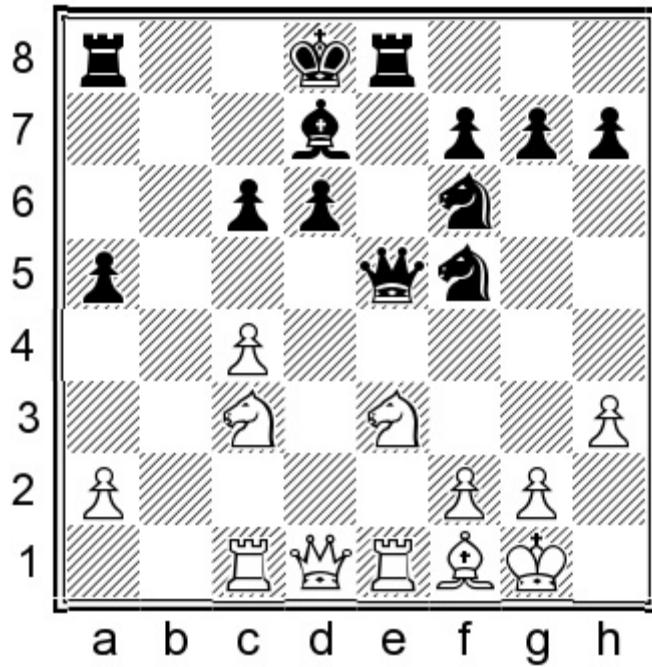
After this match, Steinitz's next event was no less than seven years later, the strong tournament in Vienna 1883. At that time Steinitz's position as the world's number one was under serious discussion, as in his absence Zukertort (amongst others) had been very successful.

It is characteristic of Steinitz's principled attitude that in this all-important event he chose the 4... $\mathbb{W}h4$ Scotch twice again, despite his shaky experiences against Blackburne. And with success, though against Paulsen the latter missed a very nice but rather hidden possibility.

Louis Paulsen

William Steinitz

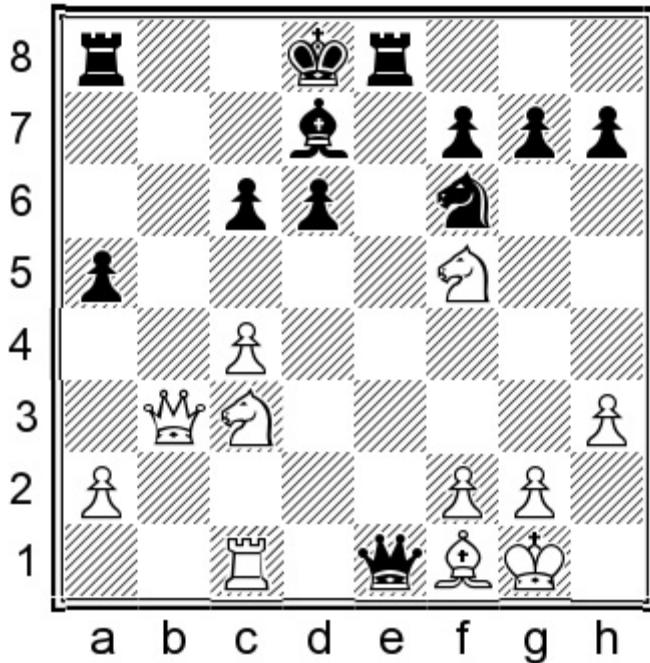
Vienna 1882



White to move

(Exercise no 108)

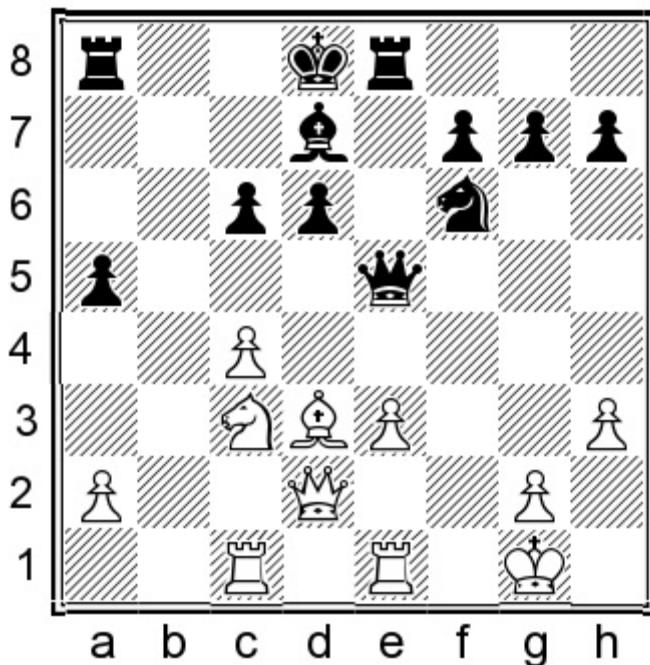
Black's last move was 21... $\mathbb{Q}d4-f5$, assuming that taking on f5 would bring White nothing. But after 22. $\mathbb{Q}xf5!$ $\mathbb{W}xe1$ (not 22... $\mathbb{W}xf5$ 23. $\mathbb{W}xd6$) White has 23. $\mathbb{W}b3!$.



Now 23... $\mathbb{W}xc1$ 24. $\mathbb{W}b6+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ is mate and 23... $\mathbb{W}e5$ doesn't help after 24. $\mathbb{W}b6+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$.

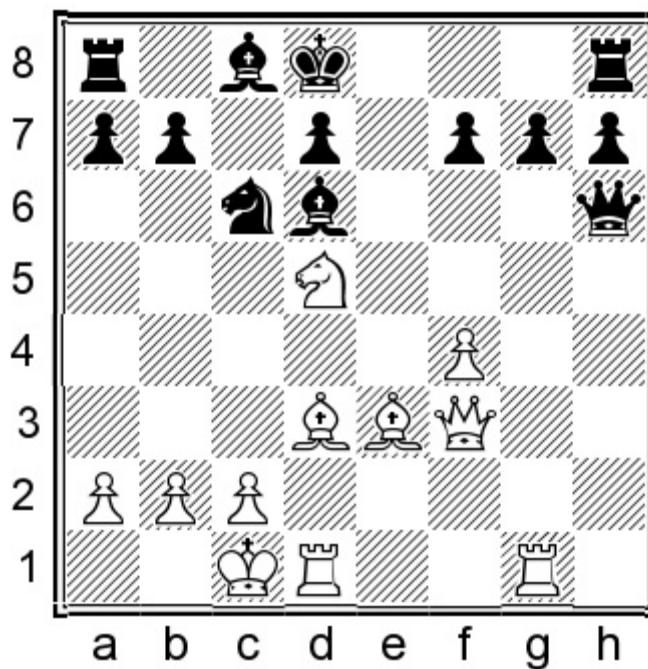
In the game there followed:

22. $\mathbb{W}d2$ $\mathbb{W}d4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ 24.fxe3 $\mathbb{W}e5$



White's attack has lost momentum, and the extra pawn and better structure later brought Black the win.

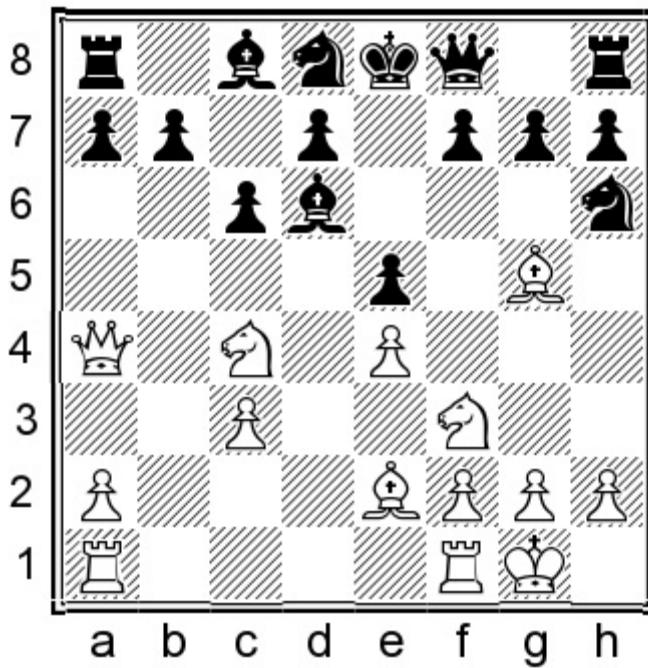
The last time Steinitz used this variation was in an important game again, from the fourth World Championship match, his second against Chigorin. The score was 7-7 in won games, playing for the first to win 10 games.



This is the position after 15 moves, with Black to move. He is already two pawns to the good, but that is the only positive thing we can say about Black's position. Maybe this game finally convinced Steinitz that the 4... $\mathbb{W}h4$ Scotch in combination with the ... $\mathbb{K}d8$ defence was asking too much of Black. If so, it would be with pain in his heart, because the idea that such a king on d8 could take care of itself was *the* cornerstone of Steinitz's 'modern school'.

Exercises for Chapter 25

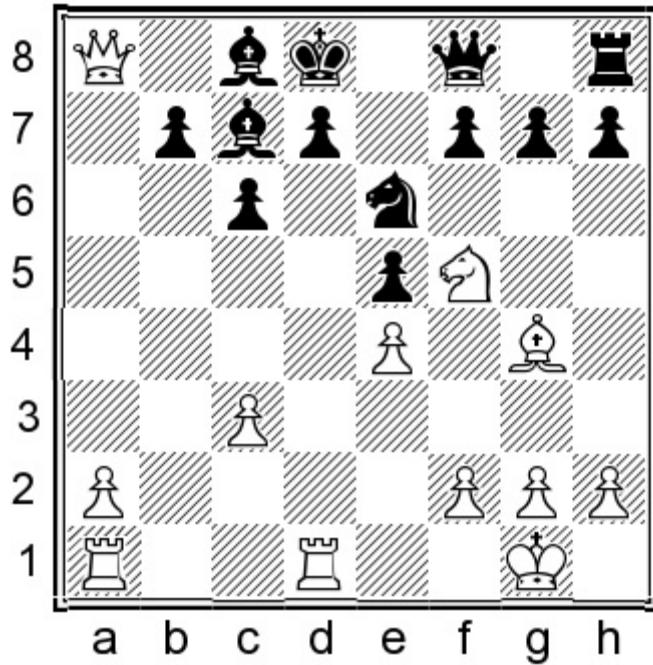
109 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

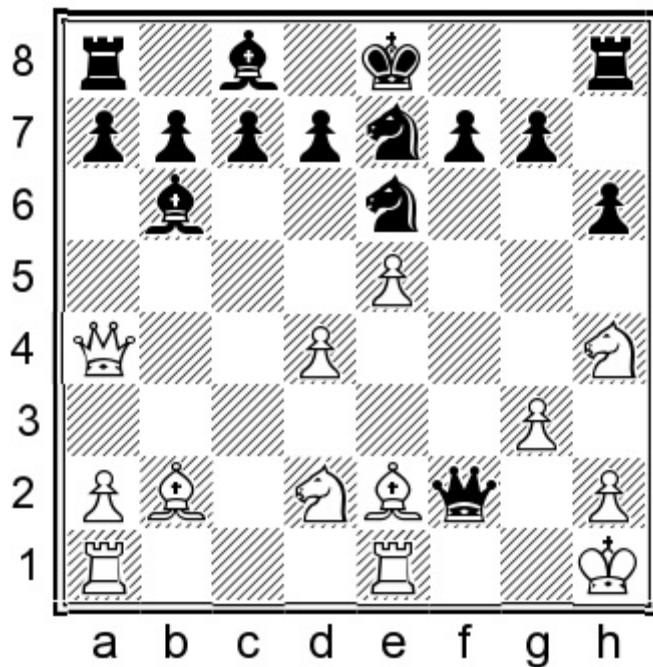
Your opponent in the coming World Championship match is prepared to play this position as Black at least four times against you. Do you accept?

110 (*go to the solution*)



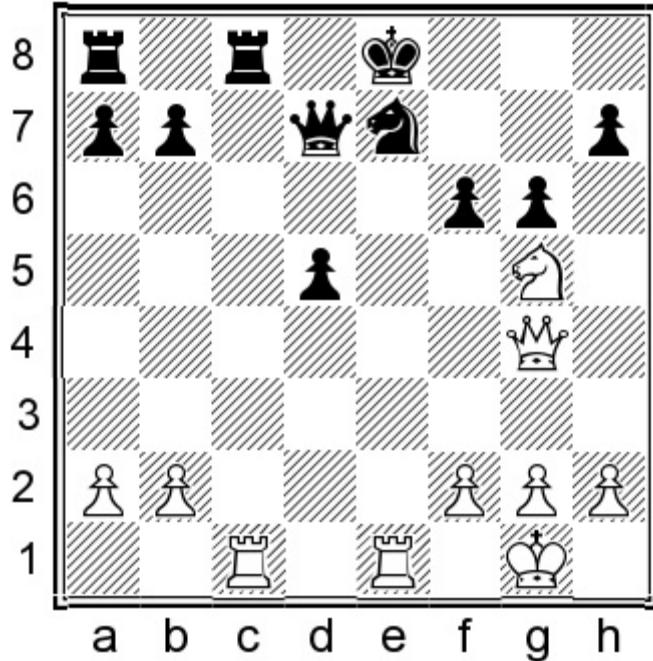
White to move

111 (go to the solution)



White to move

112 (go to the solution)



White to move

25

The king can take care of itself

Simpson's Divan

The following anecdote stems from Chernev (also known as ‘the Believe-It-Or-Not man of chess’), so some prudence is in order. But, true or not, it nicely addresses the central element of Steinitz’s theory:

‘One day Steinitz was holding forth at Simpson’s Divan in London, his audience including among others Bird and Mackenzie. Steinitz talked of his discoveries in chess, and aired his not unreasonable pride on being a pioneer in unexplored regions. In an unguarded moment he spoke of Morphy as a mere imitator. “I play my king all over the board; I make him fight. What did Morphy do? He castled! He put his King safely in the corner!” Mackenzie blew a cloud of smoke and quietly observed, “Not a bad idea, either”.¹¹³



If there is one thing that Steinitz really claimed to be his own major invention then it is his idea about the role of the king. As he puts it clearly in *The Modern Chess Instructor*:

‘But it is specially as regards the powers of the king that the modern school

deviates from the teachings and practice of old theorists and chess masters, and we consider it established that the king must be treated as a strong piece both for attack and defence.¹¹⁴

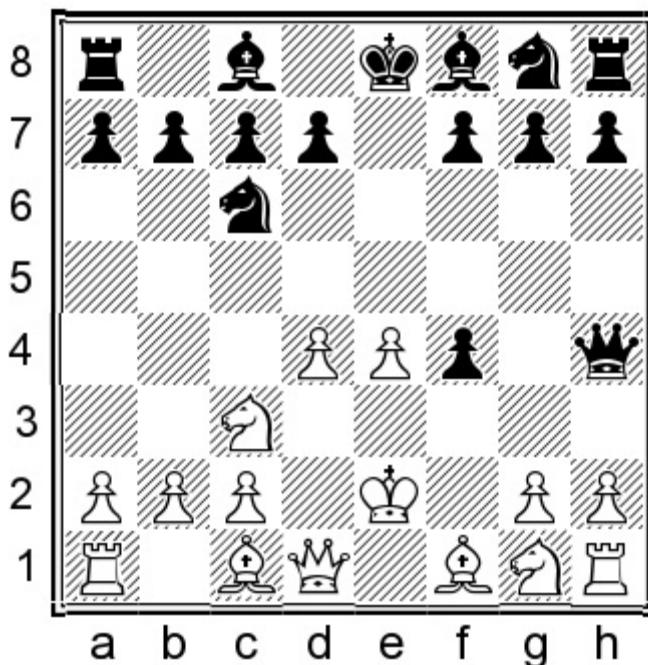
It is significant that this aspect is the first he brings forward when asked in an interview about how Morphy would do in those days: ‘Well, the game has made immense strides since his time. For one first-class player then, there are twenty now, and the science has developed. Morphy would have to alter his style to suit the new conditions. For instance, Morphy considered the king as an object merely of attack and defence, while the modern view is that it is itself a strong piece, to be used throughout the game. You see how frequently I will move my king all over the board to capture a pawn. In the old days that was never done. It sometimes loses me a game on account of the extraordinary foresight required. That is, in a match game it may do so, but in a game by correspondence never.’¹¹⁵

Those questions about Morphy were of course somewhat annoying for Steinitz. Morphy was still considered to be the strongest player of the day, but since he had retired, Steinitz had no chance to challenge this assumption.

Steinitz did meet Morphy, who at the time was already no longer doing very well, in New Orleans, but the anecdote that the only thing Morphy said to Steinitz was something like ‘your gambit is unsound’ is in all probability just made up.

We have already seen Steinitz stubbornly holding on to the 4... $\mathbb{W}h4$ Scotch. Likewise, throughout his whole career he was an avid supporter of the gambit that was named after him:

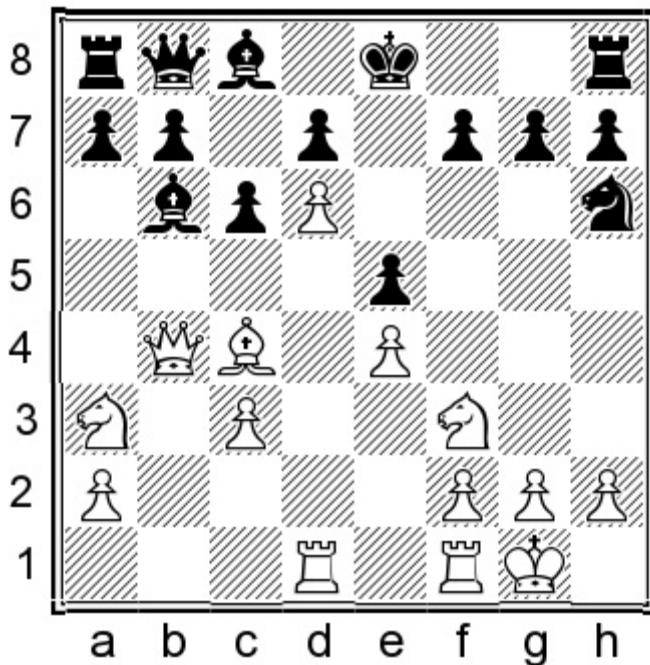
1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.f4 exf4 4.d4 $\mathbb{W}h4+$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}e2$



The pawn structure resembles that of a King’s Gambit. As we have seen, Steinitz was set against gambits, but this line is not actually meant to remain a gambit. White hopes to regain the f4-pawn soon, then complete development and possibly bring the king back into safety to finally enjoy the structural

advantages of this pawn formation. The exposed position of his king was only a minor worry for Steinitz.

But if – with the cliché in mind that a picture is worth a thousand words – I had to choose one diagram that is iconic for ‘the modern school’, it would be the following:



This diagram is the result of an important piece of analysis in *The Modern Chess Instructor*, which eventually led to the famous telegraph match between Steinitz and Chigorin. It has all the features of the modern school: Black is a pawn up for the moment; his king, which has lost the right to castle, has to take care of itself; he has carefully kept his pawns at home; and finally he has managed to provoke the white d-pawn to advance all the way to the sixth rank, which is ‘rarely good play’ as we have learned before.

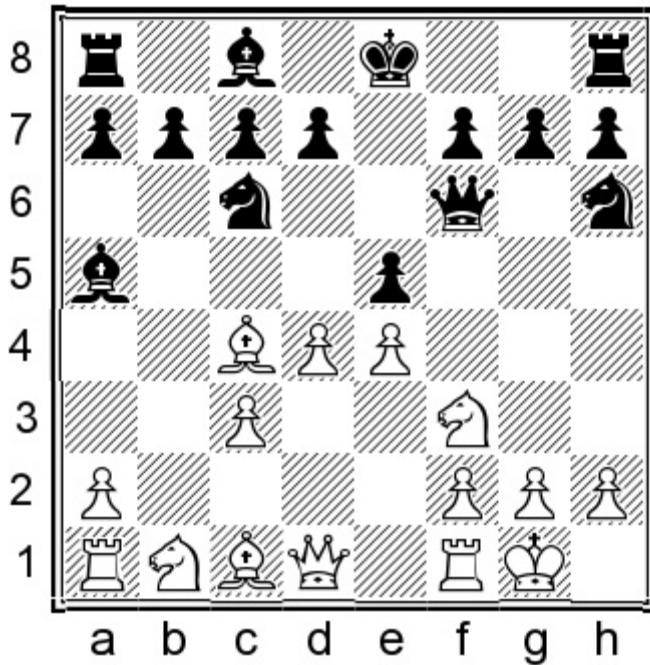
Being opposed to gambit-play, Steinitz would have welcomed an antidote to the Evans Gambit, which was very popular back then, and belonged to the main weapons of his greatest rivals Anderssen and Chigorin. But Steinitz was struggling to find a good answer and this struggle forms an eventful episode in the history of chess.

In *The Modern Chess Instructor*, Steinitz reflects on the second World Championship match, his first against Chigorin, that had just finished, and on the important role the Evans Gambit played in it:

‘But we wish to make some special remarks on the new defence adopted by the author in the Evans gambit as it affords striking examples of the application of, and the selection between, some of the different maxims laid down in our chapter on the Modern School and the Principles of Play.’

In this match, after the moves 1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♘c5 4.b4 ♗xb4 5.c3 ♘a5 6.0-0 Steinitz introduced the new move 6...♗f6. After 7.d4 he continued with 7...♗e7 8.d5 ♘d8, but this got him into trouble in several games (see below). After careful analysis Steinitz concluded ‘that Black by a little amendment of the developing moves can make his game secure and keep the material advantage.

The right move at this juncture is 7... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ and afterward ... $\mathbb{Q}e7$, instead of ... $\mathbb{Q}d8$.'



Steinitz continues his analysis with:

8.d5 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 9. $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}g5$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ c6 12. $\mathbb{R}ad1$

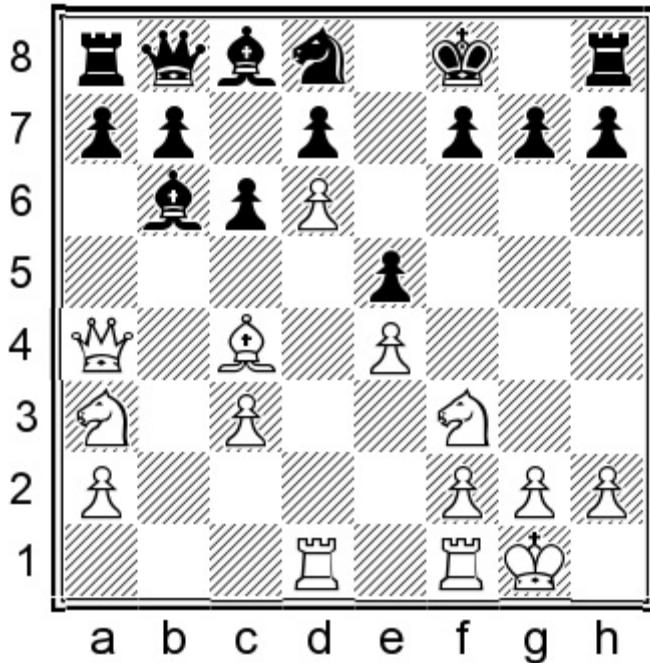
'At this juncture Black has to take the choice between retarding his development for a long time or allowing two holes to be formed in the center. As will be seen the two holes are more dangerous to his game than the block that White will create.'

12... $\mathbb{W}b8$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ 14.d6+ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 15. $\mathbb{W}b4$

We have reached the position I started with. Steinitz comments:

'And now Black's pieces are certainly shut out uncomfortably for the present, but our theory is that White's d-pawn being too far advanced will require the protection of queen and rook for some time, and if Black's king can only be guarded against any attacking surprises the defense ought gradually to obtain the best of the game with the majority of pawns on the queenside and the two bishops.'¹¹⁶

Steinitz intended this as an improvement on his play against Chigorin in the second World Championship match, in which he reached in his last two games with black the following very similar position:



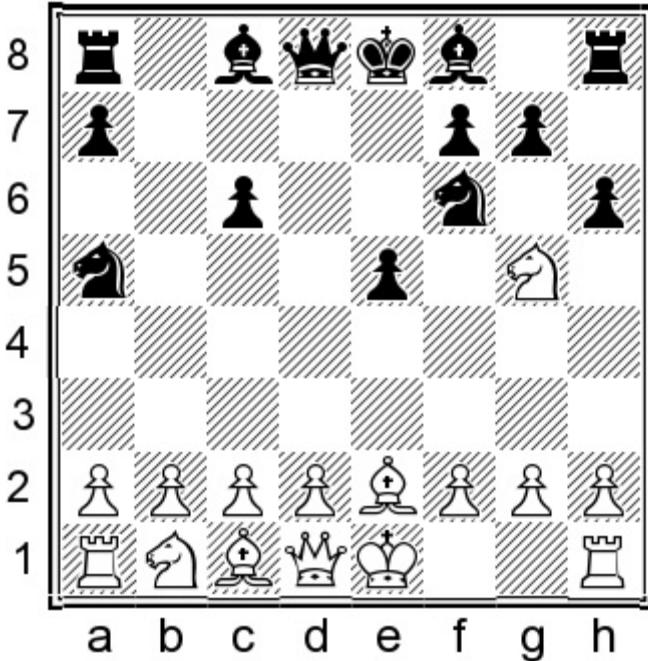
Discussing his predecessors, Vladimir Kramnik said: ‘One would want to resign in such a position [...] the position at the diagram is absolutely hopeless for Black.’¹¹⁷

Henry Bird once said about Steinitz:

‘Place the contents of the chess box in your hat, shake them vigorously, pour them at the board at the height of two feet and you get the style of Steinitz.’¹¹⁸

Another novelty Steinitz advertised with great pride in *The Modern Chess Instructor* was the move 9.♗g5-h3 in the Two Knights Defence:

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♘f6 4.♗g5 d5 5.exd5 ♘a5 6.♗b5+ c6 7.dxc6 bxc6 8.♗e2 h6



9. ♦h3

[...] the entirely new ninth move for White that seems to have escaped the attention of all analysts, being no doubt opposed to the manner of the old school which often was too eager to guard the kingside too much. In the present instance we do not think that the doubling of the h-pawn can do White as much harm, as it weakens the defense by exchanging an active bishop and gives White two bishops.' (Actually, unbeknown to Steinitz, 9. ♦h3 already had been played a few times – nota bene by ‘old school’ Anderssen!)

Chigorin reacted to *The Modern Chess Instructor* and analysed these two suggestions by Steinitz, ... ♦h6 in the Evans and ♦h3 in the Two Knights, claiming they were as good as losing. He proposed Steinitz to play a match with these two positions for a big stake. Steinitz accepted and so the famous telegraph match came about, which in the press was presented as the ultimate test between the theories of the old school and the modern school. Gunsberg wrote in the *New York Sun*:

‘The differences between the old school and the new are simply these: While the player of the old school will take the aggression from the very beginning of the game and try to get an attack by sacrificing a pawn or even a piece, the adherent of the modern school will only play for position at the opening of a game. [...]’

Steinitz, the inventor of this modern principle, looks upon his king not only as a piece which defends his whole position, but also as one which might become rather dangerous when used for the attack [...] In order to test his theory Steinitz says to the latter [Chigorin] “Let us play two games, you opening one and I the other. You will play the Evans Gambit in attack and the Two Knights Defence in the defence, and I will prove to you that the sacrifice of a pawn which these gambits entail will lose against the opposing game properly played.”¹¹⁹

This match was played by telegraph from 1890 to 1891 and it aroused enormous interest. A special

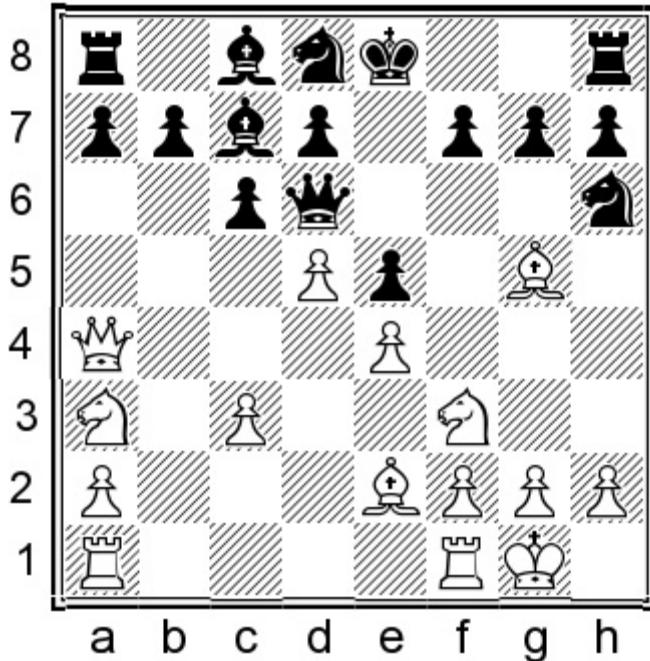
feature was that Steinitz in his chess column commented on the games while in progress. That led to some characteristic and (with hindsight) rather funny quotes.

Before the start:

'It will be noticed that in each of these games I am a pawn ahead and, theoretically, I maintain I ought to have a won game in each. Of course, Mr. Chigorin is evidently of a different opinion, and he probably speculates on some hidden king's side attack, which, however, according to the principles which I have followed in practice and theory for over twenty years, ought not to succeed by best play on my own side.'

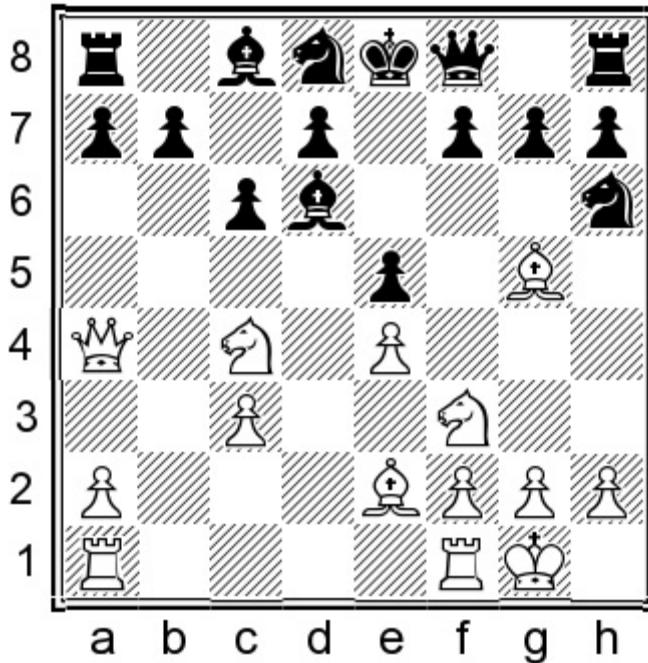
Mikhail Chigorin – William Steinitz telegraph match 1890-1891

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♘c5 4.b4 ♖xb4 5.c3 ♘a5 6.0-0 ♖f6 7.d4 ♘h6 8.♗g5 ♖d6 9.d5 ♘d8 10.♗a4 ♖b6 11.♘a3 c6 12.♗e2 ♘c7



'In general, I may remark that my antagonist's attack is of the same description as in most of the games which we have played together, and it is representative of the old school. He believes in advancing the pawns, and sacrificing one or more of them in order to create difficulties on the king's side, or for the purpose of blocking his opponent's pieces; whereas I maintain that the King is a strong piece that can usually take care of itself, and that in his style of attack Chigorin has to employ powerful pieces in order to block inferior ones. In the end, I opine that as usual, my minor pieces will thoroughly develop, while his far advanced pawns, which cannot retrace their steps, will form weak marks for my own ultimate counter-attack. For the present I am a pawn ahead, but I am likely to lose it, as on previous occasions, in order to rectify my position.' (+1.2)

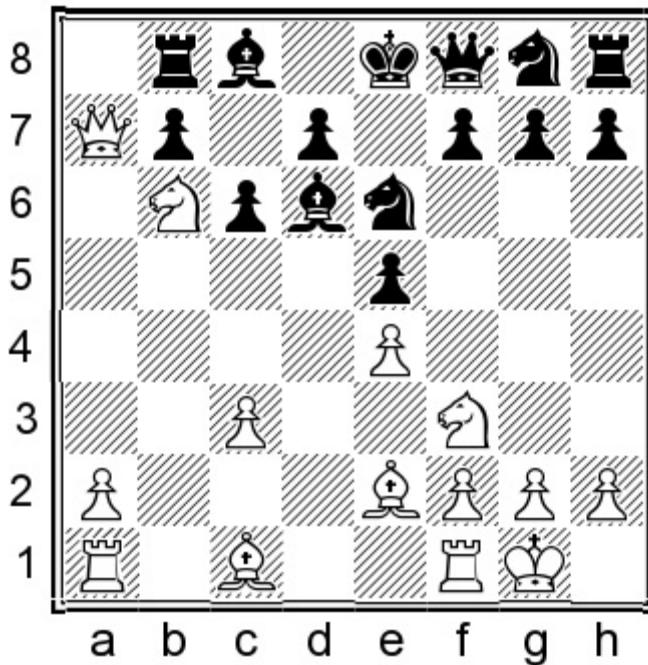
13.♘c4 ♖f8 14.d6 ♖xd6



(Exercise no 109)

'In a match over the board, I would undertake to play the identical variation up to this point against any living player, at least four times, and if either Chigorin or Gunsberg were to offer me a draw at that stage, I would refuse.' (+1.7)

15. ♜b6 ♜b8 16. ♜xa7 ♜e6 17. ♜c1 ♜g8



'I consider that now my position is better than it was at the start of the game, and I am ready to lay odds of two to one that my opponent will not win. In other words, I undertake to draw at least.' (+2.6)

18. ♜a3 c5

‘At any rate, I hope to make a hard fight for at least a draw.’ (+2.9)

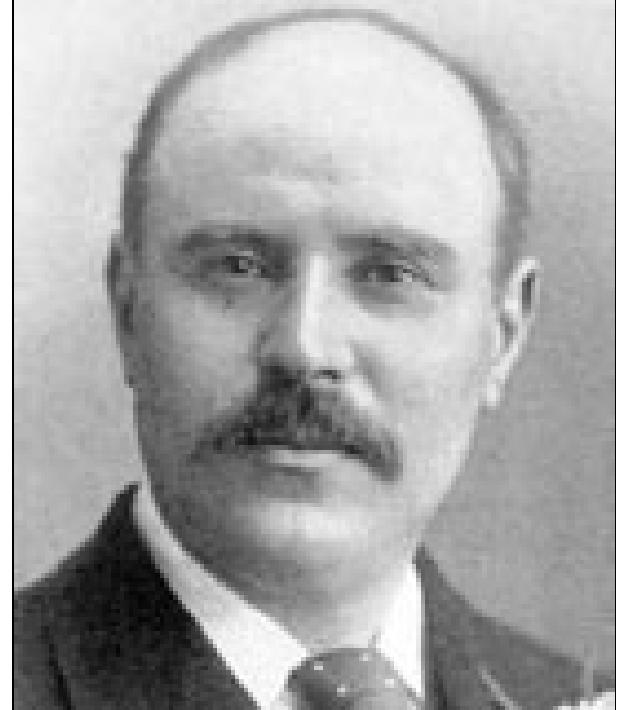
19. ♜ad1 ♜f6 20. ♜c4 ♜c7 21. ♜d5 ♜d6 22. ♜h4 ♜xd5 23. ♜f5 g6 24. ♜xd6+ ♜xd6 25. ♜xd5 ♜c7
26. ♜xe6 fxe6 27. ♜xc5 ♜a8 28. ♜xa8 ♜xc5 29. ♜a4 ♜d8 30. ♜d2 ♜c7 31. ♜b1 ♜d8 32. ♜b5 ♜c6 33. ♜b4
d6 34. a4 ♜e8 35. ♜b6 ♜f8 36. ♜a5 d5 37. exd5 ♜b8 38. d6 1-0

Isidor Gunsberg

The other game went along similar lines, together resulting in a crushing 2-0 defeat. But instead of admitting that something might be wrong with his ideas, Steinitz after the match chose a surprising defence: Chigorin won because he had adopted the principles of the modern school!

‘Without disparaging in the least the credit which my opponent deserves for his victory, I do not accept my defeat as conclusive evidence against the application of my theories in the two disputed positions, and still less as proofs against the doctrines of the modern school. I think that impartial experts will have to recognize that the Russian master’s tactics seem to show a conversion to the new ideas [...]’

This was a slow struggle and wrestling for position, in which the Russian master gained ground on the most approved principles of modern warfare in chess.¹²⁰



The story doesn’t end here. While the telegraph match was still in progress, Steinitz played his third World Championship match, against Isidor Gunsberg. In a reaction to *The Modern Chess Instructor*, Gunsberg, just like Chigorin, had spoken slightly about 7... ♜h6 in the Evans:

‘This move of course is desperate nonsense’.

In his reaction Steinitz called this ‘a most amusing instance of that negligence in reference to theory’ and stated that,

‘Still I am not discouraged, and make bold to say whatever the result of the ‘desperate nonsense’ may be in my cable match, I am still desperate enough to offer to play that move against Mr. Gunsberg himself as often as he likes in the forthcoming match.’¹²¹

Again, Steinitz had little success in this World Championship match with his pet line, losing 2-1 with it. The story goes that in the opening stage of the first of these three games, the opponents were engaged in the following dialogue:

Steinitz: ‘Are you expecting me to play my defense?’

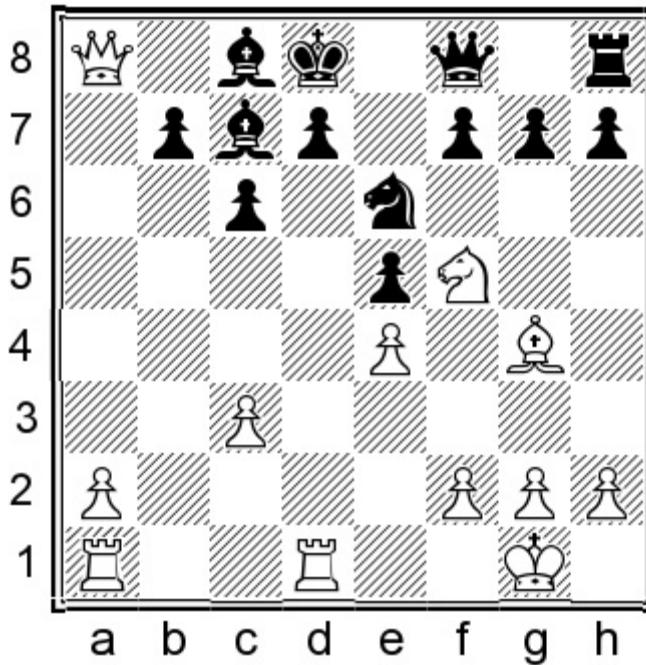
Gunsberg: ‘I would not have chosen the Evans Gambit otherwise.’

Steinitz: ‘Good! Then I will play $\mathbb{W}f6!$ ’¹²²

Isidor Gunsberg

William Steinitz

World Championship m 1891 (12)



White to move

(Exercise no 110)

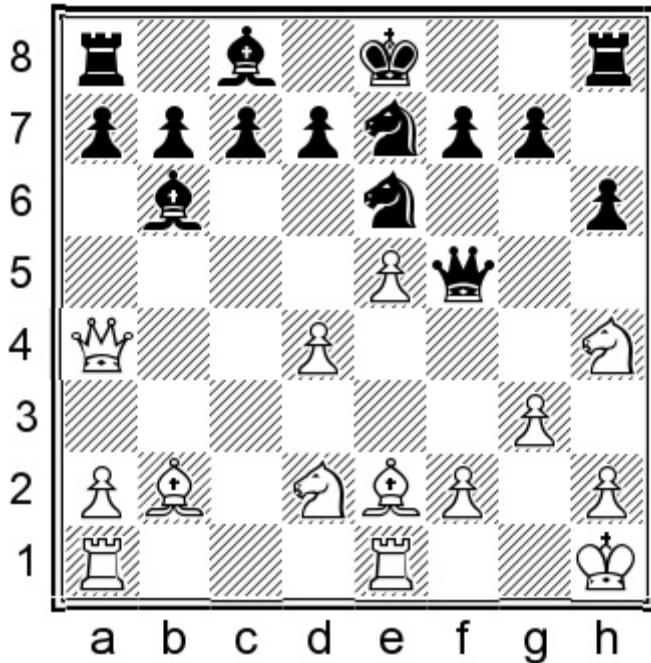
Things have gone wrong in a way very similar to the telegraph match game. White ends the game with a small combination:

23. $\mathbb{B}xd7+$! $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 24. $\mathbb{B}d1+$ 1-0

Isidor Gunsberg

William Steinitz

World Championship m 1891 (16)



Black to move

White has just played 20. Qh4 , attacking the queen. After the only move, 20... Wh7 , White is clearly better, though in the eyes of Steinitz it must have looked like a perfectly normal position. That makes it puzzling why he chose the next move, since it is not that difficult to see that the queen gets trapped.

According to Steinitz, Gunsberg nearly executed the move Qh4 , took it back and after some further thought and headshaking, finally played it. Steinitz felt a bit cheated, but even if this was a cheap trick, there is little excuse for a world champion to fall for it. Gunsberg by the way denied any evil intent.

20... $\text{Wxh2}??$ (Exercise no 111)

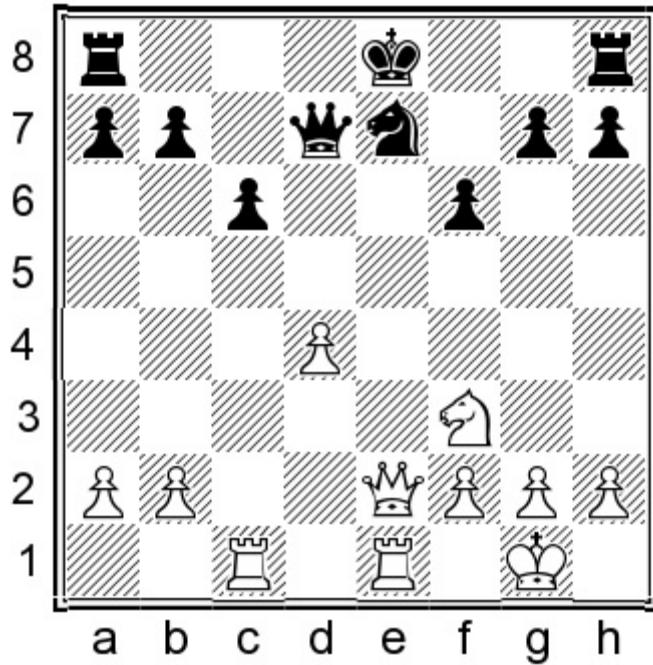
21. Qe4 1-0

After 21... We3 , moving the bishop, for example to f1, simply wins the queen.

In the fourth World Championship match, again between Steinitz and Chigorin, the discussion in the Evans and the Two Knights was continued, but Steinitz did not return to his plan with ... Wf6 and ... Qh6 , although he did remain loyal to his principles, which, especially in the Two Knights, several times led to disastrous defeats.

It is funny that Steinitz's most famous combination has him on the good side of the 'king in the centre' issue:

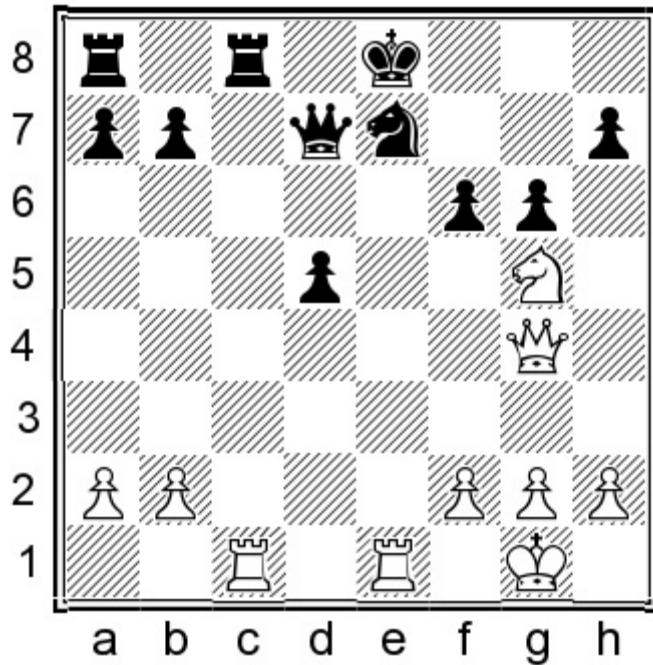
**William Steinitz
Curt von Bardeleben
Hastings 1895**



White to move

Black is only two moves (... $\hat{Q}f7$ and ... $\hat{B}e8$) away from consolidating.

17.d5! cxd5 18. $\hat{Q}d4$ $\hat{Q}f7$ 19. $\hat{Q}e6$ $\hat{Q}hc8$ 20. $\hat{W}g4!$ g6 21. $\hat{Q}g5+$ $\hat{Q}e8$



(Exercise no 112)

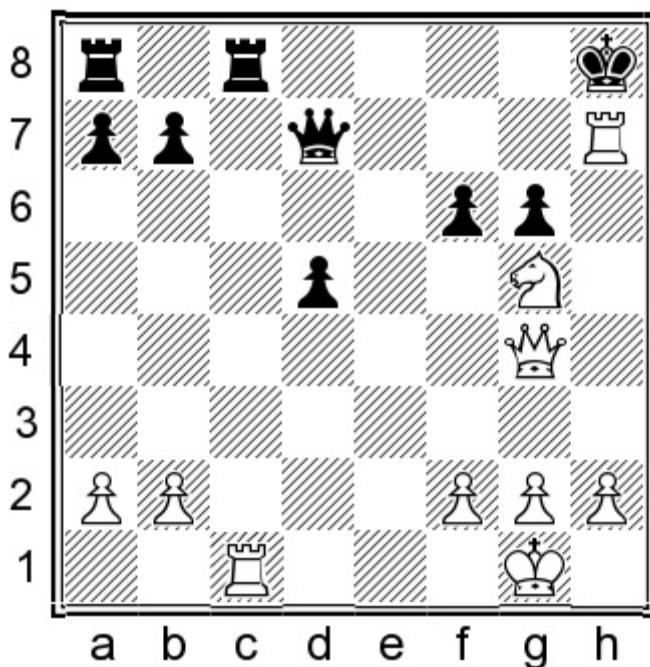
Maybe you recognized this famous position and knew how the game continued, but still some calculation has to be done.

22. $\mathbb{B}xe7+$! $\mathbb{Q}f8$

On 22... $\mathbb{W}xe7$ there is 23. $\mathbb{B}xc8+$, but 22... $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ is the main move. After 23. $\mathbb{B}e1+$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ (or 23.... $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c5+$) 24. $\mathbb{W}b4+$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ (or 24... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$ 26. $\mathbb{W}f4+$) the simplest win is 25. $\mathbb{Q}e6+$.

I would not be surprised if Steinitz had missed Black's ingenious defence, which would be perfectly understandable, but luckily or not, he has a beautiful follow-up which gives this combination its extra brilliance.

23. $\mathbb{B}f7+$! $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 24. $\mathbb{B}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 25. $\mathbb{B}xh7+$



If 25... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 26. $\mathbb{B}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ White has a mating sequence starting with 27. $\mathbb{W}h4+$.

Black now disappeared from the tournament hall without resigning. In our days, disconnecting has for a lot of people become the preferred way of resigning, but back then this was not considered to be completely sportsmanlike. (The finish of this game has been much discussed and it seems that Von Bardeleben told Steinitz that he did not resign because he wanted to avoid the applause disturbing the other players.)

Steinitz's idea that 'the King is a strong piece that can usually take care of itself' is the crown jewel of his theory. Had it been true, it would have been a rather fundamental revolution in chess. One can differ about to what degree it is nonsense. I think it is rather modest to state the opposite: the king usually can't take care of itself.

Above I showed Steinitz's stubborn and not very fair reaction to his loss in the telegraph match, claiming his 'modern school' wasn't affected by the loss at all. In a reaction, Chigorin wrote:

'I do not consider myself belonging to this or that 'school', I am guided not by abstract theoretical considerations on the comparative strength of pieces etc., but

only the data as it appears to me in this or that position of the game, which serves as an object of detailed and possibly precise analysis. Each of my moves presents itself as a feasible inference from a series of variations in which theoretical “principles of play” can have only a very limited significance.’¹²³

Compared with Steinitz’s dogmatism, this looks like a very modern point of view.

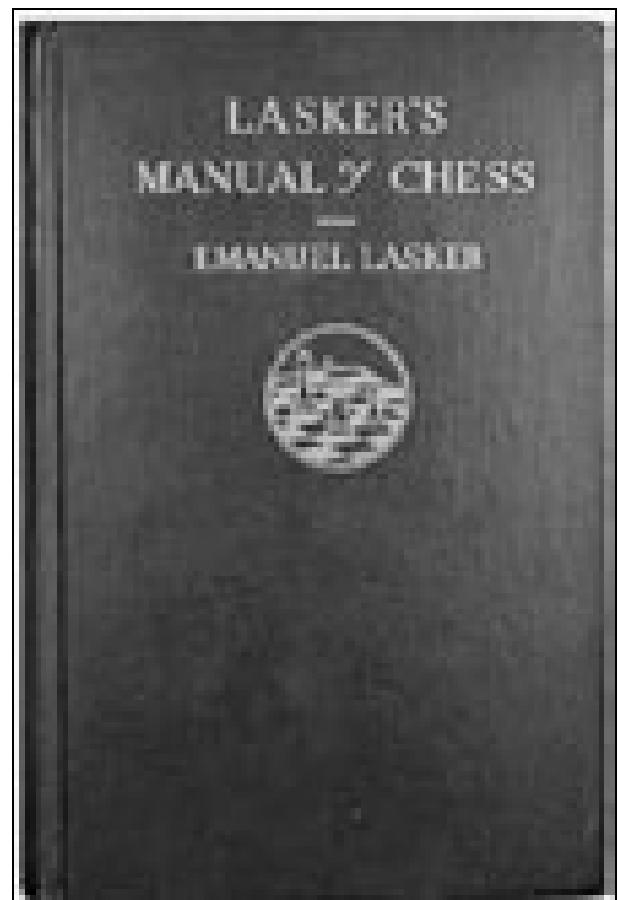
26

Lasker making history

In the previous chapters I have given an overview of Steinitz's 'modern school' and of his style of play. The essence of his school is in my opinion formed by the eccentric parts, but others have placed the positional elements in the centre, and look at the eccentricities as a minor side effect.

And some writers chose to simply ignore them completely. A good example of this is Euwe in *The Development of Chess Style*. In the seventy pages he devotes to Steinitz's theory he manages to completely smuggle away Steinitz's controversial view on the role of the king, apart from this one remark:

'With regard to these cases [issues of king safety] Steinitz warned the attacker against being too optimistic. "The King is a strong piece" he used to say, meaning that this piece is quite capable of attending to its own safety. The games of Steinitz contain many daring examples of self-defence on the part of the King.'¹²⁴



Returning to Purdy and his idea of the Great Steinitz Hoax: I agree that what in the history of chess has been presented as the theory of Steinitz – the 'revolutionary' idea of balance and the principle of making plans based on the positional elements – is not exactly what Steinitz had in mind with his modern school, nor is it what he claimed to be his invention. Although I don't think these ideas are developed by Lasker, he surely made something peculiar out of this part of chess history.

For this we have to go to Lasker's *Manual of Chess* (1925), and especially the parts about positional play and the history of planning in chess. I will extensively quote from them, but the reader is warned that though these belong to the most influential texts in chess history, they are certainly some of the weirdest as well.

The first quote gives a good idea of Lasker's philosophical writing style, bombastic and full of historical and mythological references, typical for those days but a bit hard to digest for most readers today.

'When Paul Morphy, despairing of Life, renounced Chess, Caissa fell into deep mourning and into dreary thoughts. To the masters who had come to ask her for a smile she listened absent-mindedly, as a mother would to her children after her favourite had died. Therefore, the games of the masters of that period are planless; the great models of the past are known, and the masters try to follow them and to

equal them, but they do not succeed. The masters give themselves over to reflection. One of them reflects a long time and intensely on Paul Morphy, and gratefully Caissa encourages him; and the greatest landmark in the history of Chess is reached: William Steinitz announces the principles of strategy [...] Steinitz had to dig deep to lay bare the roots of the art possessed by Morphy. And when Steinitz after hard work had bared these roots, he said to the world: Here is the idea of Chess which has given vitality to the game since its invention in the centuries long past. Listen to me and do not judge rashly, for it is something great, and it overpowers me.

The world did not listen but mocked at him [...] but the world was entirely mistaken. The world would have benefited if it had given Steinitz a chance. He was a thinker worthy of a seat in the halls of a University. A player, as the world believed he was, he was *not*; his studious temperament made that impossible; and thus he was conquered by a player and in the end little valued by the world, he died. And I who vanquished him must see to it that his great achievement, his theories should find justice, and I must avenge the wrongs he suffered.'

The borders between serious history writing and mythology are vague here. In his story it fitted Lasker well to link Steinitz to Morphy, and Kasparov in *My Great Predecessors* follows him at this point, but Steinitz himself gave a completely different origin for his change of thought:

'At the tournaments in Paris (1867) and Baden-Baden (1870), I was hoping to win the first prize. After I did not succeed, I had to think about it and came to the conclusion that combinational play, while yielding beautiful results on occasion, cannot provide lasting success. After careful analysis of such games, I found a number of weaknesses. Many seductive and successful sacrifices were not sound. I decided that reliable defense demands much less effort than attack. In general, attack has a chance for success only when the position of the opponent is already weakened. Since then, my research has been focused on finding a simple and certain way to weaken the opponent's position.'¹²⁵

Another strange point, brought forward by Lasker again and again, is the 'fact' that Steinitz was misunderstood and treated badly by the chess world. This exactly parallels the story about Philidor being misunderstood, a story Lasker, a few pages before the above quote, supported as well. Or maybe he even was the main origin of that story too – that wouldn't be surprising.

'Philidor showed the value of the Pawn in slow manoeuvring for the purpose of opening lines desired open and of obstructing lines dominated by the enemy. And again he showed how to assault a firm position by advancing an array of Pawns against it, the pieces following on their heels. He showed it more in his games than by word or writing, but his contemporaries understood neither.'

Just as with Philidor I find it hard to understand why Steinitz should have been misunderstood. He was the number one and/or World Champion for almost 30 years, and during this entire period he published

his ideas and analyses in columns and books that were well read all over the chess world. And, to put it mildly, he wasn't modest in bringing forward his own ideas, nor did he write them down in an obscure style. So I think he was understood perfectly well but, not surprisingly, on some important points, people did not agree with him.

Let's continue Lasker's history:

'Steinitz felt that a plan, being a prescription or a rule for successful action on the Chess-board, could *not* be based on the reason ascribed to it during this time, namely, the genius of the player, the creative fancy of a master, but another reason – a reason residing not in the persons or minds of the players but in the position on the board [...]

The world did not comprehend how much Steinitz had given it; even Chess players did not comprehend it. And yet his thought was revolutionary, because, of course, it is not limited to the Chess-board [...] but extends to every activity directed towards meaning and purpose. [...] This fundamental and universal principle be briefly expressed as follows: the basis of a masterly plan is always a valuation. [...]

Therefore, I fancy, Steinitz, by slow degrees, was led to believe that Chess, after all, must be subject to a reason of its own not to be affected by invention, intuition, inspiration, genius, or anything else of the kind.'

Lasker is making a caricature of chess before Steinitz. This 'romantic' form of inspired chess, not bound by the limits of the position, never existed. There is no way to play good chess (as they did before Steinitz) without being completely inspired by the position on the board. And if you look at analyses from those days you see players discussing the pros and cons of moves and positions in basically the same style as we do today.

Noteworthy in the above is that Lasker asserts that 'making a plan based on an evaluation' is *the* revolutionary invention of Steinitz. Lasker discusses Steinitz's thinking for about 50 pages in his history, but, alas, without a single quote. It would have been really useful.

'Surely, Steinitz's heart beat when for the first time the thought came to him that the master should not look for winning combinations, unless he believed, unless he could prove to himself that he held an advantage. [...]

For if a great advantage is the necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of a combination, this longed for but seldom attained goal, the laborious search for it can be methodically made and thereby facilitated. With such a method one possesses a magic wand that is efficient indeed. [...] Therefore his maxim: In the beginning of the game ignore the search for combinations, abstain from violent moves, aim for small advantages, accumulate them, and only after having attained these ends search for the combination [...].

His generation did not comprehend, did not even suspect this trend of thought. The people among whom he lived were willing to reward nonsense and humbug if

dressed up magnificently.'

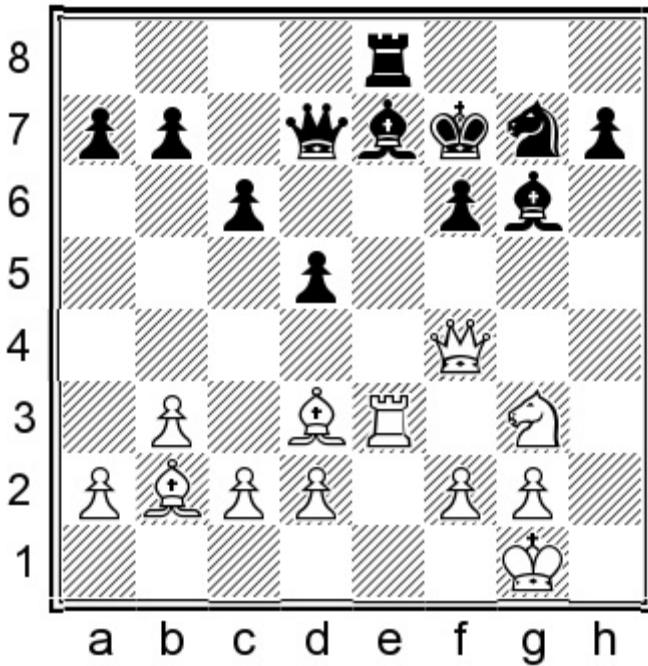
Again, to come to these fantastic conclusions, you have to make the craziest assumptions about chess before Steinitz. Does Lasker really think the old masters were constantly looking for combinations, regardless of the position? Common to all improving chess players is the fact that they develop a feeling for the tactical possibilities in a position. This is such an essential trait of good chess-playing that throughout the whole history of chess all (stronger) players have developed their tactical antenna to spot things like a vulnerable king, unguarded pieces, your own active ones, pawns close to promotion, etcetera etcetera. No magic wand needed.

To illustrate what he thinks to be the essential part of Steinitz's theories, making a plan based on an evaluation of the position, Lasker uses games from the first World Championship match. As before, in the hands of Steinitz, poor Zukertort is the victim again.

William Steinitz

Johannes Zukertort

World Championship m 1886 (6)



Black to move

Emanuel Lasker

In Chapter 23 we left the game at this moment. White has a nice advantage and his position is very solid, which makes this difficult for Black to play. His next move makes things worse and I don't know what was Zukertort's idea, or what he missed or feared, but well, these things can happen when under pressure. Lasker shows less understanding.

25...Qe6?

'From the fourteenth move until this moment Black, on the defence, has played very good Chess. Now White has no immediate threats and Black, to give a direction to his game, has to follow his own initiative: he has to originate a plan. But that is exactly what Zukertort did not understand.

Steinitz with whom he contested had furnished the intellectual armament needed for planning, but Zukertort did not comprehend his antagonist and was entirely lost when confronted by such a task. His right plan was to keep his attention riveted on his weak points f5, c5 and f6, and consistently work for a Draw by exchanging dangerous pieces. His initiative lay in building a phalanx by c5 to be used, if needed, to blockade a Bishop.

'This plan was certainly a difficult one to execute, but Zukertort did not even try to conceive this or any other plan and failed, and was bound to fail, since the theory of Steinitz carried no message to him.' Ouch.

In the last part of his history, under the heading 'Steinitz Advances his Theory beyond the Needs of Practical Chess and thus enters the Domain of Science and Philosophy', Lasker really raises the roof. Purdy thought that Lasker attributed his own findings to Steinitz out of some feeling of guilt, since shortly after he had beaten Steinitz twice, the latter had broken down mentally and died in poor conditions.

I don't think Lasker credited Steinitz with his own ideas. It looks much more as if Lasker tries to incorporate Steinitz in his own philosophy, and with that Lasker had much greater aspirations than solely producing a theory of chess.

'Only after the balance of the positions has been disturbed, so that one player holds an uncompensated advantage, may this player attack with intent to win. And here Steinitz elevates himself to the level of a genuine philosopher in demanding that that player *must* attack with intent to win or else be punished by being deprived of his advantage.'

This 'must' connotes an ethical power. [...] you must obey the ethical command of your struggle, in Chess or elsewhere – at school, in the garden, in dispute, in negotiation or wherever you may contend. This is a fundamental law in the world and Steinitz felt it, and in a mysterious way had understood that it operated also on the Chess-board. [...]

One may say that *he who has not* Steinitz's theory in his grasp does not understand how to conceive sound plans, either on the Chess-board or elsewhere.

Certainly, he will sometimes be able to hit upon a sound plan, not like a swallow that in the midst of its flight catches its prey with ease, but like a poodle which clumsily jumps after a fly.



The theory as above presented does not, however, embrace all of the fundamental principles of a contest. To put them together with sufficient explanations is rather a formidable task. My first attempt was made in 1906 in my book *Struggle*, and another and more successful one in my system of philosophy, *Das Begreifen der Welt (Comprehension of the World)* 1913 and *Die Philosophie des Unvollendbar (The Philosophy of the Unattainable)* 1918 [...]. This philosophy – pardon, reader, this is my conviction which is not entirely vain – this philosophy will some day be known and esteemed by man. [...] But my philosophy is young [...]. One must not, therefore, wonder that man does not seem to know much of a theory of “struggle”, and still less should one draw the conclusion that probably it is of little importance. What ripens soon, fades soon. To good and weighty theories public recognition comes late. The theory of struggle, divined by men like Machiavelli, Napoleon, Klausewitz, moulded by Steinitz in accurate detail for the Chess-board, longingly desired by some philosophers, established by myself in universal validity, therefore philosophically, will some day regulate the life of man. I do not in the least hesitate to say so.¹²⁶

What a change of perspective! It falls a bit outside the scope of this book to comment on Lasker’s philosophy, but as far as I can see, the day on which this philosophy will ‘regulate the life of man’ has yet to come.

Time to get back on our feet again. Many have commented on Lasker mixing his philosophical ambitions with his analysis of chess history, but nonetheless this text has been enormously influential. I guess that an important part of the historical picture of Steinitz and his role as the father of positional chess originates here with Lasker.

Let me try to summarize what I think ‘The Great Steinitz Hoax’ consists of. From the start of serious competition, the level steadily rose, in ‘attacking’ as well as ‘positional’ play. Towards the end of the 19th century, positional knowledge was growing and the gambit style of play was declining in popularity. The way Steinitz’s style developed (trying for a slow accumulation of advantages instead of going for a direct (gambit) attack), fitted well within this ongoing tendency. But he also had some really new ideas, of which the active role of the king and a restrained handling of the pawns were the central ones, and this he called his ‘modern school’. While these central ideas were (partly) discredited, the qualification ‘modern’ or ‘new school’ became more and more transferred to positional play in a general sense – but that was not Steinitz’s invention, nor new at all.

Lasker gave an extra twist to the further development of this historical picture. By caricaturing the chess before Steinitz, Lasker made Steinitz look like a revolutionary, breaking with the past. And by accentuating the ideas of ‘balance’ and ‘making a plan based on an evaluation of the elements of a position’, Lasker added some of his own philosophical peculiarities to Steinitz’s theory. I don’t think this idea was the essential part for Steinitz and I’m sure that before Steinitz players were looking at the position as well instead of searching for ‘inspiration’. And those elements of positional play were all well-known before Steinitz, and other players took part in developing new positional plans just like Steinitz did.

This doesn't mean that Steinitz did not play an important role in the development of chess. But regarding his theories I think that much that has been ascribed to him wasn't his invention, and much of what he did invent has rightfully been put aside. Steinitz's style fitted well with the way the game already was developing. If it weren't for the eccentric parts of his theory, Steinitz even might not have used the words 'new' or 'modern' himself.

This version of Steinitz as the originator of positional chess has been told in numerous books, so it seems rather pretentious to try to adjust it. But for a good part, these books are only parroting earlier books and/or based on research of a very small number of games (if based on any research at all).

Here is just one example of this stereotyping of the past, from Harold Schonberg's *Grandmasters of Chess*:

'The romantic age was coming to an end. New players with new ideas were arriving, and they sneered at the old boys with their unsound attacks and sacrifices. The new breed ignored the wild sorties of the romantics. Quietly they went ahead building up a solid center and planning long ahead for the endgame. The art of position play was being established, and the romantics were like knights in shining armor faced by peasants with gunpowder.'¹²⁷

It is beautifully written, but you can only arrive at a comparison like this if you haven't played over the games of those days. Note that it is a perfect echo of Lasker's description of the romantic era:

'The plan was wholly dominated by the feverish desire to make a rush against the hostile King and to this end furiously to assail the obstructions, regardless of the sacrifices required.'

As an example of this 'feverish' attacking style, Lasker gives the first encounter between Anderssen and Steinitz, from the London 1862 tournament. On closer inspection, this choice doesn't do justice to the undogmatic and at times rather brilliant play in this game.

Adolf Anderssen – William Steinitz London 1862

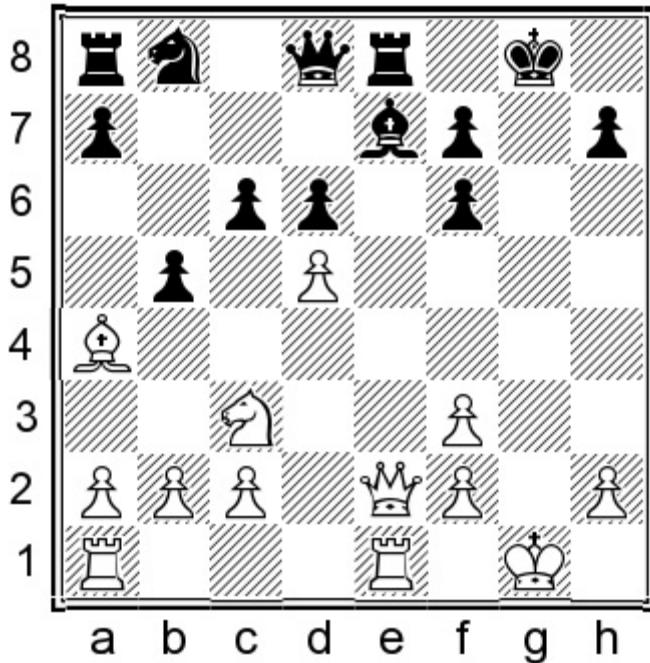
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘f6 4.0-0 ♘xe4 5.d4 ♘e7 6.d5 ♘b8 7.♘xe5 0-0 8.♗e1 ♘f6 9.♗c3 d6 10.♘f3 c6 11.♗a4 ♘g4 12.♗e2!?

An enterprising idea. White doesn't mind taking back on f3 with the pawn. He has sharply seen that Black cannot avoid the same.

12...♘xf3 13.gxf3 ♘e8 14.♗g5 b5

On 14...♘f8 White has 15.♘xf6; 14...♗bd7 leaves c6 hanging.

15.♘xf6 gxf6



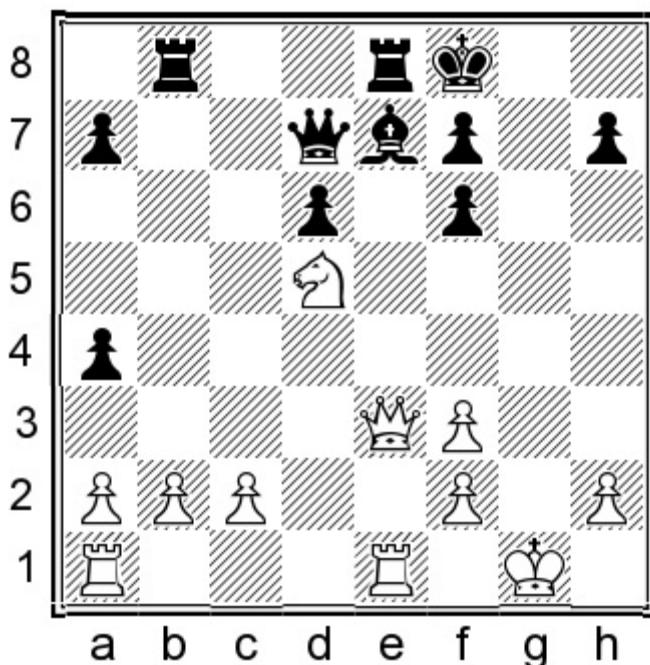
16.dxc6!

The fine point of White's play.

16...bxa4 17.c7 ♕d7

After 17...♕xc7 18.♘d5 Black's position collapses.

18.cxb8=♕ ♜axb8 19.♘d5 ♔f8 20.♕e3!



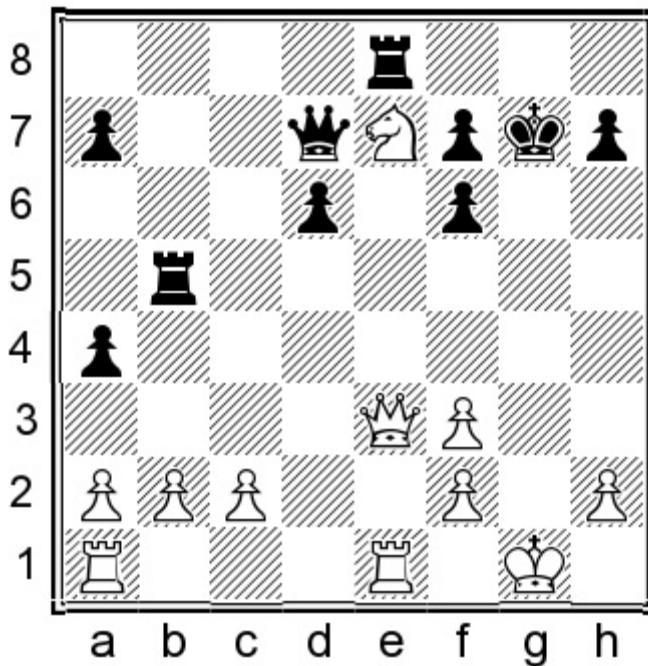
Anderssen must have been convinced that his last move was decisive. Black seems unable to defend

against 21. $\mathbb{W}h6+$ and keep the bishop covered, so Black's next move didn't raise any suspicions.

20... $\mathbb{B}g7!?$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}xe7?$

21. $\mathbb{Q}h1!$.

21... $\mathbb{E}b5!$



A devilish defence. If White prevents 22... $\mathbb{E}e5$ with 22.f4, Black has 22... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ back, since there is no 23. $\mathbb{W}h6+$ any more. Nor can he keep his extra piece after the game continuation with (22. $\mathbb{Q}f5+$ $\mathbb{E}xf5$) 23. $\mathbb{W}xe8$ because of the counterattack 23... $\mathbb{E}g5+$ followed by 24... $\mathbb{W}h3$.

22. $\mathbb{Q}f5+!?$ $\mathbb{E}xf5$ 23. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{E}ee5$

Black regained the piece with approximately equal chances, although White later won in the endgame.

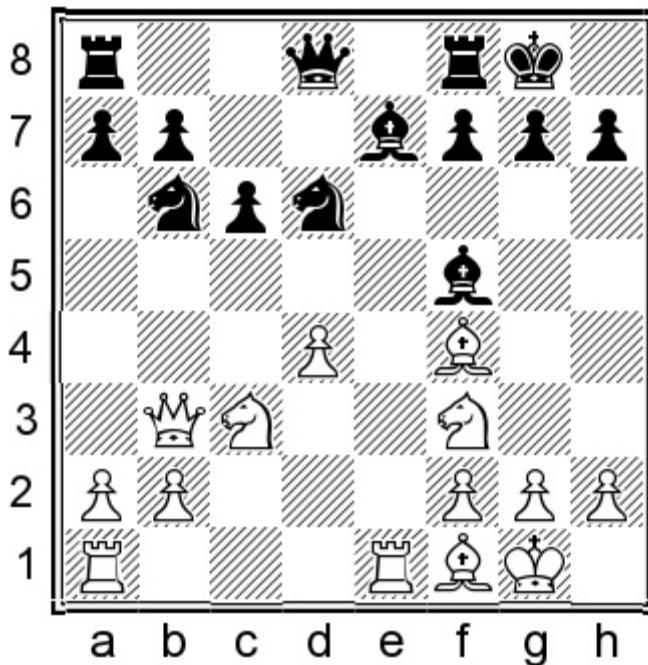
Though this wasn't a perfect game, it surely doesn't fit in with the 'attack at all costs' cliché. White's opening play and subsequent attack was rather sophisticated and completely justified.

Lasker's own play has been praised for its concrete approach and its assimilation of all possible styles. That makes it a bit strange to see him developing such a stereotyped version of chess history.

Instead of recognizing the slow evolution of positional knowledge, conventional chess history sees in Steinitz's theory – or what gets presented as such – a sudden revelation and a revolutionary break with the past. Others contributed to this version of history as well but, thanks to the success of his *Manual*, Lasker seems to be the main perpetrator.

Exercises for Chapter 27

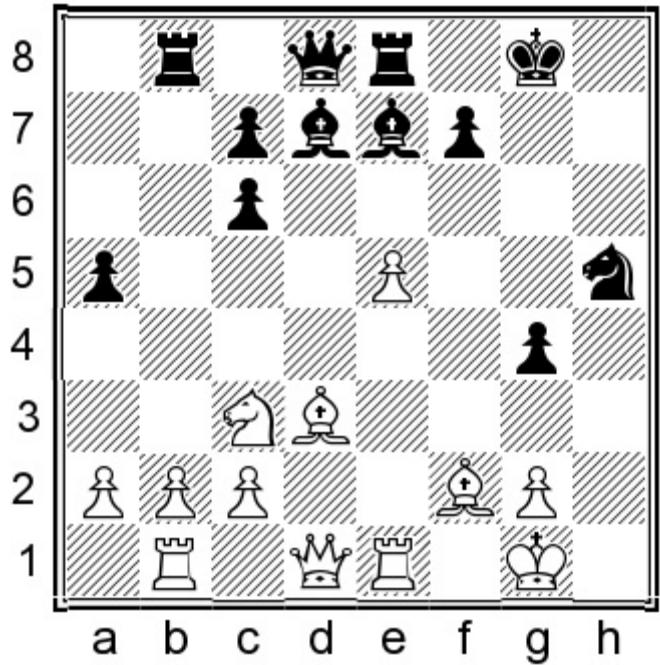
113 (*go to the solution*)



Black to move

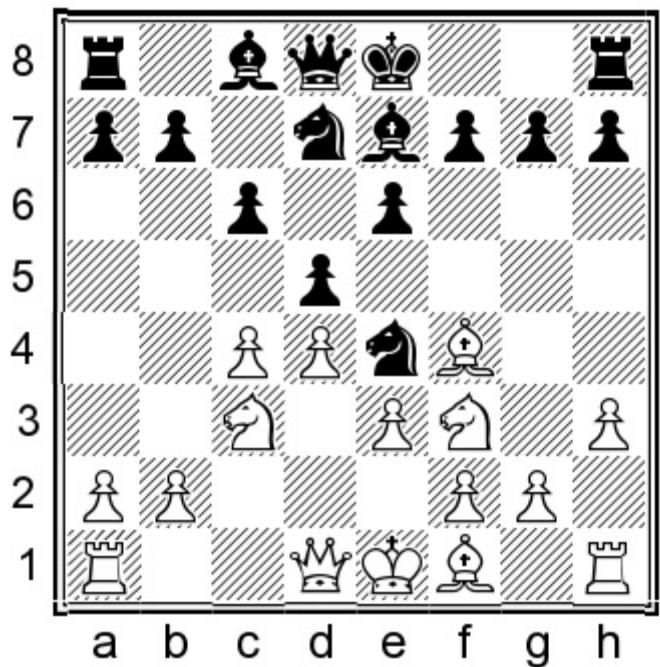
- A) Black has a clear advantage thanks to the weak isolani.
- B) Because of his great activity, it is White who has the big advantage.
- C) The position is about equal; a decent move would be 14...♝e6 to take control over the d5-square.
- D) Indeed, chances are about equal, but Black should not miss the opportunity to gain space on the kingside with 14...g5.

114 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

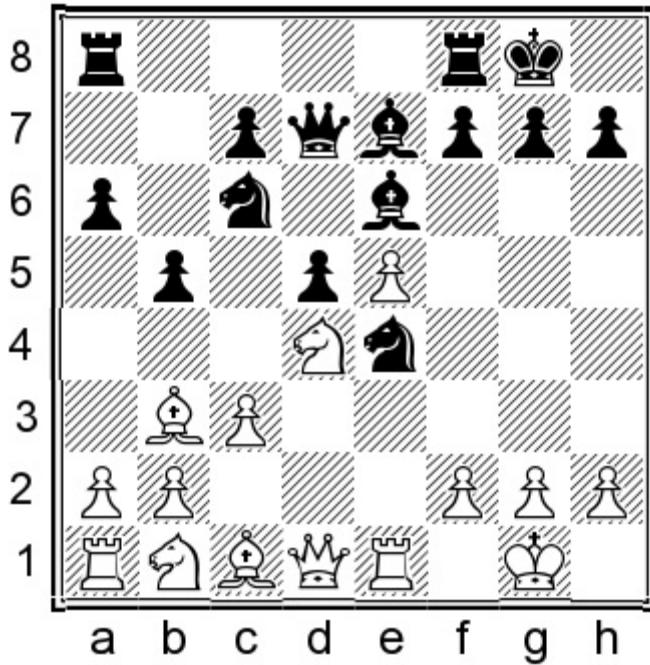
115 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

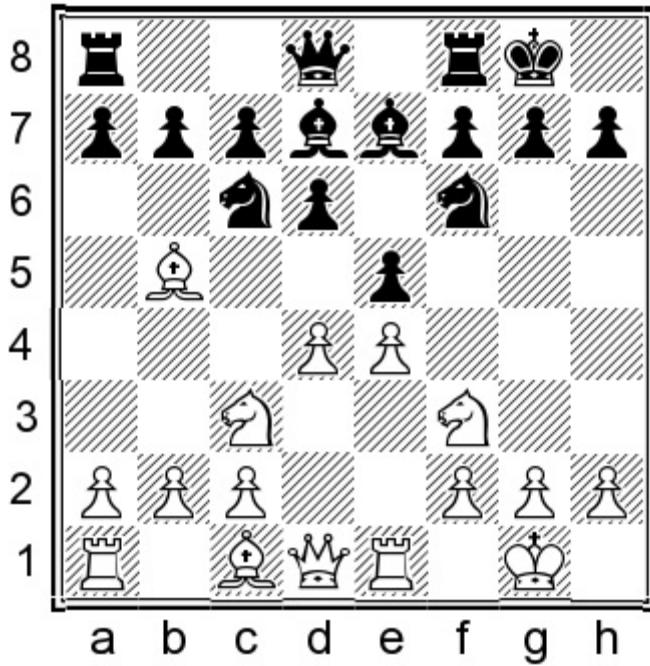
Design a plan.

116 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

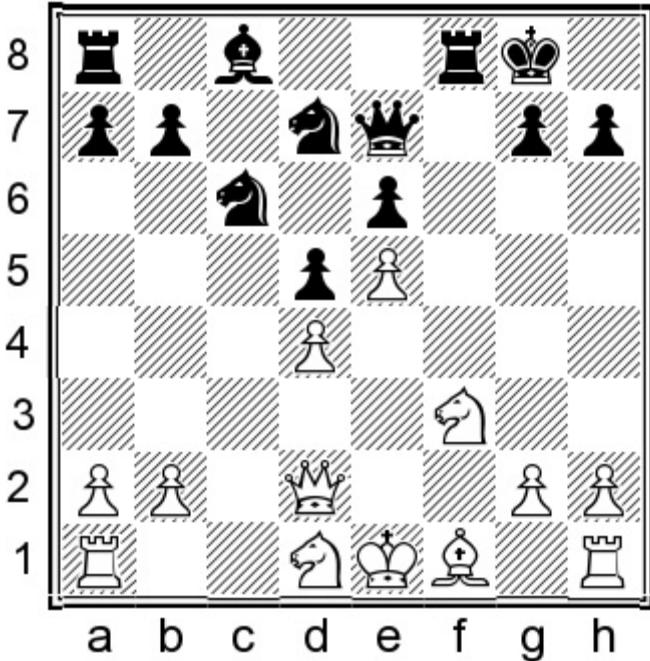
117 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

Can White win a pawn by taking on c6 and then on e5?

118 (*go to the solution*)



Black to move

27

Tarrasch versus Chigorin: the dialectic of theory and praxis

If you look at the history of improvement in chess from an evolutionary perspective, in which progress is mainly brought about by the gradual accumulation of small bits of concrete knowledge, it is difficult to find a good point to quit your investigations. The end of the century would be a rather artificial choice, and the end of Steinitz's reign a more natural one, but I decided on Tarrasch and his brilliant book *Drei Hundert Schachpartien*, since Tarrasch's games and writings have often been considered as bringing Steinitz's ideas close to perfection.

Towards the end of the century some new rising stars appeared on the scene and Steinitz was getting older, so it could be only a matter of time before he had to leave the throne. At first, Tarrasch seemed the likeliest candidate to succeed Steinitz, but he let pass one opportunity for a match and didn't get a second chance. In the meantime, Lasker, who had improved very rapidly, did challenge Steinitz and, against all expectations, managed to beat him convincingly.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Lasker portrayed himself as an heir to Steinitz's theories. Tarrasch usually gets placed in the 'Steinitz school' as well, though I don't know if he would have agreed upon being called someone's scholar. However, Tarrasch is not only depicted as a disciple of Steinitz, but even as a better version. Gunsberg wrote:

'In the success of Tarrasch, Steinitz's modern school has achieved its greatest triumph. But the scholar is acting more faithfully on the precepts than the master himself, who will often forget his own teachings and adhere to crotchety lines of

play in the openings, a thing which Tarrasch never does.¹²⁸

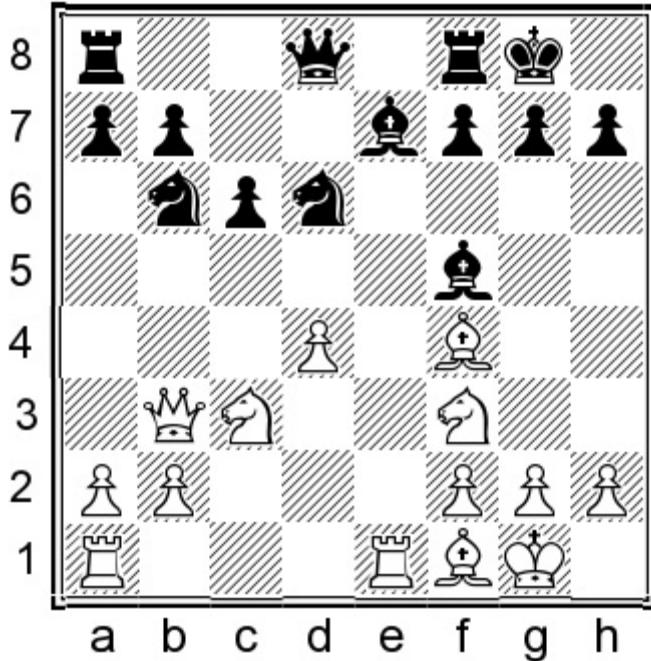
Another reason for finishing this story with Tarrasch is the fact that the level of play had already come close to perfection, as Tarrasch himself noticed – not to brag but simply out of biographical necessity. After praising the lenient rate of play in his 1894 match with Walbrodt, Tarrasch continues:

‘The result was – and I have to note this, for being a true biographer – such a degree of correctness, as has never been achieved before in any series of games I know of. Apart from the first game, where I made an incorrect move on purpose, to avoid the draw [...] I have made, in those eight games with together more than 300 moves, not only not a single mistake, but missed the strongest move three times at most [...]. Apart from those few exceptions, I found the best move every time. Only by playing like this it was possible to beat Walbrodt; against the near absolute correctness he could not compete.’¹²⁹

Carlsen should be envious.

One example from this match:

Siegbert Tarrasch
Karl Walbrodt
Nuremberg 1894



Black to move

(Exercise no 113)

This is a position Steinitz and Tarrasch probably would disagree about. In his match against Zukertort, Steinitz preferred to play against the isolani, whereas Tarrasch generally preferred the extra space and

activity the side playing with the isolani enjoys.

Tarrasch comments: ‘By now White is two pieces (queen and rook) ahead in development and he possesses a strong, though isolated, pawn in the centre. Black didn’t have anything better now than 14... $\mathbb{Q}e6$, with the likely follow-up 15. $\mathbb{W}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}e5$, after which White still would have had some advantage in position and development.’

It is surprising that Tarrasch doesn’t mention 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$, a move I guess every modern player would look at immediately (see below for a similar exchange sacrifice that Tarrasch doesn’t mention). However, after 15...fxe6 16. $\mathbb{W}xe6+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ White has no direct follow-up, just sufficient compensation.

Tarrasch is a bit optimistic in the line he gives after 15. $\mathbb{W}c2$ – Black must be okay at the end of it. So chances are about equal, which makes C) the correct answer. Those who chose D) I have to surrender to Tarrasch’s wrath.

14...g5?

Tarrasch: ‘In general, nothing weakens the position as much as pushing forward the g-pawn (respectively the b-pawn when one has castled queenside) two steps, which I’m used to call the harakiri move. One usually can play this move only when it yields a direct advantage, like the start of a strong attack or the win of a piece. Here the move is completely out of place and it compromises the position beyond repair.’

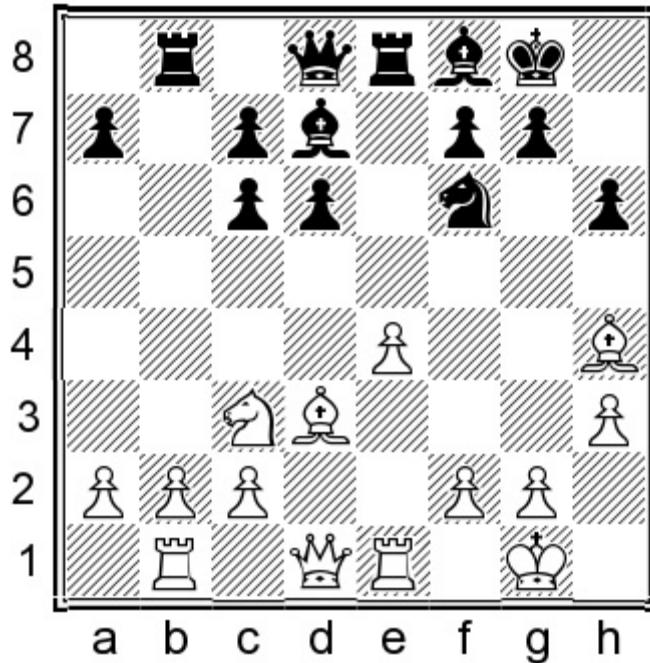
15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 16.d5 c5 17.a4 g4 18. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{E}c8$ 19.a5 $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}ce4$ b6 21.axb6 axb6 22. $\mathbb{E}a7$ $\mathbb{E}c7$ 23. $\mathbb{E}xa8$ $\mathbb{W}xa8$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xd6$ $\mathbb{Q}g6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xc7$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 27. $\mathbb{E}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{E}f6$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}xb3$ $\mathbb{W}d5$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{W}d6$ 32. $\mathbb{E}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 33. $\mathbb{E}e7+$ 1-0

Incidentally, Steinitz, at the end of his career, used the harakiri move once against Tarrasch, though it evidently wasn’t in line with his ideas about a prudent handling of the pawns:

Siegbert Tarrasch

William Steinitz

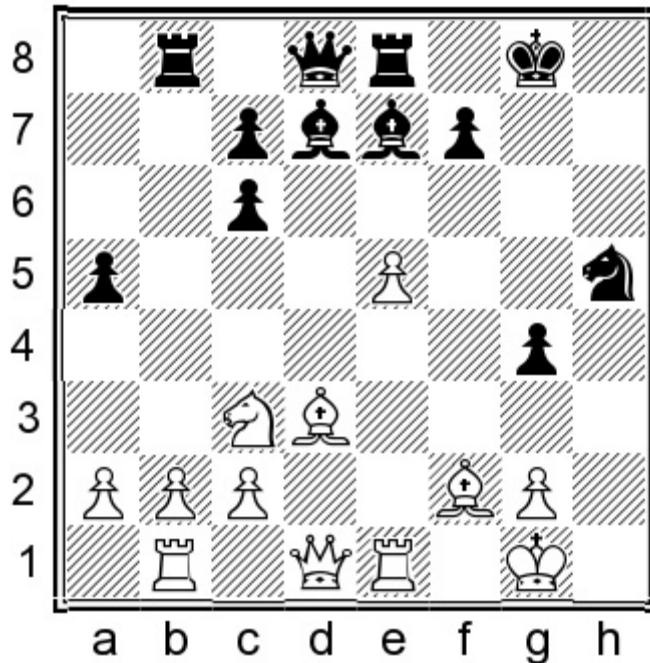
Vienna 1898



Black to move

This position arose out of a Ruy Lopez with 3...d6 – for Tarrasch's disapproval of this move see below. The pin is annoying, but 14... $\mathbb{Q}e7$ seems a more prudent way to deal with it.

14...g5?! 15. $\mathbb{Q}g3$ g4 16. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ h5 17.hxg4 hxg4 18.f4 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ a5 20.e5 dxе5 21.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}h5$



(Exercise no 114)

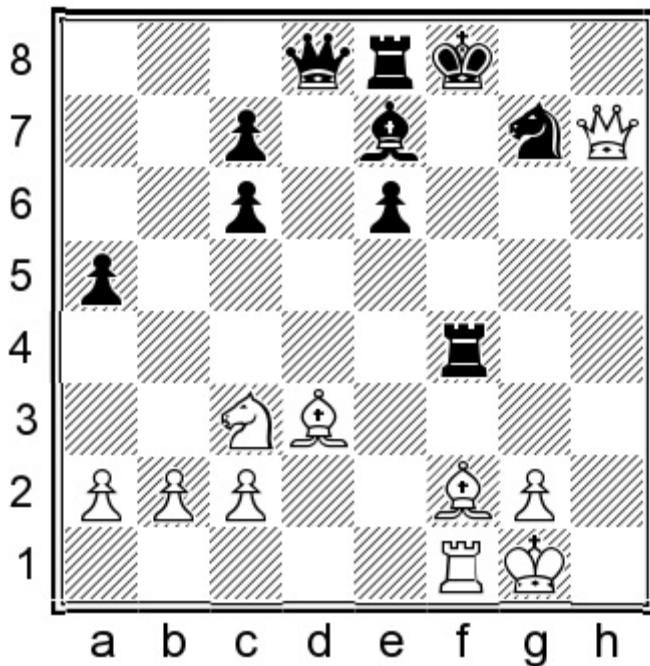
White has taken advantage of Black's weakening play with some powerful chess. Time for the final

blow:

22.e6! ♖xe6 23.♖xe6 fxe6 24.♗xg4+ ♔g7 25.♗g6

Black is helpless against all the mating threats.

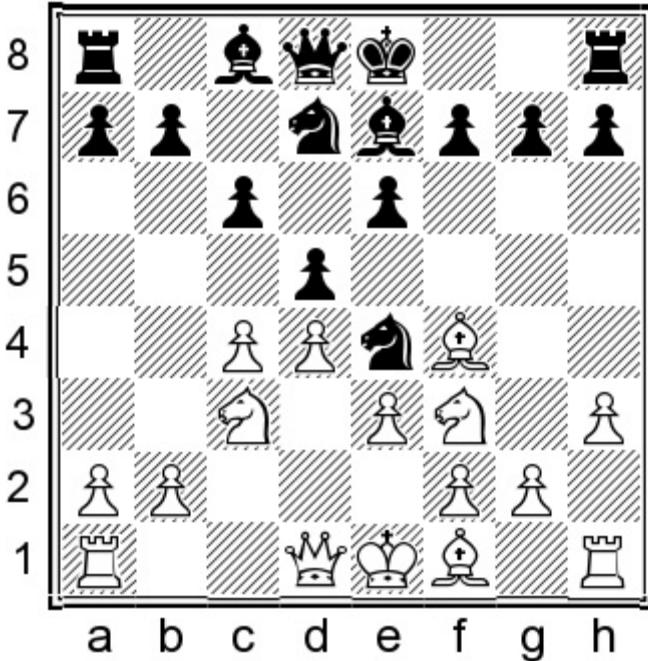
25...♗b4 26.♗f1 ♗f4 27.♗h7+ ♔f8



28.♗g6 1-0

In his match against Walbrodt, Tarrasch, according to himself, came close to ‘absolute correctness’. He set another remarkable record in the next game against Theodor von Scheve.

**Siegbert Tarrasch
Theodor von Scheve
Leipzig 1894**



White to move

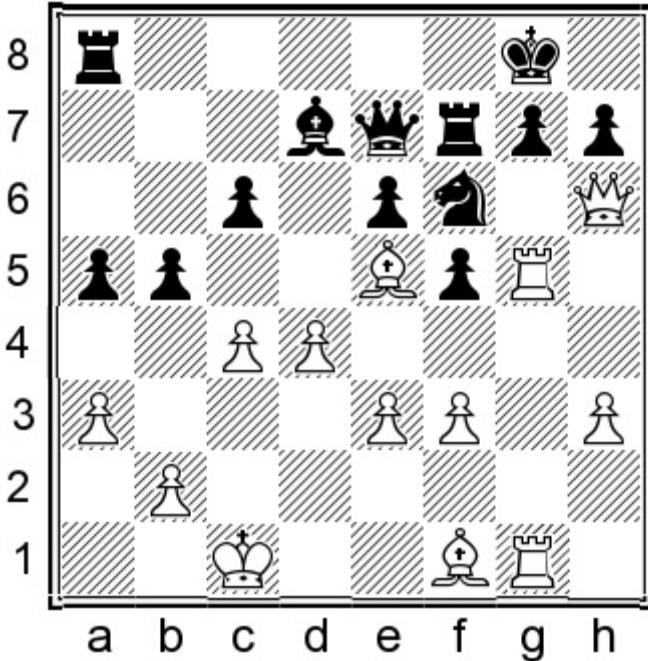
(Exercise no 115)

You were asked to design a plan. Black's last move 7...Qe4 was a bit premature and now all normal developing plans (e.g. $\mathbb{R}c1$, $\mathbb{W}c2$, $\mathbb{B}e2$, $\mathbb{B}d3$) are fine for White, though Black might then adopt a Stonewall strategy with 8...f5.

White's choice of immediately resolving the tension in the centre is perfectly playable as well. Maybe you just thought something like '8. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $dxe4$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$, looks okay, see what will happen next' (like I probably would have done). Throughout this book that would have been considered good enough, but here full points go only to those who plan until... mate!

Tarrasch: 'The decisive mistake. After the exchange the pawn on e4 becomes weak and, if to be maintained in the long run, it will have to be defended with f7-f5; then it will be attacked again with f2-f3, Black has to capture on f3, thereby opening the g-line for White and then the queen, together with both rooks and the dark squared bishop, will combine for an irresistible attack on the g7-square. In the complete literature on chess I know of no other game in which at move eight (!) such a precisely detailed plan, almost until mate, was developed, and consequently, without any side tracking, got executed until the catastrophe that followed 20 moves later.'

8. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $dxe4$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{B}b4?$ 10. a3 $\mathbb{Q}xd2+$ 11. $\mathbb{W}xd2$ 0-0 12. $\mathbb{W}c2$ f5 13. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{E}e8$ 14. 0-0-0 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 16. f3 exf3 b5 18. $\mathbb{E}g1$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 19. $\mathbb{E}d2$ $\mathbb{E}f7$ 20. $\mathbb{E}dg2$ a5 21. $\mathbb{W}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 22. $\mathbb{E}g5$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 23. $\mathbb{W}h4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 24. $\mathbb{W}h6$



All as foreseen on move 8. Now there is no defence against the threat of taking on f6, for example 24... $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 25. $\mathbb{B}xg7$ or 24... $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 25. $\mathbb{B}h5$.

24... $\mathbb{B}a7$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d6!$ $\mathbb{W}xd6$ 26. $\mathbb{B}xg7+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 27. $\mathbb{B}xh7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 28. $\mathbb{B}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 29. $\mathbb{B}g7+$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 30. $\mathbb{W}xf6$ 1-0

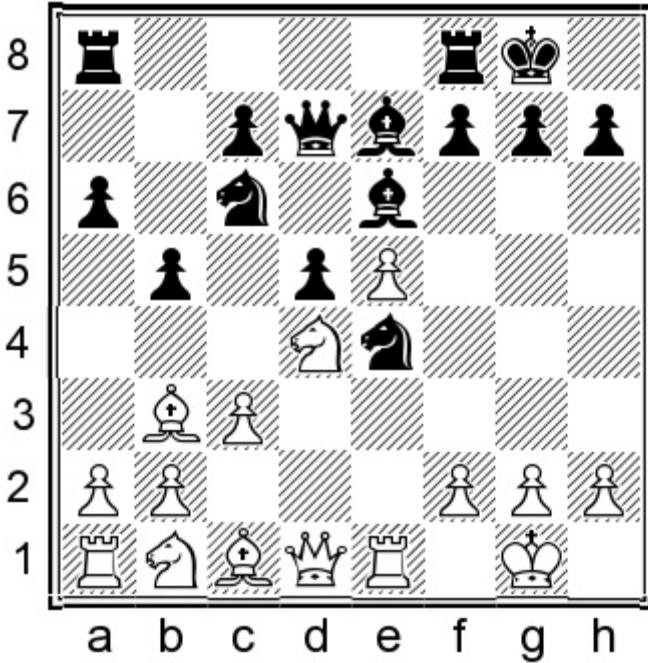
In these game fragments we have already seen something of the playing and writing style of Tarrasch. Compared, for example, to Steinitz's rather dry analyses, Tarrasch's writing is much more entertaining and personal. But it is also richer in explaining and in (chess) vocabulary. Of course he is well known for not being averse to some self-glorification, and in finding excuses for his defeats he was a more than worthy successor to Staunton.

I'm not sure if Tarrasch considered himself to belong to Steinitz's school, I guess that would not fit with his character. In line with Steinitz's play, and the overall tendency, Tarrasch wasn't a big fan of gambit play. But, rightfully, he left out most of the typical Steinitzean concepts. No kings left in the centre to take care of themselves, no cramped play holding back the pawns and no extreme pawn-grabbing. Tarrasch did have a good feeling for weaknesses in the pawn structure, but he valued piece activity, development and space higher than Steinitz did. And his opening play was healthier and more varied; most of his repertoire is still mainstream today. For all these reasons Tarrasch has gained fame as the teacher of Germany or even as the teacher of the world.

He was a model that could be followed: he had sound openings (about which he had some strong opinions though) backed up by good theoretical knowledge. His *Dreihundert Schachpartien* has a chronological set-up, but his second major work, *Die Moderne Schachpartie*, is organized by opening, which makes it easier for the reader to develop a repertoire based on Tarrasch's example.

One of the reasons Philidor and Steinitz were said to be misunderstood or didn't 'make school' is because the openings that evolved out of their ideas didn't appeal to most chess players (and for good reasons).

Let's have a look at some examples of Tarrasch's opening play in the Ruy Lopez.



White to move

(Exercise no 116)

Black's last move was 11... $\mathbb{W}d7?$, losing on the spot because of 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ fxe6 (or 12... $\mathbb{W}xe6$ 13. $\mathbb{R}xe4!$), winning a piece.

Note that the moves can't be reversed, as after first 12. $\mathbb{R}xe4?$ the queen on d1 is unguarded.

The funny thing is that Tarrasch won this game not once but twice, both times against former contenders for the world title, Zukertort (in 1887) and Gunsberg (in 1890). I will return to the question of how strong the players of these times were, but this double accident is not a good advertisement.

This 'Tarrasch trap' was not too difficult. The next exercise, however, requires quite some depth of calculation – actually, it was a piece of home analysis by Tarrasch.

Siegbert Tarrasch – Georg Marco Dresden 1892

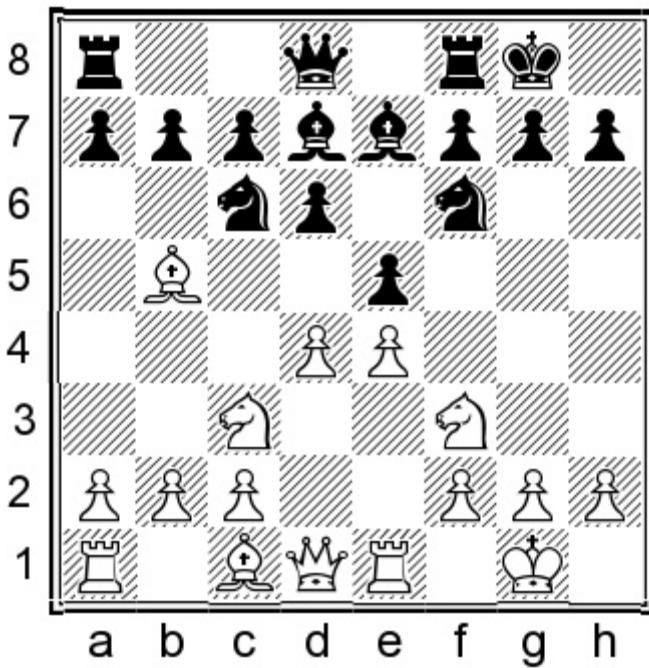
1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ d6

Tarrasch attaches a question mark to this move (in *Die Moderne Schachpartie*). Also, the line that later came to be considered the main line did not get Tarrasch's approval: 3...a6 4. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7?$ – one of his famous sayings is that cramped positions bear in them the germ of defeat. The way to go, according to Tarrasch, was the open Spanish: 5... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 6.d4 b5 7. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ d5 8.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$. See also his sneer at Steinitz at the end of this game.

4.d4 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 7. $\mathbb{R}e1$ 0-0?

In my database there are 178 games with this move. And this one, where the move is refuted, was the

first! The main line is first 7...exd4 8.Qxd4 and then 8...0-0. That type of position, with the small advantage in the centre, was a favourite of Tarrasch.



(Exercise no 117)

Indeed, White can win a healthy pawn.

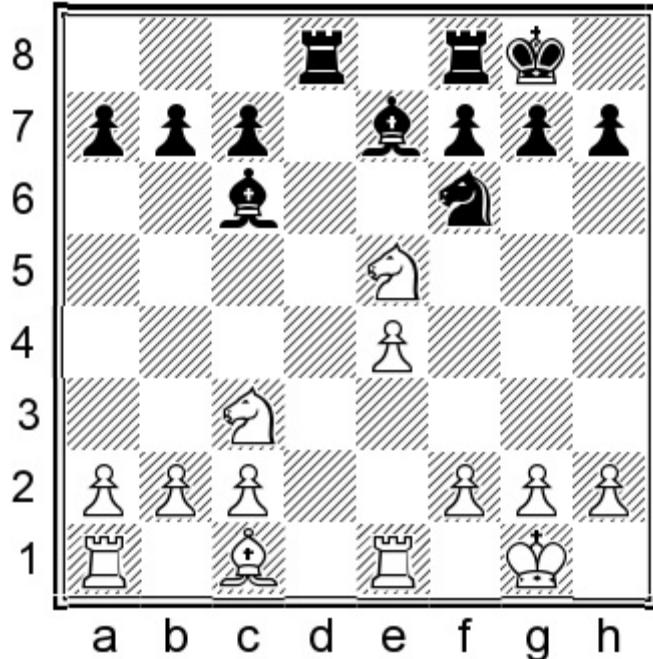
8.Qxc6! Qxc6 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.Qxd8

This has to be inserted to keep the rook on the e-line.

10...Raxd8

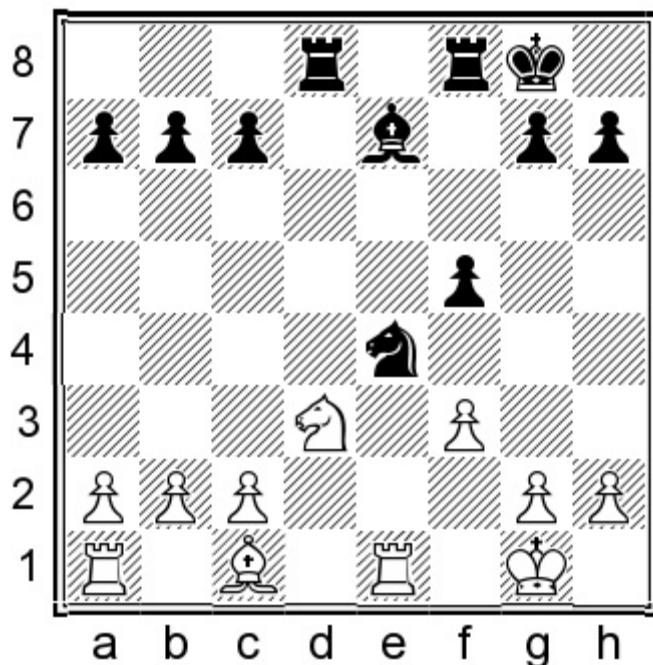
Which rook does make a difference, see the note on White's 15th move.

11.Qxe5



White has won his pawn, but it seems that Black, thanks to the back-rank tactic, can win back the e-pawn (though of course not with 11... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$? 12. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$).

11... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}d3!$ f5! 14.f3



Black has regained the pawn, but now has an issue on the e-file. However, he still has some counter-tactics:

14... $\mathbb{Q}c5+$

If now 15. $\mathbb{Q}f1$? Black has 15... $\mathbb{Q}b6!$ because after 16.fxe4 Black takes back with check and regains the piece. Had Black played the other rook on move 10 (10... $\mathbb{Q}fxd8$) then 15. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ would have worked.

15.♘xc5 ♘xc5 16.♗g5!

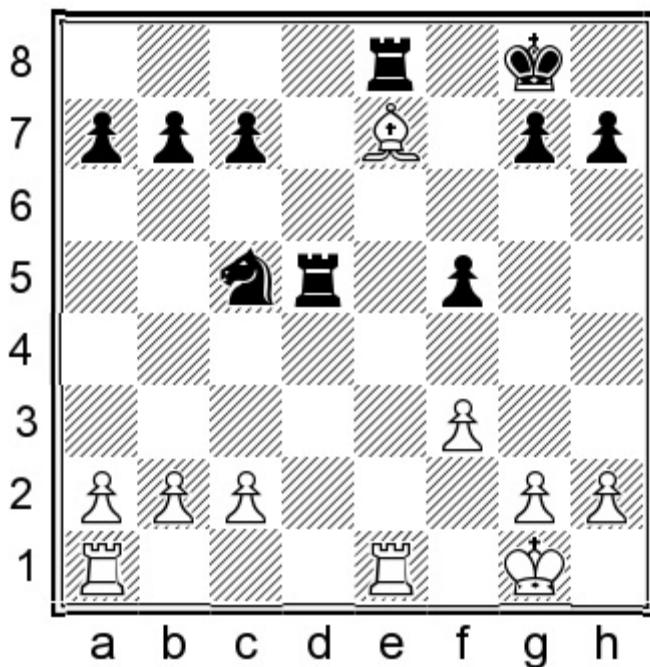
It looks as if Black has survived, but White brings in new tactics: the double attack with ♗e7 is coming.

16...♝d5 17.♗e7

Reversing the moves is not good: 17.c4? ♜d7 18.♗e7 ♘d3!.

In this game Black already resigned here. From the 178 games mentioned, 20 reached this position.

17...♝e8



18.c4!

The final point.

A very impressive piece of analysis (or, if you managed to solve the exercise up to this move, an even more impressive piece of calculation, ten moves deep). Tarrasch:

'This game, which delivers an important contribution to the refutation of the defence 3...d7-d6, which is especially recommended by Steinitz, is an exact replica of an analysis I published in the 1891 February issue of the *Schachzeitung*.'

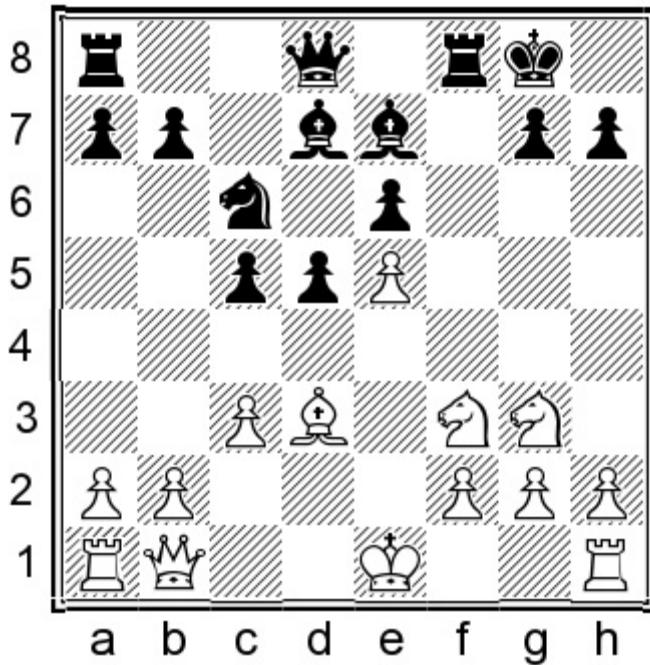
Compared to Steinitz, the opening repertoire of Tarrasch was more diverse. For example, against 1.e4 Steinitz played almost exclusively 1...e5, and though this was Tarrasch's main choice as well, he also regularly played the French and incidentally the Sicilian and the Scandinavian.

Without doubt Tarrasch contributed much to the popularity of the French. In a previous chapter we have heard some authors complaining about the dullness of the French, but mostly the white players were to blame for that because of the dominating preference for the Exchange Variation. Towards the

end of the century, the interesting lines against the French became more popular, and they have a positionally very rich character.

Here is one of Tarrasch's first games with the French:

Fritz Riemann
Siegbert Tarrasch
Hamburg 1885



Black to move

Black's opening is already a success thanks to the favourable exchange ...fxe5-dxe5, but White's last move 13.♗d1-b1 made things worse. There is some threat against h7, but it's not directly killing (here the battery is more powerful with queen and bishop reversed) and White's queen is getting a bit out of play. On top of that, the e-pawn is weak.

Black has several good moves; for example, simply defending with 13...h6 is perfectly okay. The move Tarrasch plays is strong as well, but I guess most players today would choose the standard exchange sacrifice which is the most attractive and likely also the best move.

After 13...♝xf3 14.♝xh7+ ♔h8 15.gxf3 ♜xe5 Black has beautiful play.

But what is 'standard' for us of course wasn't standard in the days this was played (although we have already seen La Bourdonnais inventing this move against McDonnell). It is telling that Tarrasch does not even mention the move in his analysis.

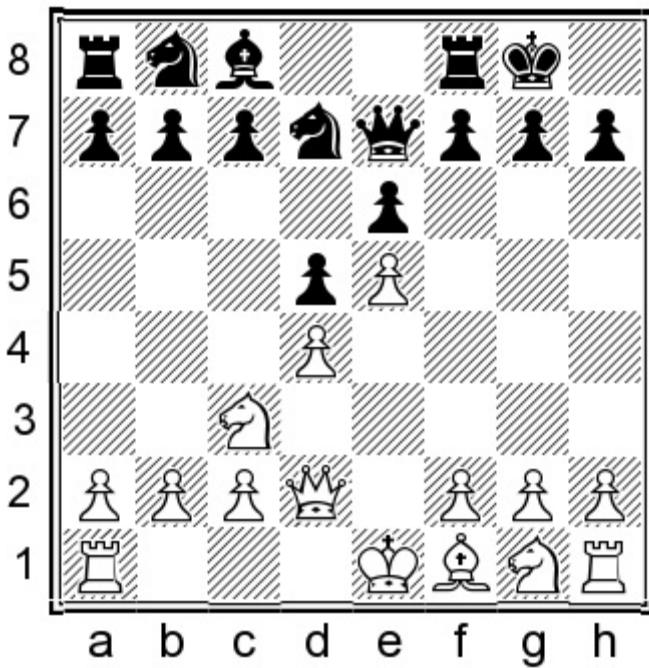
13...♝c7 14.♝xh7+ ♔h8 15.h4 ♜xe5 16.♝g5 c4 17.♛d1 ♜f6

Black is better, and though the game became a bit messy he eventually managed to win.

The understanding of these positions quickly developed, and only a year and a half later, in the next German championship, Tarrasch was able to score a nice dual.

Hermann von Gottschall – Siegbert Tarrasch Frankfurt 1887

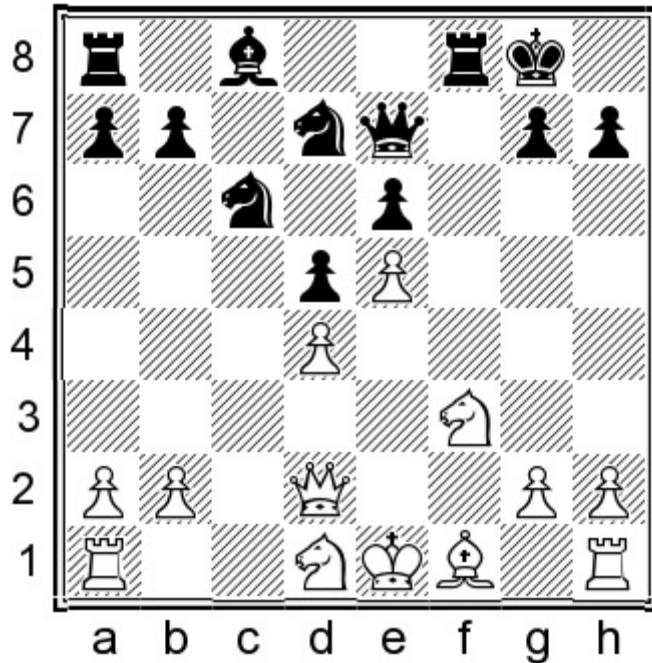
1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♗g5 ♘e7 5.e5 ♘fd7 6.♘xe7 ♗xe7 7.♗d2 0-0



8.♘d1?!

White wants to keep his centre completely intact with c2-c3 but this move looks very slow. The normal move is 8.f4 (or, even better, 7.f4 instead of 7.♗d2).

8...f6 9.f4 c5 10.c3 ♘c6 11.♘f3 cxd4 12.cxd4 fxe5 13.fxe5

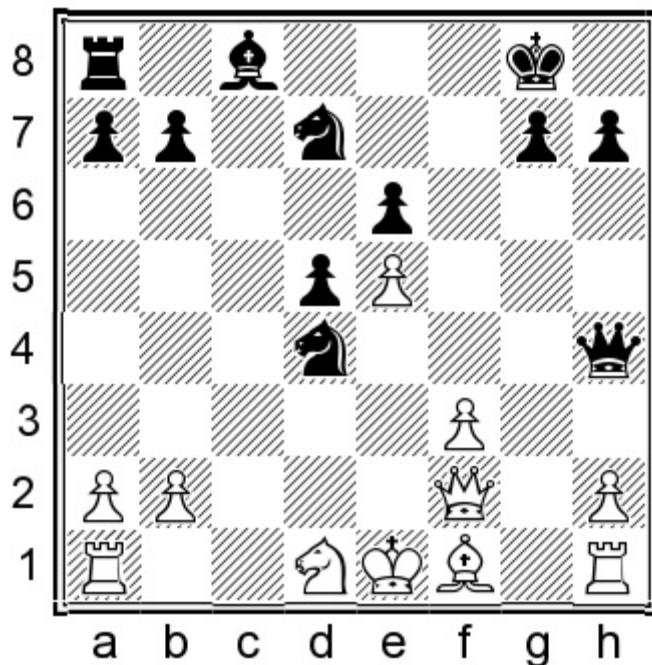


(Exercise no 118)

13...Bxf3!

With the follow-up 14...Wh4 Black wins back at least two pawns for the exchange, which makes it look very attractive, but in those days this apparently wasn't evident to everyone: the next day Max Harmonist repeated the whole line against Tarrasch!

14.gxf3 Wh4+ 15.Wf2 Qxd4!?



Mikhail Chigorin

With his next move White gives back the exchange. Harmonist here played his ‘improvement’ 16. $\mathbb{Q}e3$, but that was just disastrous after 16... $\mathbb{Q}xf3+!$.

16.f4 $\mathbb{Q}c2+$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}xf2+$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{Q}xa1$

And Black later won the endgame.

The struggle between the ‘modern’ school and the ‘old’ school reached its peak with the telegraph match between Steinitz and Chigorin. But we have already seen Chigorin claiming back then to belong to no school at all. We have looked at the contrast between ‘all-out attacking’ and ‘slow positional play’ before, but it would be too simple to reduce the theoretical controversy between Steinitz and Chigorin to just this. More fitting is the opposition between a ‘concrete’ approach, trying to treat every position according to its own merits, and a ‘rule-based’ approach, trying to develop general ideas and rules for every position.



Later on in this controversy, Tarrasch took over the role of Steinitz – to a small extent, that is, since Tarrasch did not support the core points of Steinitz’s theory. Nonetheless, in the history of chess Tarrasch has gained status as a great dogmatist, even more so than Steinitz.

In later years, Soviet chess historians made Chigorin the forefather of the Soviet school of chess. Kotov and Yudovich tried to bring him in line with Marxist theory:

‘Chigorin was the first in the history of chess to raise and correctly answer, the question of the connection between theory and praxis; he did not separate theory from praxis and placed it on a higher level than Steinitz and Tarrasch did [...] his strategical and tactical views were far ahead of the Steinitz and Tarrasch school.’¹³⁰

For readers today this might not seem a very revealing claim, but dialectics played an essential role in Marxist theory, so saying that Chigorin ‘placed the connection between theory and praxis on a higher level’ is almost the highest praise possible.

In an obituary on Chigorin, Tarrasch gave, in beautiful style, a rather different opinion. The dialectic he sees at work between theory and praxis in Chigorin is of a rather peculiar character:

‘His play was above all characterised by a ravishing energy. No matter if he stood good or bad, if he was attacking or defending, he constantly played with colossal power, his moves where now and then bad, but never weak, and that made him always one of the most dangerous opponents. He had not a clue about the judgement of the position; he could only play chess well, not think chess well, and this weakness was his greatest strength. Because it gave him a confidence in himself that could not be weakened by any self criticism, so that he always was convinced to have the better position and to be on his way to the win. If he was

playing White, he moved e2-e4 in the conviction to have the better position, and as Black he believed after e7-e5 to stand at least as good as his opponent. Only a few moves before the mate he might get persuaded his opponent had the advantage after all. His plans were now and then incorrect, but he carried them out with such a force and consistency, that he often, despite all the mistakes, took away the game from the opponent. [...]

With this, he was a frightening opponent for everybody, except for one, who combined a much cooler temperament with smart calculation in an even harder iron skull: Steinitz. The two matches they played together in Havana, brought the Russian Matador indeed some respectable results, since he won almost as many games as his opponent. If we look at the individual games more precisely however, than we have to acknowledge that Steinitz won the way he wanted to. Playing Black he risked the most insane defences, of which he tried to persuade himself and the chess world, they were sound. Of course he lost with them now and then, but this didn't matter to him, knowing yet he would be playing White in the next game. And then he built up his game in a reasonable way and won with deadly effectivity.¹³¹

In 1893, when he would have had good chances against Steinitz, Tarrasch did play a long match, albeit against Chigorin, that ended 9-9. It was an extremely hard-fought and interesting match, one of the highlights of 19th century chess. The result was a bit disappointing for him, but as noticed before Tarrasch always had an excuse at hand:

[...] from the eight game on it looked as if I would win the match, and when after the 17th game I even could show eight wins against five losses, everybody – and I self most of all – already considered the match decided in my favour. But staying up unusually late, which is more or less habitual in St. Petersburg, until 3, 4, and even until 6 o'clock in the morning, had a negative influence on my usual brightness and decisiveness, and all the drinking, from which, for representative reasons, I did not want to exclude myself, also added its part; to make a long story short, my resilience suddenly failed me completely and that's why Chigorin managed to beat me three times in a row and thereby make up the enormous lead.¹³²

Milan Vidmar finely commented on this:

'Many chess masters are convinced that the best result they ever attained, characterizes their true strength. That's why they cannot understand that occasionally, respectively commonly, they end up with lesser results. [...] I always wonder, when I hear or read "explanations" for seemingly unsatisfactory results, why the master, only adoring himself, never comes up with the obvious idea to ask himself with what problems of a non-chess technical nature his opponents had to deal, when they helped him attaining his best results.'¹³³

Against Tarrasch's French Defence, Chigorin invariably chose 2. $\mathbb{W}e2$. And though it probably wasn't played with that intention, for someone who believes that play should obey the classical rules this move is a provocation.

In those days the main lines of the French were in full development, with much still to be discovered, but this branch of the French was completely unexplored territory. With his subsequent kingside fianchetto, Chigorin moved towards what today is called the King's Indian Attack. But back then the King's Indian (Defence) was barely in existence.

With these experiments, Chigorin already anticipated the 'hypermodern' school, which came into prominence around the 1920s. But before that there was Lasker's long reign and Capablanca's classical perfection. Capablanca feared that chess in his day was getting near to 'dead by draws', that it was becoming 'sterile and played out'. That would have been a nice point to end this story, but as we know now, history *did* continue after Capablanca. Players like Alekhine, Réti, Nimzowitsch and Tartakower brought all kinds of new openings and new ideas into existence and, contrary to Capablanca's fears, chess became very lively again.

For now, I will end this historical investigation with Tarrasch and Chigorin. The question of whether Tarrasch's playing style was a perfection of or a correction to Steinitz's ideas remains open. But I think it is especially his style of commenting which makes *Dreihundert Schachpartien* a good read even in our days.

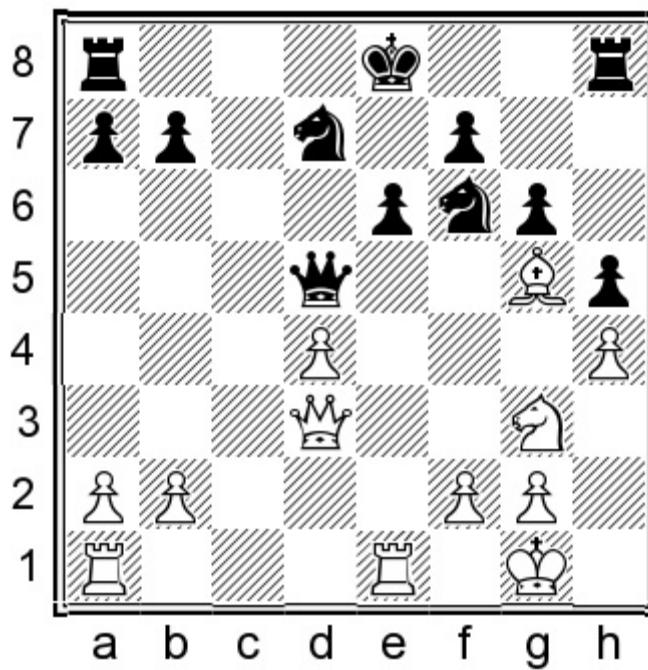
Tarrasch fully embraced the role of teacher, as can be seen in the preface to *Die Moderne Schachpartie*:

'I do not limit myself to the game at hand, but I am looking for the stable point in the flight of the appearances, most often I abstract from the specific case towards the general, and I set up a number of principles and doctrines, whose knowledge will improve the level of play enormously.'

As a teacher, Tarrasch surpassed Steinitz in this respect, with his wealth of advice, principles and doctrines. Above we saw that Tarrasch didn't have a high regard for Chigorin's 'theory' of chess. But Chigorin did have a clear opinion, which was essentially a distrust in the power of the theories of Steinitz and Tarrasch. In his view, the game of chess is so rich that only a concrete approach to every singular position can reveal its truth. My sympathy lies with Chigorin's point of view, but more about that in the concluding parts.

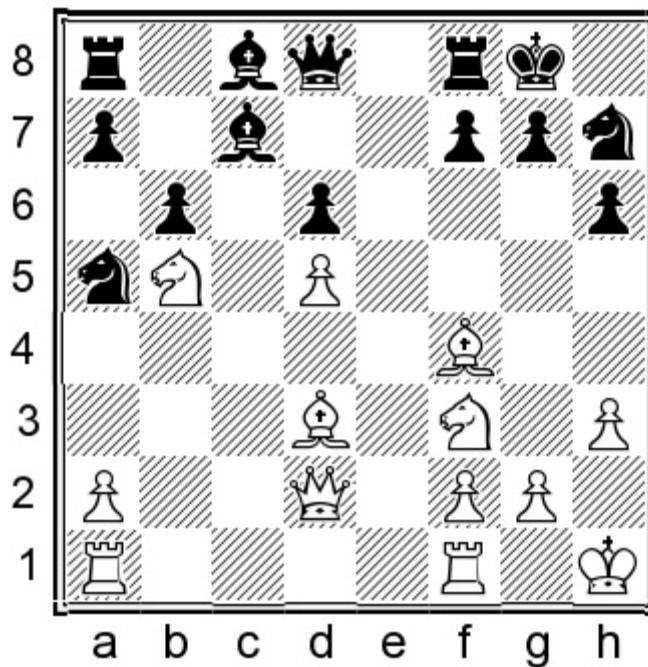
Exercises for Chapter 28

119 (*go to the solution*)



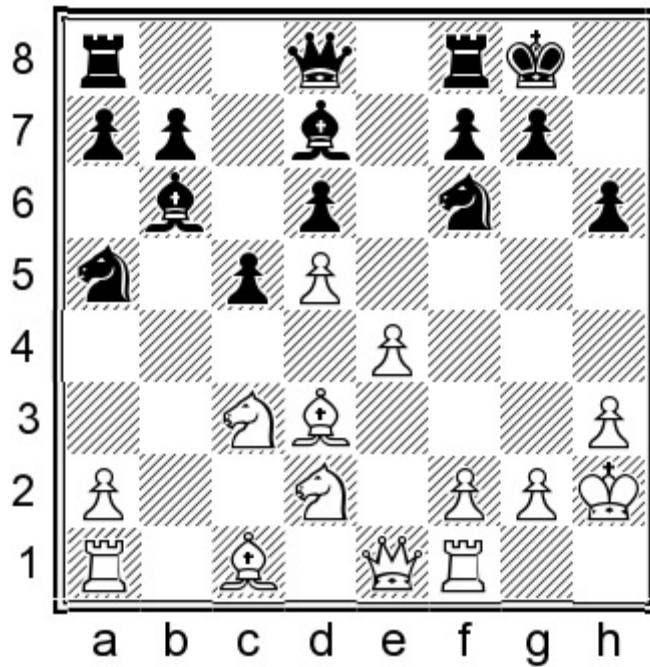
White to move

120 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

121 (go to the solution)

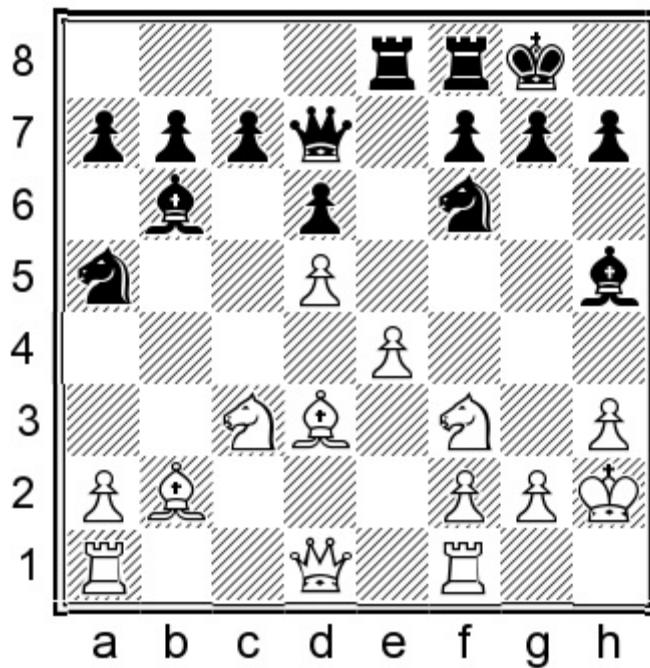


Black to move

Take a look at 15...g5.

- A) It starts a dangerous initiative on the kingside.
- B) No, it is the harakiri move!

122 (go to the solution)



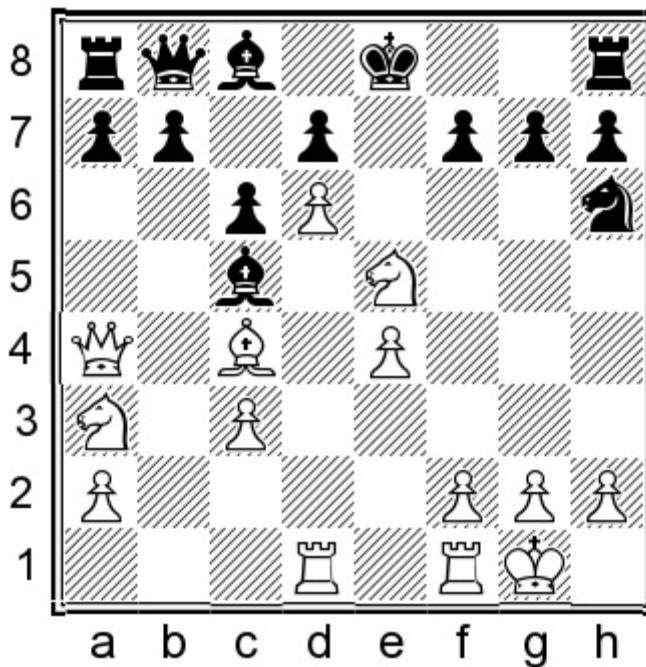
White to move

Take a look at 16.g4.

A) It is the best way to handle the annoying pin.

B) No, it is the harakiri move again.

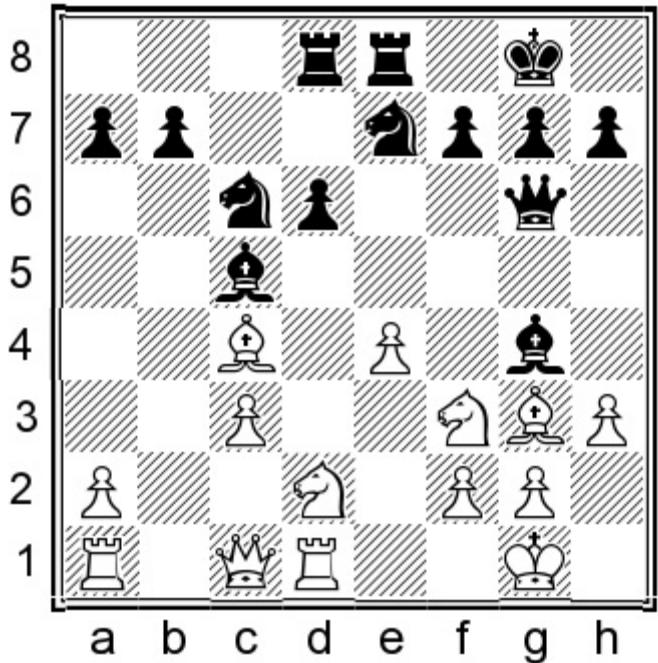
123 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

Black has lost the right to castle.

124 (*go to the solution*)

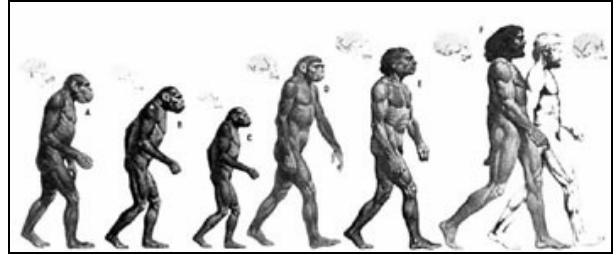


Black to move

28

Back to the future

There is a film genre in which travelling in time plays an important role: forward, backward, or both. Travelling back in time leads to some typical problems (especially if you try to change that past or, more specifically, your own past, and then go back again, to the future) and part of the success of these films depends upon how plausibly they manage to deal with those frictions. In trying to answer the question of how strong the players from the past were, you encounter similar problems. In a previous chapter I offered the two possibilities of teleporting someone from our time into the past or someone from the past into our time. One problem is that the question ‘How strong were they?’ tends to overlap with the question ‘How strong would they be in our day?’, which is basically a question about talent. Since the conditions for becoming a strong player are much more favourable nowadays, it seems obvious that the players from the past could have been better players today.



Our rating system might bring a solution, but this system first came into (full) use around 1970. There are some nice projects that have tried to calculate ratings for the whole history of chess, but there we meet with the fundamental problem that rating systems are good for comparing people playing at the same time but not so good when comparing people from different eras – especially when in history the general level has gone up considerably, as we believe it has.

A well-known picture from the biology books might be enlightening on this point, showing the evolution from the ancestor we share with the chimpanzees to the humans of today (facing page). In most books this evolution is shortened into around 10 pictures and the differences between these pictures are large, but in reality the distance between me and my shared forefather is estimated at about 250,000 generations, and the difference between every link would be almost indiscernible. Nevertheless, the difference between me and this far forefather is rather great (please feel free to disagree).

Looking at the evolution of chess strength, if we take the best players of their time, say the official and unofficial World Champions, each of them could win a game against his successor. In some cases the successor might not have been stronger than his predecessor. But looking at the complete picture, I have no doubt that La Bourdonnais would lose every single game to Carlsen (even if we have to teleport the latter into a London pub around 1830).

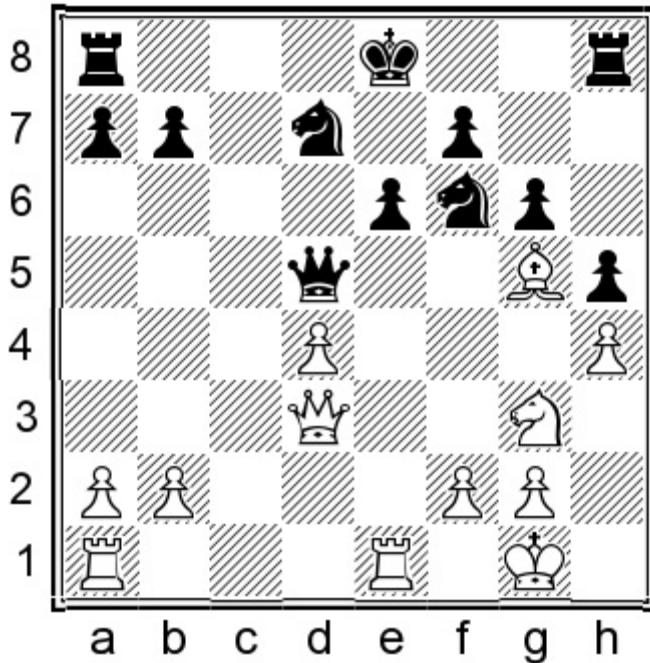
I'm not an expert on rating systems, and maybe there are ways to design them in order to deal with slow evolutionary changes in level. Anyway, if you look at those historical lists you can see that the ratings of players from long ago, for example the protagonists of this book, cannot be compared in a meaningful way with the ratings of today, unless you believe those players were as strong as the present-day elite grandmasters. In the middle of the 19th century the chess-playing community was small. I could not find any estimates, but I guess compared to today the number of players was somewhere between 0.1% and 0.01% of today's total. Even if you concentrate solely on the quantitative aspect, it would be surprising if there were more than a few players of IM strength or above.

If ratings can't help us out, we'll have to take a look at the games. Engines can be of great assistance, and maybe it is even possible to develop a program that attaches a value (or a rating) to a complete game (if it doesn't exist already).

In *John Nunn's Chess Puzzle Book* there is a chapter called 'The Test of Time' (referring to Kasparov's book with the same title) in which the English grandmaster does some fine research on our topic, comparing two top tournaments: Carlsbad 1911 and the 1993 Biel Interzonal. Nunn decided to concentrate on the presence of really serious (tactical) errors as the criterion for comparison. Having no particular preconceptions, Nunn was 'quite surprised by the results. To summarize, the old players were much worse than I expected.'¹³⁴ He estimates that the mid-range players of the Carlsbad tournament were only slightly above 2100.

I give two of Nunn's examples. The first one is a nice variation on a theme addressed earlier in this book.

Rudolf Spielmann
Alexander Alekhine
Carlsbad 1911



White to move

(Exercise no 119)

A young future World Champion has ended up in a precarious situation. And though his opponent was known as ‘The Master of Attack’, he did miss an excellent opportunity here with 17. $\mathbb{W}a3!$. After all the $\mathbb{Q}a3$ ’s from previous chapters I hope you spotted this move – with the extra that White also threatens mate on e7 if the knight on f6 moves, which makes 18. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ a huge threat. For example: 17... $\mathbb{W}xd4$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}ad1$ $\mathbb{W}b6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ and Black’s king in the centre can’t survive.

Instead, White exchanged all the minor pieces with 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf6?$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 20. $\mathbb{W}xe4$ 0-0, although he later managed to win this equal position.

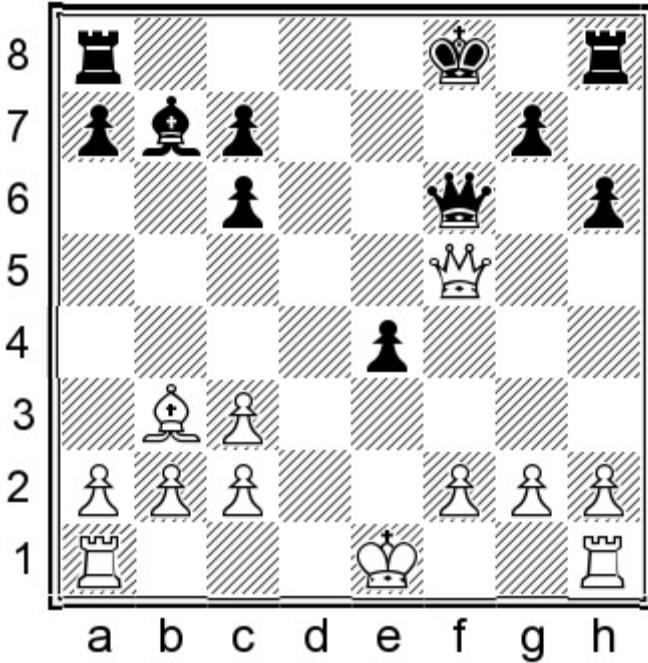
According to Nunn, the main deficiencies revealed at Carlsbad fell into three categories: serious tactical mistakes, completely adopting the wrong plan and weak endgame play. Which is as good as everything, apart from the opening.

Regarding the ‘inclination to adopt totally the wrong plan’, Nunn’s main example is the next one.

Savielly Tartakower

Paul Leonhardt

Carlsbad 1911



White to move

White is a pawn up, Black's king is in a bad position, almost all his pieces are inactive and his pawn structure is terrible. Because of the weak king, keeping the queens on is essential, and 20. $\mathbb{W}a5$ was probably best, but other moves keeping the queens on would do as well, for example 20. $\mathbb{W}c5+$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 21. $\mathbb{W}e3$.

20. $\mathbb{W}xf6+?$

Repairing Black's structure and solving all Black's worries about his king. Though the endgame should still be winning, Black later managed to draw.

In the next chapter we will see a similar scenario happening in a Chigorin-Steinitz game.

Interestingly, only one year after the Carlsbad tournament, in 1912, Tarrasch, in his introduction to *Die Moderne Schachpartie*, also made a comparison between his days and a top tournament from the past, Paris 1878:

'How big an upturn the art of playing chess has taken in the last decades, how much the general level of playing strength and the scientific treatment of the game has risen, shows itself clearly, when you take a critical look at a games collection from earlier times, not even that long ago, as for example the Paris 1878 tournament book. You can find in the majority of these games such an amateurishness in conception and technique, that it is not daring for me to state, that the level of the masters back then roughly equals that of the stronger participants in the main tournament of today.'¹³⁵

If the difference between the premier and the main tournament Tarrasch is talking about is something

like 150 to 200 points (comparing this to differences between similar groups at present) then the level had gone up quite substantially in those 25 years.

Some ten years after the Paris tournament, in 1889, Blackburne spoke in an interview about the level of chess 25 years earlier:

'The present players are incomparably stronger. This is no doubt owing to the large number of treatises on the science of the game now available. [...] During the last five years, the various chess works must number many hundreds, many of them very large and formidable compendiums of analysis.'¹³⁶

And in an interview I have already quoted, Steinitz said in 1883 about Morphy's days (i.e. the same interval of 25 years):

'Well, the game has made immense strides since his time. For one first-class player then, there are twenty now, and the science has developed.'

If Nunn is right, and Tarrasch and Blackburne/Steinitz were too, this would mean that a strong club player of today would not fare badly amidst the strongest players of halfway through the 19th century. Which I think is fairly accurate.

It is clear that the players from the 19th century had the impression that they lived in a time of great progress, and there is no reason to doubt that this is true, looking at the enormous growth in number of players, literature on chess and competitions. It is difficult to say anything about the chess from earlier days, since not many games were recorded and there was very little of what could be called serious competition. Since the scoring of games is so essential for progress in chess, it's tempting to speak of 'the prehistory' of chess. Greco, Philidor and the Modenese masters were certainly strong players, and I guess they could compete with the strongest players of the first half of the 19th century.

I paid quite some attention to the first serious matches that were entirely recorded, La Bourdonnais-McDonnell and Staunton-Saint-Amant. There are a few things to learn from those matches: in particular, La Bourdonnais's positional ideas in the French are remarkable. But the general level of play was rather low and since there was a lot happening, these games are ideal for training purposes: analysing them and comparing your results with an engine.

In the historical Edo rating list, these players have peak ratings ranging from 2547 to 2674, and if I understood it well these numbers are meant (with all possible methodological reservations) to form a comparison with today's ratings. Looking at their games, this is hard to believe. Slightly above 2000 seems more accurate.

For example, La Bourdonnais's case shows the difficulties with making a good comparison. Where McDonnell took the match rather seriously, La Bourdonnais played very quickly, hoping to have some



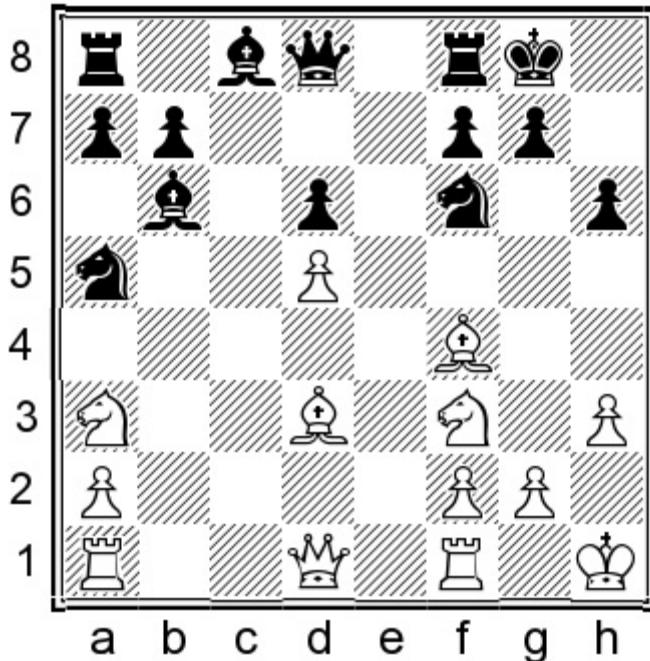
time left in the evening for more important activities (like playing for stakes at odds). Recording the games was not at all customary in those days, and I don't think La Bourdonnais could have imagined that almost 200 years later people would look at these matches as a forerunner to the World Championships. So my guess is that La Bourdonnais could have done even better, although he still won by a large margin.

McDonnell could be dangerous in the attack and he had his nice moments, but his play in the next two fragments gives a good indication of what he was capable of on a bad day.

Louis de La Bourdonnais

Alexander McDonnell

London m 1834 (5.7)



Black to move

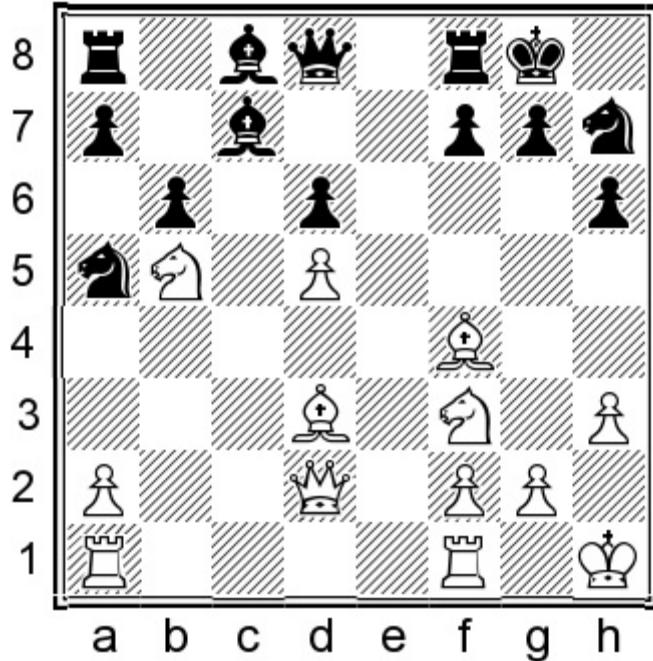
The Evans Gambit hasn't brought White much and Black could even have taken an extra pawn on d5. Instead he chose a very ugly move:

15...♝c7 16.♛d2 ♝h7

White threatened 17.♝xh6 and Black prevents this, so both players seem to have been familiar with this idea. In Chapter 9 I mentioned the year 1845 as the debut for this move, but maybe it was already known in literature before.

17.♝b5 b6

This doesn't answer the threat; 17...♝b8 would have kept the piece, although this way of burying the active bishop from b6 is not a manoeuvre you might wish to add to your repertoire.



(Exercise no 120)

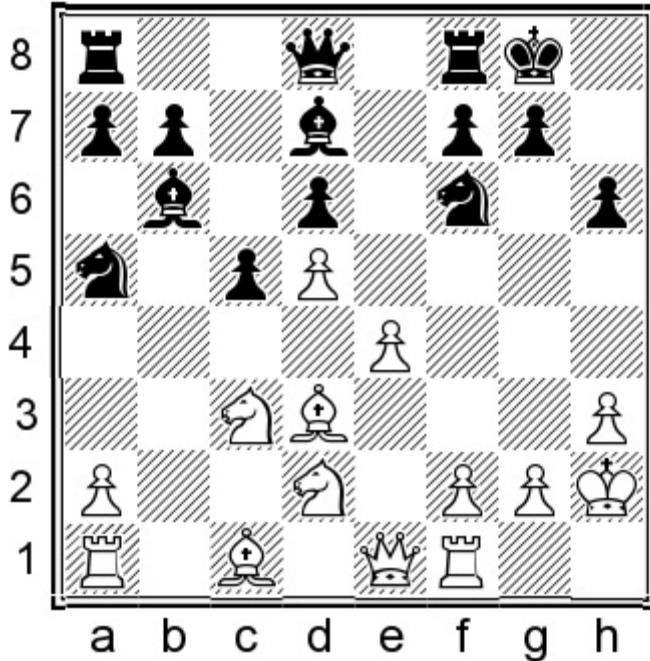
18.♗xh7+!

Starting with 18.♕c2 does the trick as well.

18...♝xh7 19.♕c2+ f5 20.♕xc7 ♕xc7 21.♘xc7

Black resigned.

**Louis de La Bourdonnais
Alexander McDonnell
London m 1834 (5.3)**



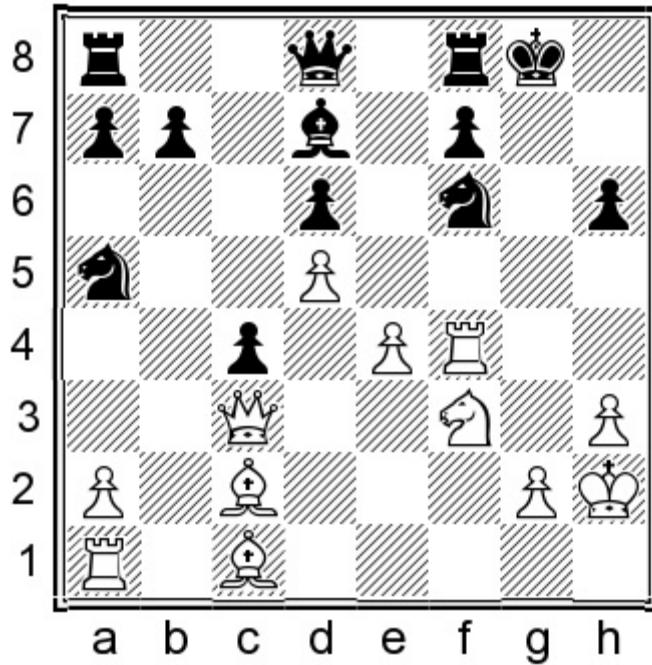
Black to move

(Exercise no 121)

In previous chapters a lot of attention has been devoted to the g2-g4/...g7-g5 move and we saw throughout the 19th century a growing positional awareness of the potentially weakening downside of this move, finally culminating in Tarrasch's apt characterization, which is also appropriate in this case. Apart from the terrible weakening, it also gives White an excellent opportunity to open things up on the side where he is outnumbering his opponent.

After any normal move White would still have had to prove his compensation for the pawn.

15...g5? 16.f4! gxf4 17.Qxf4 c4 18.Qc2 Qd4 19.Qf3 Qxc3 20.Qxc3



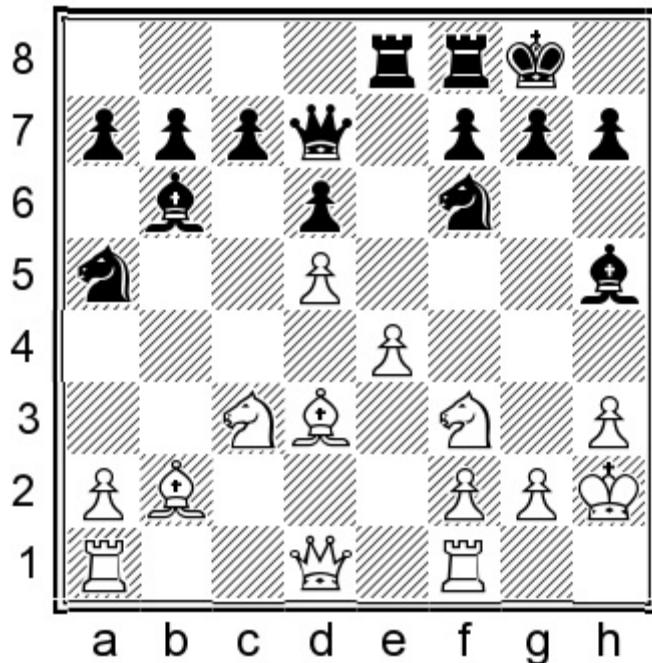
One more picture to show the disaster Black has inflicted on himself. White won after a few more moves.

To compensate for the one-sidedness, here's one last position with the roles reversed, arising from an Evans Gambit again. Having finished this book, the reader will have gained quite some expertise on this opening. What benefit this brings you is a good question. Just wait for the time capsule to arrive!

Louis de La Bourdonnais

Alexander McDonnell

London m 1834 (6.3)

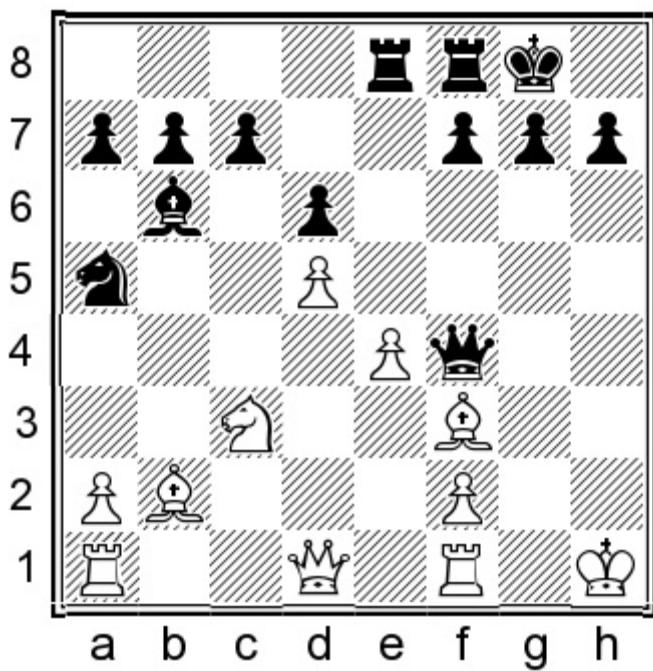


White to move

(Exercise no 122)

This is a slightly more difficult problem than the previous exercise, but I hope that your positional sensitivity made you feel uncomfortable when looking at White's next move. We have addressed the question of the sacrifice on g5/g4 earlier in this book; in the matches between these two players, opportunities for this common thematic sacrifice occurred quite often.

16.g4? ♕xg4+! 17.hxg4 ♖xg4 18.♕e2 ♖f4+ 19.♔h1 ♖xf3+ 20.♕xf3



20...f5!

Very well played – McDonnell at his best. The threat of lifting the f8-rook into play decides the game.

21. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{B}f6$ 22. $\mathbb{W}d3$ $\mathbb{B}h6+$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}h3$ $fxe4$ 24. $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ $\mathbb{B}xe4$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{B}e3$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xe3$ $\mathbb{B}xh3+$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}g2$ $\mathbb{W}h2$ mate.

As far as I can see, most history books tend to have an over-optimistic view of the chess-playing strength throughout the 19th century. For example, Tim Harding, in his thorough work *Eminent Victorian Chess Players*, sees quite a few masters and grandmasters walking around. About Henry Bird, who was for the biggest part of his career (lasting almost the complete second half of the 19th century) somewhere between number 10 and 25 on the (not yet existing) list of top players, Harding says that ‘despite his patchy results, he should be considered, in today’s terms, a strong international master.’¹³⁷

If I might venture a wild guess regarding the average strength of say the top five or top ten players throughout the century I would say it gradually went from about 2000 around the thirties to 2400 near the end of the century. The historical Edo ratings, on which Harding bases his appreciations, surpass

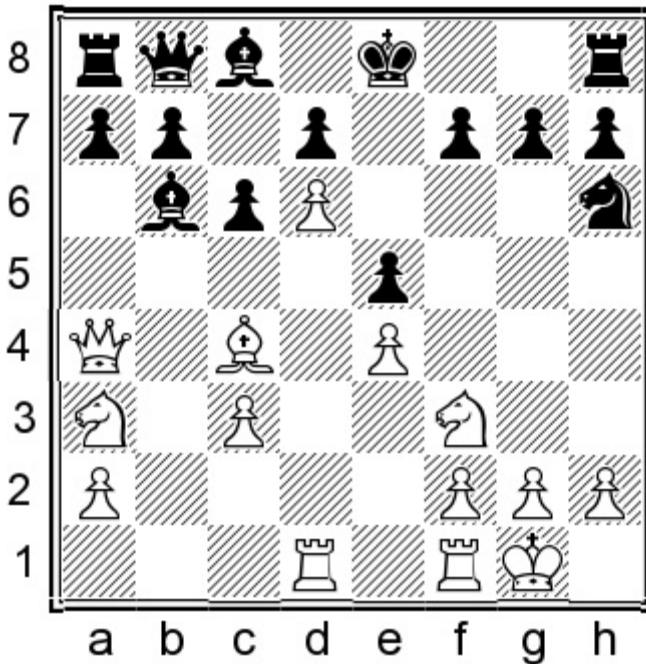
this by hundreds of points.¹³⁸

If you start a discussion on the question of how strong the masters of the past were, inevitably a lot of bad moves will pass by. In my own games I have had my fair share, so it is with real sympathy that I show other players going wrong.

I realize that with today's help of the engines I'm in a privileged position compared to the players from the past, and that it is easy to 'blunder-check' their games and have a cheap laugh. But I always try to keep the human perspective in mind and take the difficulties of the position into account instead of solely watching the engine evaluation fall or rise.

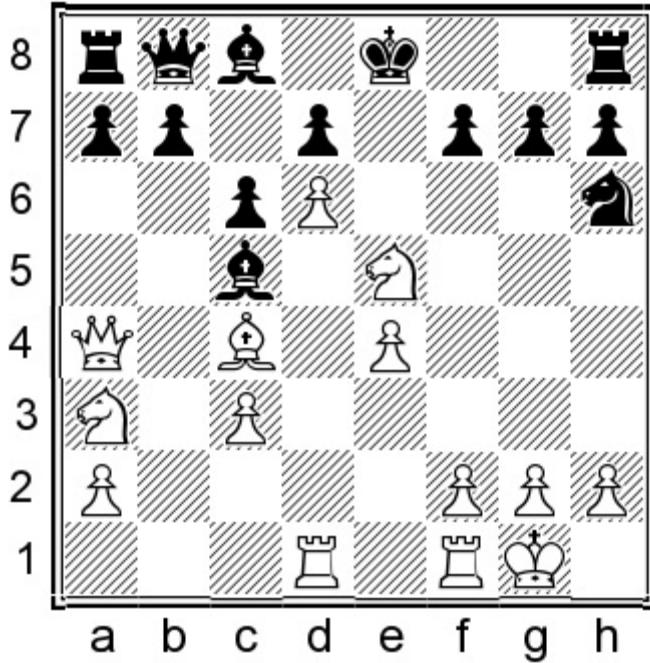
As we saw above, Nunn decided to focus on big tactical errors as a way of comparing the two tournaments he had chosen. He used Fritz 5 in blunder-check mode to make a first selection out of all those games. He also used Milan Vidmar's book on the Carlsbad tournament, but this turned out to be completely useless for his purpose because of Vidmar missing almost all the big blunders. (Vidmar himself was already aware his book was not the best possible, giving the small payment he received for it as an excuse.)

So, apart from the games from the past, the analyses that have been made of them also reveal a lot about the tactical strength of the players. Take for example a position I have discussed before, Steinitz's analysis of the Evans Gambit in *The Modern Chess Instructor*:



Steinitz more or less ended his analysis with 15. $\mathbb{W}b4$ and a positive verdict on Black's chances, which is why I thought this position to be a true icon of the modern school.

About this last move he said that it was 'no doubt superior to 15. $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ to which Black would reply 15... $\mathbb{Q}c5$.'



(Exercise no 123)

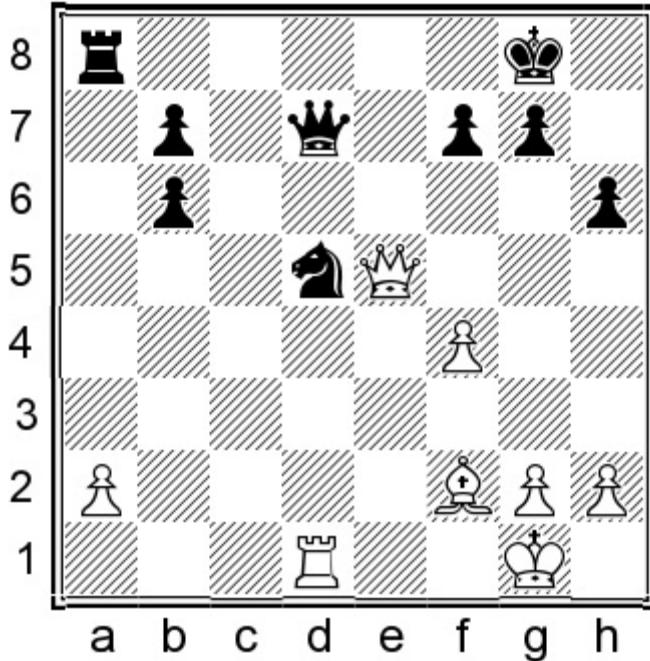
Now I can't imagine that any strong player of today would need more than a split second to see the sacrifice on f7. 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ is a bit messy after 16...b5, but simple and strong is 16. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ with an extra pawn and an overwhelming position. The main tactic of course is 16... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 18. $\mathbb{W}c4+$.

Hoping the reader doesn't consider this to be disrespectful, I will add a few more examples from the fights between Steinitz and Chigorin.

Mikhail Chigorin

William Steinitz

World Championship m 1889 (1)



Black to move

This position arose in the first game of their first match. Black has only one move to protect the knight on d5. After 27... $\mathbb{Q}a5$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}c6$ the position would have been equal. Instead, Steinitz had counted on a back rank trick, overlooking the fact that the a1-square was protected.

27... $\mathbb{Q}xa2??$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{Q}a1+$ 29. $\mathbb{W}xa1$ $\mathbb{W}xd5$

and White won with his extra piece.

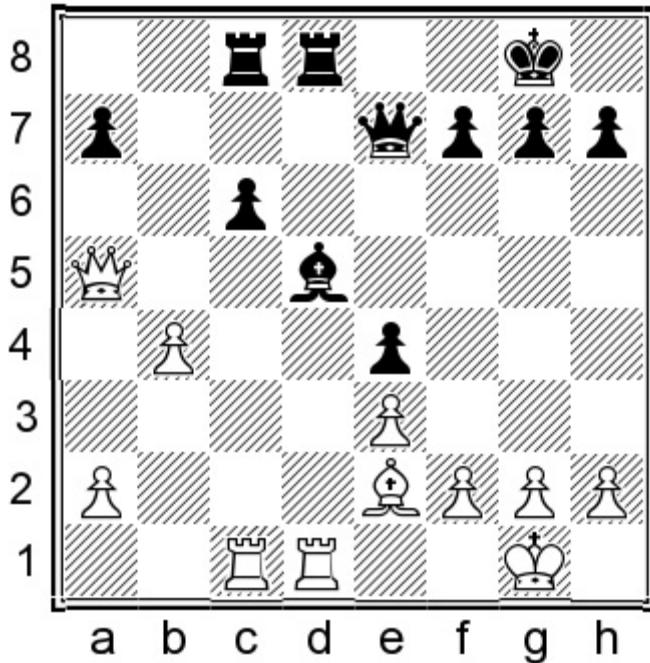
Regarding those blunders from the old days, seldom can the time element be put forward as an excuse, since time allocation was very generous compared to today: for this match, for example, two hours for 30 moves and an hour for every subsequent 15 moves.

One might think this must have been the worst start to a World Championship match ever, but take a look at the following game.

Emanuel Lasker

Dawid Janowski

World Championship m 1910 (1)



Black to move

White has a clear advantage because of his better pawn structure, but nothing serious is happening yet, so this was a good moment to make a *luft* with 19...g6

or 19...h6. Instead there followed:

19...♝d6?? 20.♝xd5 ♚xd5 21.♝xd5 ♜xb4 22.♝xc6 1-0

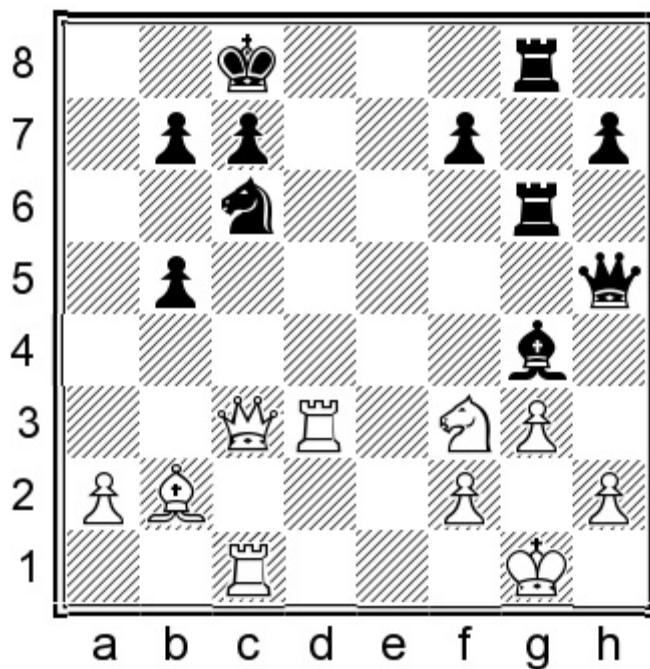
This whole match was a disaster for Janowski, who ended with eight losses and three draws. There were some candidates who probably could have put up a better fight but couldn't raise the money (Lasker had a reputation for imposing severe burdens on potential challengers). It is a bit strange that Janowski could, because the year before he had lost a match to Lasker by a similar score. Apparently he managed to persuade his patron Nardus to provide funds again, maybe with the help of his enormous self-confidence. After this second match, he was already thinking of a new challenge for a third, because he was...

'convinced that he had outplayed Lasker in almost all the games and that the World Champion could actually not play chess. The way he moved around with the pieces had disgusted him. Thus it had been enough for Janowski to reach a winning position and after that he had lost interest in the games.'¹³⁹

With his habit of playing very quickly and spending the evenings at the casino, he reminds me a bit of his compatriot La Bourdonnais.

Back to our two great rivals. In the strong 1895/1896 St Petersburg tournament, the following happened.

Mikhail Chigorin



Black to move

Black is already a healthy pawn up; directly winning was 24... $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 25. $\mathbb{R}xf3$ $\mathbb{R}h6$ and there is no defence for the h-pawn. Steinitz reversed the moves.

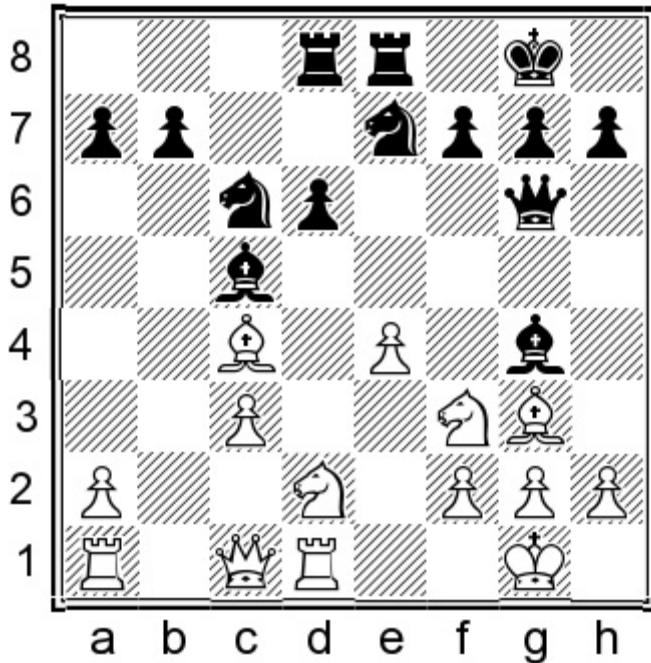
24... $\mathbb{R}h6?$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}h4$ $\mathbb{W}xh4??$

Very strange since at best it would be a drawing combination. Some illusion must have taken hold of Steinitz. Maybe he missed the rook interposing at g3 or thought the h6-rook was still on g6.

26.gxh4 1-0

Though compared to Steinitz he was much more eager to conjure up beauty in chess, Chigorin wasn't a rock-solid tactician either:

Mikhail Chigorin
William Steinitz
World Championship m 1889 (5)



White to move

18.h3?? (*Exercise no 124*)

After a normal move chances would have been about equal, but this allows a very elementary tactic.

18...♝xf3!

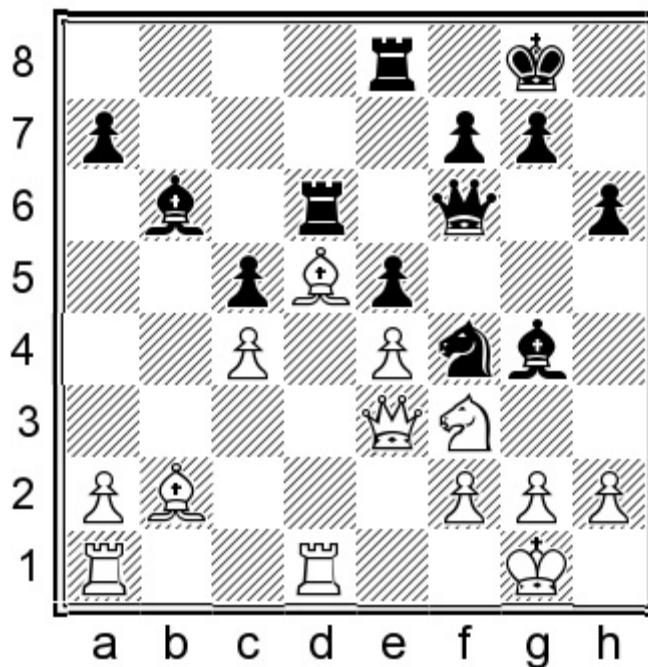
18...♝xh3 would have been strong too but the text wins a piece right away.

19.♞xf3 ♛xg3 and Black won after a few more moves.

One of the most eventful World Championship matches was the fourth, being the second between Steinitz and Chigorin. It was a tense match with lots of difficult positions and by itself it provided sufficient material for me to make my own ‘test of time’ chapter on it.

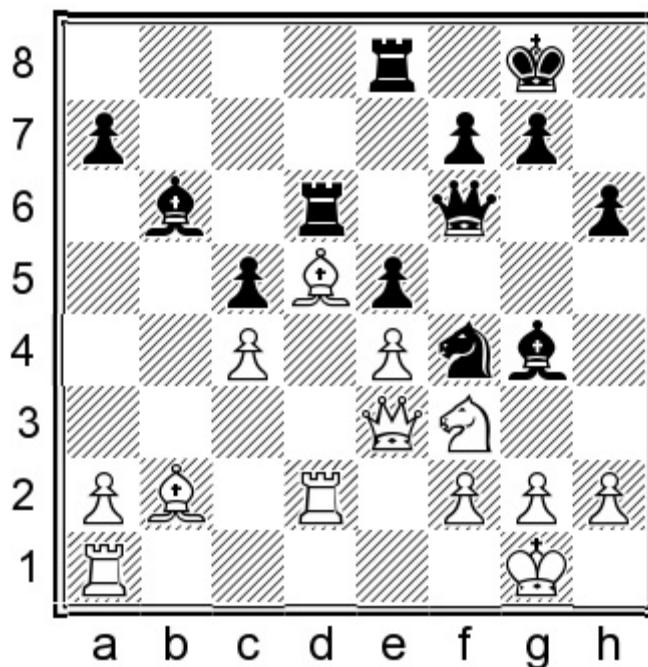
Exercises for Chapter 29

125 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

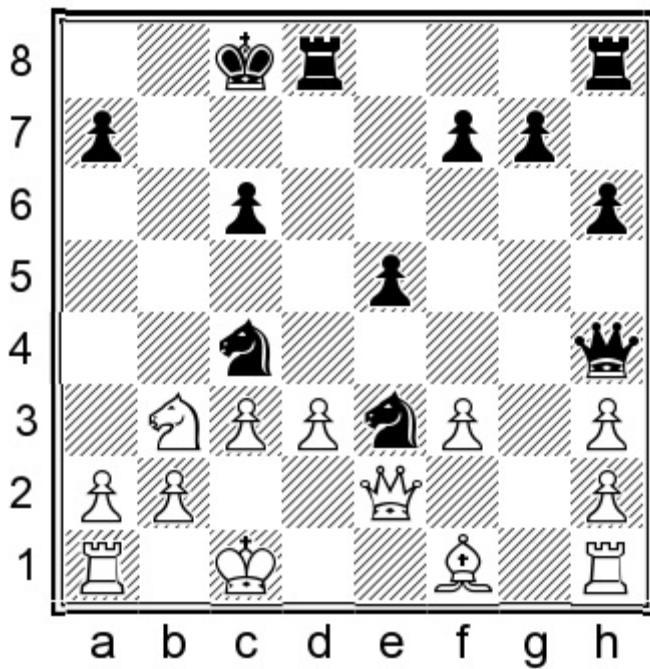
126 (*go to the solution*)



Black to move

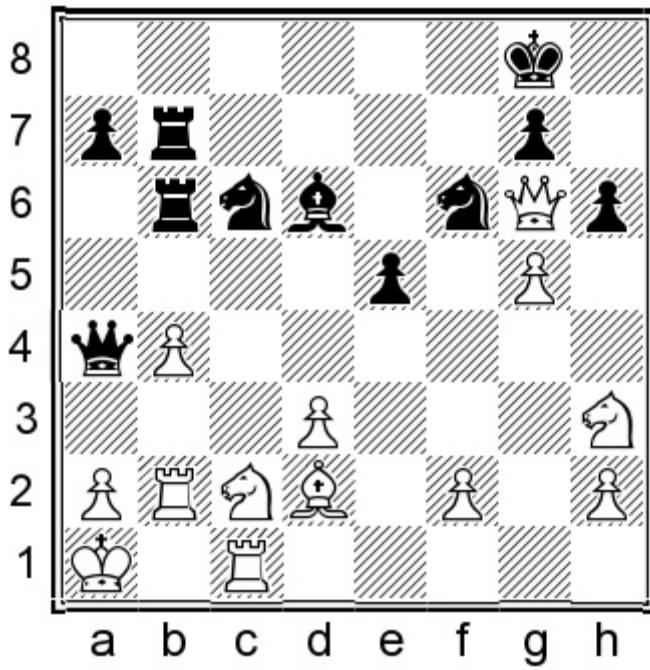
Calculate the consequences of 23... $\mathbb{Q}xg2$.

127 (go to the solution)



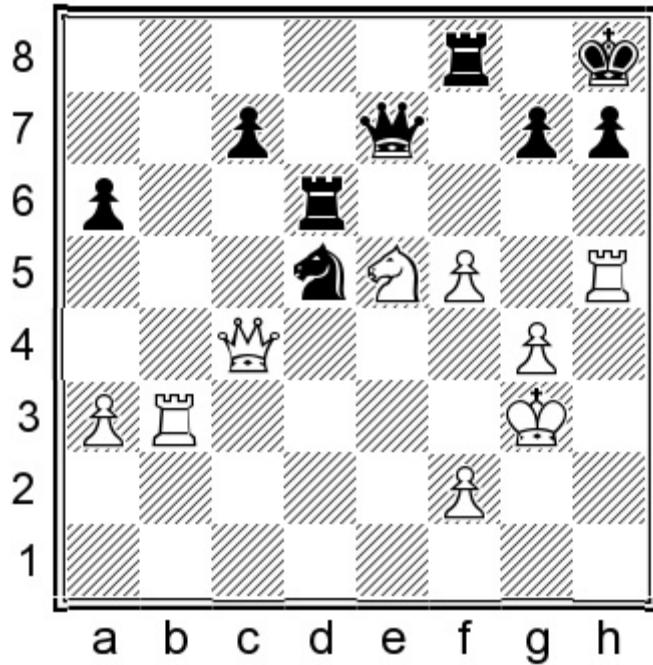
Black to move

128 (go to the solution)



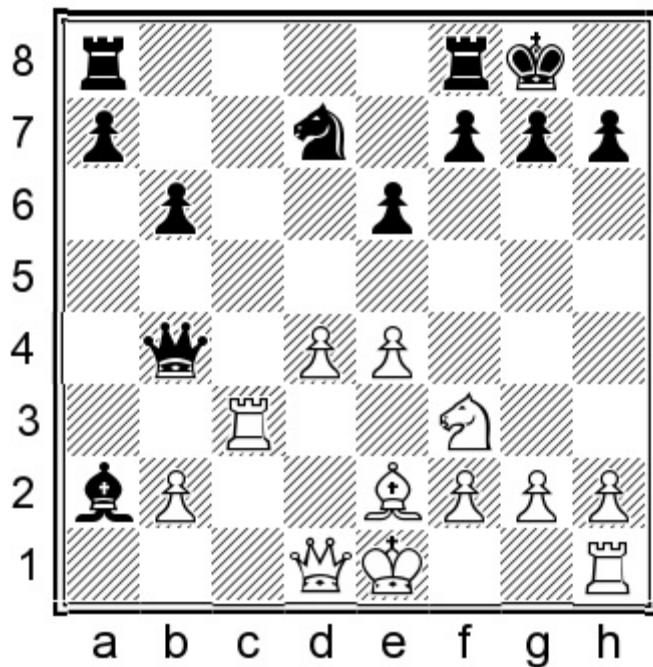
Black to move

129 (go to the solution)



White to move

130 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

29

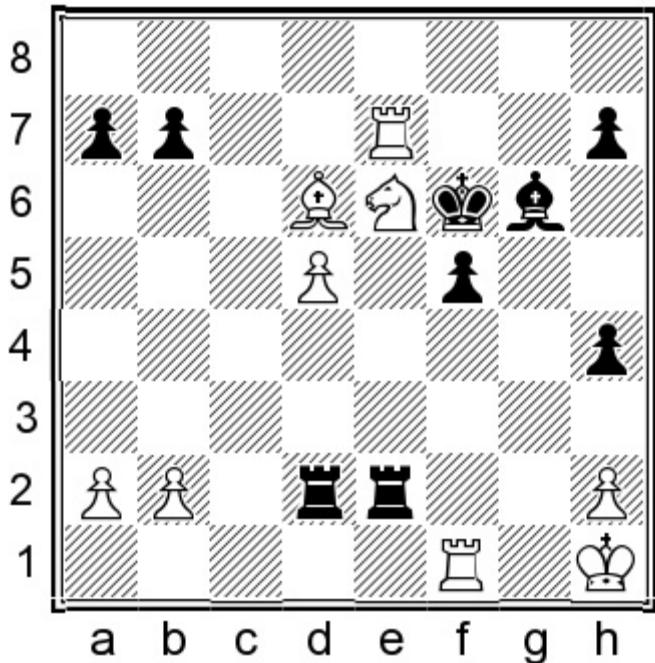
The test of time

There is a fair chance you have seen the next position before, since it is one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of chess.

Mikhail Chigorin

William Steinitz

World Championship m 1892 (23)



White to move

White is a piece up, though some practical problems still have to be solved. Actually, I would say it is easy to go wrong: White's central pieces are a bit loose, ... $\mathbb{Q}h5$ might be a threat and there is no simple solid move available to meet those problems.

Strong would have been 32. $\mathbb{Q}xb7$; on 32... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ there is 33. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ and 32... $\mathbb{Q}h5$, with the threat of ... $\mathbb{Q}f3+$, can be met with 33. $\mathbb{Q}b3$.

But Chigorin lost control and allowed mate in two:

32. $\mathbb{Q}b4?? \mathbb{Q}xh2+ 0-1$

The time control (at move 30) had already passed and Chigorin pondered for 20 minutes over this move. As an excuse he mentioned extreme fatigue, caused by the climatological circumstances in Havana. A biographer comments that,

'the history of matches for the World Championship is full of oversights, though, for all that, the 32nd move in the 23rd game of the Chigorin-Steinitz match stands

out for its drama and irreparable damage.¹⁴⁰

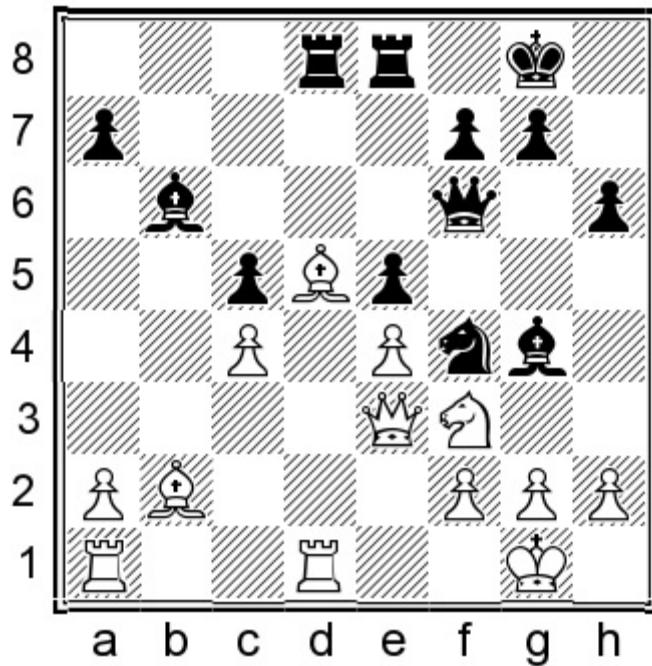
This was indeed a terrible blunder. But if you play over all the games from this match you might come to the slightly different conclusion that this move wasn't that much out of step with the overall level of play. Though there were a few nice games as well – the first game saw Chigorin winning in brilliant style, the fourth Steinitz, both very well known –, in the great majority of games rather shocking events happened.

The first two exercises come from the seventh game, with starring roles for both players:

Mikhail Chigorin

William Steinitz

World Championship m 1892 (7)



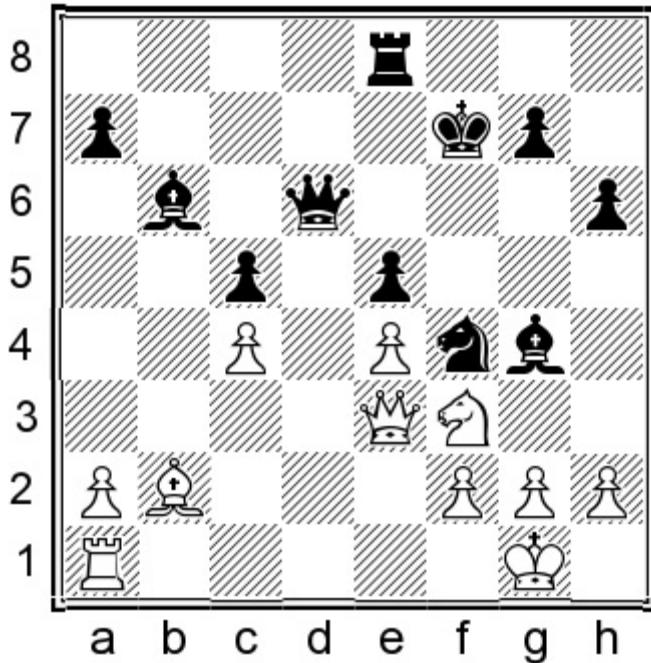
Black to move

A tense position. With his next move Black makes a tactic possible that wasn't threatened yet.

22...♝d6? (*Exercise no 125*)

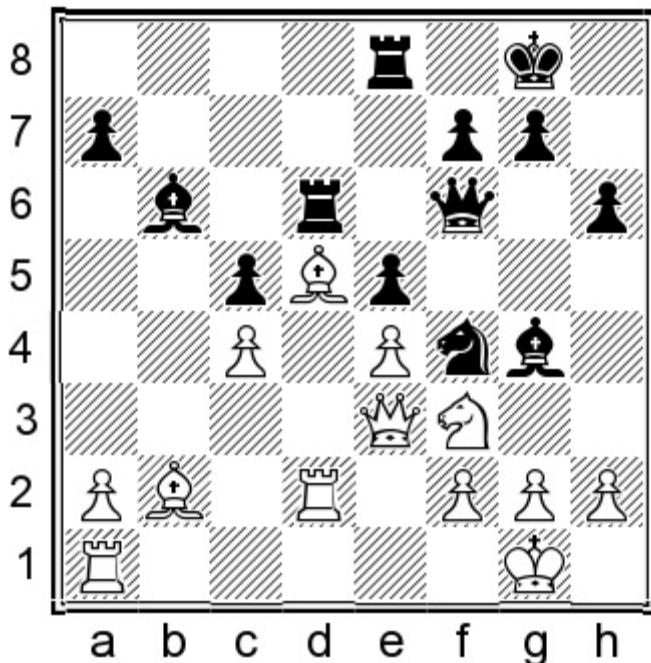
23.♝d2?

Now 23.♝xf7+ was winning: 23...♚xf7 24.♝xd6 ♛xd6.



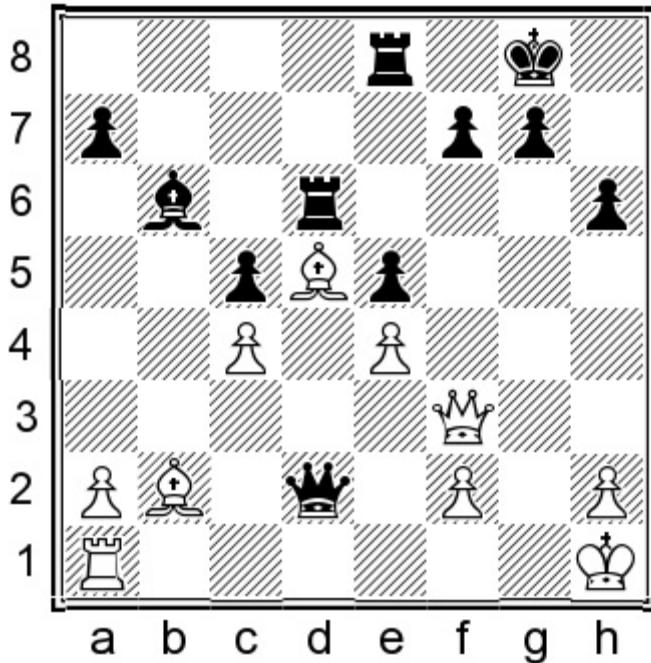
White could go wrong with 25.♖xe5 because of the ingenious 25... ♔e2+! but after 25.♔xe5+! White wins material, for example 25... ♕xe5 26.♕xf4+. A nice combination, but once you have spotted 23.♖xf7+, it should not be too difficult to work it out, and ♖xf7+ isn't the rarest move to start a combination.

After White's miss it was Steinitz's turn to calculate an attractive tactical idea.



(Exercise no 126)

23... ♔xg2? 24.♔xg2 ♖xf3+ 25.♕xf3 ♕g5+ 26.♔h1 ♕xd2



The point of Black's combination. Looking only one move deeper is sufficient to see why it is wrong.

27.♕xf7+ ♔h7 28.♗g1 1-0

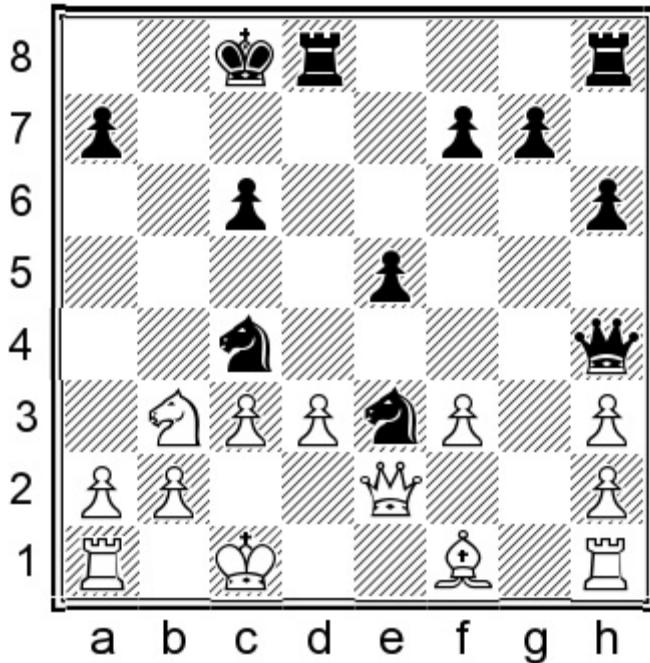
In the chapter on the telegraph match we saw Steinitz propagating his new move 9.♘h3 in the Two Knights Defence, and in this match he played it four times, with little success (1-3). Steinitz's opening choices were a bit strange at times – or maybe stubborn is a better word, since if you think you are strong at positional play and your opponent is a tactical genius, the Two Knights is playing into your opponent's hands. Later in the match Steinitz started playing the Ruy Lopez and also 1.♘f3, with great success, just as in their first World Championship match.

Two of the games with the Two Knights ended in a catastrophe for Steinitz; the following is the first one:

William Steinitz

Mikhail Chigorin

World Championship m 1892 (8)



Black to move

(Exercise no 127)

20...♝xd3!

Not the only winning move, but by far the strongest.

21.♝g2 ♜hd8 22.a4 ♜d1+ 23.♝xd1 ♜xd1+ 24.♛xd1 ♜xd1 0-1

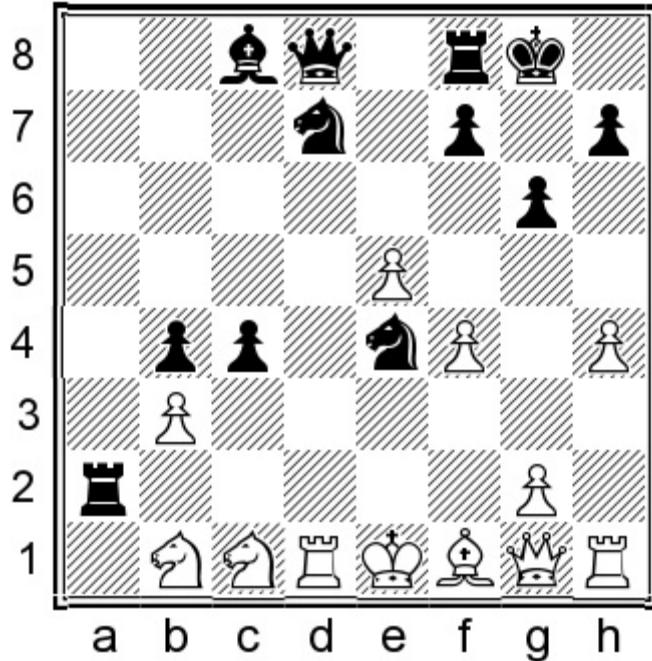
Of all world champions, no one lost as many miniatures with his king still in the centre and his pieces undeveloped as Steinitz. We have already seen one other example from this match in Chapter 24, Steinitz's last game in the 4...♝h4 Scotch.

Looking for something similar in the history of the world champions, the next position springs to mind, between two other great rivals.

Anatoly Karpov

Garry Kasparov

Linares 1993



Black to move

White's last move was 22. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ and now mundane moves like 22... $\mathbb{B}b2$ would have done, but Kasparov finished in great style with 22... $c3$ and after 23. $\mathbb{Q}xa2$ $c2$ 24. $\mathbb{W}d4$ $cx d1 = \mathbb{W} +$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ $\mathbb{Q}dc5!$ 26. $\mathbb{W}xd8$ $\mathbb{B}xd8 +$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}f2$ White resigned. After 28. $\mathbb{B}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}f5 +$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ there is a nice two-knights mate with 29... $\mathbb{Q}d1 +$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ $\mathbb{Q}xb3$.

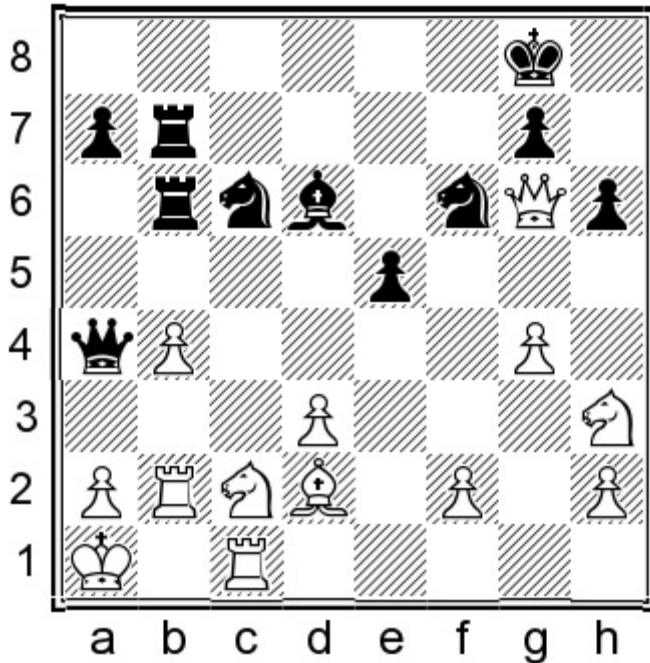
This was a rare occurrence for Karpov, and clearly things had gone wrong before, whereas Steinitz had no principled objection to positions like the above and often got into them on purpose. I think it's safe to say that Steinitz was capable of staying on top not thanks to, but despite, his principles. He must have been a strong player.

In the last game with the Two Knights, Steinitz managed to castle queenside and resist Black's ferocious attack.

William Steinitz

Mikhail Chigorin

World Championship m 1892 (10)



White to move

A double-edged position has arisen. Black's last move was 29... $\mathbb{Q}a5-c6$ and I can imagine that you might only focus on his queenside intentions and miss the rather surprising threat of trapping the queen.

30.g5?

(Exercise no 128)

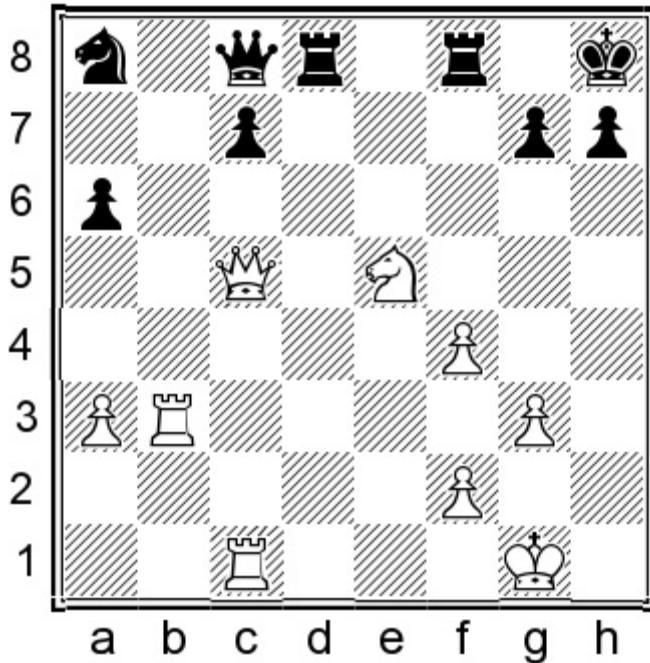
30... $\mathbb{Q}e7!$ 0-1

In the last part of the match there were several games with the evaluation changing considerably more than once.

Mikhail Chigorin

William Steinitz

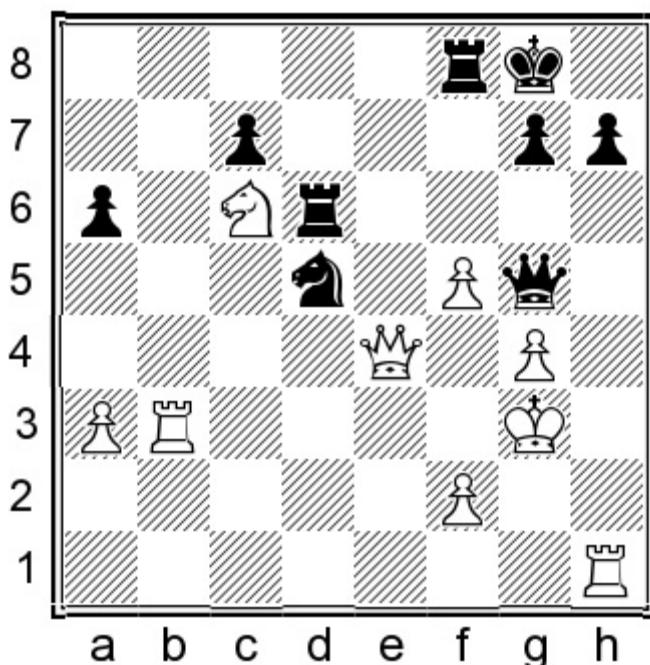
World Championship m 1892 (15)



White to move

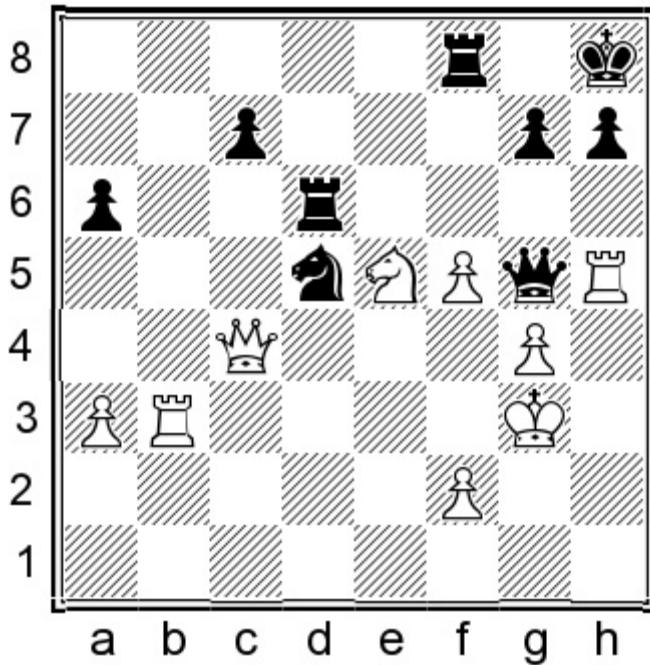
Black has just played his knight to a8, a clear sign that things have gone wrong, though Steinitz seemingly didn't completely agree, since he offered a draw here! Most straightforward would have been 36.♘c6, which wins material because of the nice X-ray after 36...♝de8 37.♜b8 ♛d7 38.♛xf8+!, but Chigorin was afraid that after 36...♝d6 37.♜b8 ♛xb8 'it would be very difficult for White to win with queen against rook and knight'. That, however, is nonsense, the extra material plus Black's weak pawns and unsafe king make this an easy win.

36.♛c4 ♛f5 37.g4 ♛f6 38.♝g2 ♘b6 39.♛e4 ♘d5 40.f5 ♛g5 41.♜h1 ♛g8 42.♘c6 ♜d6 43.♝g3



What a change compared to the previous diagram. Black's knight is back in play and White has severely compromised his king's position. Black is not even worse any more.

43... $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 44. $\mathbb{W}c4+$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 45. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}d5$ 46. $\mathbb{Q}h5$



Black has got into trouble again and finally Steinitz makes the last mistake. Afterwards he thought he could have held the draw with 46... $\mathbb{W}d8$, but, as Chigorin pointed out, 47. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ would be winning: after 47... $\mathbb{Q}xg6$ 48. $f x g 6$ $\mathbb{W}d6+$, White has 49. $f4$.

46... $\mathbb{W}e7?$

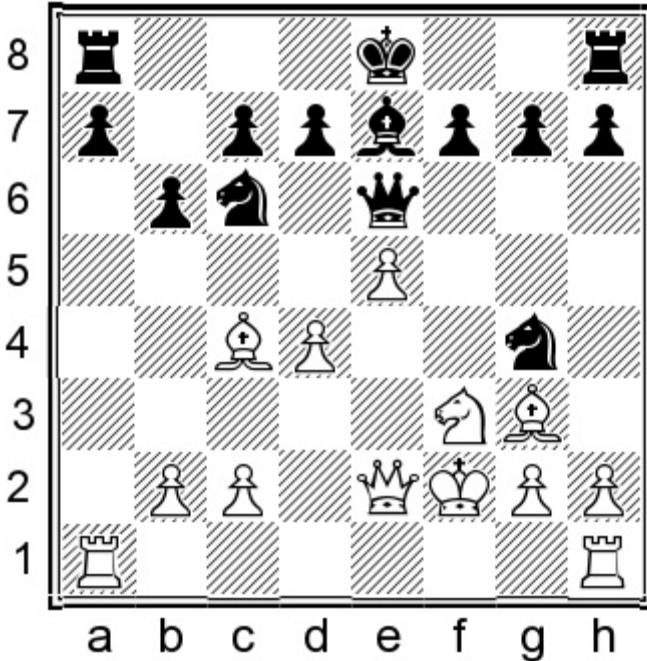
(Exercise no 129)

47. $\mathbb{W}xd5!$

And Black resigned because of 47... $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ 48. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$.

These knight forks weren't Steinitz's forte. In the Baden-Baden 1870 super tournament Steinitz finished half a point behind Anderssen. See what happened to him against the bottom seed Minckwitz.

William Steinitz
Johannes Minckwitz
Baden-Baden 1870



White to move

You might recognize the remains of a Steinitz Gambit. Though he hasn't got his pawn back yet, White is doing fine and after 18.♔g1 the black pieces would be pushed back and they are really lacking good squares. But Steinitz chose another square for his king:

18.♔f1?? ♕xc4 0-1

Giving you this one as an exercise seemed too much of a good thing and I don't think any reader needs encouragement to master these basic tactics. And if you could also master the (slightly more difficult) time-travelling trick, this might make *you* the first World Champion.

In his last three games with white, Steinitz opened 1.♘f3, a good choice upon which Chigorin apparently had not prepared anything special, although in their first World Championship match Steinitz already had been successful with this move. Later on in his career Chigorin did manage to build a decent repertoire against 1.d4 (and 1.♘f3).

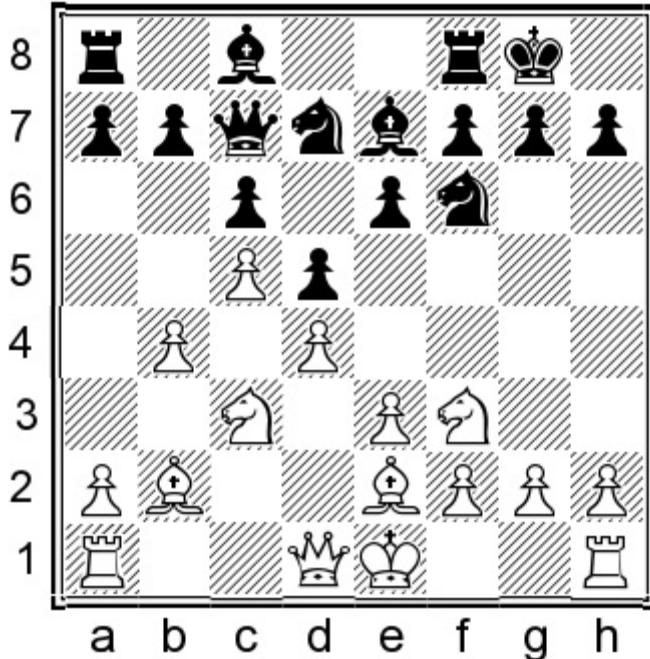
This lack of preparation led to disaster in all three games. In the following game Chigorin didn't manage to put up any resistance. Maybe Tarrasch was thinking of this game when he claimed that Steinitz could win any way he wanted with the white pieces.

William Steinitz

Mikhail Chigorin

World Championship match, Havana 1892 (20)

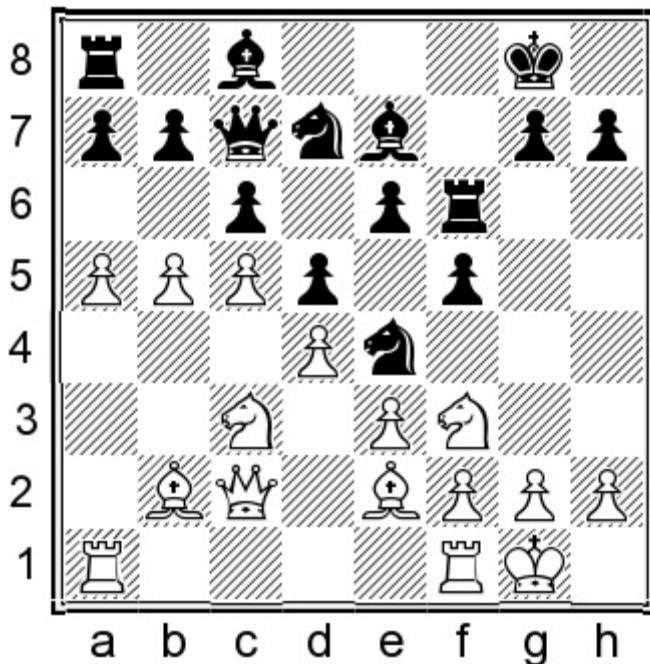
1.♘f3 d5 2.d4 ♘f6 3.e3 e6 4.c4 ♜e7 5.♘c3 ♘bd7 6.c5 c6 7.b4 0-0 8.♘b2 ♜c7 9.♘e2



Black is facing an important decision. Becoming active in the centre with 9...e5 suggests itself. A small check is necessary because of the bishop on b2, but White has nothing special, for example 10.dxe5 ♖xe5 11.♗xd5? fails to 11...♗xf3+. Another idea is to take up the gauntlet on the queenside with 9...b6, for example 10.0-0 a5 11.a3 ♜a6, with a decent game.

Chigorin opts for a Stonewall set-up, but that costs two extra tempi compared with the original.

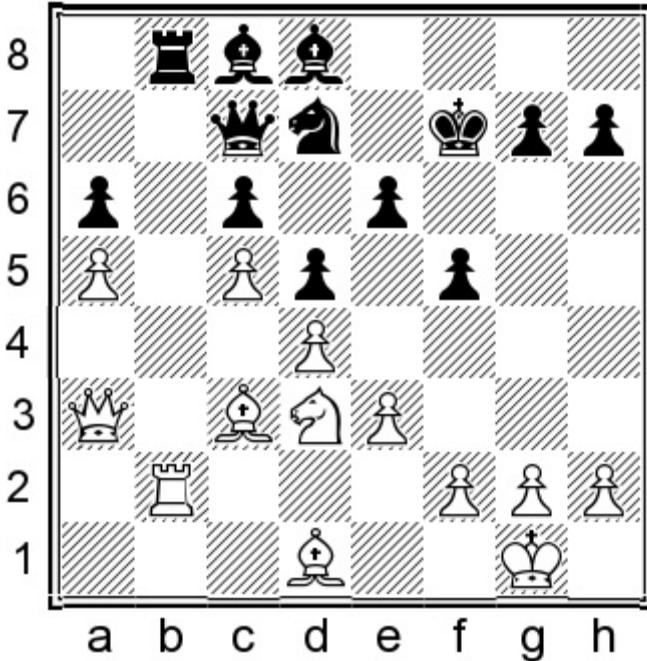
9...♝e8?! 10.0-0 f5 11.♘c2 ♝ef6 12.a4 ♞e4 13.b5 ♘f6 14.a5



White's attack on the queenside is becoming serious, whereas Black has no threats yet. Although I'm not sure about the value of the 'better a bad plan than no plan at all' mentality, in this case Black's following moves form a sad withdrawal. It seems too late for anything else than ...♝h6 and ...g7-g5 and

hoping for the best. Instead, Chigorin first exchanges the knight on e4, which he invested so much time in getting there, and then also retreats the f6-rook.

14... $\mathbb{Q}xc3$?! 15. $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ a6 16.bxa6 bxa6 17. $\mathbb{Q}fb1$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}ab1$ $\mathbb{Q}fb8$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 23. $\mathbb{W}a4$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 24. $\mathbb{W}a3$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}b8$



26. $\mathbb{Q}b6!$

In those days, the exchange sacrifice wasn't as common as today, but this one is too natural to be missed. Black now could try to hold on by letting the rook stay on b6, but that's a hard thing to do; accepting the sacrifice gave White all the beautiful squares (and a mega-passed pawn on b6) and the rest is as terrible as the famous Steinitz-Sellman game.

26... $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 27.cxb6 $\mathbb{W}b7$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}e5+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 29. $\mathbb{Q}a4$ $\mathbb{W}e7$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ $\mathbb{W}f6$ 31. $\mathbb{W}c3$ h6 32. $\mathbb{Q}d6$ $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 33.axb6 $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ 34. $\mathbb{W}xc6$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 35. $\mathbb{Q}c5$ $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}h7$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 38. $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ 39. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ $\mathbb{Q}xd8$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ 1-0

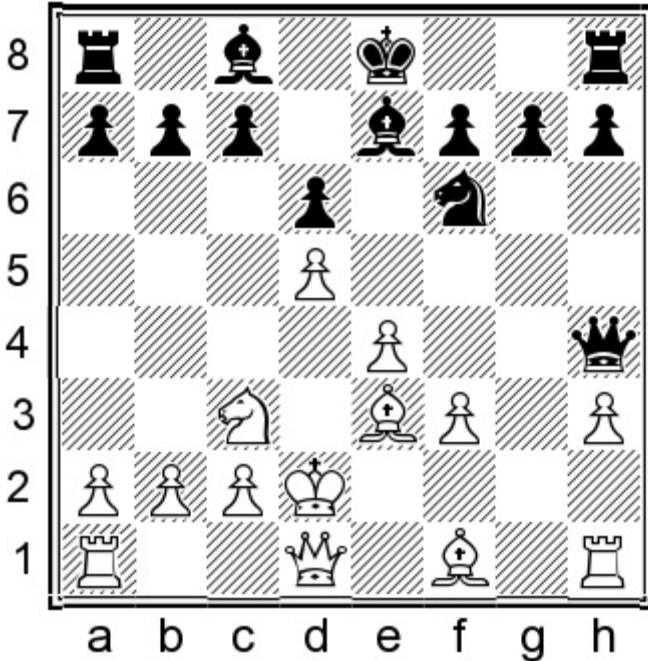
With this win Steinitz levelled the score at 8 wins each while playing for the first to win 10 games (and a draw if 9-9). The next game was also peculiar, because Chigorin as White played the Steinitz Gambit.

Mikhail Chigorin

William Steinitz

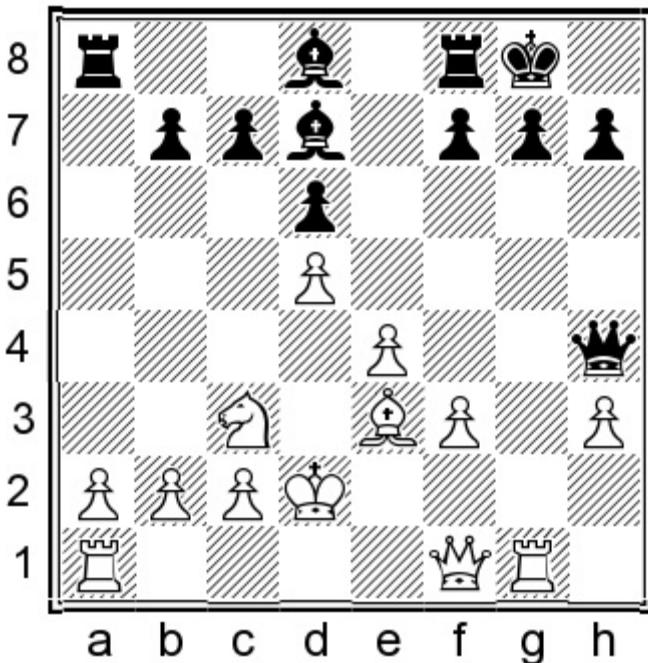
World Championship match, Havana 1892 (21)

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.f4 exf4 4.d4 $\mathbb{W}h4+$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}e2$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{W}g4$ 7.d5 $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 8.h3 $\mathbb{W}h5$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}xf4$ $\mathbb{Q}xf3$ 10.gxf3 d6 11. $\mathbb{Q}d2$ $\mathbb{W}h4$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$



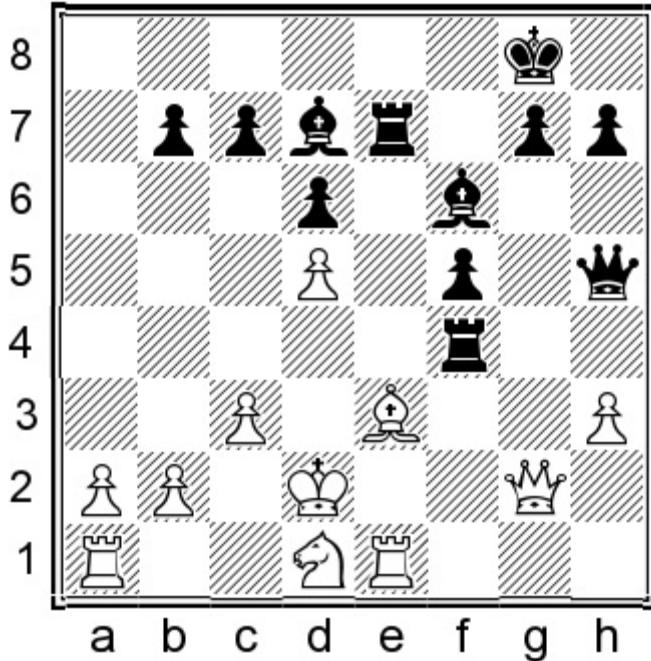
The only thing I would think of in this position is to complete development and artificially castle queenside as quickly as possible (with moves like $\mathbb{W}e1$, $\mathbb{R}d1$ and $\mathbb{K}c1$). But having adopted his opening, Chigorin continues in the style of his opponent with some pawn-grabbing:

13. $\mathbb{Q}b5!?$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 14. $\mathbb{Q}xa7$ $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ 0-0 16. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}h5$ 17. $\mathbb{W}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g3$ 18. $\mathbb{R}g1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf1+$ 19. $\mathbb{W}xf1$



By now Chigorin must have regretted spending so much time on getting the a7-pawn. With his next move Black takes the initiative.

19...f5! 20. $\mathbb{W}g2$ $\mathbb{R}f7$ 21. $\mathbb{R}h1$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{R}e8$ 23. $f4$ $\mathbb{R}xe4$ 24. $c3$ $\mathbb{R}fe7$ 25. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{R}xf4$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}h5$ 27. $\mathbb{Q}e3$



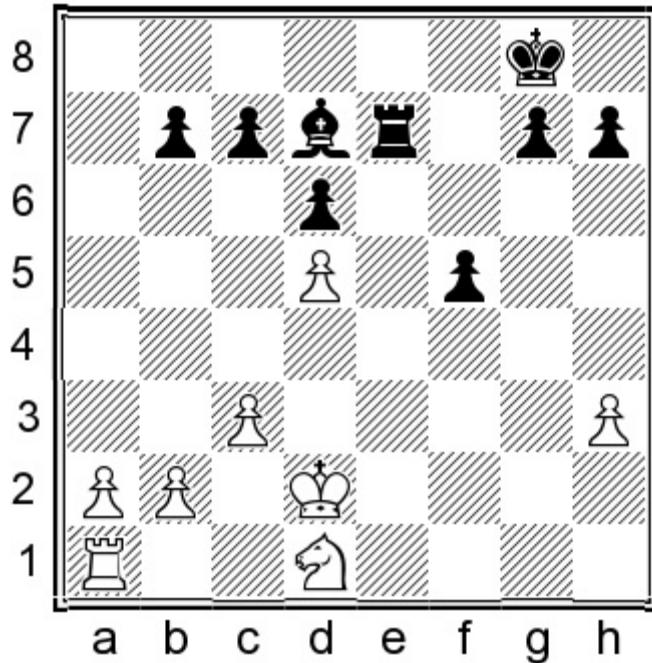
White hasn't managed to withstand the attack. Apart from all his other advantages, Black already is a pawn up, and for example 27... $\mathbb{Q}f3$, threatening 28... $\mathbb{Q}xh3$ or 28... $f4$, would leave White helpless.

27... $\mathbb{W}h4$ 28. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{W}g5?$

Essentially the same mistake as Tartakower made in the previous chapter. If I have to name one principle or rule you can follow almost without reservation, it is the following: if your king is much safer than your opponent's, don't exchange queens.

In the earliest textbooks, the theoretical part often consisted of an exposé of the relative values of the pieces and some general advice ('principles of play'). The strength of the queen against an unsafe king (both in the mating attack and for double attacks) has been known since the queen became the strongest piece (in the transition to our version of the game around 1500). But I do not know who was the first to formulate the above principle.

29. $\mathbb{W}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 30. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}fe4$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ $\mathbb{Q}xe1$ 32. $\mathbb{Q}xe7$ $\mathbb{Q}xe7$

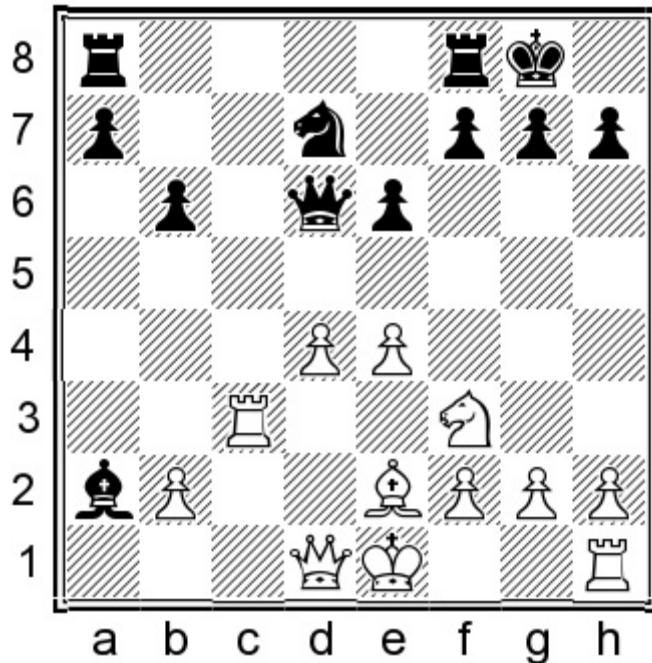


With the exchange of queens Black threw away a large part of his advantage, and although this endgame should still be winning, Chigorin managed to draw.

William Steinitz

Mikhail Chigorin

World Championship m 1892 (22)



We are getting near the end of the match. Chigorin lost a pawn in a Queen's Gambit and decided to win one back on a2. With his last move 14.e3-e4, Steinitz put the bishop on a2 in serious trouble. Black should do something about that, for example 14...f5 15.e5 ♜b4 16.0-0 ♜d5.

14...♜b4?

(Exercise no 130)

15.♗a1!

Now there is no escape for the bishop.

15...♝b3 16.♘d2 ♚c2

Or 16...♝a4 17.♝c4.

17.♝c4 ♜d6 18.♝xc2 ♜xd4 19.0-0

and White later won.

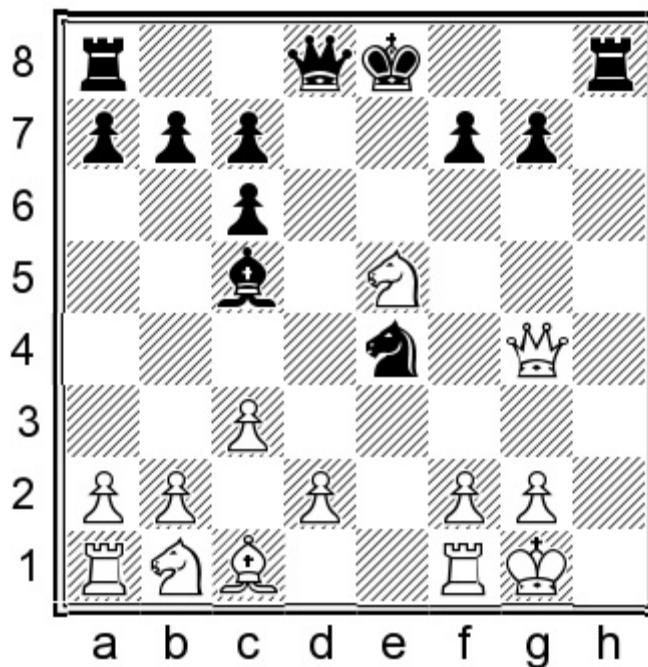
That brought the score to 9-8 – the dramatic finale you have already seen at the beginning of this chapter.

This summing-up of mistakes might leave an overzealous impression, although I have actually left quite a few things out. It does however give a good picture of how strong these players were and especially of their tactical abilities.

In the 19th century, they knew what brilliant chess looked like and occasionally they managed to produce beautiful combinations, but at the end of the century the general tactical level, although much higher than at the beginning, was still rather low. The average master of today would surely stand a good chance against Steinitz or Chigorin.

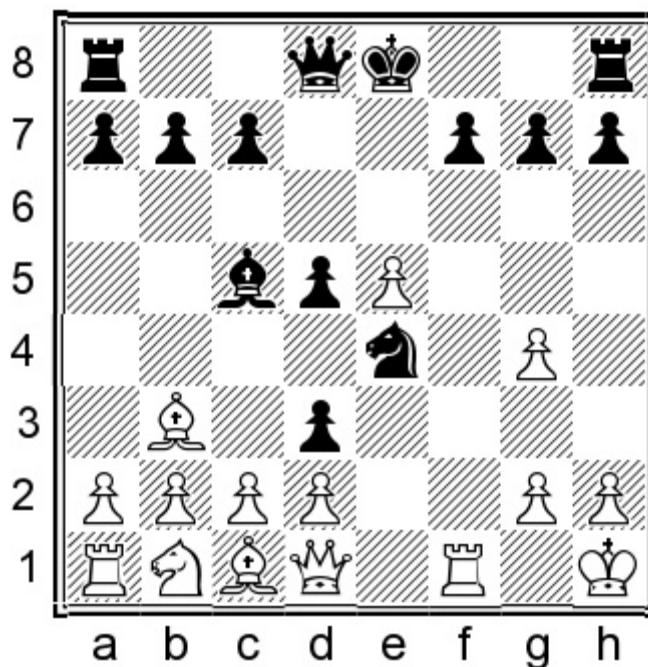
Exercises for Chapter 30

131 (*go to the solution*)



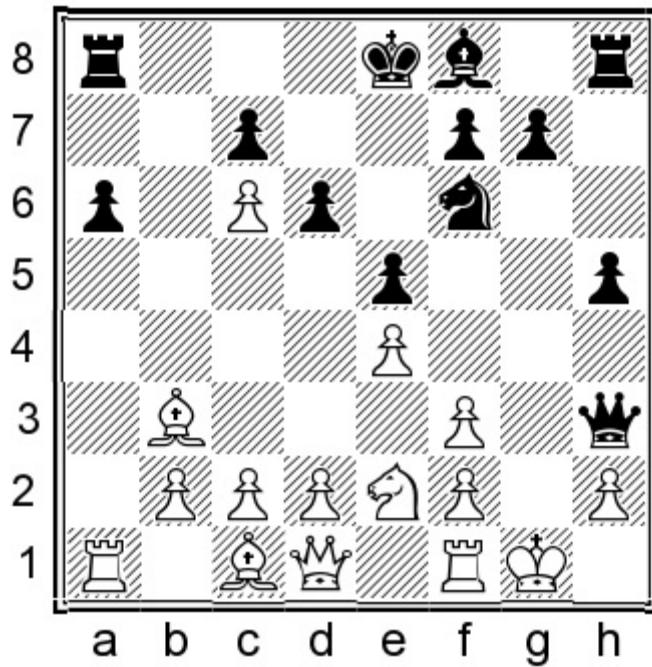
Black to move

132 (*go to the solution*)



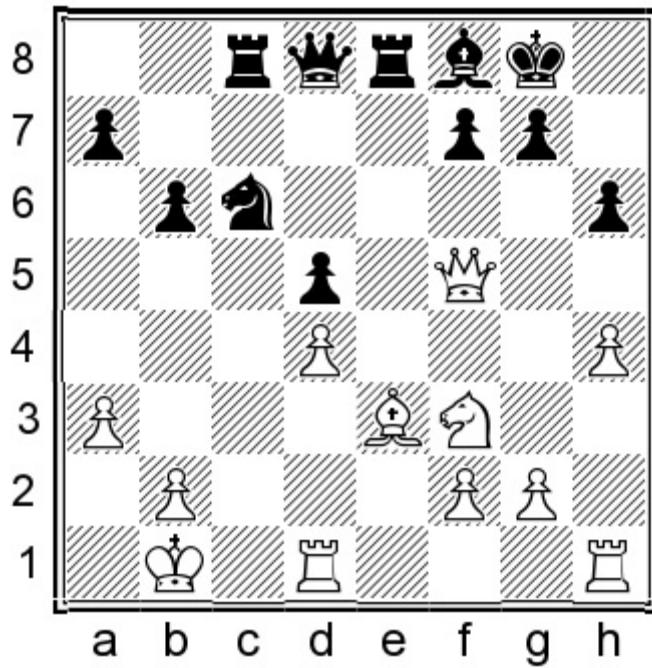
Black to move

133 (*go to the solution*)



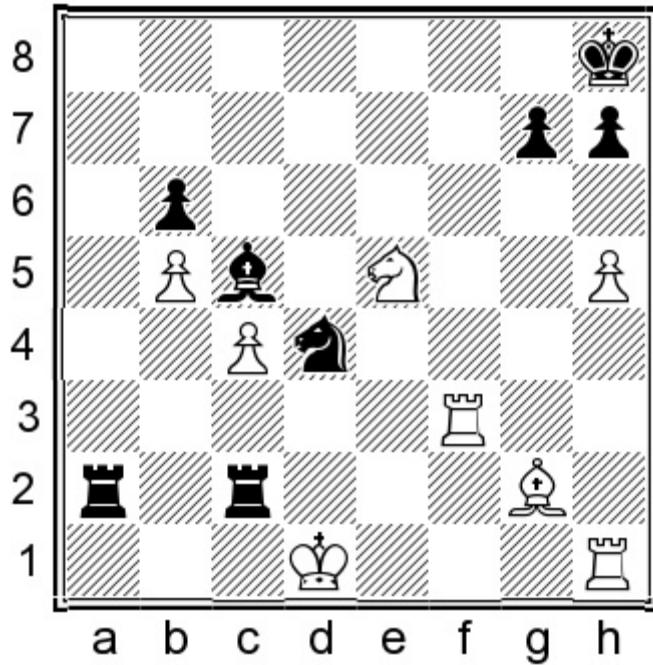
Black to move

134 (*go to the solution*)



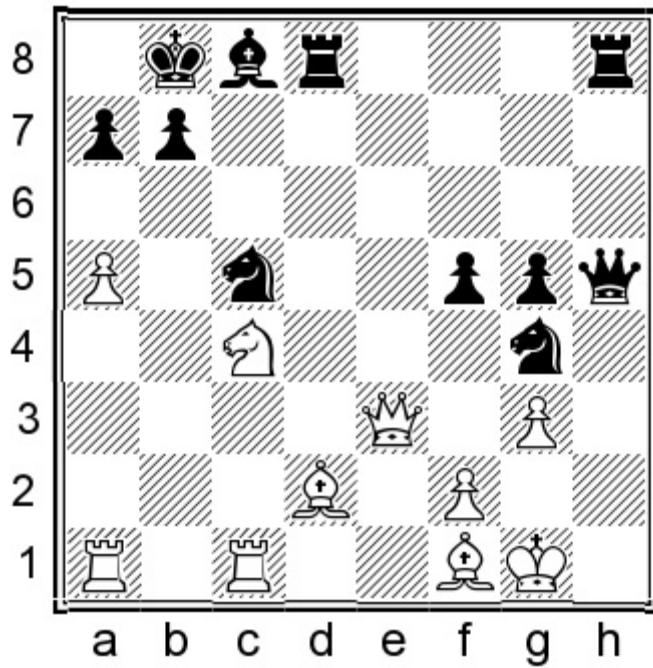
White to move

135 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

136 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

30 Accumulating tactical ideas

Approaching the end of our historical journey, the time has come to return to the question this book started with: do these historical developments somehow resemble the development at an individual level and, if so, can something be learned from them? Following a traditional division into tactics and strategy (middlegame), opening and endgame, I'll start with the topic addressed in the last two chapters: tactics.



The matches between La Bourdonnais and McDonnell stood at the very beginning of serious competition. From there on until the end of the 19th century the pyramid of the chess-playing community grew considerably upwards and in breadth. Reading books on chess history, one might get the impression that the tactical side of chess held few secrets for the players back then, and that the main reason for this enormous progress was the development of positional understanding.

Hopefully the last two chapters have corrected this impression. Though considerable progress was made throughout the 19th century, even near the end, in the Steinitz-Chigorin match we've looked at thoroughly, the level of tactical play was still far from today's standard. The whole idea that the so-called romantic players were brilliant tacticians and lousy positional players can be dismissed.

A better model for looking at progress in chess is based on the idea that tactics and positional play are the extremes on a single scale: that they are inseparably connected and that mastering them is mutually reinforcing.

Throughout the history of chess there has always been something of a basic dualism regarding playing style. In the Dutch language there is a well-known distinction between 'schuivers' and 'hakkers' that defines this dualism very well. There seems to be no good equivalent in English, something like 'woodpushers' and 'woodchoppers' is meant. Those style differences are real, but when you improve, it simultaneously affects both ends of the scale, and your level is telling more than your playing style.

Take for example Tigran Petrosian and Mikhail Tal. They are considered to have been poles apart with regard to chess style: the former very cautious and a genius in defence, the latter a daredevil with brilliant combinative skills. But if you compare them with two club players with the same difference in style, you will find that Petrosian and Tal are much more similar to each other than to their counterparts at club level. Having to choose between alternatives of about equal value, they will sometimes make different choices, but when a clear best move is available, Petrosian and Tal will almost always agree on that one, no matter if it is a good defensive or a good attacking move. To put this in our historical context, comparing these two to Steinitz and Chigorin will give the same outcome: Petrosian and Tal will have had much more overlap in the moves they chose than, for example, Petrosian and Steinitz.

Steinitz's preferred style of play was a non-tactical build-up of the game, based on accumulating small advantages. Only when the scales were turned could the search for the win by tactical means start. He called this scientific, but it is just a matter of style. Going for unbalanced and tactically

complicated positions is no less scientific. Of course, you cannot conjure up a winning combination from an equal position, but that doesn't mean you cannot strive for tactically complicated positions. That can be done perfectly without disturbing the balance to your disadvantage. And no matter what you prefer, your also opponent has a say in determining the character of the play.

Chigorin preferred aggressive openings and tactical complications, but he did not claim that this was *the* way chess has to be played. Instead, in reaction to Steinitz's claims, he said that he was 'not guided by abstract theoretical considerations' but only by 'the data as they appear to me in this or that position of the game, which serve as an object of detailed and possibly precise analysis.'¹⁴¹ This sounds like a very modern position to take, but strangely enough, in chess history the verdict seems to be that Steinitz's ideas prevailed over Chigorin's. But Steinitz simply was the better player, and that could just as well have been the other way around.

Actually, in a similar battle 30 years before, it *was* the other way around. Paulsen, who is considered to have been an inspiration for Steinitz's style, a forerunner to positional chess, didn't stand a chance against Morphy's attacking play. But as we have seen, chess historians have managed to fit in Morphy to the standard narrative, by adding some 'deep positional foundation' to his style.

Steinitz's idea of chess cleaned of tactics didn't hold. There are some well-known statements about the nature of our game claiming that 'chess is 99% tactics', and though one can discuss the number, it seems clear that to understand chess, one has to delve deep into the concrete peculiarities of every position, as Chigorin proposed.

The opposite can be identified in Philidor's model games. They try to exemplify some explicit positional ideas, but because of the absence of any 'tactical fine-tuning', this only leads to chess that hurts the eye.

Some of Steinitz's successors, like Alekhine, Tal and Kasparov, showed that you can do justice to the balance in chess *and*, from the start of the game, bring in as much tactical complexity as you like.

Regarding style in chess, there are of course more nuances than this simple opposition between attacking and positional play. In both extremes (or better: on the whole scale) enormous progress has been made and I think that the great majority of new discoveries in chess are of a very mixed nature.

If we concentrate on the purely tactical side, the previous chapter gave an impression of the level towards the end of the 19th century. Actually, I think the match between Steinitz and Chigorin was quite exceptional, considering the number of accidents that happened. Maybe the Havana climate did take its toll to some extent. Nonetheless, it evidently wasn't a match between two strong tacticians. We saw completely winning positions being spoiled, not too difficult and even simple tactics being missed and lines calculated badly.

Looking at the tactical level of our day, two major differences from those days can be mentioned. They had few opportunities for training their tactical abilities and their tactical 'knowledge' was only a fraction of ours. These two features overlap to some extent; knowledge and ability are notoriously difficult to distinguish in chess.

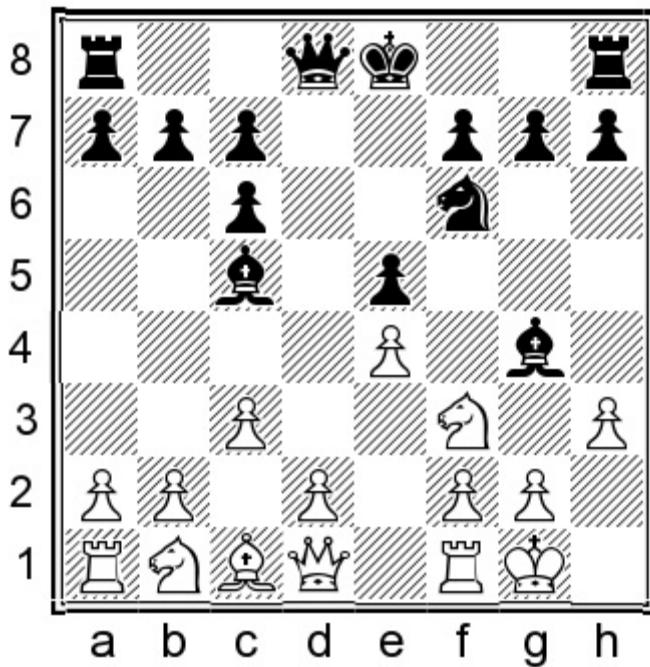
Regarding the first, one can think of knowledge of typical combinations. Let's take for example a device that was discovered quite early in history, the 'h4xg5 line opening piece sacrifice' we have seen

in the chapter on Greco.

Information didn't spread as quickly as in our day and the fact that an idea occurred in a game or in a book didn't mean it was common knowledge. Anderssen, however, knew Greco's games, and he used it in the following nice, though not perfect, miniature against a member of the Berlin Pleiades.

Carl Mayet – Adolf Anderssen Berlin 1851

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗b5 ♘c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.♗xc6 dxc6 6.0-0 ♘g4 7.h3

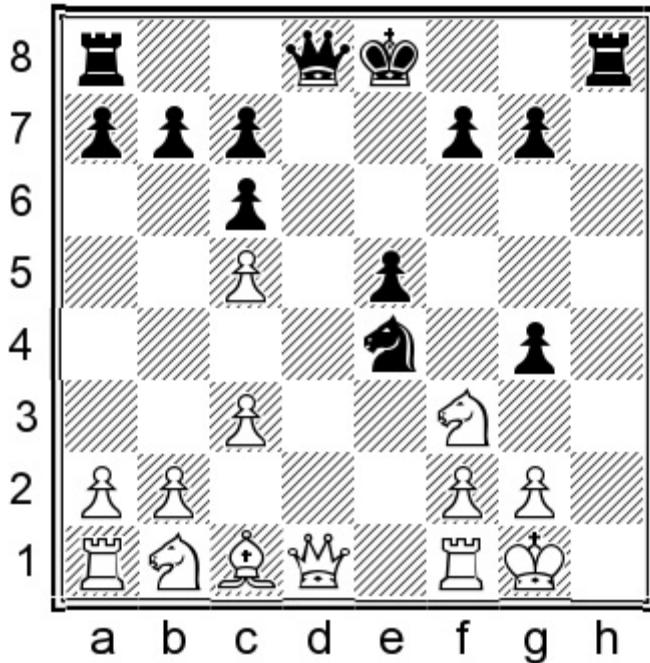


7...h5

There it is. White wasn't forced to take the bait; for example 8.d3 was a good way to avoid the coming complications.

8.hxg4 hxg4 9.♘xe5?

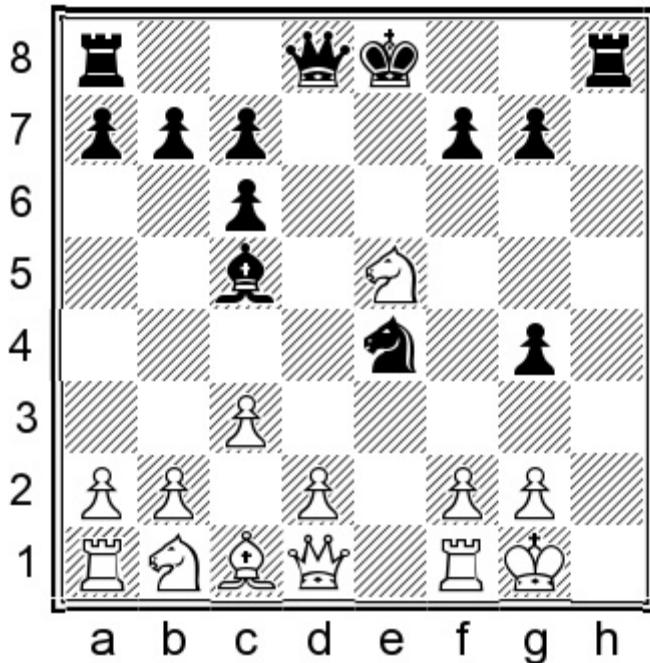
Too risky: 9.d4 was better. After 9...♘xe4 one good move for White is 10.♔e2, but not 10.dxc5?



This gives Black the first chance for a (sophisticated) version of a typical combination with 10... $\mathbb{E}h1+$! 11. $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ (if 12. $\mathbb{E}xf2+$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}xc1$ wins) 12... $\mathbb{Q}xd1$ and Black is much better, though it remains a bit messy.

9...g3?

Here Black missed a good opportunity with 9... $\mathbb{Q}xe4$.



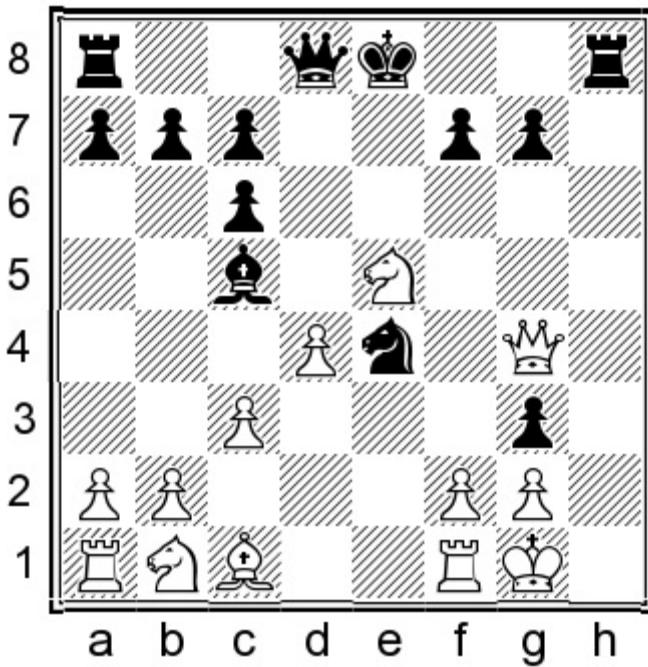
Threatening to start a mating attack with 10.-- 10... $\mathbb{W}h4$, but also the better known version of the tactic we've just seen with 10... $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 11. $\mathbb{E}xf2$ $\mathbb{E}h1+!$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$.

This also works after 10. $\mathbb{W}xg4$, the move Anderssen might have been afraid of, since it prevents

... $\mathbb{W}h4$ (Exercise no 131): 10... $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ 11. $\mathbb{B}xf2$ $\mathbb{E}h1+!$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$, winning the queen.

10.d4 $\mathbb{Q}xe4$ 11. $\mathbb{W}g4?$

Now was the moment for 11.fgx3 and Black hasn't enough for the piece.



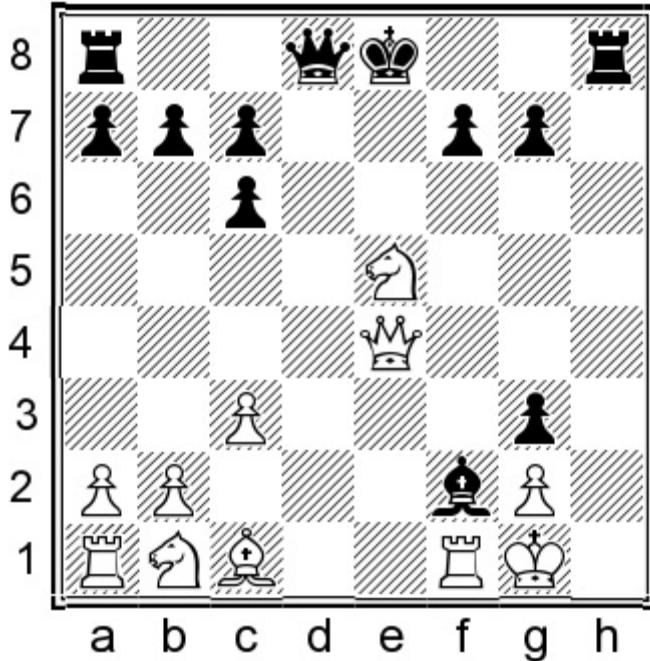
11... $\mathbb{Q}xd4?!$

This move doesn't spoil the win but it raises (once more) the strong suspicion that Anderssen didn't notice our tactic: 11...gx $f2+$ 12. $\mathbb{B}xf2$ $\mathbb{E}h1+!$ 13. $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$ was directly winning.

12. $\mathbb{W}xe4?!$

A pity: by playing 12.cxd4 he would have given Anderssen a last chance to prove our suspicions wrong.

12... $\mathbb{Q}xf2+$



White resigned. The pretty finish would have been 13. $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ $\mathbb{W}d1+$ (or first 13... $\mathbb{Q}h1+$) 14. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}xh1$ $\mathbb{W}xf1$ mate.

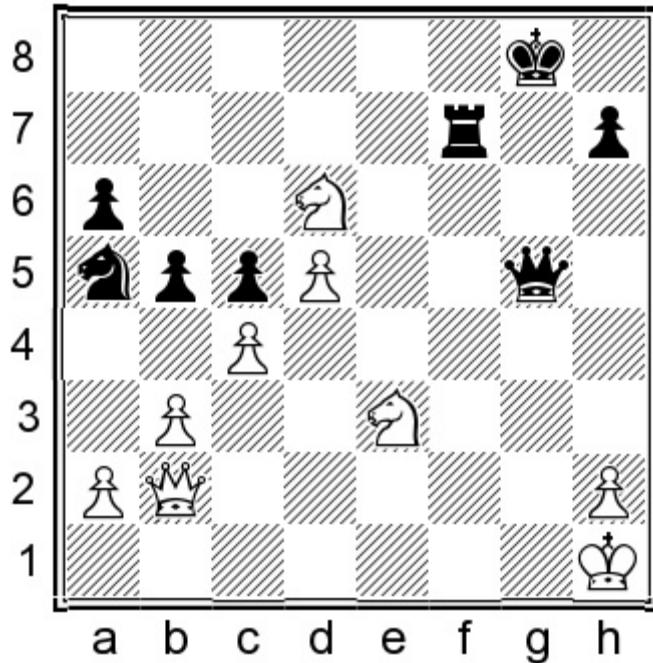
The ...h7-h5 idea Anderssen took from Greco, but the knight fork tactic introduced by ... $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ seemingly wasn't in his bag of tricks. Probably it was still waiting to be discovered. For a player of Anderssen's strength it should not be impossible to find this over the board, but it sure helps if you have seen it before.

The next position is the finish from a well-known tremendous fight, too late in history to be the original, but probably no problem for Petrosian either way.

Tigran Petrosian

Boris Spassky

World Championship m 1966 (10)



White to move

30. $\mathbb{W}h8+$! 1-0

If an idea like the one we are looking at gets incorporated into the repertoire of the stronger players, after a while more sophisticated versions of it start to appear. Some years after the above game, Anderssen together with Max Lange reached the next (sort of delayed) version of Greco's line-opening mechanism in a brilliant miniature. Although it is often given as an actual game it seems to have been the product of a joint analysis:¹⁴²

Adolf Anderssen – Max Lange Breslau 1859

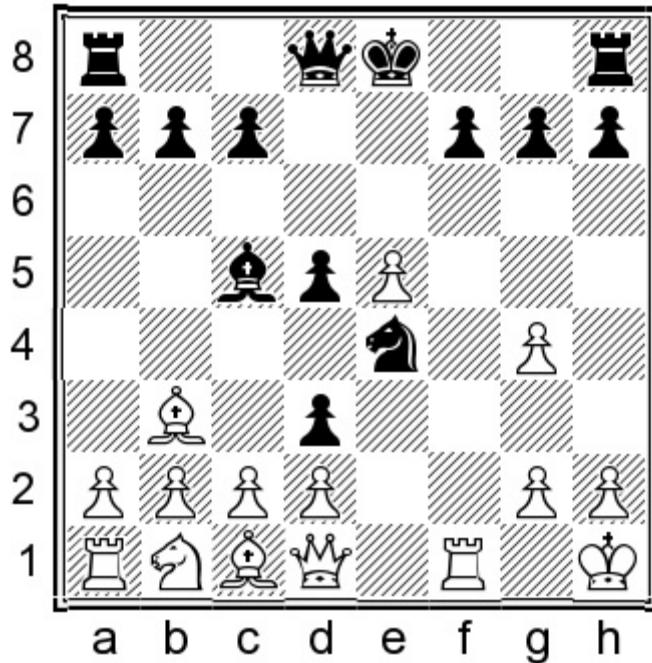
1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b5$ $\mathbb{Q}d4$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ exd4 5. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 6. e5 d5 7. $\mathbb{Q}b3$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 8. f3 $\mathbb{Q}e4$!?

The start of the spectacle.

9. 0-0 d3 10. fxg4?

Unfortunately, 10. $\mathbb{W}e1$ refutes Black's set-up, but that's only a small blemish.

10... $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}h1$

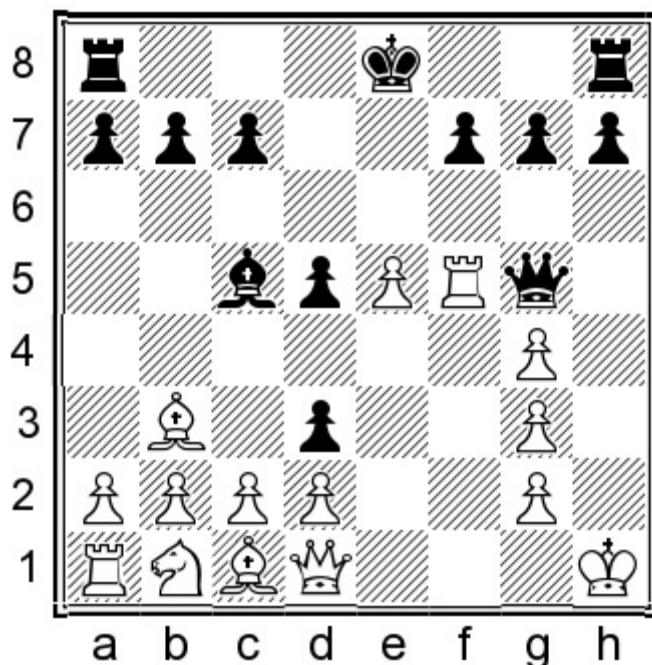


(Exercise no 132)

11...Qg3+!! 12.hxg3 Kg5

If Black immediately tries to open the h-file with 12...h5, White can keep it closed with 13.g5 (with the funny continuation 13...h4 14.g4 h3 15.g3). Now, little is left to defend against the threats 13...Wh6 mate and 13...h5.

13.Qf5



13...h5! 14.gxh5 ♖xf5 15.g4 ♕xh5+ 16.gxh5 ♖e4 17.♖f3 ♖h4+ 18.♖h3 ♖e1+ 19.♔h2 ♖g1+

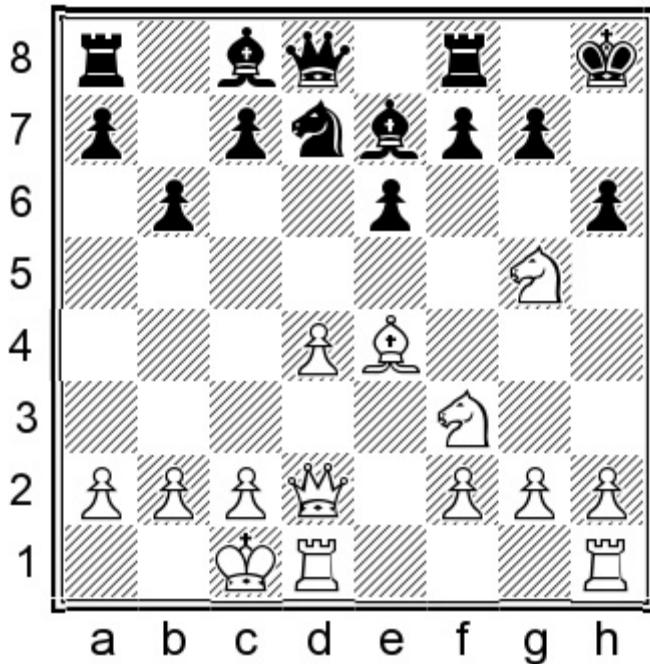
White resigned.

This typical tactical fight of trying to open lines versus keeping them closed reminded me of a more recent but no less brilliant game.

Judit Polgar

Ferenc Berkes

Budapest 2003



Black to move

White has just played 13.♘e4, and after 13...♗b8 White can follow up with Greco's move 14.h4, with an interesting position. Black, however, took the bait – understandably, since White's last move seems to be mistaken.

13...hxg5

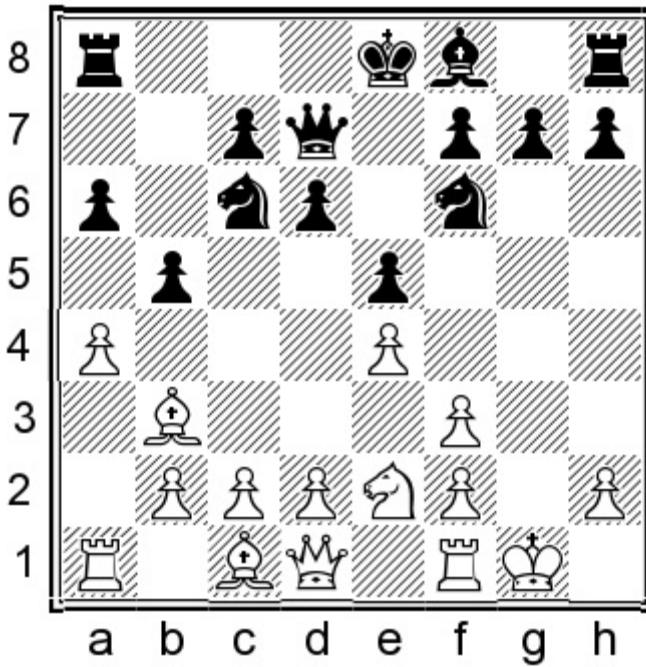
If White now takes the rook with 14.♖xa8, Black wins an extra piece with 14...g4, since the knight cannot move because of♗g5, winning the queen – and no lines against Black's king get opened. But White had something different in mind.

14.g4!

Amazing. White finds the time for a quiet move, ensuring that the h-file will be opened. After 14...♗b8 15.h4 White's attack proved decisive in the end.

No less brilliant was Tarrasch's version of our idea in the following game, though it eventually only led to a draw.

Curt von Bardeleben
Siegbert Tarrasch
Hastings 1895



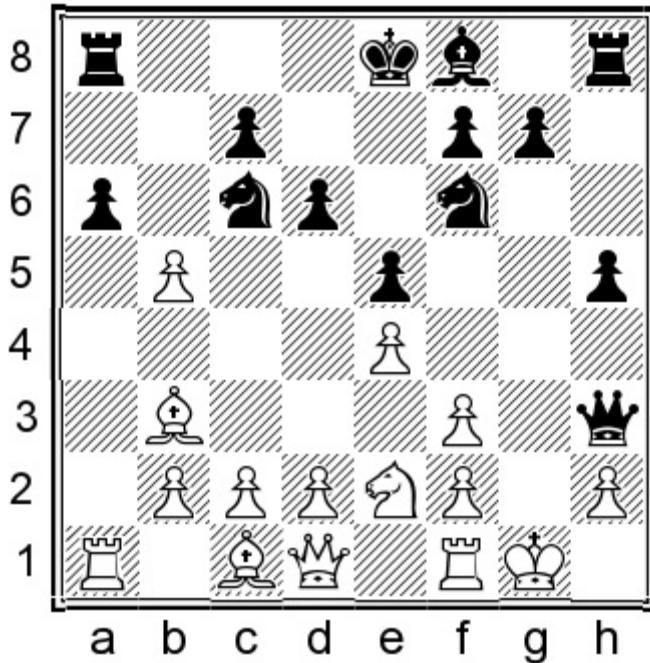
Black to move

10... $\mathbb{W}h3!$

The starting point of the combination. Even with the previous exercises as a warm-up I didn't dare to ask you for a move at this moment. 'A splendid and profound combination,' Lasker commented.

11.axb5 h5!

The idea becomes clear. Black is going to force White to open the h-file. (Reversing the moves doesn't work, as the h-file remains closed after 11... $\mathbb{Q}g4?$ 12.fxg4 h5 13.g5.)



White now has to take defensive measures: 12.bxc6? (*Exercise no 133*) 12... $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ 13.fxg4 hxg4 14. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{W}xh2+$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ $\mathbb{W}h3+$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}h1$ mate.

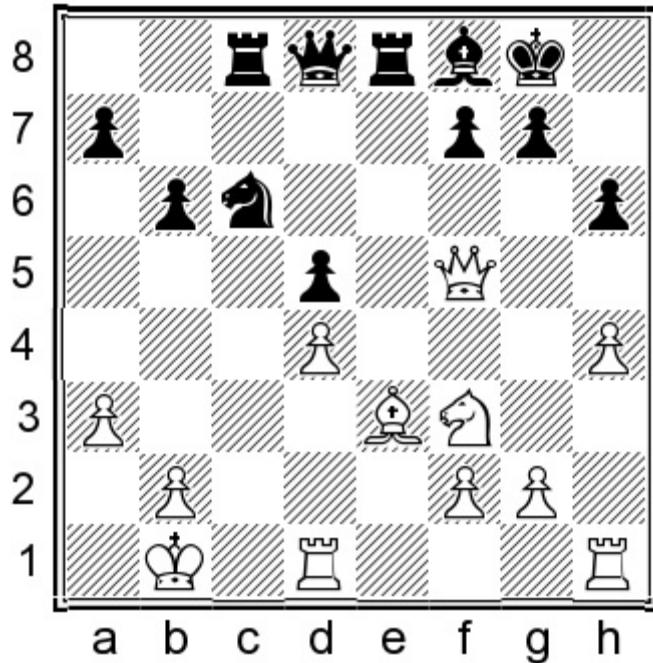
In the game White played

12. $\mathbb{R}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 13.fxg4 hxg4 14. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ 15. $\mathbb{R}a3$ $\mathbb{W}xh2+$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ axb5 17. $\mathbb{R}g3$

White has given back the piece, but the extra pawn didn't prove sufficient for Black to win – no reward, alas, for the beautiful concept.

One last example of the line-opening device, again combined with another important tactic. Unfortunately it isn't completely correct, as in one line Black has a nice but rather hidden defence at his disposal, so it's not surprising that it slipped through in several older books on tactics.

Petar Orev
Gillhausen
Correspondence 1955



White to move

(Exercise no 134)

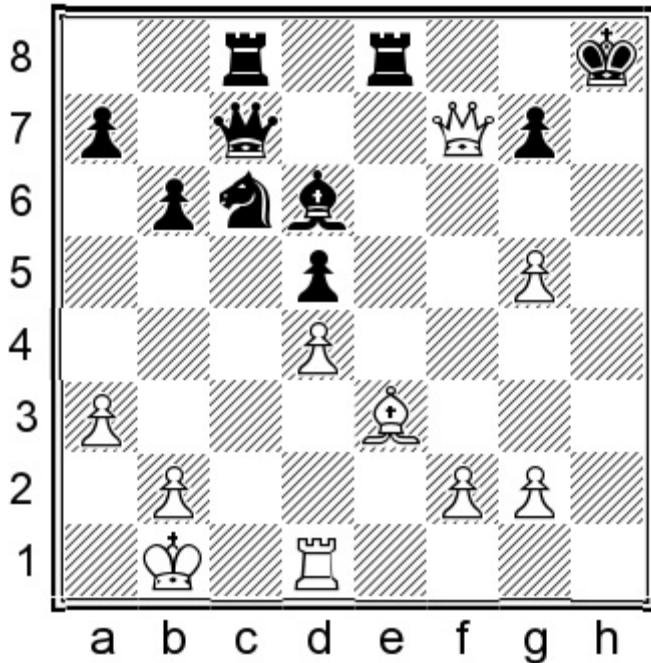
1. $\mathbb{Q}g5!$ hxg5 2. hxg5 g6? 3. $\mathbb{E}h8+$!

The second tactic, and also one that might come in handy on occasion. It had to be foreseen: if Black is allowed ... $\mathbb{Q}g7$, the attack is over.

3... $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 4. $\mathbb{W}xf7$

Black resigned, as there is no defence against 5. $\mathbb{E}h1$ mate.

At first sight the other defence, 2... $\mathbb{Q}d6$, makes no difference, but after 3. $\mathbb{E}h8+?$ $\mathbb{Q}xh8$ 4. $\mathbb{W}xf7$ Black has the clever 4... $\mathbb{W}c7!$.



After 5. $\mathbb{Q}h1+$ there is 5... $\mathbb{Q}h2$ and Black's material surplus decides the issue. Instead of 3. $\mathbb{Q}h8?$ in this last variation, White has several promising continuations, like 3. $\mathbb{Q}h4$, but there are no clean wins.

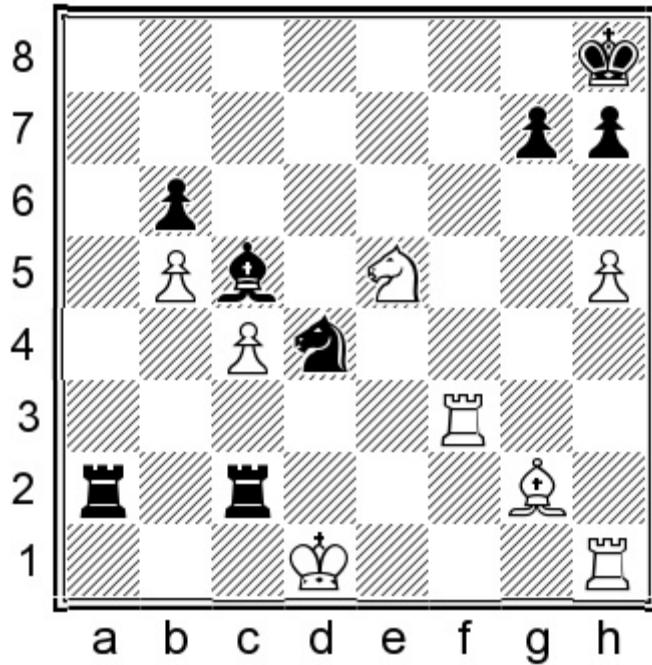
So 1 point for $\mathbb{Q}g5$, 1 extra point for the $\mathbb{Q}h8$ tactic and 2 more points for those who saw this isn't correct after 2... $\mathbb{Q}d6$ (please raise your hands – well, as usual, only the silicon guy).

It is not impossible to discover these advanced tactics at the board without having seen them before. Players with a natural talent, like Morphy, needed very little input to see very much. But for most of us, hard work is needed to build up a substantial tactical base.

This brings me to the second difference – or more specifically, the second advantage we have over players from the 19th century. Not only is our knowledge of typical tactics far more in-depth, but we also have more ways of training our tactical skills, with books, programs, engines and online.

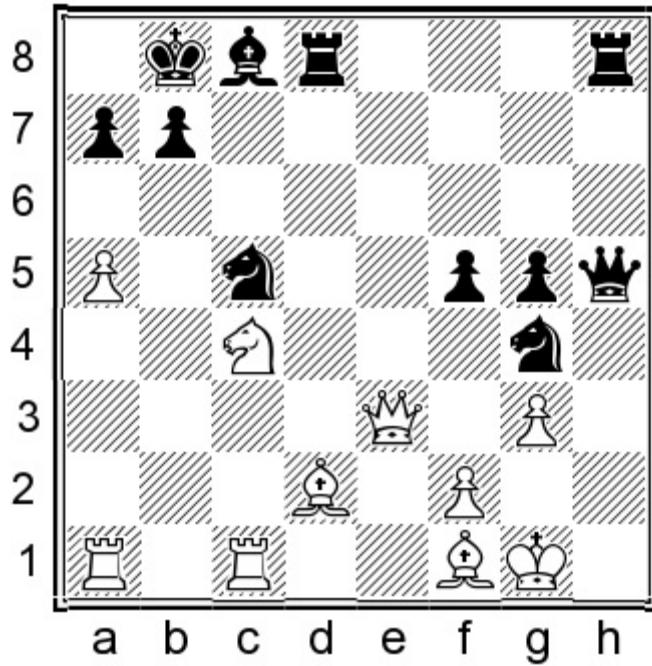
In the past they had very little. Apart from a few examples from practical play, there were composed middlegame problems and (tactical) endgame studies. We have already seen some problems from Del Rio, and Anderssen also made a nice collection of middlegame problems, though most of them are not as 'natural' as Del Rio's positions. Stamma's collection of 1737 (*The Noble Game of Chess* in English translation) is of high quality as well.

Here are two nice examples of Stamma, the second one slightly more artificial than the first.



(Exercise no 135)

1. $\mathbb{E}f8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf8$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $hxg6$ 3. $hxg6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}d5+$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ mate.



(Exercise no 136)

1. $\mathbb{W}f4+$ $gxf4$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}xf4+$ $\mathbb{Q}a8$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}b6+$ (Greco's line-opening device) 3... $axb6$ 4. $AXB6+$ $\mathbb{Q}a6$ 5. $\mathbb{E}xc8+$ $\mathbb{E}xc8$ 6. $\mathbb{E}xa6+$ $bxa6$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}g2+$ $\mathbb{E}c6$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}xc6$ mate.

Columns in magazines and newspapers often had a weekly puzzle, with positions like the above. These

were the sparse opportunities to train your tactical skills. I'm sure that some players of today solve more tactical exercises on a single day than the old masters did in their entire life. Playing and analysing of course does also add to your tactical powers, but compared to the old masters today's stronger players are real calculation machines.

The absence of training possibilities makes the low level of tactical play in the previous chapters understandable. The knight fork with just one preparatory move that Steinitz fell for twice would take today's 'puzzle-rusher' only a split second.

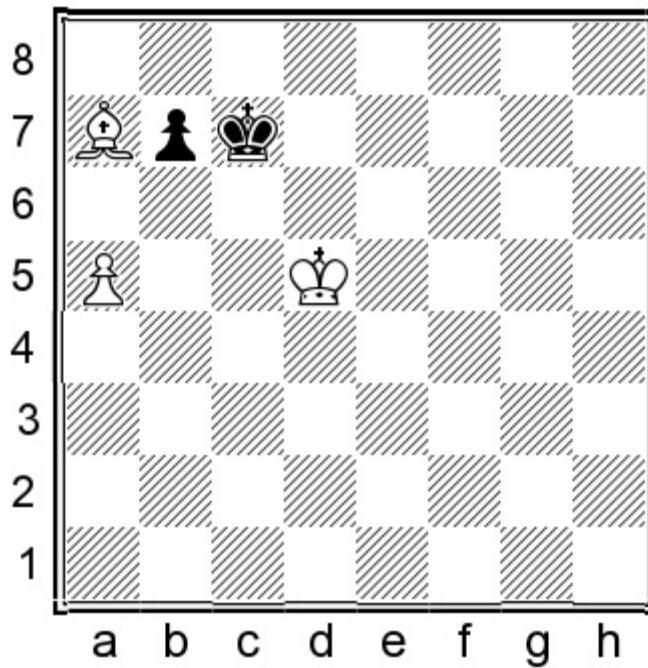
The image of Romantic chess consisting of strong tactics and bad positional play doesn't make sense. Although the players at the time had some occasional brilliancies, in general they made a lot of tactical mistakes and oversights. This explains why a player like Morphy, with his exceptional natural talent for seeing tactical possibilities, became the world's best player with hardly any study at all. He saw the same brilliancies as, for example, Anderssen, but on a more mundane level he made fewer mistakes and his calculations were better.

Knowing many typical combinations or elements of combinations contributes a lot to your tactical strength. Discovering and developing them is a major part of the history of improvement in chess. One could call this 'the accumulation of small bits of knowledge', to vary on Steinitz. This is the way the development of the individual resembles historical development – not sensational, but more realistic than a passage through different styles of play.

The other advice that follows from this historical excursion can hardly be called sensational either. Our wealth of training possibilities has made us, on average, much stronger tacticians than the players of the 19th century. From the start of serious competition onwards, this improvement occurred gradually, and the level at the end of the pre-computer era was already incomparably higher, but the possibilities resulting from the digital age have added even more extras. So you had better make use of them. I'm not sure the puzzle-rush and its equivalents are the most helpful, but there are quite a few other promising tools, like those based on rehearsing and adaptive functions – which endorse the effective 'accumulation' mentioned above. Today players that are less gifted than Morphy can become much stronger tacticians.

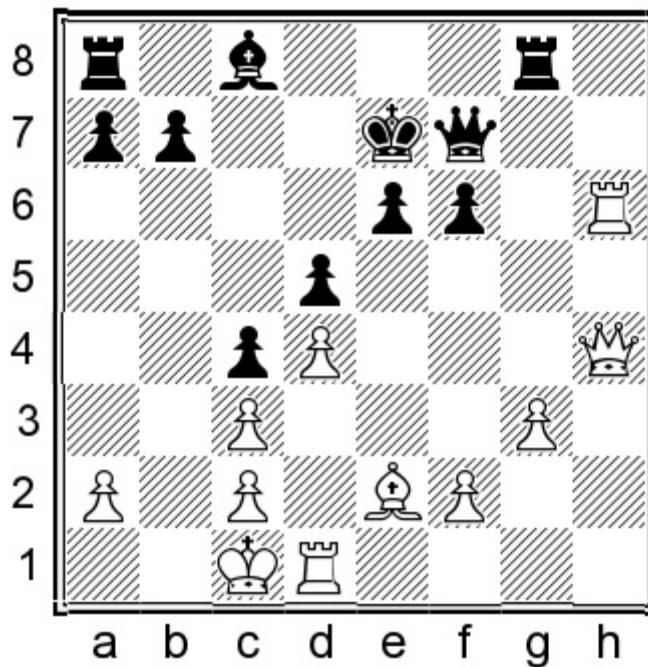
Exercises for Chapter 31

137 (go to the solution)



White to move

138 (go to the solution)



White to move



31

The best plan is the absence of it

Let's move from tactics to the other end of the scale, positional play (strategy). Starting from Lasker, 'planning based on evaluation' has been identified as the core of Steinitz's theory. Throughout this book, every time I mentioned 'Steinitz's theories' I wanted to (and sometimes did) add something like 'or what others made of it', which has become a bit tiresome. Steinitz did have some strong opinions on how chess should be played, but this belief in the omnipotence of making plans based on evaluations wasn't one of them.

Lasker summarizes his view on Steinitz's main idea:

'This fundamental and universal principle be briefly expressed as follows: the basis of a masterly plan is always a valuation.' To look for a reason 'residing not in the persons or minds of the players but in the position on the board' Lasker called a revolutionary idea because the masters of the past supposedly were led by 'invention, intuition, inspiration, genius, or anything else of the kind.'

This can lead a player to success only by chance: 'Certainly, he will sometimes be able to hit upon a sound plan, not like a swallow that in the midst of its flight catches its prey with ease, but like a poodle which clumsily jumps after a fly.'

Although unfortunately I have to settle for the role of the poodle, I'd like to add a few things to this. I really don't think Lasker's description of the players before Steinitz does them justice. When we play a game, we build up the position from the beginning and constantly have ideas about its merits and about possible (favourable) directions the play might develop into. As the game progresses, these ideas are constantly revised, in major or minor ways. I don't know if this counts as 'making plans based on evaluations' but I'm sure that before Steinitz they played chess in exactly the same way. Everybody plays the position 'at hand' – there simply is no other way.

When thinking, a lot of tactical and strategic options pass the mind's eye of a player, depending on his knowledge and experience. So I would rather vary on Lasker with: *the basis of a (masterly) plan is*

always knowledge and recognition. If I can pick one option out of Lasker's list of how not to think, the player's intuition is not that bad a choice. The source of our moves is 'residing in the minds of the players'.

Following Lasker, 'planning based on evaluation' has sometimes been honoured as Steinitz's Copernican revolution. But I don't believe anything has changed in the way chess was played because of Steinitz's ideas – at least not on a cosmic scale. The old guys played chess just like we do – and for this no conscious efforts are needed. If you look at a position, it starts automatically, and your mind tries to arrive at what the position is about as quickly as possible, utilizing all the knowledge you have gathered before.

In my first book, *Move First, Think Later*, I gave quite some attention to the issue of making plans, confessing that I never make plans in the traditional way – leaning back at some important moments, taking a good look at the characteristics of a position, and then deriving a plan out of them. I don't *make* plans, I *see* plans, just like I see combinations. This combines with the idea of a single scale, with tactics at the one extreme and positional play at the other. And it conflicts with the idea of two fundamentally different modes of thinking, which Lasker adheres to.

I think that at this point in history, with Lasker, the over-valuation of planning in chess began. So if there indeed was something like a Copernican revolution, I'd want to propose a contra-revolution. *Making* plans – one of the worst ideas in the history of chess theory.

Science in chess

In Steinitz's day, the sciences were developing rapidly and by calling his theories 'scientific', Steinitz neatly connected to the spirit of the time. Later on in history, under the influence of Lasker and Euwe, this appreciation became rather commonplace. Steinitz's theory increasingly gets presented as an empirical technique of deriving good plans/moves out of the evaluation of a position. Kunnen says:

'The introduction of the concepts of *balance of position* and *accumulation of small advantages* provided the new style with a scientific basis. [...] The aim of the theory of balance was to give a judgement of a position on the basis of objective criteria and the theory of accumulation prescribed how to act on the basis of this judgement: which moves keep the balance, how can an unbalanced position be exploited? Lasker would later explain that players like Anderssen and Chigorin, no matter how thought-out they proceeded, finally believed in a higher power, their genius, which would surely bring about the winning combination. This idealistic approach has been vanquished by Steinitz and replaced with an empirically founded theory.'¹⁴³

And this is what Steinitz's biographers Isaak and Vladimir Linder wrote:

'Steinitz's outstanding contribution to chess came in the form of his positional principles, many of which are still valuable today. Among them are methods for evaluating the position and developing a plan. The accumulation of small advantages and gaining an advantage through maneuvers were also techniques that were new to the strategy of the game. [...] Steinitz systematized these principles

and laws of chess in the 1880s'.¹⁴⁴

These authors, and they are not alone, are somewhat overoptimistic about the scientific character and prescriptive power of Steinitz's theory. To support the assertion that it 'prescribed how to act on the basis of the evaluation of a position' some examples or quotations would have been helpful.

We saw Chernev saying that 'Tarrasch then refined these theories of Steinitz and fashioned a technique based on principles by means of which a player could be guided in the conduct of his game.' Unzicker claims that 'the systematic Tarrasch assimilated Steinitz's ideas into a scientific system.'¹⁴⁵ According to Kunnen it was Tarrasch who not only further developed Steinitz's principles but also made them measurable:

'It was Tarrasch's merit that he formulated general principles on how to handle certain types of positions. [...] However, the way his evaluation came about, was different. While this remained a slightly obscure process with Steinitz, Tarrasch tried to design an objective scientific method. Power, space and time were its main elements.'¹⁴⁶

Tarrasch certainly offers a lot more advice than Steinitz. And he even made some efforts to quantify certain aspects, like the time aspect, which was especially valuable to Tarrasch ('Das Tempo ist die Seele des Schachspiels.'). But to characterize these pieces of advice, proverbs, rules and principles as 'an objective scientific method' shows way too much confidence in their prescriptive power. They are better described as the proverbial good advice of a wise grandmother than as a form of science.

Steinitz's own evaluations, for example those in the Evans Gambit, might be regarded as proof that little science was involved.

However, this image of Steinitz and Tarrasch as having a scientific approach to chess has become rather dominant in chess history, and it lives on until today. In Tarrasch's day, though, there already was some opposition. Very well known is Nimzowitsch's reaction to Tarrasch's *Die Moderne Schachpartie*, claiming it was not modern at all. But Nimzowitsch didn't want to part from scientific and systematic thinking. He only wanted another system (his system!), which was even more systematic.

In discussion with Tarrasch and Nimzowitsch, the Russian player and theorist Semyon Alapin was one of the first to cast doubts on the power of these so-called scientific systems in chess. About Steinitz he wrote,

'[...] in my opinion, he was the first to make the attempt, albeit unsuccessful, to draw up [...] a codex of general considerations in words (!), which he called "the principles of the modern school", and which supposedly formed a guide for the best way to play chess. [...] The most important difficulty here is, in my opinion, the too great power of "words" upon our mind, which [...] almost always gets carried away to overestimate the practical value of general considerations. [...] For all "general considerations" in chess, even if they should be correct (which is almost never the case ...), are at best just considered as possibly (!) useful "direction signs", which are only in some circumstances (!) suited to reduce a

haphazard wandering in the forest of the variations, to shorten the path of research [...] The “road” itself (!) though is, and remains, practically speaking, only the purely empirical, ad hoc established variation, consisting of concrete and effectively combining moves!'¹⁴⁷

Alapin adds the warning that the reader of all the verbal generalities in Steinitz’s and Tarrasch’s works might easily get the impression that he has now also learnt the concrete topic. But he has only learned to ‘talk’ chess, not to play it well!

To my mind, this is more modern than Nimzowitsch, but Alapin has been largely forgotten. Because of his emphasis on the concrete element in chess, I am tempted to put him in a ‘school’ together with his compatriot Chigorin. However – and this probably will no longer come as a surprise in this history – these gentlemen too couldn’t stand the sight of one another. The fact that Alapin sent his analyses of the Evans Gambit to Steinitz before his second match with Chigorin surely didn’t contribute to their friendly relations.

Most of what has been published about the relationship between Chigorin and Alapin stems from Soviet historians, which might explain why Alapin has ended up with the reputation of the bad guy.

Ariadne’s thread

Semyon Alapin

We already saw Lasker speaking of a magic wand with respect to the power of Steinitz’s ideas and he also mentions the search for ‘the philosopher’s stone’. Now Lasker claimed that Steinitz *did* succeed on this mission, but I think these metaphors are indeed well chosen, since they describe a search for something that is essentially unattainable. There is no scientific method to lead you from an evaluation to the best move.

Maybe, as a small refinement to Purdy – who wouldn’t agree on this since he was a big fan of the ideas mentioned above; he only thought they should be attributed to Lasker instead of Steinitz – it is appropriate to speak of ‘the Great Lasker Hoax’.

The idea of planning played a major role in Lasker’s philosophy, of life as well as of chess. In his *Manual* he makes a sharp distinction between combinational and positional play:

‘The combination-player thinks forward: he starts from the given position and tries the forceful moves in his mind; the position-player thinks backward: he conceives a position to be arrived at and works toward that position of which he is more conscious than the one on the board. He sees successive stages of the position aimed at and he visualizes the stage in a reverse



order. If one position, according to his plan, is to follow another he sees the one that is to follow first and he deduces, as it were, the anterior position from it.¹⁴⁸

This is rather typical for the idealistic tone of *Lasker's Manual*. I don't think there is such a big distinction between tactical and positional play – they are like extremes on a scale, and the great majority of the variations we see, the evaluations we make and the decisions we take are of a very mixed nature. Basically I don't believe in the different directions in our thinking that Lasker sees. If we look at a (new) position, our mind quickly starts trying to discover what it is about and essentially this is forward thinking. Of course, all kinds of future possibilities and dream case scenarios play a role, so in an abstract sense there might also be some 'backward' aspects in our thinking.

If we are to describe our thinking in terms of direction, I would prefer the spiral. Expectations, possible moves, evaluations, lines, ideas, tactics, strategies, hopes, adjustments, trial and error – in a raging interaction, they (hopefully) lead to the essence of the position.

This spiral bears some resemblance to the often (most famously by Alexander Kotov) criticized 'back-and-forth thinking'. In discussing different forms of thinking in *How to Choose a Chess Move*, Andrew Soltis tries to defend this 'method':

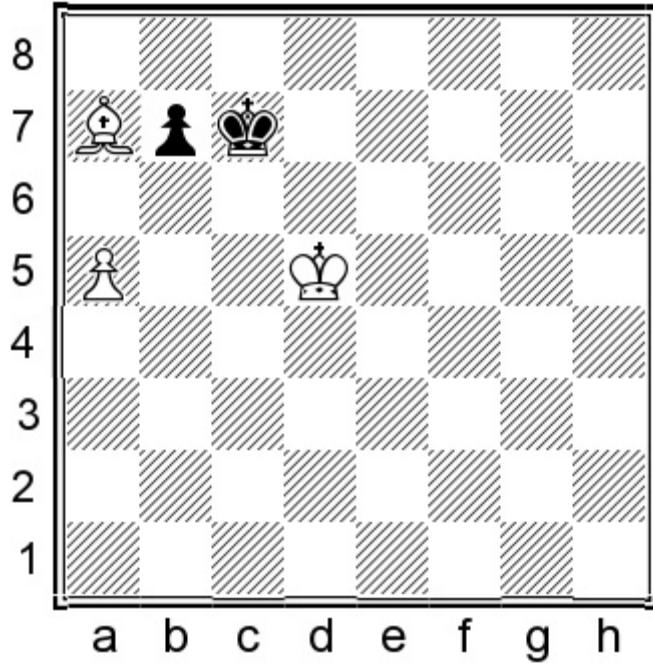
'Kotov reserved his greatest scorn for the player who goes back and forth between candidates [...] But the back-and-forth method can yield the best results in many positions because of the serendipitous nature of analysis. When you analyse one candidate you often come up with insights that you can use to improve your analysis of another candidate.'¹⁴⁹

I think those new insights not only concern other candidates but every aspect of your thinking process, like your expectations, your evaluation or your big and small plans. This spiral way of thinking is just a description, not a model that can be followed, but it does more justice to what is happening in our minds than a one-way 'evaluation-plan-candidates-calculations-move' model. This image of our thinking process stands in complete opposition to Lasker's idealism:

'[...] every spirit, however great or small, in combat with what to him is complicated has need of this admirable faculty of conceiving plans with which Nature has provided him. [...] The plan shall provide for long and manifold series of moves and conduce to a desirable end. [...] and the Chess-player, to grasp the immense number of possibilities, would have need of Ariadne's thread, namely, of a plan.'¹⁵⁰

Now we all would like to possess such a powerful thread so this raises high expectations for the examples with which Lasker continues his story.

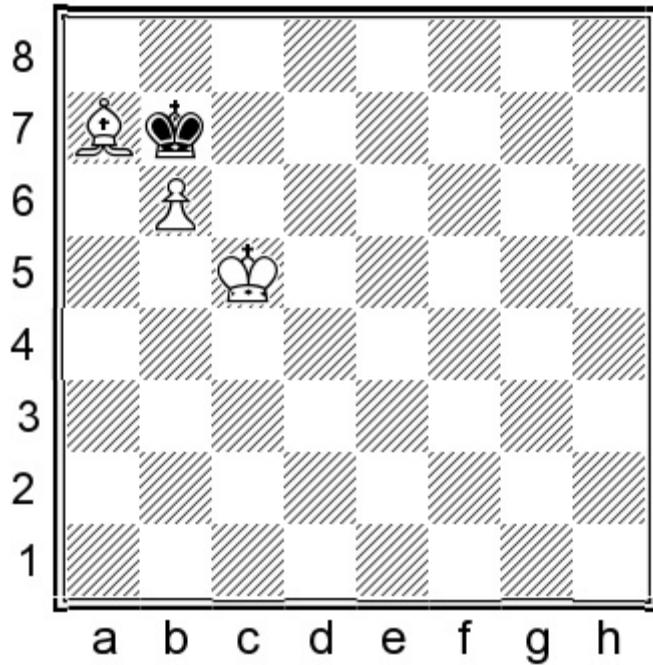
The first is a very tricky endgame, supposedly from a game Metger-Paulsen.



(Exercise no 137)

What makes this a strange example is the fact that ‘the plan’ is so obvious: capture the b-pawn and promote your a-pawn. But you need quite some endgame knowledge and some good calculation to get it done. (And since I gave this as an exercise you are already provided with the strong suggestion that White can win; in an actual game you just might come to the conclusion it’s a draw.)

The most basic part of this knowledge is that without the b-pawn, Black can draw by bringing his king to a8 (with 1... $\hat{\square}b7$). However, if White is to move in that case, he wins with 1.a6: an important form of cooperation between pawn and bishop to keep the king out of the corner. Things might look easy at this point since 1. $\hat{\square}c5$ seems to lead directly to our goal (1... $\hat{\square}d7$ 2. $\hat{\square}b8!$), but another, less common, bit of endgame knowledge is needed to see this doesn’t work: after 1...b6+! 2.axb6 (2. $\hat{\square}xb6+$ $\hat{\square}b7$) 2... $\hat{\square}b7$ we have the following theoretical draw:



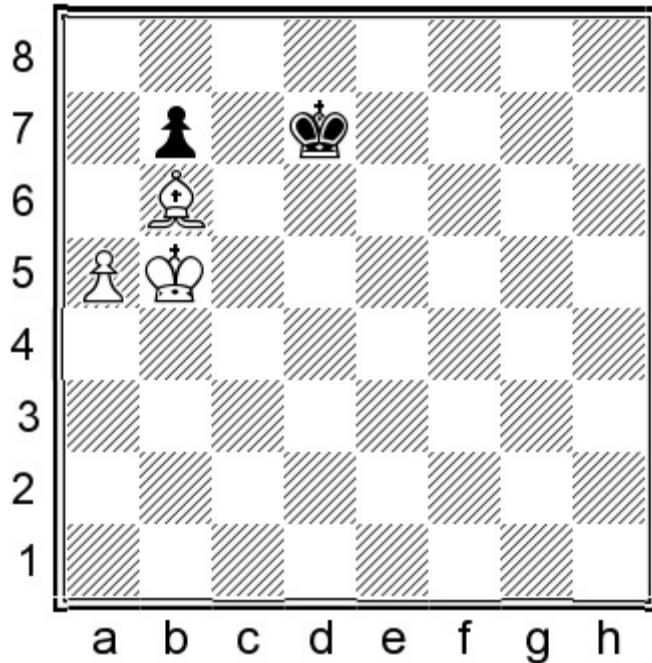
If you don't know this, it might be hard to believe, but despite now having the better b-pawn, with the bishop on a7 this is a draw.

No better is 1. $\hat{Q}c4$ because of 1... $b5+$! with the same result.

What then? Since 1. $\hat{Q}e6$ $b5$ 2. $a6$ $b4$ doesn't work either we are, by a process of elimination, left with 1. $\hat{Q}d4$!. Now 1... $b6$ comes without check and after 2. $a6$ $\hat{Q}c6$ White is in time to prevent Black playing 3... $\hat{Q}b5$ with 3. $\hat{Q}c4$.

This leaves 1... $\hat{Q}c6$, and now 2. $\hat{Q}b6$! more or less wins a tempo – now it takes Black three moves to get to b8, instead of one from c7, so after 2... $\hat{Q}d7$ 3. $\hat{Q}c5$ $\hat{Q}c8$ 4. $\hat{Q}a7$! $b6+$ 5. $\hat{Q}xb6$, White is in time.

2... $\hat{Q}d6$ 3. $\hat{Q}c4$ $\hat{Q}c6$ (3... $\hat{Q}d7$ 4. $\hat{Q}c5$!, one more subtlety; on 4. $\hat{Q}b5$ $\hat{Q}c8$ 5. $\hat{Q}a7$ $\hat{Q}c7$ 6. $\hat{Q}c5$ there is again 6... $b6+!$) 4. $\hat{Q}b4$ $\hat{Q}d6$ 5. $\hat{Q}b5$ $\hat{Q}d7$.

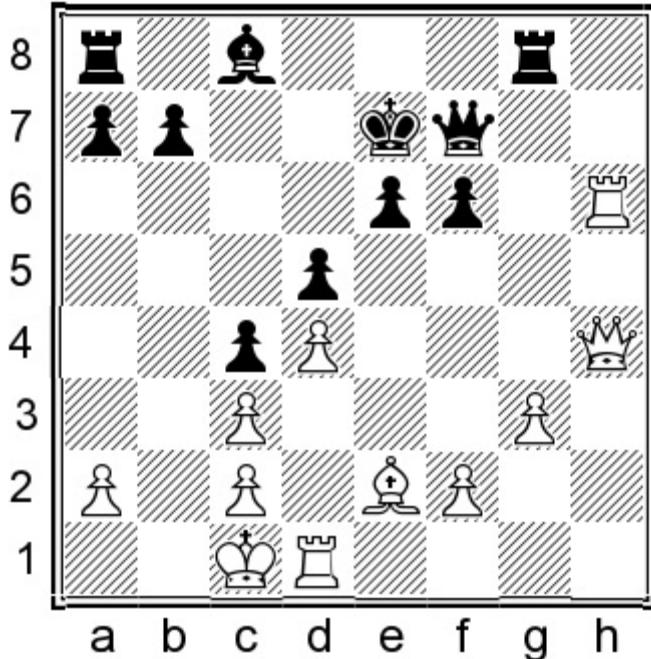


And now the finishing touch: 6. $\mathbb{B}g1!$, changing diagonals for the bishop; after 6... $\mathbb{B}c7$ 7. $\mathbb{B}h2+$ $\mathbb{B}c8$ 8. $\mathbb{B}b6$ White wins.

Good endgame knowledge, a lot of hard calculation work at the board, probably done piecemeal – but planning?

In the actual game (from Nürnberg 1888) the position was mirrored and Paulsen as Black had the extra bishop, but alas, he immediately fell for the 1. $\mathbb{B}c4?$ $b5!$ trick. Incidentally I found a study from Löwenthal from 1852 with exactly the same position (mirrored on the kingside) and he had already discovered all its subtleties. In a later chapter I'll return to this interesting phenomenon, which might be called 'evolutional coincidence'.

Leo Forgacs
Rudolf Spielmann
 St Petersburg 1909



White to move

(Exercise no 138)

I gave this as an exercise, but there is no one solution, just many equally promising possibilities. Though introspection is difficult, if not impossible, regarding the thinking process in chess, maybe you remembered how you arrived upon your choice. Does it resemble Lasker's idea of planning?

This is Lasker's first example of planning in the middlegame and as such it seems to me as unconvincing as the previous position. I guess every player will need just a few seconds to come to the conclusion that White has a very nice position thanks to his active pieces and Black's vulnerable king. If you have to formulate a plan, then 'do something with this' is the most primitive. Will this be enough to help Theseus get out of Minos's labyrinth?

I don't think planning can do wonders in this position, you just have to do the hard work of comparing a lot of attractive alternatives. Lasker says: 'White plans to get the Pawns which obstruct his pieces out of the way and to enter the Black camp with his heavy artillery'. The moves played, 22.f4 and 23.f5, fit in with this plan, but a combination with g4-g5 might be an idea as well. An assault with pieces only also looks attractive, with moves like $\mathbb{E}e1$ and $\mathbb{Q}f3$ or $\mathbb{Q}g4$ or $\mathbb{Q}h5$. Using the entrances already available is another option, with moves like $\mathbb{H}h1$ and/or $\mathbb{W}f4$. All these options keep a big advantage, so actually this position resembles a labyrinth with almost all ways leading out.

As always, the order can be reversed just as easily: it is not the plan that leads you to examining the right moves but the examination of the moves that leads you to the right plan.

22.f4!? ♖d7 23.f5 exf5 24.♖xc4 ♕g4 25.♗e1+ ♖e6 26.♘h1 ♔d6 27.♗h7 ♕g8 28.♔b3 ♗e4 29.♗xb7 ♜c8 30.♘f1 ♜c6 31.♗xe4 1-0

The sharp distinction between combinational and positional play relates back to Steinitz. Steinitz stated

that winning combinations are only possible when a sufficient advantage has been attained, which is something of a truism, but in line with this he also propagated a positional style in which combinational play could only have a minor role. I think this is one of the points that Chigorin rightfully objected to. Even if there are no winning combinations, tactical possibilities are omnipresent in our game and there is no positional understanding that can be separated from the more tactical aspects of the position.

A large part of *Move First, Think Later* was devoted to why I think that ‘making plans’ is an overrated concept, and I don’t want to repeat all that I’ve written but to summarize it: *Good moves and good plans are evidently connected to the elements of a position, but there is no deductive method that leads you from the general to the concrete.* The hard work you do at the board is rather of the opposite character: based on your experience and knowledge (of positions somehow similar to the present one) moves and plans appear in your mind’s eye and you try to find out which ones suit best. It is not a deductive reasoning method that does the trick, but the (large amounts of) knowledge you bring with you to the board. A strong chess player is not a cook who knows techniques and methods to make a meal out of a set of ingredients, it is someone who has an awful lot of recipes. (And as a master cook, his abilities rise to a level where he can refine recipes or invent his own.)

The great pitfall in chess thinking, which is connected to the philosophical issue of the concrete and the general, is the belief that the best moves can be deduced from the elements of the position. Now I do think that it can be enlightening and instructive to talk about the characteristics of a position and how moves relate to them, but there is an enormous gap between ‘explaining’ good moves afterwards and finding them at the board. It’s the difference Alapin mentioned between ‘talking’ chess and ‘playing’ good chess. I think every author or teacher should do justice to this fact, but it is easy and tempting to sin against it.

What is there to see in a position? I would say: everything and nothing. It is well known in other areas that different people looking at the same object may see different things. Chess is a striking example of this, not only between novices and experts, but also between players who have reached the same level: the differences in what they see may be considerable.

One could say that the truth is in the eyes of the beholder. If you look at a position, you see what you already know. If there are eggs, milk, flour and butter (*Exercise no 139*), you can stare at them for a long time, but if you’re unaware of (for example) the recipe for pancakes, probably not much will come out of it.

Let’s return to Steinitz and/or Tarrasch and/or Lasker. Their ideas about planning are the first steps in a line of thinking that concentrates on ‘method’ instead of content knowledge. Many authors and thinkers have followed in their footsteps, and today the branch of chess literature that focuses on the decision-making process and tries to teach you (new) ways of thinking has become rather substantial.

Lasker and also Euwe (*Judgement and Planning in Chess*) were important pioneers in the promotion of the idea of planning in chess. Maybe this idea fitted well into the ‘intellectual climate’ of those days, if I may endeavour some philosophizing on the history of ideas. It certainly fitted very well into communist ideology, which might explain its continuing popularity. We saw before that the Soviet chess ideologists made Chigorin the forefather of their school of chess, but they would have been better off with Steinitz, Tarrasch and Lasker. The concepts of planning and balance combine perfectly with

Soviet planning in economics and their dialectical philosophy.

So actually, they got the wrong guy with Chigorin. However, those ideologists were very flexible and with dialectical rhetoric they could, if necessary, incorporate (or kick out) virtually everyone within their system of thought.

To philosophize a bit further about the spirit of *our* times: this emphasis on methodical aspects fits in well with the continuing popularity of management, personal development and coaching theories. But to elaborate on these modern-day religions would be a bit outside the scope of this book.

The title of this chapter is a catchy aphorism of the type that today's coaches are so fond of. If you, however, prefer something like *a goal without a plan is just a wish* or *failing to plan is planning to fail*, then you'd better go to the management book store and buy yourself a different book. Another maxim in the same style goes: *better a bad plan than no plan at all*. This has been brought forward by numerous authors, amongst them Lasker and Euwe. It is difficult to imagine a way to put this maxim to an empirical test, but I guess it might just as well be the other way around.

The individual level

To take the step from the historical to the individual level: there is a fair chance that at some point in your chess-playing life some person or some book told you that you should end the blissful 'romantic' phase of 'just playing moves' and from now on adopt some sort of method to arrive at your moves. However, I think that when you start playing and studying chess, the natural ways of thinking get implemented automatically for the most part. The same goes for a lot of other complex intellectual activities, like speaking a language or, indeed, cooking. A book entitled something like *The Decision-Making Process in Cooking* is not yet available.

The type of chess book mentioned above might be especially attractive to those who have studied for quite some time and feel that their improvement has come to a halt, and for those who fall for the promise of a short-cut route to success, a smart way of thinking instead of studying hard.

Regarding strategy and the elements of positional play, I think it is useful to get acquainted with the basics. There are a lot of books that present the elementary categories and vocabulary. There are also a lot of books with more particular subjects (techniques, patterns, structures), and these are often related to specific openings. It will not be a surprise that I advise you to stay away from books that focus on implementing elaborate methods of thinking.

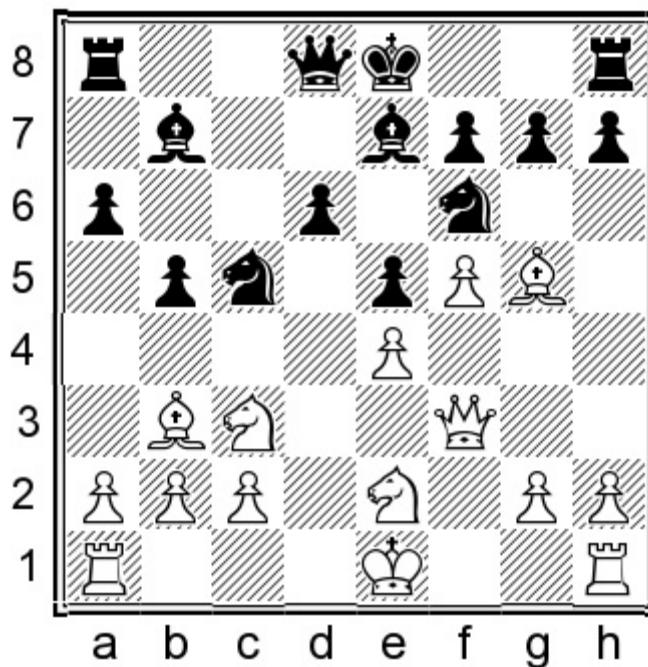
A study of the openings can be an ideal foundation for learning the plans and strategies that typically belong to the specific openings you play. In this way you are learning plans, instead of learning to *make* plans. And when you have built up a large arsenal of plans, your ability to find your way in unfamiliar positions will grow, as well as a more 'general' positional feeling.

If we put ourselves in the shoes of the players before Steinitz, I find it difficult to imagine that they played chess in a way that fundamentally differs from what we do. They played their preferred openings, with a clear idea of their chances, strong pieces, small plans, big strategies, the opponent's weak points, and so on. They looked at the position and did not wait for a bolt from the sky, but worked hard to play according to the position to the best of their abilities. If things went wrong they did not wait for the next game in the hope that 'Inspiration' would be on their side this time. Just like us, they

tried to find out where things went wrong and went looking for new and better plans or tactics. Which they found. This steady accumulation of knowledge is the motor of improvement in chess, on the historical as well as on the individual level.

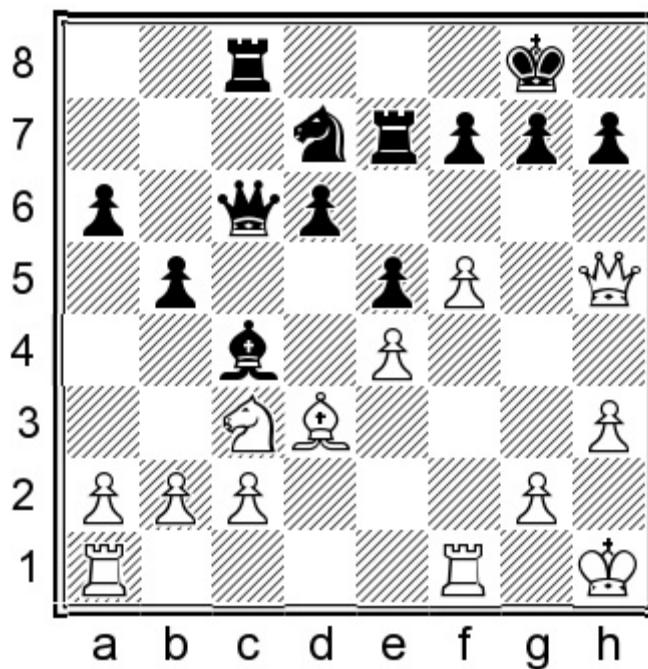
Exercises for Chapter 32

140 (*go to the solution*)

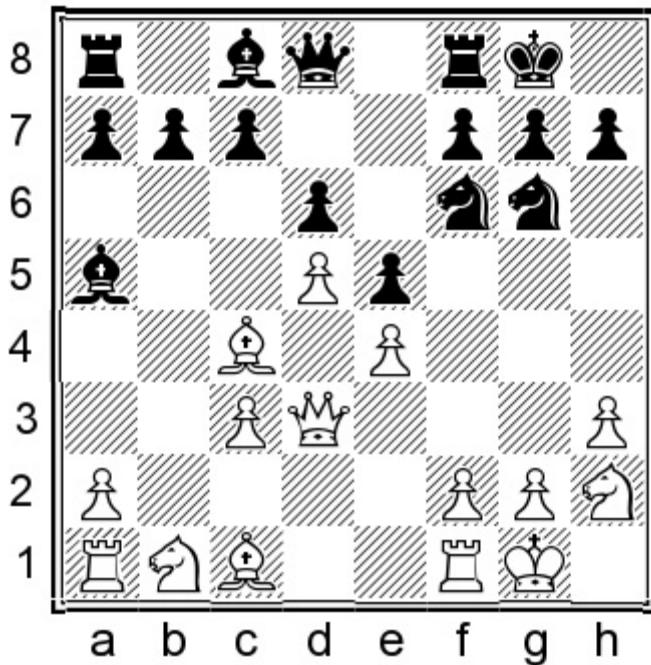


White to move

141 (*go to the solution*)



White to move



Black to move

32 Study openings

William Steinitz

Throughout the history of chess, people have been warning the improving player about spending too much time studying the openings. And throughout that same history, the majority of players have not done otherwise, and most books have been dedicated to this subject.

Rightly so, in my opinion. There is no better way to improve in chess than by studying openings. On the historical as well as on the individual level, the study of openings has been one of the main motors of improvement.

The subjects that the literature on chess addressed in the old days are mostly, though not completely, the same as in our day. A lot of research focused on the openings. If we look at some of the books that played a role in our history: Greco's work was a game collection with mainly miniatures, Philidor's *l'Analyse* was essentially a book on openings, Staunton's books had large portions of opening



theory, likewise its German counterpart the Bilguer, Neumann's collection of games was also organized as a research on openings and even Steinitz's *Modern Chess Instructor* was essentially a book on openings.

Those books often included some pages of general advice, mainly addressing the play in the opening, and there we can find the beginnings of positional theory.

In Chapter 16, we saw Von der Lasa comparing the research in opening theory to that in science. And indeed you can look at the complete history of (competition in) chess as empirical research into the value of openings. Almost all of the vehement discussions we encountered were about openings.

A book by Raymond Keene that I mentioned before is entitled *The Evolution of Chess Opening Theory*, and evolution is an appropriate term for the way opening theory develops. Step by step, and thanks to the interaction between many players and researchers, theory moved forward, and along the way all kinds of problems and issues of tactical or positional nature automatically attracted attention and were dealt with. This aspect is also on the individual level of vital importance.

What hampered the development a little was the dominating preference for the open games during most of the 19th century. There is nothing wrong with these open games, and all kinds of interesting strategies and tactics can arise out of them, but I guess that a more diverse use of openings would have brought some interesting positional possibilities to the fore at an earlier stage. Those heroes of the open games include Anderssen, Morphy, Zukertort, Chigorin and also Steinitz. Two-thirds of his games started with 1.e4 e5. Only towards the end of the 19th century did the diversity in openings start to grow.

Two main openings of the 19th century, the Evans and the King's Gambit, have not completely stood the test of time. They certainly add to the romantic character that games of those days have in our eyes. But the research on them was very serious (scientific) – which eventually led to their decline.

Some might see a historical necessity in the openings that occur in a certain period. But maybe it's just a matter of chance. Had, for example, Steinitz followed in the footsteps of Anderssen and chosen the Sicilian as the hallmark of a new school, instead of the rubbish he became so fond of, history might have taken a different path.

But the discussions Steinitz was involved in are part and parcel of the evolution of chess knowledge. The telegraph match was presented as a discussion between two major schools. Steinitz did not feel his school was delivered the fatal blow (or any blow whatsoever) by the unfavourable result. But on a more concrete level, his handling of the Evans Gambit did not pass the test. It was only one game, which is minimal from an empirical point of view, but later games (amongst others those against Gunsberg) added to the final conclusion that this whole approach with ... $\mathbb{W}f6$ and ... $\mathbb{Q}h6$ was not a good idea.

The Evans Gambit was at the centre of theoretical investigations in the second half of the 19th century. The story goes that in this search, at one point even a spiritual séance was held with the aim of consulting the spirit of La Bourdonnais on a specific position. But alas, the spirit had no solution at hand. So Steinitz kept struggling to find a satisfactory answer to the Evans, but Lasker's handling of it (together with the rising popularity of the Two Knights) put the Evans out of business near the end of the century.

Around that time the repertoire became more diverse, and for example the popularity of the queen's pawn openings grew. It goes a bit far to claim that they offer more positional possibilities than the open games, but at least they offer different ones. Some strategies can be found in different openings, some belong to specific ones. For example, although it is a rather peculiar structure, the Wyvill formation can originate from different openings. But the French exchange sacrifice is, well, typically French – though one may see similarities with the Sicilian exchange sacrifice.

Typical positional (and tactical) ideas evolve in the context of specific openings. Here I think it is appropriate to jump from the historical development to the individual.

There are several reasons why studying openings is so rewarding, and I want to single out two important ones that are more or less mutually reinforcing.

The first is of a didactic nature, and though didactics is actually not what you could call hard science, the idea that practice makes perfect has been a well-established part of all theories on learning. Every game you play offers an opportunity to practice your openings. And secondly, those games often lead you into new directions for further study.

This feedback relationship between study and practice hardly exists in the endgame (more about that in the next chapter) and this lack of a direct link to practice also applies to books on the middlegame. Although I think it is useful to become acquainted with the basic theories and vocabulary, reading middlegame books can be compared to reading cookery books without subsequently preparing the recipes. If you want to become a good cook, the preparation is essential. Initially you have to do your best to get a satisfactory result, but once you've mastered the recipe you can later refine or vary on it.

For the study of chess openings, the situation is much more favourable. Practice constantly gives you the chance to play what you have studied, and gives you feedback for new studies. With the rise of online playing possibilities especially, the opportunities for this form of studying have multiplied. Of course this is not simply an advance: we are in an arms race, with the opponent having the same opportunities as we do.

Analogous to the history of chess you will, in developing your openings, deepen your knowledge of the typical tactics and strategies that belong to the openings you are playing. Concepts you might have learned from a general book on strategy will become meaningful, or maybe your study of an opening will be your first acquaintance with these concepts.

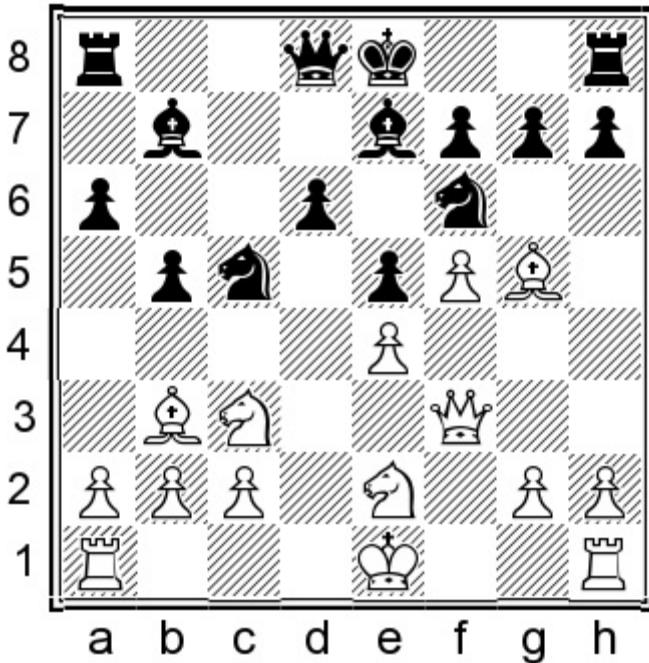
Take for example the theme of weak/strong squares we discussed in previous chapters. For me the first square that comes into mind is d5, from a white perspective. Against the Sicilian, my first repertoire contained the ♜c4 lines (Fischer, Velimirovic). As in many lines of the Sicilian, the struggle for the d5-square plays a big role in these lines. One attraction of the Fischer attack was the simple plan of f2-f4-f5, putting pressure on e6 to provoke Black into playing ...e6-e5, after which the d5-square might fall in White's hands.

One example from my own games:

Willy Hendriks – Jan Hania Leeuwarden 1996

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 d6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 ♘f6 5.♘c3 a6 6.♘c4 e6 7.♘b3 ♘bd7 8.f4 ♘c5 9.f5 ♘e7 10.♗f3

e5 11.♘de2 b5 12.♗g5 ♗b7



(Exercise no 140)

Looking at this exercise, maybe you thought: oh no, not Fischer-Gadia again, but the position is slightly different. With some typical moves White decides the struggle for d5 in his favour to reach the good knight versus bad bishop ideal.

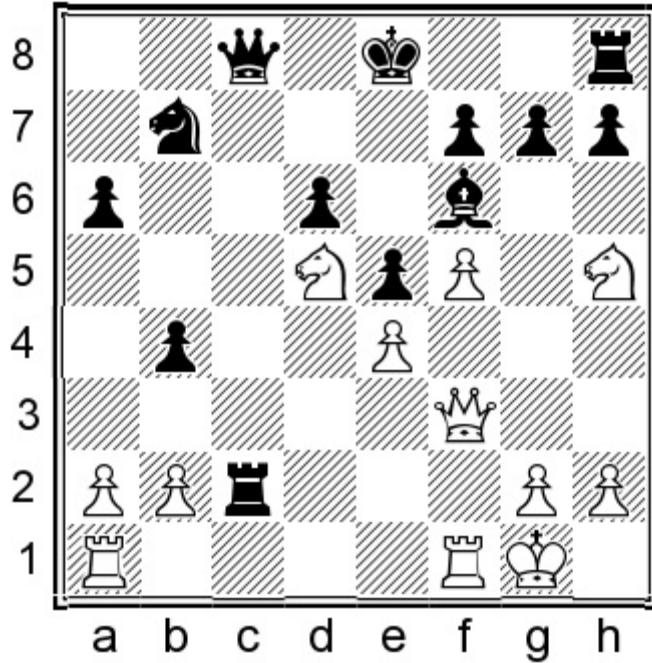
13.♗xf6 ♗xf6 14.♘d5 ♜c8

Since he hasn't castled yet, trying to make an exchange sacrifice of it with 14...b4 15.♗xb7 bxc3 16.♗xa8 cxb2 doesn't work because of 17.♘c6+.

15.♗xb7 ♛xb7 16.0-0 b4 17.♘d5 ♜xc2

The pawn doesn't matter, White's attack will be irresistible.

18.♘g3 ♜c8 19.♘h5



19... $\mathbb{W}c4$ 20. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{W}e2$ 21. $\mathbb{Q}hxf6+$ $gxf6$ 22. $\mathbb{W}g7$ $\mathbb{E}f8$ 23. $\mathbb{E}ac1!$

With the threat of 24. $\mathbb{E}xc2$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 25. $\mathbb{W}xf6$.

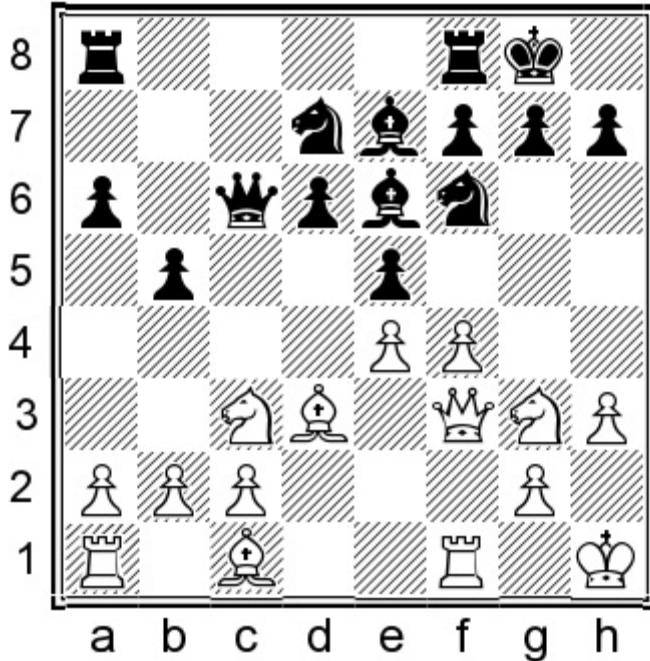
23... $\mathbb{E}xc1$ 24. $\mathbb{E}xc1$ $\mathbb{W}d2$ 25. $\mathbb{E}c8+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 26. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ 1-0

In games between top players, you rarely encounter these dream scenarios, but in a recent game something very similar happened, though from a different Sicilian line.

Markus Ragger

Jeffery Xiong

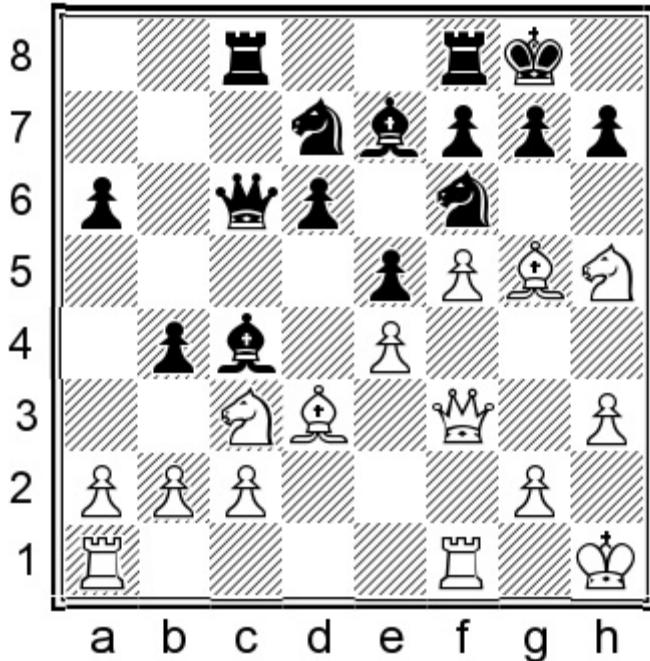
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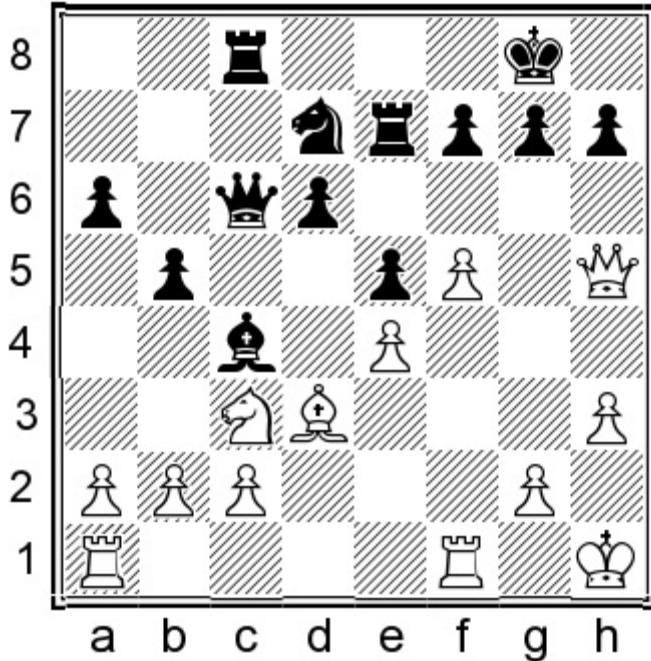
White to move

It seems that Black has sufficient control over d5, but in the next few moves the defenders get exchanged one by one:

14.f5! ♜c4 15.♗g5 ♕ac8 16.♗h5! b4



Though this finally wins the c-pawn, it loses the struggle for the d5-square. But the logical alternative, 16...♝xh5, to get rid of the bad bishop, doesn't work well either: 17.♜xe7 ♕fe8 18.♝xh5 ♕xe7.

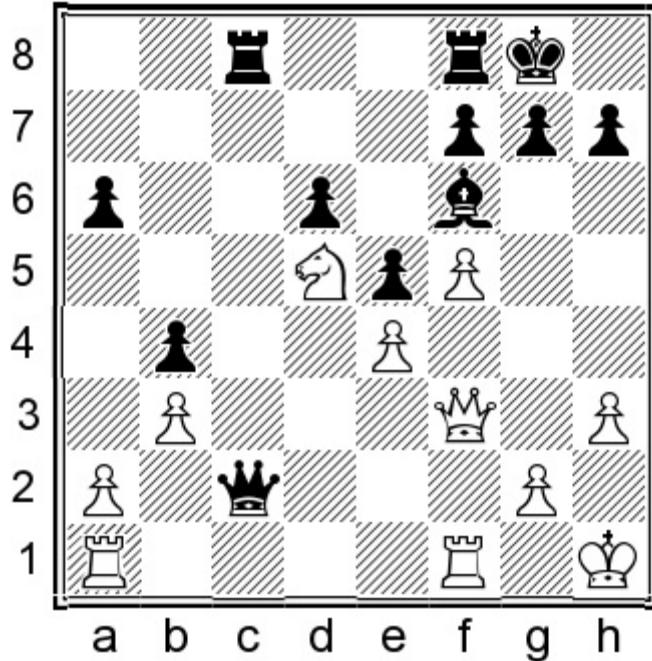


(Exercise no 141)

With just one more move, ... $\mathbb{Q}f6$, Black would be in control of the important squares. But White strikes first with 19. $f6!$; after 19... $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $gxf6$ White has the powerful 21. $\mathbb{Q}d5$. Taking the knight is taboo because of the attack on $h7$, and after 21... $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f1$ White has a beautiful attack; the knight on $d5$ might occasionally jump to $f5$.

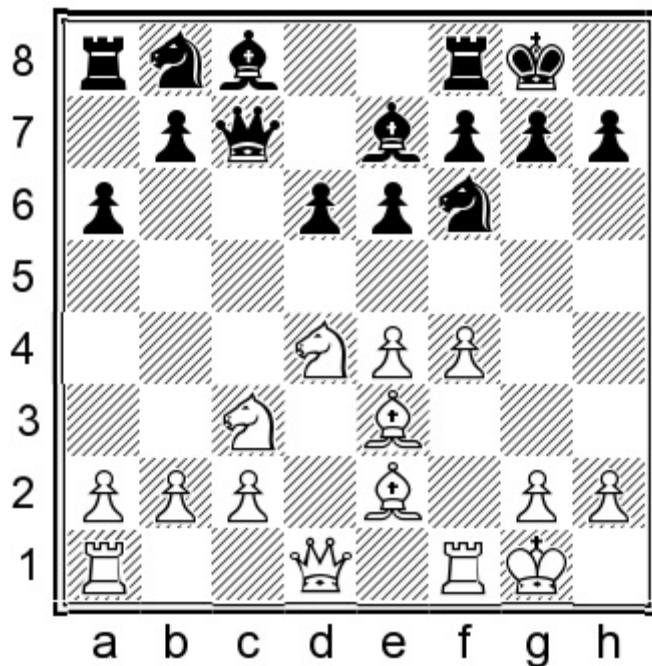
In the fight for the $d5$ -square, 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ seems logical as well, but Black has the *zwischenzug* 19... $\mathbb{Q}f6!$; then 20. $\mathbb{Q}xf7+$ temporarily wins a pawn, but after 20... $\mathbb{Q}xf7$ Black's has sufficient counterplay, with ... $b5-b4$ as a possible follow-up.

17. $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}xf6+$ $\mathbb{Q}xf6$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ $\mathbb{W}xc4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}d5$ $\mathbb{W}xc2$ 21. $b3$



White has more than enough compensation for the sacrificed pawn and later won the game.

Steinitz describes how ‘holes’ come into existence because ‘the two adjoining pawns have been moved or captured.’ As a trainer I have used this principle to explain the dangers in certain positions, unaware of Steinitz’s formulation. This is of course an extremely simple principle, but nonetheless I think it is a useful way of talking about positions. Take for example a standard Sicilian position:



Since White’s d-pawn is gone, he is vulnerable on the e- and c-files. The f-pawn is left to guard the e-file and as soon as it marches forward, the e-pawn can become weak. And if it moves further to f5 or gets exchanged, Black might get a strong square on e5. The c-file is half open, which adds to Black’s possibilities on that file, and there are many different manoeuvres for Black in the Sicilian to exploit the weaknesses on the c-file: for example putting a knight on c4, or the exchange sacrifice on c3, which

completely ruins White's structure.

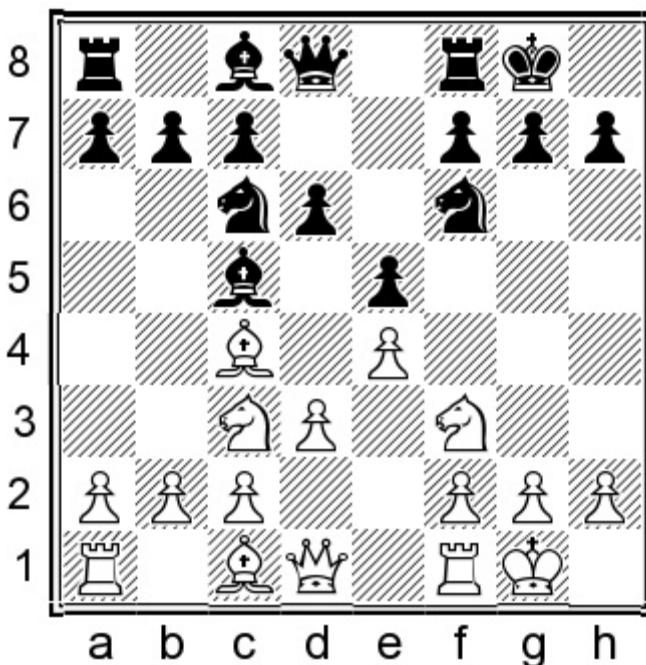
Likewise, Black, who is missing his c-pawn, is vulnerable on the b-file and especially on the d-file, which is White's semi-open file. The d-pawn can become weak and if Black's e-pawn moves forward or gets exchanged, the d5-square can fall into White's hands, as seen above. Nothing spectacular, but for the improving player this might be a bit of an eye-opener.

Depending on the choice of openings, everyone has their 'own' strong squares that they are very familiar with. From them you can derive a more general feeling for strong/weak squares.

In the historical context, the knight on f5 was recognized as a potentially powerful outpost quite early on. With the great majority of the games starting 1.e4 e5, this is not a surprise of course, since these moves leave the squares d5 and f5 (for Black) and d4 and f4 (for White) potentially weak.

Here too, there is a link with the development of a lot of individual players. The first opening many children learn is the (slow) Italian:

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c4$ $\mathbb{Q}c5$ 4.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 5.d3 d6 6. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ 0-0



In these and similar positions, d5/d4 and f5/f4 are potential targets and $\mathbb{Q}g5$ (... $\mathbb{Q}g4$) is an important option that often (in combination with $\mathbb{Q}d5$) forces Black to recapture on f6 with the g-pawn, leaving the f5-square weak.

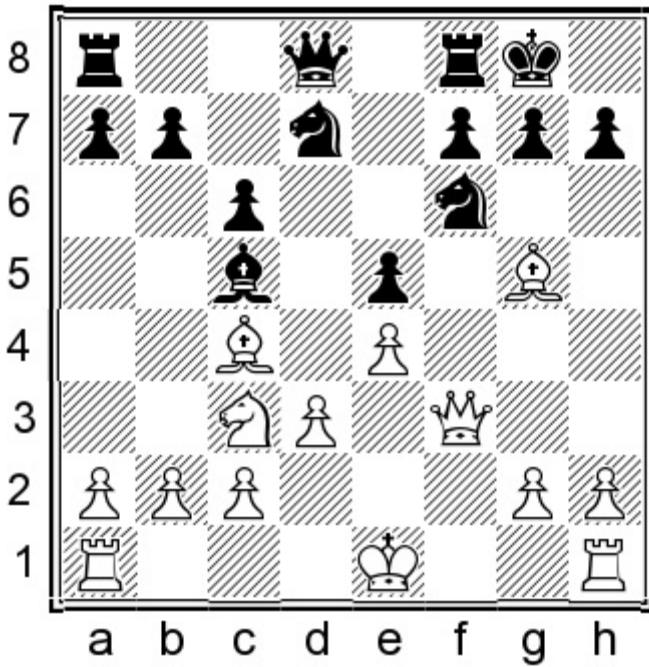
In his *Handbook*, Staunton's advice is the following:

'When you have brought out your knight to c3, it is frequently advisable, at a proper opportunity, to get him round by e2 to g3, where he exercises a very important influence, by threatening, whenever the square is left unguarded, to post himself on f5.'¹⁵¹

Other textbooks, including Steinitz's *Modern Chess Instructor*, give the same advice. For example, in

the Italian Game and the Ruy Lopez this is a very common manoeuvre (though mostly the knight arrives at g3 via d2-f1). In the next game, Staunton falls victim to his own advice.

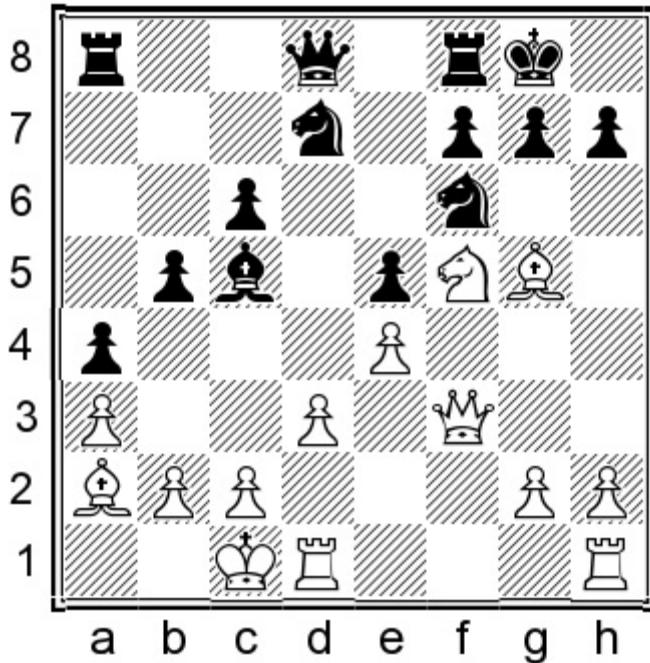
John Cochrane
Howard Staunton
London 1842



White to move

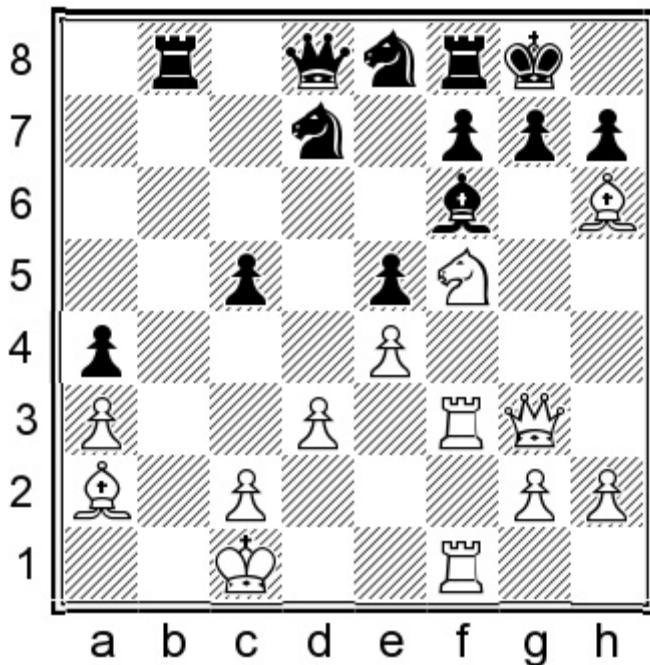
With the pawn on c6, White's knight has little future on c3, so redeploying it via e2 makes sense. Playing over a great number of games from the past, I was struck by the fact that this was indeed a very popular manoeuvre, for White as well as Black, also in less suitable circumstances. It might betray a romantic 'Italian school' attitude: nothing of importance can happen on the queenside (as in a car race movie I saw a long time ago where someone ripped off the rear-view mirror and threw it out of the car, saying with a heavy accent: 'The first rule of Italian driving: what is behind you is of no importance!').

11.♘e2 ♘b6 12.0-0-0 a5 13.♘g3 ♘d8 14.a3 b5 15.♘a2 a4 16.♘f5



Technically, f5 is not a strong square but Black won't manage to get ...g7-g6 in. White has a nice advantage and eventually won in the attack.

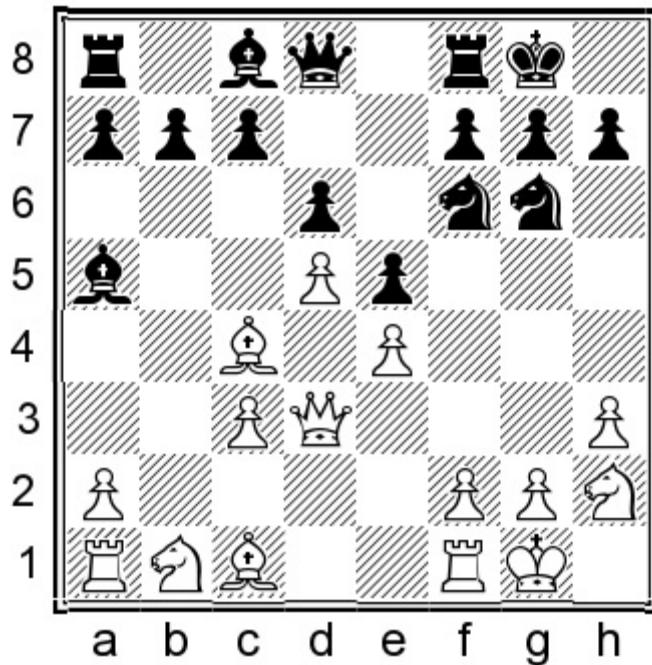
16...♜e7 17.♝h6 ♜e8 18.♝g3 ♜f6 19.♜df1 c5 20.♜f3 b4 21.♜hf1 bxa3 22.bxa3 ♜b8



23.♝xg7 ♜xg7 24.♝xg7 ♜xg7 25.♜xf7 1-0

Morphy of course also knew how to use this (semi-) strong square.

**Augustus Mongredien
Paul Morphy**



Black to move

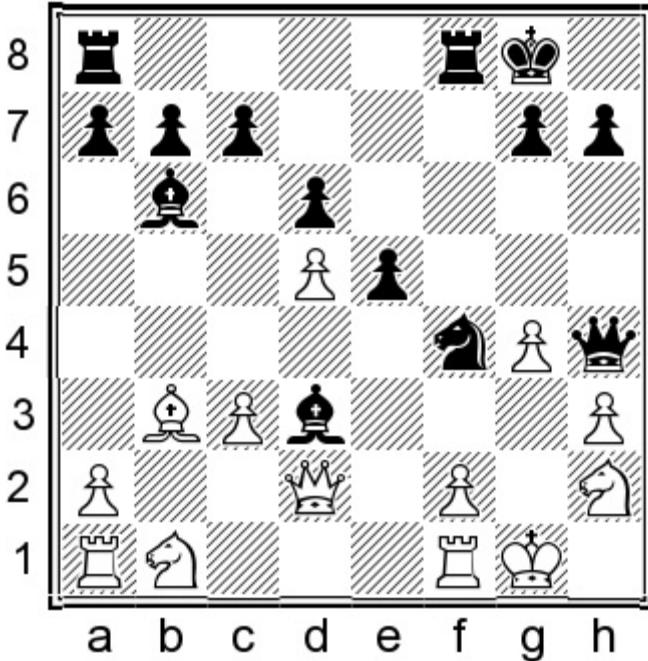
(Exercise no 142)

An Evans Gambit has gone wrong and Black has both the pawn and the better position. With h2-h3 inserted, White does not have the move g2-g3 at his disposal, which makes Black's next manoeuvre very powerful.

11...♝h5! 12.♝b3 ♝hf4 13.♝xf4 ♝xf4 14.♛f3 f5 15.exf5 ♝xf5 16.g4

Things were already beyond repair, so why not add the harakiri move?

16...♝d3 17.♛e3 ♜b6 18.♛d2 ♛h4



White resigned. It is funny to see that compared to the previous diagram White hasn't managed to improve his position a single bit whereas in the meantime Black has brought all his pieces in the attack. A very instructive game in the master beats amateur genre.

On the topic of openings, I would like to address one more question for which looking at historical development might be useful for the individual. It is the question of whether or not to change or enlarge your repertoire. Towards the end of the 19th century, the repertoire of the stronger players broadened, and in particular the Ruy Lopez and the Queen's Gambit became the main openings. The rise of the hypermoderns saw a lot of new openings coming to the fore, such as the Indian openings, and also a revival of the Sicilian. All these developments enriched our understanding of the possibilities of the game.

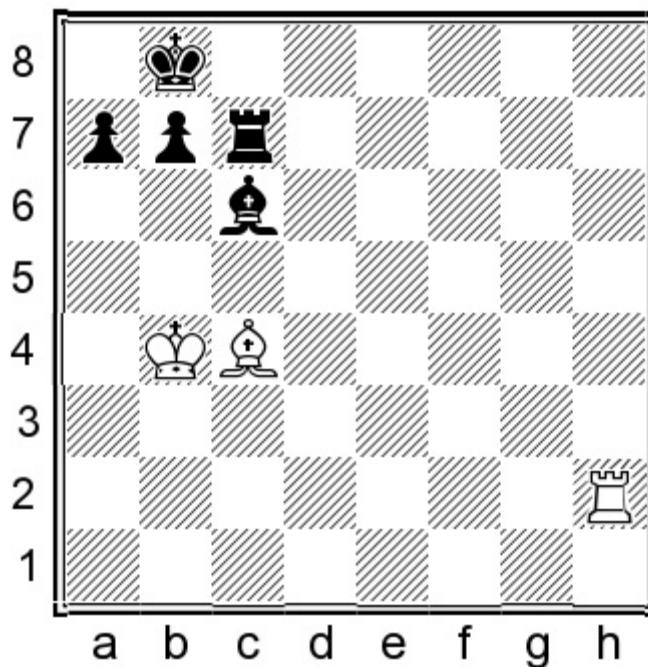
I think this also holds true at an individual level, but of course it depends on your personal situation, your ambition, the time you can spare, etcetera. But if you want to invest some time and spice up your play, mastering a new opening can be a good idea.

Of course, I can't guarantee you success, and if you look at the top players there are great differences at this point, with some having a very limited repertoire and others playing almost everything.

It also depends on what you like most, but if you like studying openings, playing on the Internet and working with databases and engines, I think taking up a new opening is one of the most rewarding ways of studying chess. (With of course the caveat that play and study should be in proportion and that you have to do some work on your online games.)

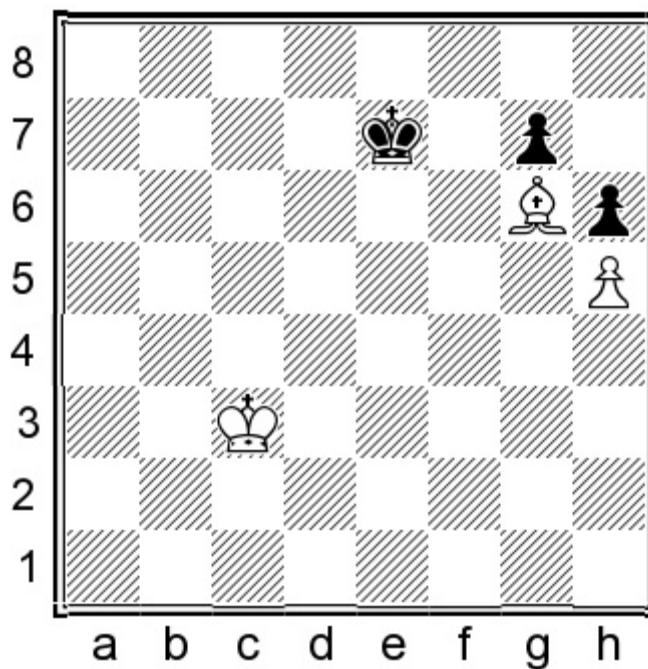
Exercises for Chapter 33

143 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

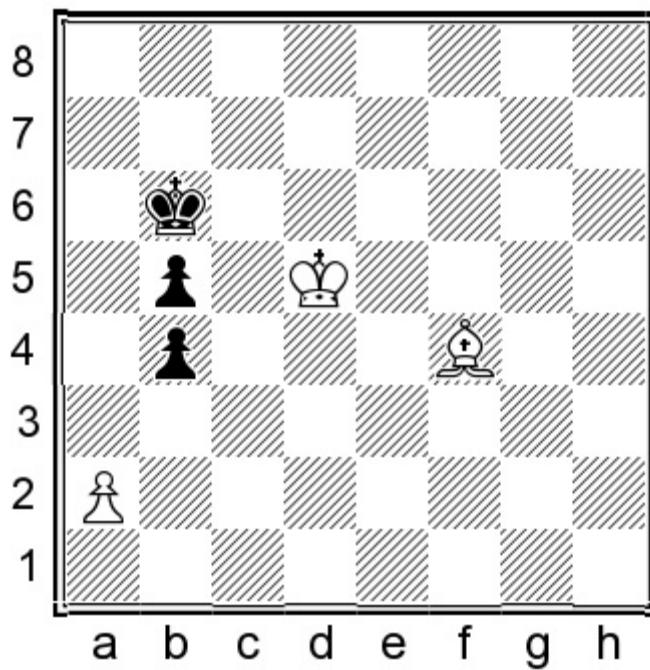
144 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

Win or draw?

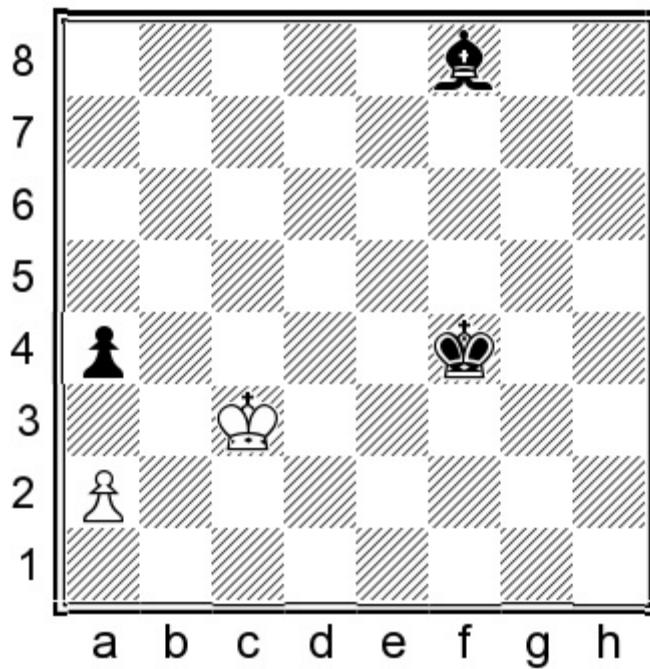
145 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

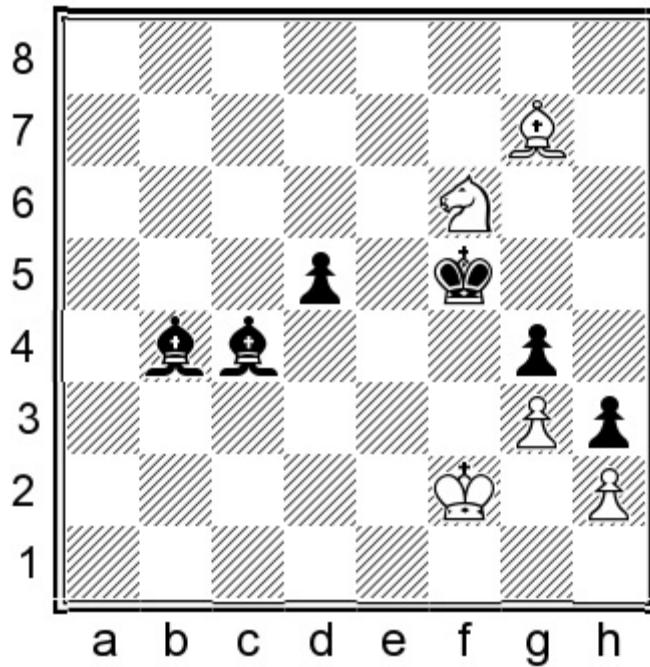
Win or draw?

146 (*go to the solution*)



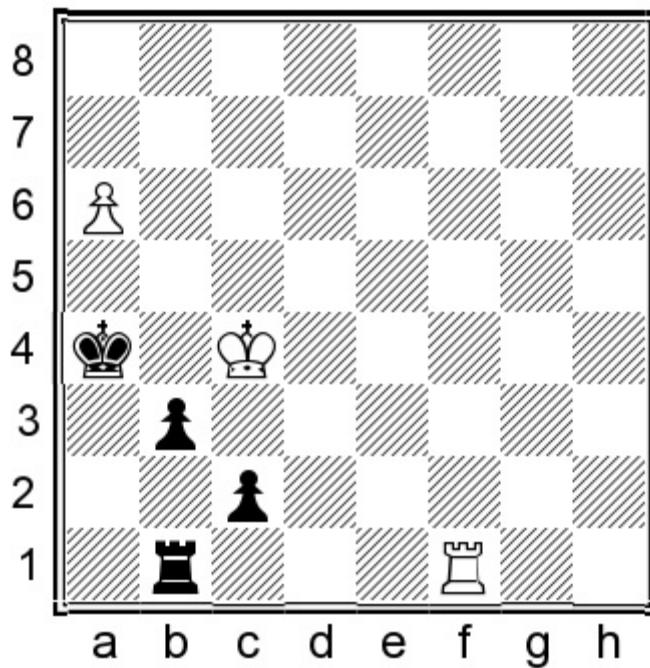
Black to move

147 (go to the solution)



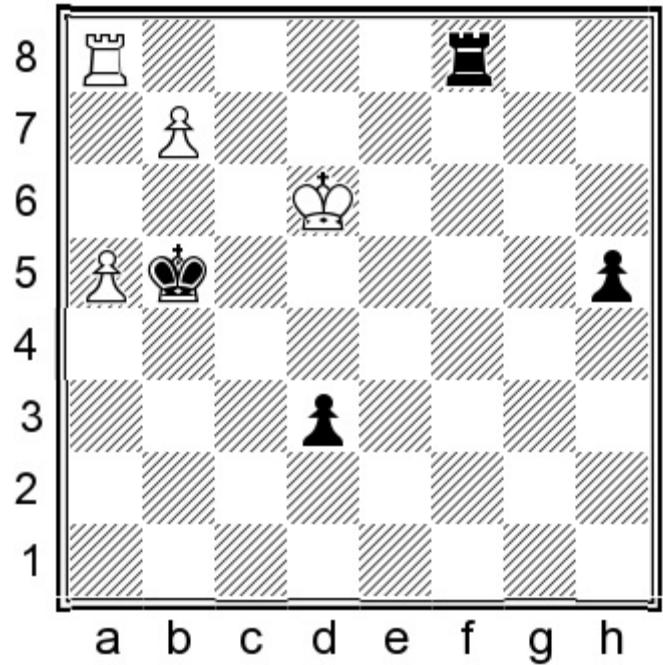
White to move

148 (go to the solution)



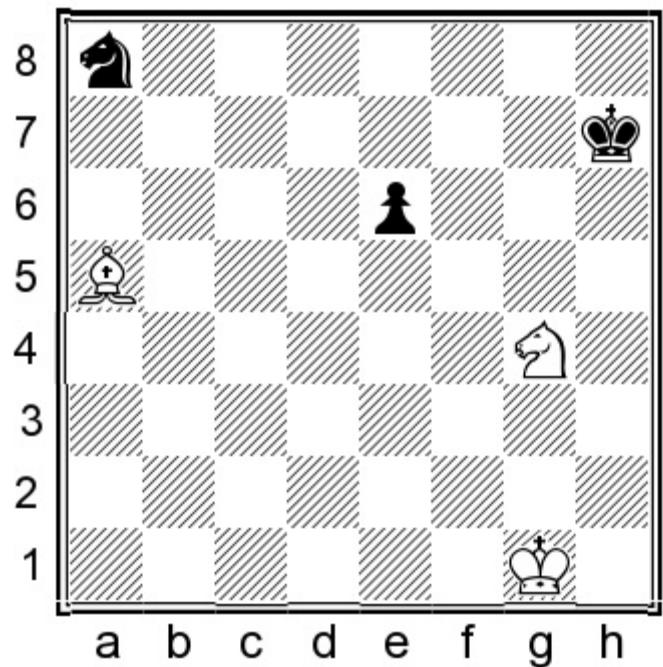
White to move

149 (go to the solution)



Black to move

150 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

Until now, the endgame has been treated rather as a stepchild in this book. The vehement discussions between players or schools all concentrated on the opening or the early middlegame.

For the development and the improvement of opening and middlegame play, competition (and discussion) was essential. The study of the endgame has been inspired by actual games as well, but it evolved largely in the tranquillity of the study room. Much of our endgame knowledge has been discovered by lone thinkers who did not take part in competition.

From the start of the study of the endgame, not only the practical but also the aesthetic aspect was important. Today the term ‘endgame study’ solely denotes a composition made for aesthetic purposes (though it still might have some practical function, either for its content or as a way of training your calculating ability). This branch of study composing has developed into an almost separate world.

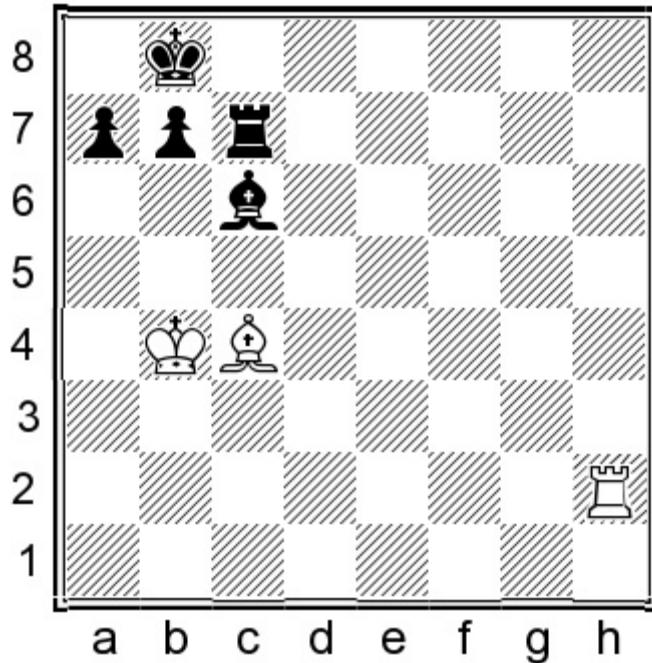
The first international tournament was held in 1851 and, taking into account the rather modest general level of play in this event, I find it amazing how well developed the level of endgame knowledge was at the time. In that same year, Kling and Horwitz published their book, *Endgame Studies*, which is a fine proof of this development. Many different endgames are looked at, some of them at a very sophisticated level. Thanks to this and other endgame chapters or complete manuals, the truth of many positions was discovered before they ever occurred in a (published) game.

To give you something of a historical exposé, I’d like to return to the Metger-Paulsen endgame Lasker commented on, and which had already been investigated by Löwenthal in a study from 1852. It is a version of the important basic endgame of rook’s pawn plus bishop of the wrong colour. It has been known for ages that this endgame is a draw when the king can reach the promotion square.

Greco left behind only a few endgames, but one of them is the following. Maybe it was inspired by his opposite-coloured bishops ending from the French game we looked at extensively earlier on.

Greco

1621



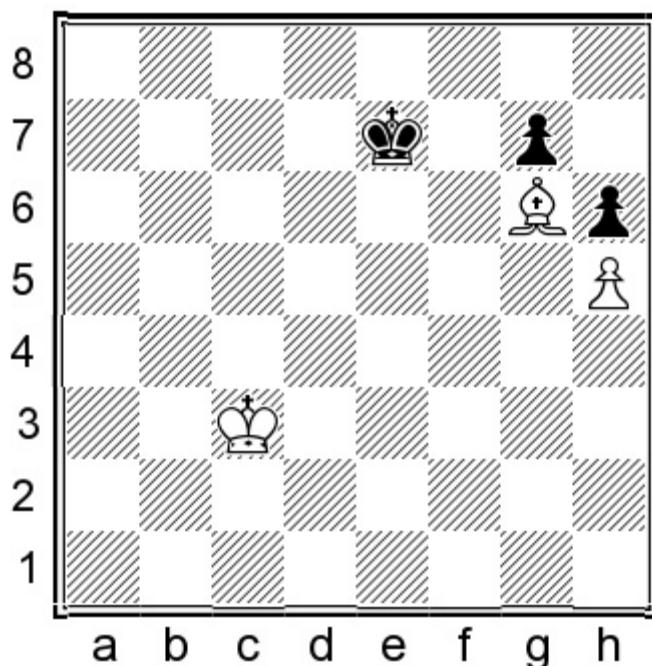
(Exercise no 143)

1. $\mathbb{Q}h8+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}xc8+$ $\mathbb{Q}xc8$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}a6!$ draw.

The exploration of this endgame continued and it was discovered that it becomes more interesting if you add one or more pawns for the defending side. In 1841 the English player and writer George Walker published the next position:

Walker

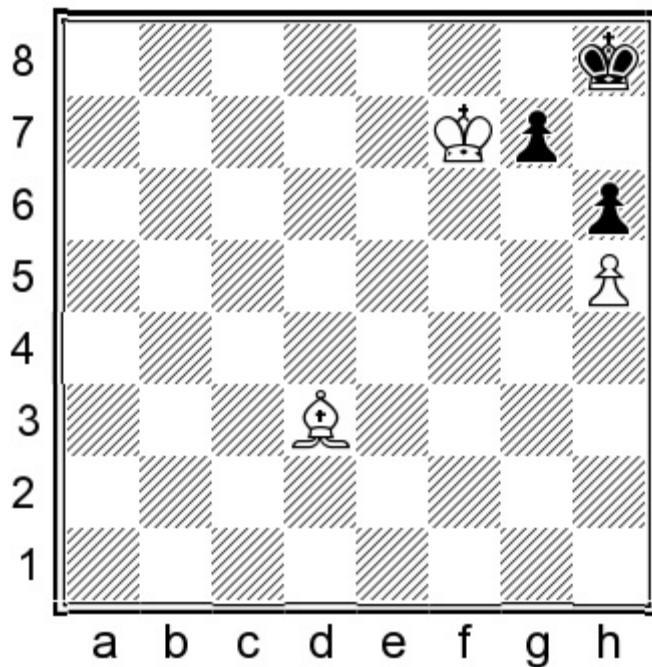
1841



(Exercise no 144)

Compared to the Metger-Paulsen game, Black has an extra h-pawn. This doesn't prove helpful: the standard drawing mechanism of walking the king to h8 doesn't work in this case. All White has to do is force the black king to h8 (and avoid $\mathbb{Q}h7$ because of the ...g7-g5 trick):

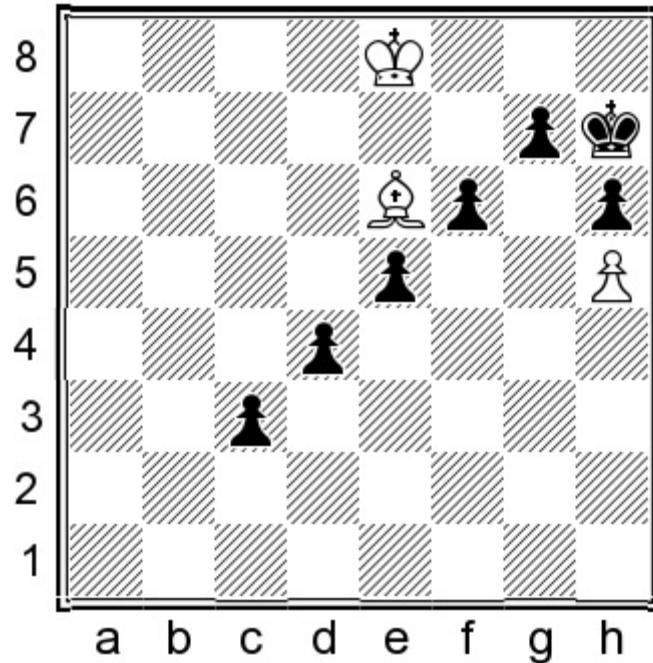
1. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}f4$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}f5$ $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}e6$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}g6$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 8. $\mathbb{Q}e7$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}c2$ $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}h8$ 11. $\mathbb{Q}f7$



Without the h-pawn or the g-pawn or both this would be a draw, but here the extra pawn eliminates the stalemate.

11...g5 12.hxg6 1-0

Walker had a sense of humour, so he added the next position. White to play and win.

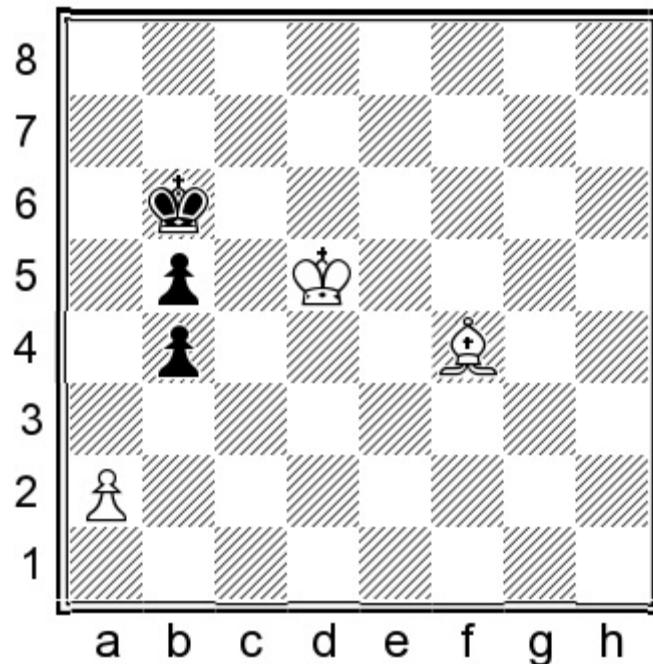


1. ♔f7 1-0

Kling and Horwitz did a lot of research on this endgame and the fine play in the next position shows how far they had advanced – and also how vague the boundaries between practical use and aesthetics are becoming.

Kling & Horwitz

1851

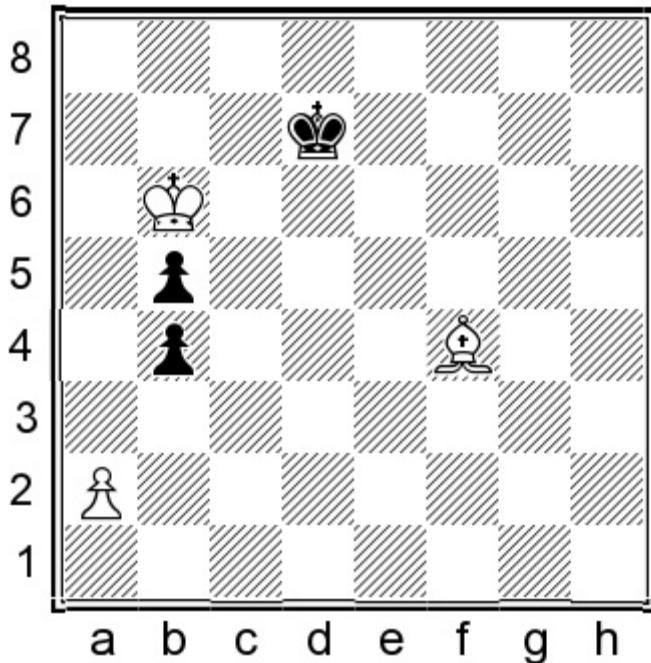


White to move

(Exercise no 145)

As in the previous example, thanks to the extra pawn Black has to avoid a stalemate construction since this would force him to play ...b4-b3, helping White to promote his a-pawn into a b-pawn. White's strategy is to chase the black king as far away as possible from the corner to be able to conquer the pawns without letting Black get back to a8. The first move is necessary to prevent Black from getting active with ... $\hat{Q}a5-a4$ (if now 1... $\hat{Q}a5$ 2.a3 White again converts his a-pawn into a b-pawn).

1. $\hat{Q}d2!$ $\hat{Q}c7$ 2. $\hat{Q}g5$ $\hat{Q}d7$ 3. $\hat{Q}c5$ $\hat{Q}c7$ 4. $\hat{Q}h4$ $\hat{Q}c8$ 5. $\hat{Q}b6$ $\hat{Q}b8$ 6. $\hat{Q}g3+$ $\hat{Q}c8$ 7. $\hat{Q}f4$ $\hat{Q}d7$

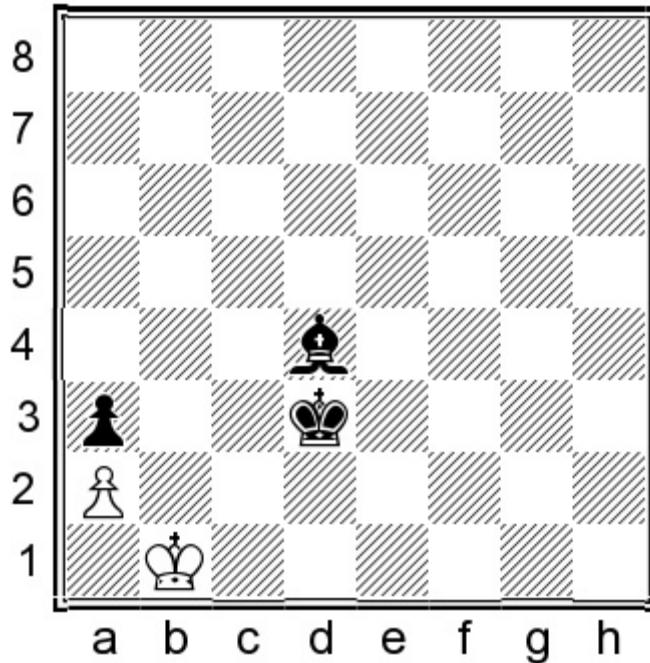


8. $\hat{Q}xb5$ $\hat{Q}c8$ 9. $\hat{Q}b6$ $\hat{Q}d7$ 10. $\hat{Q}b7$ $\hat{Q}e6$ 11. $\hat{Q}c6$ $\hat{Q}e7$ 12. $\hat{Q}d6+$ $\hat{Q}d8$ 13. $\hat{Q}b7$ 1-0

Some of the main characters in this book also made important contributions to endgame knowledge, for example Philidor and the Modenese masters.

Several discoveries were made by Lolli. The next one is a version of the previous basic ending. Although here Black has the bishop of the right colour, in this specific position it is not sufficient.

Lolli
1763



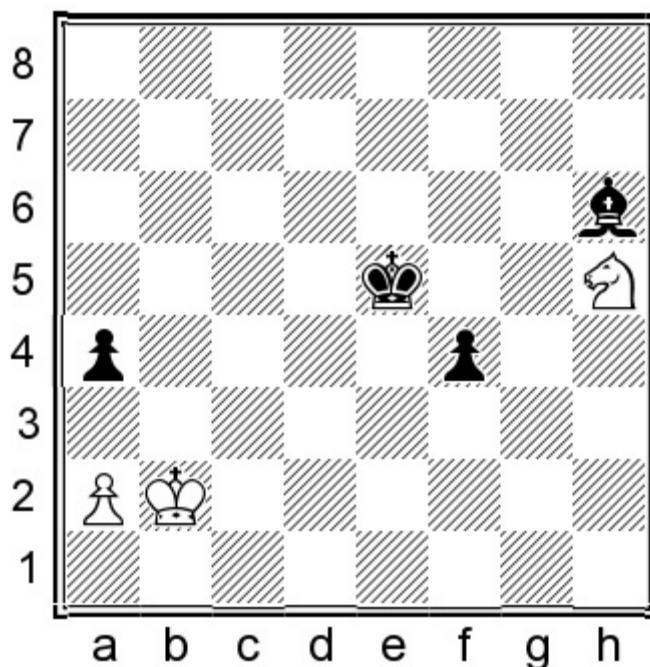
Draw

Part of our endgame knowledge consists of (elaborate) techniques of play, but an equally important part consists of knowing the verdict. This knowledge guides us in decisions in earlier phases. I once profited from knowing the verdict of the above position – though I profited even more from my opponent knowing this verdict as well!

Willy Hendriks

Sipke Ernst

Arnhem 2006



Black to move

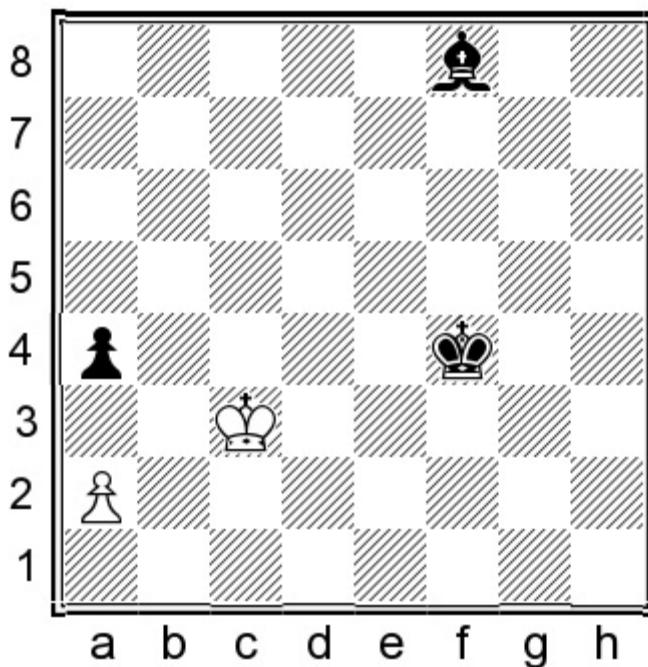
69...♞f8?!

This doesn't spoil the win, but much easier was 69...f3 and the knight stands no chance against the pawn. With little time left I decided to take my chance.

69...♞f8?! 70.♝xf4!?

This shocked my opponent and he clearly realized that he had just missed an important opportunity. Maybe out of annoyance he kept playing quickly, although he had plenty of time left on the clock. Otherwise he surely would have seen there still was a win.

70...♝xf4 71.♝c3



(Exercise no 146)

71...♝e4??

Only this gives the win away. After 71...♝e3! 72.♝c4 ♛d2 73.a3 ♜c2! 74.♝b5 ♜b3 he is just in time.

72.♝c4 a3

Otherwise White will play 73.a3 and pick up the a-pawn. But now he can return to the Lolli position.

73.♝c3 ♜e3 74.♝c2 ♜e2 75.♝b1 ♜d2 76.♝a1 ♜c3 77.♝b1 ♜g7 78.♝c1 ♜f6 79.♝b1 ♜d2 ½-½

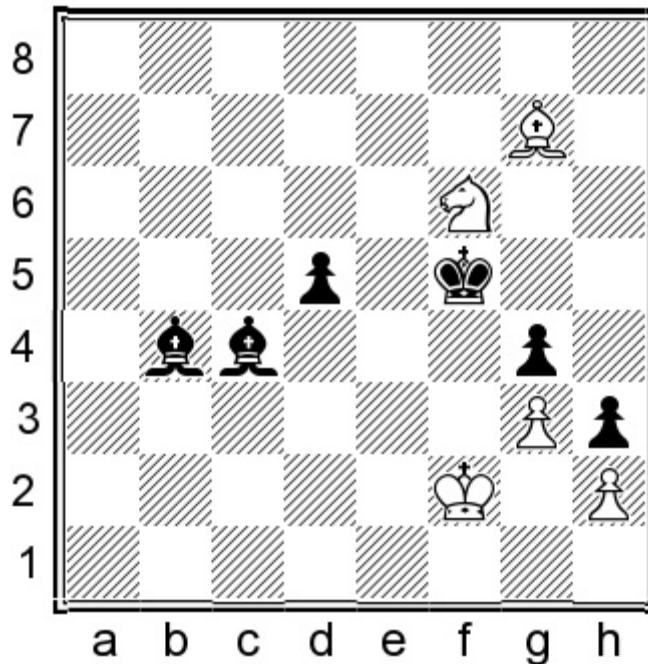
Adding two b-pawns (or even more pairs of pawns) to Lolli's position doesn't change the verdict. At the end of a long game with little time left on the clock this might be difficult to recognize, which makes it fully understandable that in the next position White missed a beautiful drawing opportunity.

Maybe he'd already given up hope.

Jens Uwe Maiwald

Klaus Bischoff

Gladenbach ch-GER 1997



White to move

(Exercise no 147)

88.♕e8?

After 88.♕xd5!! ♕xd5 89.♕d4 ♔e4 90.♕a7 there is nothing Black can do except going over to the Lolli position with an extra pair of pawns.

88.♕e8? ♕c5+ 89.♔e1 ♔e4

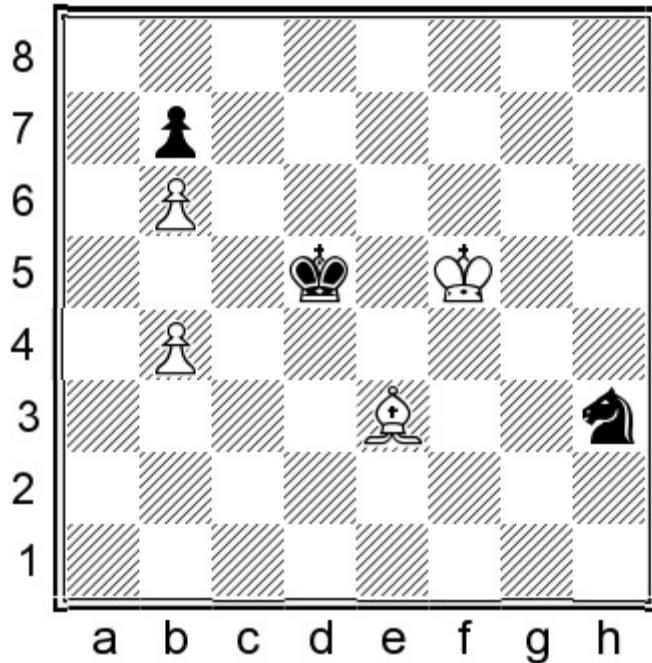
And White resigned.

Recently, something similar happened with a Lolli-like position, on the highest level.

Anish Giri

Samuel Shankland

Wijk aan Zee 2019

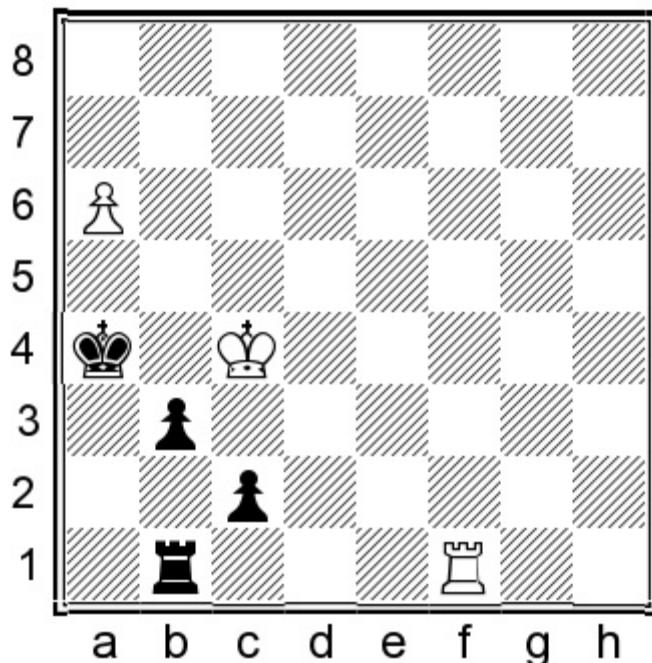


To general amazement and amusement, Black resigned in this position. But losing the knight doesn't matter; with the black king reaching c8 it still is a draw, just as in the original Lolli position. As in the previous game, some train of thought must have withheld Shankland from taking a further look at the final position.

I do sympathize with Maiwald and Shankland. I once missed at least a draw (and maybe a win) with an endgame trick that was discovered in the 18th century by Stamma. We have seen some of his middlegame problems, but he also composed a few endgame studies.

Stamma

1745



White to move

(Exercise no 148)

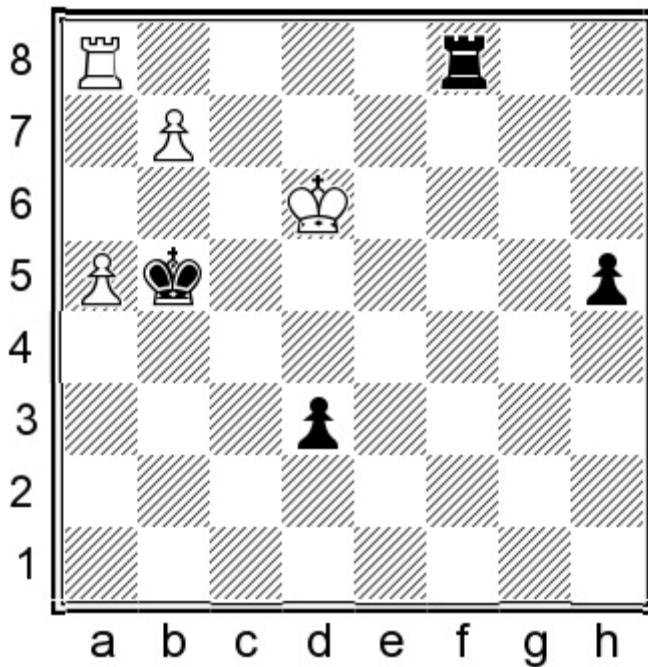
1. $\mathbb{E}c1!$ $\mathbb{E}xc1$ 2. a7 $\mathbb{A}a3$ 3. $\mathbb{A}c3!$ $\mathbb{A}a4$ 4. a8= $\mathbb{W}+$

and White wins.

Marc Repplinger

Willy Hendriks

Koblenz 2003



Black to move

(Exercise no 149)

70...d2??

A few things had happened before, and there was little time left on the clock, but I don't recall what I exactly missed. Maybe I was counting on White to play 71. $\mathbb{E}xf8$.

As in Stamma's composition, 70... $\mathbb{E}b8!!$ is the move. Tablebases give it as a win but I'm not sure I would have managed that in the remaining time.

71. b8= \mathbb{W} + 1-0

Having no time left did play a role, but for missing a beautiful move like 70... $\mathbb{E}b8$ there is no excuse.

Dealing wisely with the allotted thinking time is not my greatest virtue, but with the rates of play of our

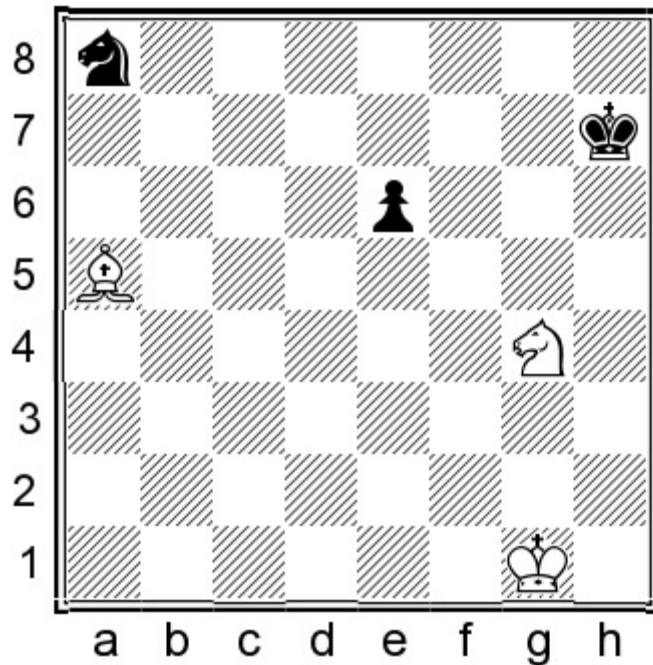
day almost all players have little time left or are playing on increment when they enter the final phase of the game. This means that you should be able to produce your knowledge and your technical mastery of basic endgames almost on auto-pilot. I am sure that this is not the case for the great majority of players, myself included. Most of us have studied the basic endgames, but there are a lot of them, and you'll never face the great majority over the board. The direct feedback link between studying openings and getting them on the board doesn't exist for endgames.

Take, for example, mating with bishop and knight. Have you mastered that? I asked a group of older students and of course they all had studied this endgame at some point, but most of them honestly doubted if they would succeed in winning it. And although it is called a basic endgame, most players will never get this endgame in their life. If you look in the databases you will find that a lot of strong players have failed to win it. Since this is a bit embarrassing, you have to practice it more often. The same applies to the rook and bishop versus rook endgame, which is of similar difficulty.

If you managed to solve the next beautiful study, I guess you are in good enough shape to mate with bishop and knight.

A.Sarychev & K.Sarychev

1930



White to move

(Exercise no 150)

White has to capture the dominated knight on a8 with his king, while Black has to try to get the knight out with the help of his king.

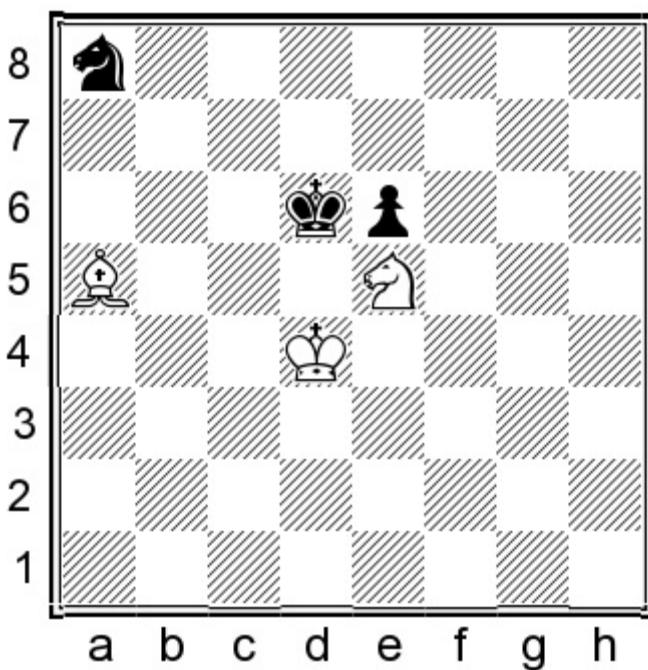
1. Kg5! Qg7 2. Kd8!

Fine play to keep the black king locked up for as long as possible. A typical form of cooperation: when the bishop and knight are on the same colour they control the most squares.

2... $\mathbb{Q}f8$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}e8$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}a5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

Black seems to be just in time, but alas...

6. $\mathbb{Q}d4$



6... $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 7. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ mate.

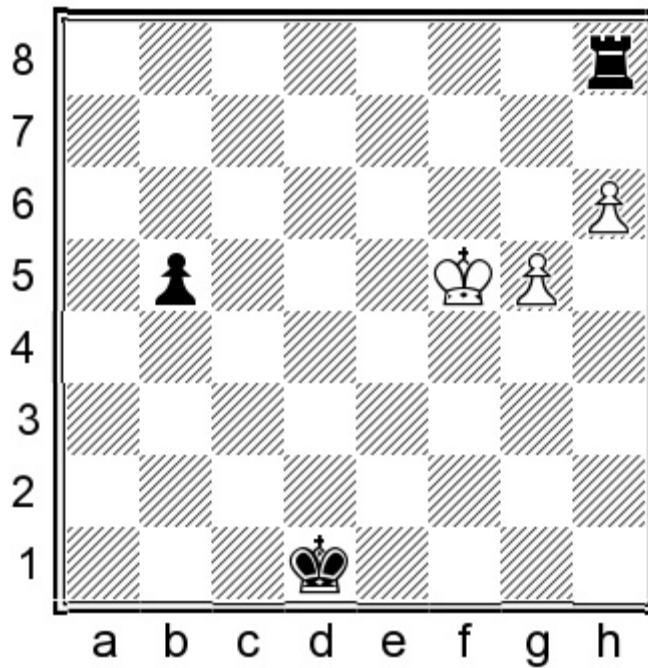
So if you have studied the bishop and knight endgame once, you have to rehearse it now and then. How often is a personal matter, but certainly more often than most players do. Once a year will probably do for most of us. Recently, more and more tools that facilitate rehearsal in chess have become available, within database programs or online, and they surely make this task easier and more enjoyable.

Returning to the idea that the development of the individual resembles historical development, this is perfectly true regarding the endgame, in the form of a slow and steady accumulation of an enormous amount of small bits of knowledge. Endgame knowledge increased gradually in history, from basic to more advanced, and even at an early stage the amount of knowledge was rather impressive.

The study of endgames was carried out away from the great controversies, and also at some distance from practical play. Throughout history, chess theorists and writers have urged players to devote more time to the endgame. And throughout that same history, most players have decided to invest their time in studying the openings. Some things will never change.

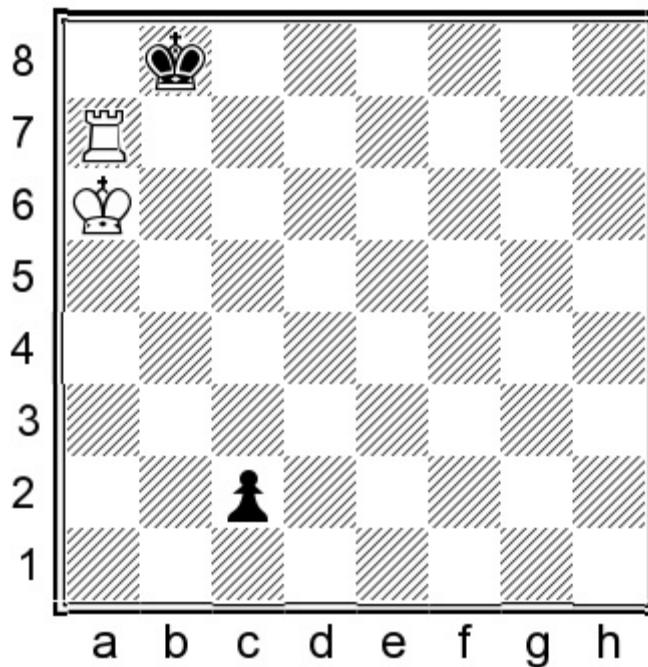
Exercises for Chapter 34

151 (*go to the solution*)



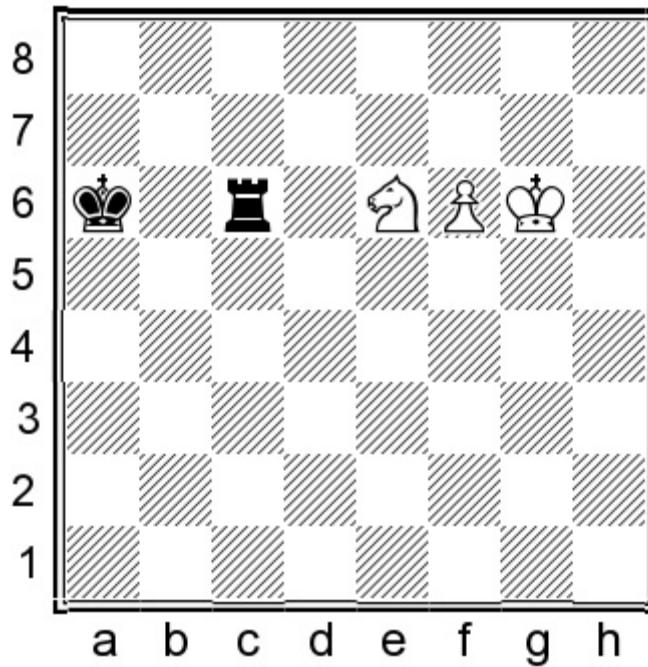
White to move

152 (*go to the solution*)



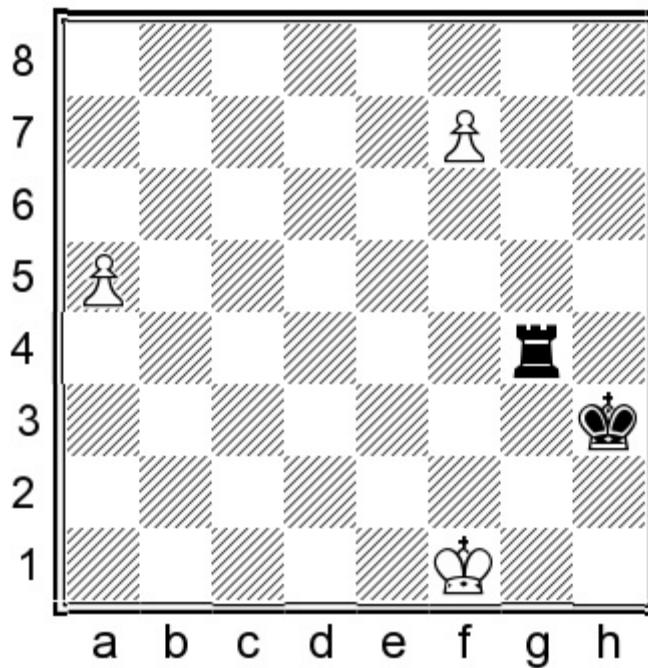
White to move

153 (*go to the solution*)



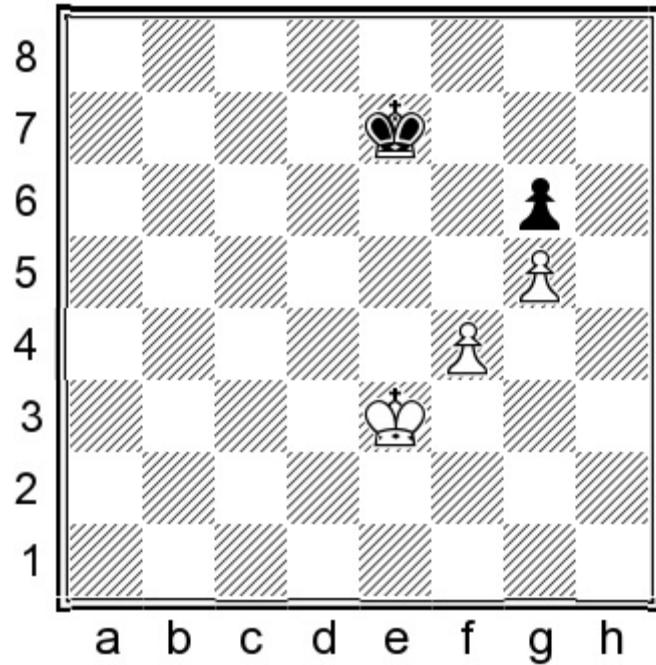
White to move

154 (*go to the solution*)



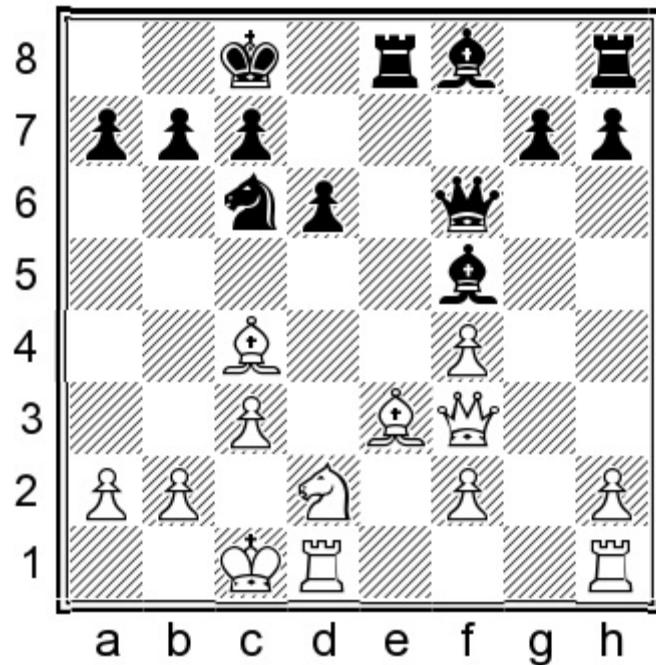
White to move

155 (*go to the solution*)



Win or draw? With either White or Black to move!

156 (*go to the solution*)



Black to move

34 Revolution or evolution

If we want to look at the history of improvement in chess from an evolutionary perspective, it is useful to distinguish between the strict biological term and a more general meaning of the word. There are some resemblances between Darwinian evolution and improvement in chess. In particular, the important role of competition springs to mind. But I'd like to use the word in a more general meaning, describing typical forms or processes of development.

A list of characteristics of evolutionary development may look like the following: gradual, cumulative, slow and steady accumulation of knowledge, cooperation and competition, bottom-up development instead of top-down, blind progress instead of an all-embracing plan, the work of many actors instead of a few geniuses and complexity resulting from the interaction between simpler elements.

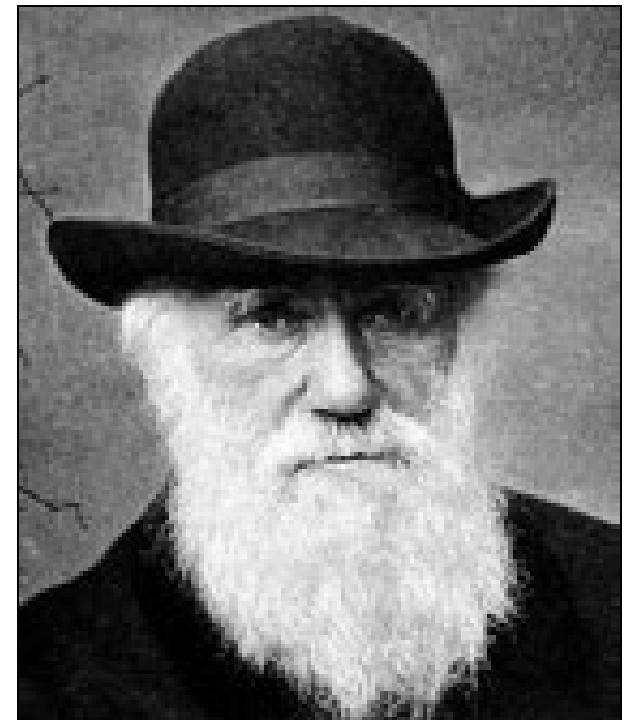
Daniel Dennett wrote about Darwinian thinking as a ‘universal acid’: it leaves nothing untouched and destroys all the traditional pyramidal top-down thinking about how things came into being. The history of improvement in chess, however, has for its essential parts been written in the first half of the twentieth century, and those writing it had a traditional view of historical development, with a few heroes and some revolutionary ideas that brought about enormous changes. The quintessential parts of this view are widely upheld until this day. For example, Kasparov’s *My Great Predecessors* is completely in line with the views of Lasker, Euwe and Réti about the developments in the 19th century.

Some years ago, Matt Ridley wrote a book titled *The Evolution of Everything*. Chess history wasn’t a part of it, but I think a revision of our understanding of this history from an evolutionary perspective will be enlightening.

For me the essence of this revision is to consider improvement in chess primarily as the result of bottom-up instead of top-down processes. This will be the subject of the next chapter. First I will address some other characteristics of evolutionary development.

Quantity and styles

Chess history books tend to hop from one big name to the other and/or from one style to the other, and in this book I have more or less followed that structure. But what really set into motion the enormous improvement that started at the beginning of the 19th century was not some exceptional idea from a single player, but the changes in the chess-playing community: the number of players started growing steadily, competition got off the ground and became more serious, games were being recorded and published, some professionalism arose and the literature on chess grew in numbers and spread. All these quantitative aspects were a precondition – or, even better, the cause of the steady progress that started back then.



Later on in history, the dominance of the ‘Soviet school of chess’ can be fully explained by the same

quantitative means: a large chess-playing community with many (semi-)professional players and trainers. To explain its success, there really is no need to search for some intrinsic qualities of the chess they played (such as the vague concept of ‘dynamism’). For Soviet ideology it was of course attractive to regard it as one school with some clear virtues, but in reality there were players with all possible differences in style who had little in common, apart from belonging to a big and strong chess-playing community.

As a side note on the quantitative acceleration of chess development: with all the online chess activity included, nowadays the same number of games as had been preserved up to the year 1900 get recorded approximately every single minute! But even if we take into account ‘serious’ games only, for example the weekly *TWIC* (The Week In Chess) collection, just 3 to 4 weeks will do to reach this amount.

A good example of the emphasis on style is Euwe’s history writing. In the influential *The Development of Chess Style* he writes in the preface:

‘Succeeding generations of experts have contributed to the development of chess play, but mostly it was the style of some outstanding individual which moulded the thinking and style of play of his time.’¹⁵²

If you read his history of those outstanding individuals, you get the impression that, in the background, there existed a community of chess players that basically didn’t change much, from Greco onwards to Philidor, Anderssen, Morphy, Steinitz and further on – as if there was one big chess club throughout history, with only different champions with their peculiar styles. Euwe’s book is a good example of the neglect of the quantitative aspect in favour of styles and ideas. Regarding the period after Steinitz, which Euwe characterizes as dominated by ‘the Virtuosi’, with their ‘technique and routine’, he even speaks of ‘a kind of lull in the development of chess’ with players primarily busy working out the ideas of the previous period.¹⁵³ A rather peculiar appreciation, considering the enormous progress made in this period, with players like Lasker and Capablanca on top.

With the Italian and the Philidorian schools, two elementary poles in chess style were named early on in history. Murray thought that a synthesis of the two had already been reached in the first half of the 19th century, thanks to his countryman William Lewis (one of the strongest players of his time and an influential writer),

‘adopting all that is best from the two rival schools, and following now the one, now the other, as circumstances demand. The result was a great increase in the brightness of the game. [...] The new school, which we may term the Lewis or English school, governed the practice of all English and German players down to the time of Wilhelm Steinitz. It reached its highest point in the play of Paul Morphy.’¹⁵⁴

History writing in terms of schools or styles didn’t stop here (with this beautiful synthesis). However, I don’t believe this approach is very useful, often forcing diverse events or persons into the straitjacket of a unifying narrative. For one funny example, Morphy gets presented by Murray as the peak of the English school, though earlier in this book we saw Morphy speaking about it in the most pejorative terms.

As can be seen from the Murray quote, this type of thinking, in terms of style, has always been inspired by nationalistic and ideological feelings. A good example is Réti's *Modern Ideas in Chess*, a classic work and at the same time a reservoir of stereotypes. To the diversity of styles already available, he adds 'Americanism' in chess, as opposed to the 'old European intellectual life'. For Réti, this opposition is nothing less than the essential struggle of his time, and he ends the book in a rather dramatic tone: 'If Americanism is victorious in chess, it will also be so in life. For in the idea of chess and the development of the chess mind we have a *picture* of the intellectual struggle of mankind.' A remarkable echo of Lasker's way of thinking.

In *Die Kunst der Bauernführung*, Kmoch tells a small anecdote on Rudolf Spielmann, the 'master of attack' we've met before. It nicely puts the style aspect into perspective, though he even introduces a new one:

'Spielmann was able to sink into utter despondency after the loss of a game, as happened to him in Carlsbad 1923. In the third round he defeated Réti, but when he lost to Rubinstein in the fourth round, he was done with. He began to play carelessly and lost many games in a row, thus denying his already questionable affiliation with the cautious Viennese school – the Munich school though, to which he belonged as a beer drinker, he remained faithful to every evening.'¹⁵⁵

There, at last, we have a school with some clear characteristics.

From the perspective of improvement in particular, I think that style differences are of minor importance compared to the quality of play (based on the quantity of good knowledge).

The openings

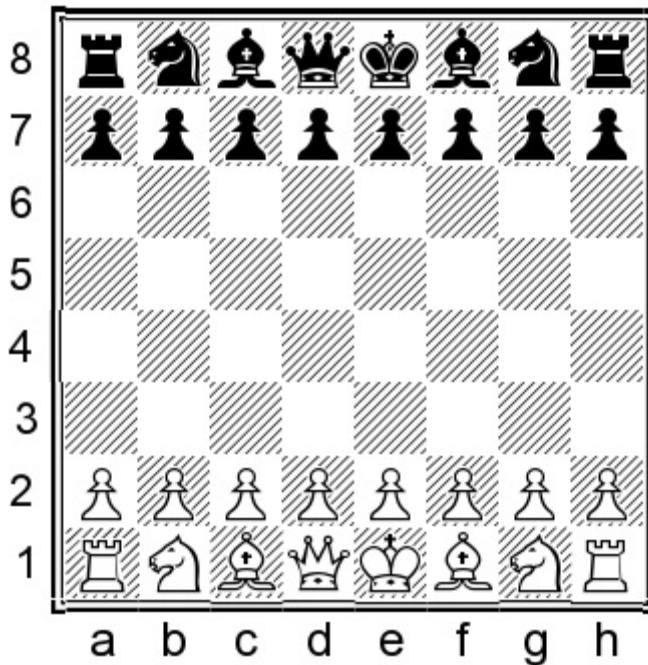
There is no better example of evolution in chess than the way opening play and theory have developed. Comparing it with evolution in nature does make sense. For Darwin, variation was an essential part of his theory. Nature is constantly trying out variations, and because of the competition, those that give some advantage tend to survive, and those that don't disappear.

In chess history, enormous numbers of games have been played, many following the known lines. Often something gets added with no lasting value, but now and then a useful novelty is discovered and added to the ever-expanding body of 'theory'. In the process, lines or openings that once flourished disappear into the background or altogether.

The speed of this evolution of opening theory depends considerably on the size of the chess-playing community. From the beginning of the 19th century this community was steadily growing, along with the opportunities to compete with each other. Competition is essential to establish the value of openings, but also for their further development. It is difficult to find out things all on your own: reacting to an opponent defending the other side is more efficient. So progress depended not only on the best players finding the most novelties, but on the whole chess community. Our engines assign trustworthy evaluations to opening lines, but in the old days, scoring numbers were much more important to establish the value of different opening lines.

Today there are so many tournaments going on every day all over the world that the next Darwin quote has become almost literally true with respect to the evolution of opening theory:

'It may metaphorically be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good.'¹⁵⁶



The basic question of chess is: what is the best way to play this position? All games deal with it. The whole history of chess can be seen as an empirical investigation into this question. The answers have become better slowly but steadily, in direct correspondence with the combined activity of all players. And these answers have also advanced further into the middlegame, slowly leading to the beginnings of middlegame theory.

Some players played a more prominent role than others, and their names, attached to specific openings or lines, testify to this. But in the long run, these individual contributions are not that essential, and had it not been this player then surely later on some other player would have discovered that certain opening or promising line of play.

Heroes and name-giving

One of the fields Ridley discusses in his book is technology, and I think there are some parallels with chess. He describes how he learned in his school days that technology consisted of a series of inventions by a sort of godlike geniuses, who came across their earth-shattering ideas more or less out of the blue. Later, Ridley came to realize that even inventions are an evolutionary phenomenon. They are rarely the product of a single genius, no matter how brilliant the person was who finally got the credit. Often, more people contribute: there is a lot of communication as well as competition with other players in the field, and at times there are several candidates who could claim the honour. Some inventions are attributed to different people in different countries. There are even cases of different individuals going to the patent office on the same day to register the same invention. When the time is right, the inventions are there to be made. The heroic image of the invention as a sudden revelation of the genius is replaced by the idea of the gradual unstoppable progress of technology.

Let's have a look at some discoveries in the history of chess to see if a comparison can be made with

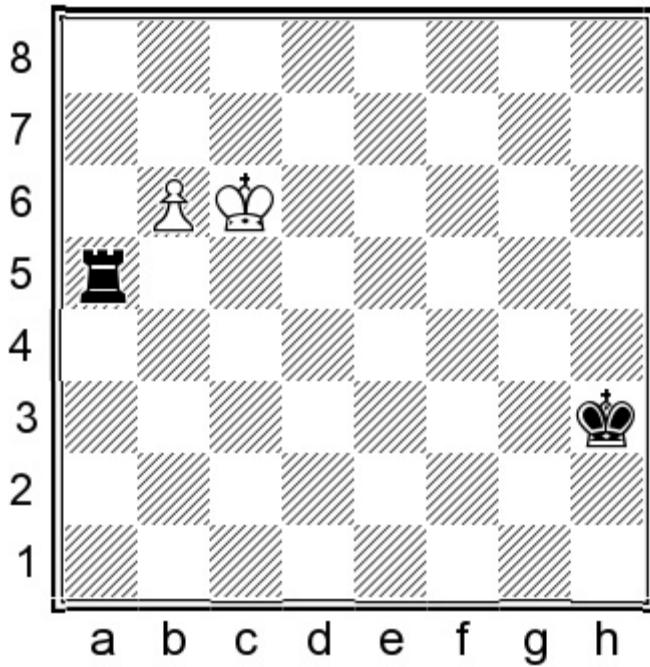
Ridley's idea of the evolutionary character of progress in technology.

The first concerns a famous position, though the amusing story about how it was discovered is less well known.¹⁵⁷ It started with the next game from a match played in London in 1875. We have already met the black player (and his in memoriam of Staunton) in an earlier chapter.

Richard Fenton

William Potter

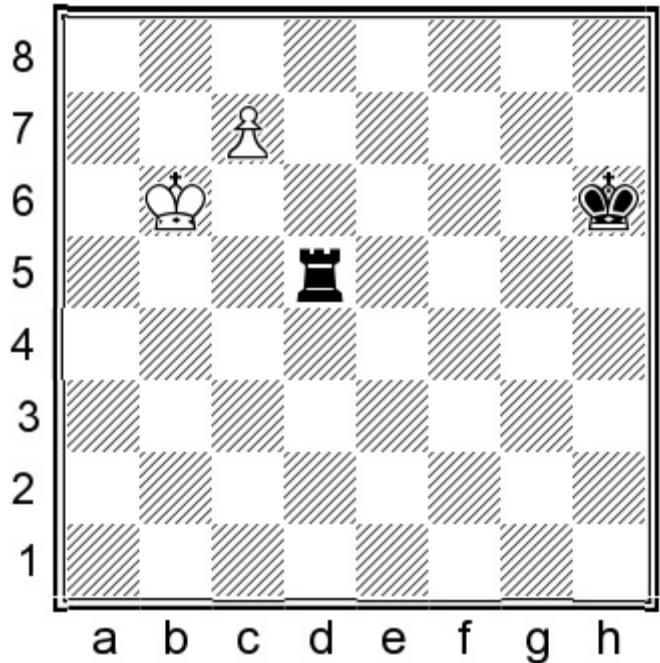
London 1875



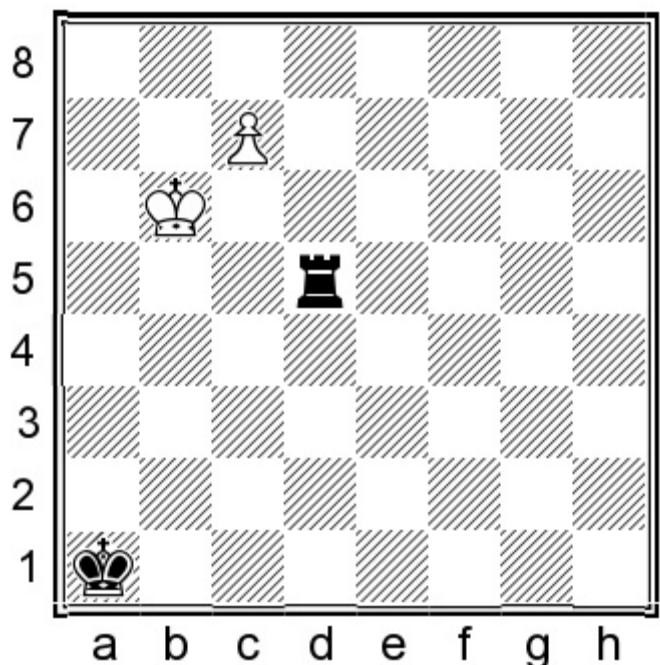
White to move

After 1.b7 $\mathbb{Q}a6+$ the players agreed to a draw. It is not clear if Potter (who was much stronger than Fenton) already realized that White could have won. Maybe it was discovered in the analysis after the game. Anyway, Zukertort indicated the win (2. $\mathbb{Q}c5 \mathbb{Q}a5+$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}c4 \mathbb{Q}a4+$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}c3 \mathbb{Q}a3+$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}b2$) in a chess column soon after.

At the time, G.E. Barbier, originally from France, lived in London, and maybe he was present at this game, or else he saw it in Zukertort's column. He later moved to Glasgow, where he had a column in a local magazine and on the occasion of Potter's death in 1895 he decided to bring this king manoeuvre once more into the limelight. He couldn't remember the exact position, so he gave the next position as 'Black to play, White wins'.



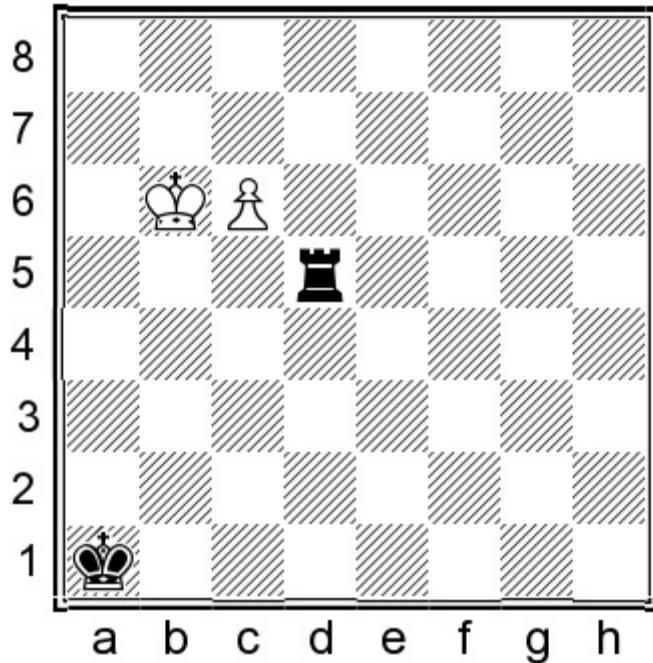
This position kept intriguing Barbier (or maybe, in his absence, the cat knocked over the king and the housekeeper put it back on a different square) and he found out that with the king on a1, Black suddenly has a beautiful draw available, so the next week he published this position as ‘Black to play and draw’.



One of the readers who found the solution was Fernando Saavedra, a player of modest level, originally from Spain. But a few days later he made another discovery which gave his name ever-lasting fame: he found out that White still had a win. He went to the Glasgow Chess Club to inform Barbier of his beautiful finding, which finally led to the following position:

Barbier & Saavedra

1895



White to play and win

1.c7 ♕d6+ 2.♔b5 ♕d5+ 3.♔b4 ♕d4+ 4.♔b3 ♕d3+ 5.♔c2 ♕d4! 6.c8=♕!!

Not 6.c8=♕? ♕c4+! – Barbier's finding.

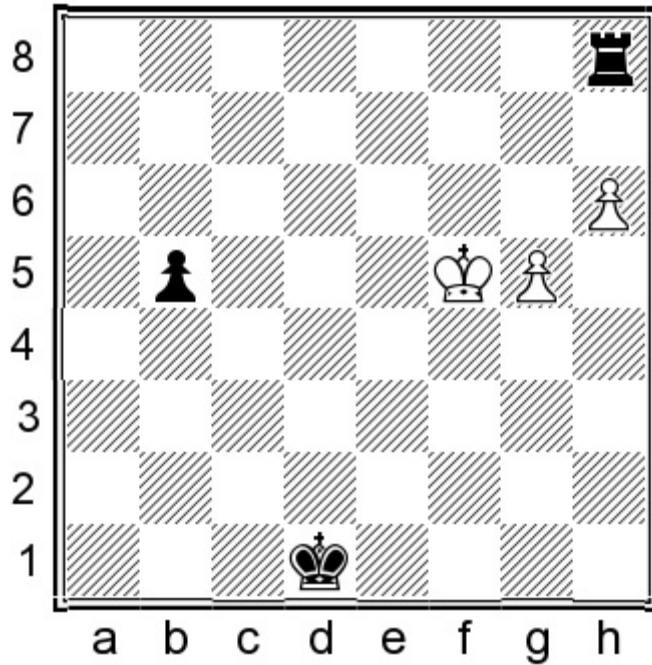
6...♕a4 7.♔b3! and wins.

The combination of the richness of ideas with a minimum of material makes this a study of great perfection. But it was composed, if that is the right word, by four players, or five, Chance included.

I guess it would have been discovered or composed sooner or later, and actually there were already a few studies anticipating elements of it. The king manoeuvre was known from a study by Kling & Horwitz from 1853. Barbier's stalemate had been discovered by Cook in 1864. And Lasker, though he wasn't much of an endgame composer, had them both in two different studies from 1892 – a remarkable coincidence.

Kling & Horwitz

1853



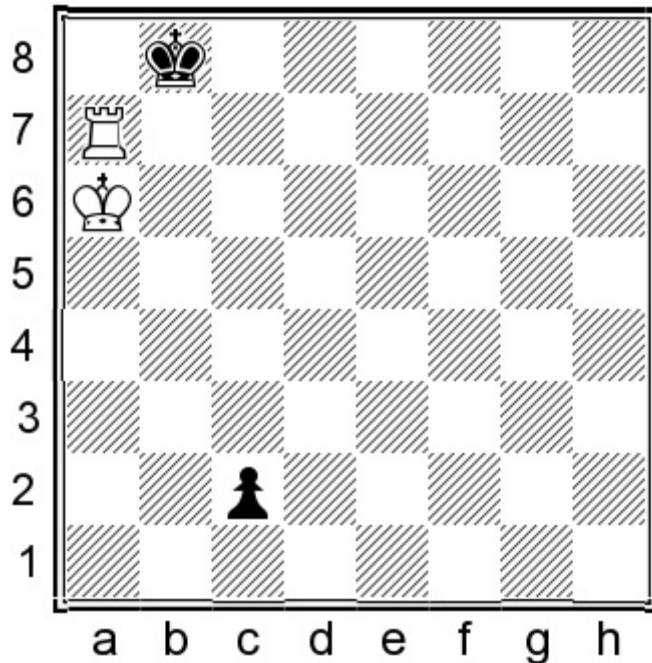
White to move

(Exercise no 151)

1.g6! ♕xh6 2.g7 and wins.

Cook

1864



White to move

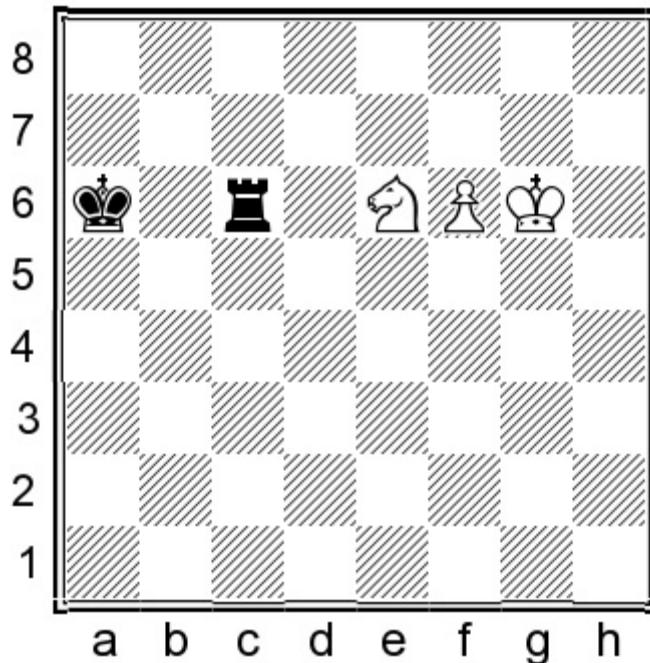
(Exercise no 152)

1. $\mathbb{Q}b7+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}b5!$ c1= \mathbb{W} 3. $\mathbb{Q}c5+$ draw.

In Van der Heijden's database of studies I found this position in a mirrored version by Stamma, without a source or date, but that should be at least a century before Cook. I guess the latter wasn't aware of Stamma's study (otherwise it would be plagiarism), or maybe it was never published. Examples of what in biology is called 'convergent evolution' can be found in abundance in chess history.

Lasker

1892



White to move

(Exercise no 153)

1. f7! $\mathbb{Q}xe6+$

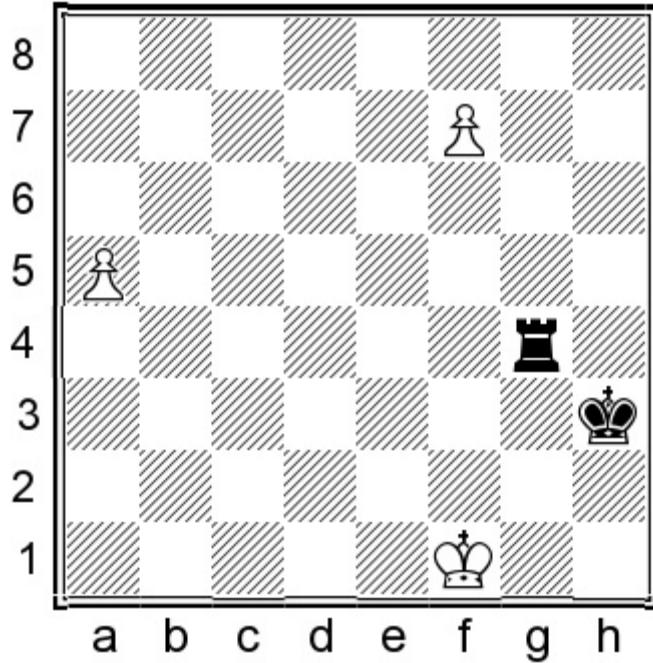
Or 1... $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}c7+$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}e8$.

2. $\mathbb{Q}g5$

with the by now well-known winning manoeuvre.

Lasker

1892



White to move

(Exercise no 154)

1.f8=♕! ♕a4 2.♕a8 ♔g4

The stalemate trick was just a nice intro, but the resulting rook endgame with the white rook in front of the rook pawn is very instructive (and probably the reason Lasker composed this position).

3.♔e2!

Not 3.a6? ♔f3! and Black's counterplay secures the draw; otherwise 3.a6, 4.a7 5.♕-check and 6.a8=♛ would have been a standard win.

3...♔f5 4.a6!

Forces the king back to the kingside: 4...♔e6 5.a7 ♔d7 6.♕h8!..

4...♔g6 5.♔d3

5.a7? is a typical mistake, White needs the a7-square for his king to hide.

5...♔f7 6.♔c3 ♔g7 7.♔b3 ♕a5 8.♔b4 ♕a1 9.♔b5 ♕b1+ 10.♔c6 ♕a1 11.♔b7 ♕b1+ 12.♔a7 ♔f7 13.♕b8 ♕a1 14.♕b6 ♔e7 15.♔b7 and wins.

The next position is almost as famous as the Saavedra. Less known is the fascinating accompanying story, told by Tim Krabbé on his *Chess Curiosities* site, about the duplicate that emerged in a magazine many years later, though it was played a few years before – or was it a hoax?

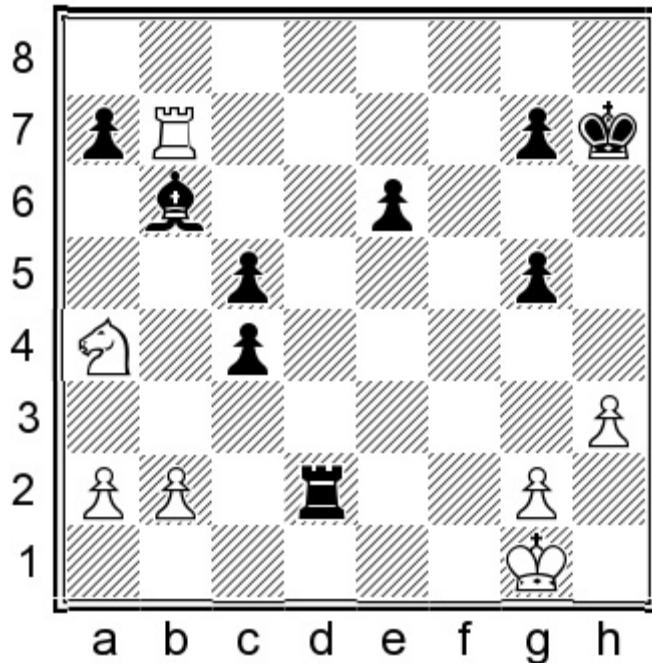
The combination is rightly famous for the incredible way in which the pawns manage to beat knight and rook – it would have been a perfect endgame study. I do think, however, that it was probably found piecemeal (in both games). White's defences on move 33 and 34 are easy to miss. According to Koltanowski, who spoke to Sanz about this game, 34...a5 took Sanz 45 minutes to work out. That would be a bit strange though: there clearly is nothing else left at that moment, so maybe Sanz meant he used 45 minutes for the complete combination until 34...a5.¹⁵⁸

It might not seem very polite to question another player's brilliancies, but finding complicated combinations often happens in piecemeal fashion, and that doesn't diminish their value at all.

Martin Ortueta Esteban

José Sanz Aguado

Madrid 1934

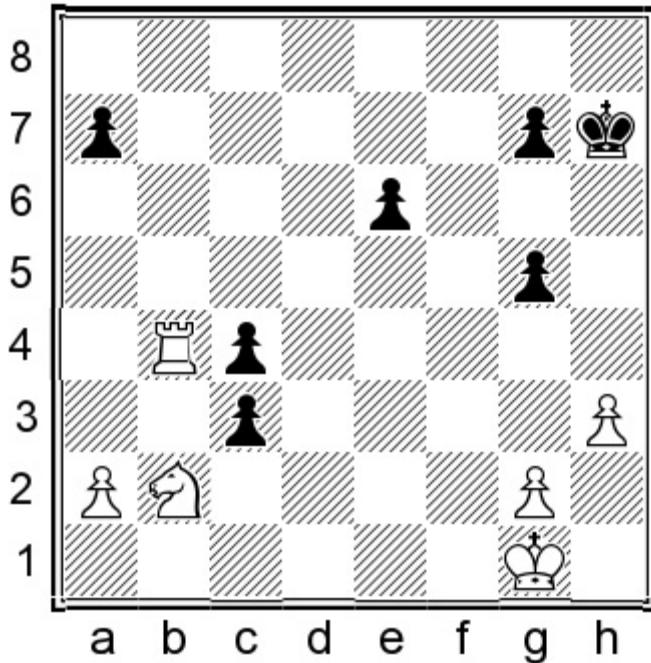


Black to move

31...♝xb2!! 32.♞xb2 c3! 33.♝xb6!

After 33.♞d3 c4+ 34.♝xb6 cxd3 the connected pawns on the third rank cannot be stopped.

33...c4!! 34.♝b4!



34...a5!

The final point (note that had the black king been on g8 this wouldn't have worked because of 35.♗xc4 cxb2 36.♗c8+ and 37.♗b8).

35.♗xc4 c2 0-1

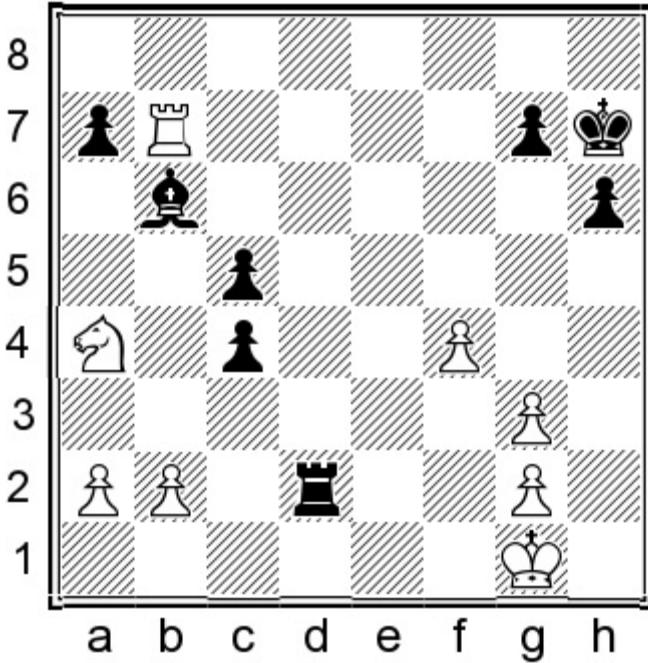
In 1952 the following game was published, and since then there have been discussions about its credibility. At the end of his detective-like investigations, Krabbé comes to the conclusion that it probably was a real game and not a fake. He gives some strong arguments for this, so I am inclined to follow him. I only have some problems with his evaluation of the game:

'Tylkowski-Wojciechowski itself looks like a perfectly natural chess game; no blunders to get the pieces where they need to be. If there are a few moves that might seem funny, or that I have trouble understanding – there are such moves in every chess game.'

I give the complete game here so you can judge for yourself, but I do see some strange things happening. Apart from that, it is a very mediocre game, which makes for a striking contrast with the brilliant finale. Maybe I'm being too suspicious.

Tylkowski – Antoni Wojciechowski Poznan 1931

1.f4 d5 2.e3 c5 3.♗f3 ♗c6 4.♗b5 ♗g4 5.0-0 e6 6.d3 ♗e7 7.♗c3 d4 8.♗b1 ♗f6 9.e4 0-0 10.♗xc6 bxc6 11.c3 dxc3 12.♗xc3 ♗xf3 13.♗xf3 ♗g4 14.♔h1 ♖d4 15.♖g1 ♖xg1+ 16.♔xg1 ♖d8 17.♔e3 ♗xe3 18.♗xe3 ♖b6 19.♗d1 h6 20.e5 f6 21.exf6 ♖xf6 22.♗f3 c4+ 23.d4 c5 24.d5 exd5 25.♗xd5 ♖h7 26.♗d7 ♖d8 27.♗b7 ♖g6 28.♗g3 ♖xg3 29.hxg3 ♖d2 30.♗a4

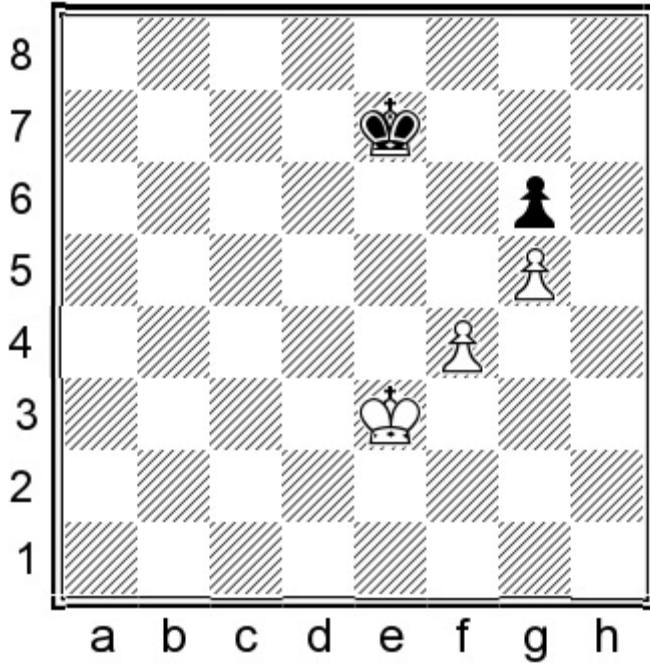


30... $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ 31. $\mathbb{Q}xb2$ c3 32. $\mathbb{Q}xb6$ c4 33. $\mathbb{Q}b4$ a5 34. $\mathbb{Q}xc4$ c2 35. $\mathbb{Q}xa5$ c1= $\mathbb{W}+$ 36. $\mathbb{Q}h2$ $\mathbb{W}c5$ 37. $\mathbb{Q}b2$ $\mathbb{W}xa5$ 38.g4 $\mathbb{W}e1$ 39.g3 h5 40.gxh5 $\mathbb{Q}h6$

and Black won after some more moves.

If both games are real, it surely is a remarkable coincidence that this brilliant combination was discovered twice, this early in chess history. But although chess is a very rich game, it is not unlimited, and a lot of similarities often return. If you look at the queenside construction there is no need to be surprised that it occurred more than once. And both players entering with their rooks on the seventh/second rank is of course a very common occurrence.

After writing the above, I decided to do some database research for the queenside half of this position (also with the black rook on e2, c2 or b1 and the white rook on b8) and I have to admit I fully expected to find at least a few more examples, but, alas, nothing, except the Ortueta-Sanz game. Our game is richer than I thought! My database has more than six million games, and the games up to Ortueta-Sanz form less than one percent of the total. It's funny that the above construction hasn't arisen again, despite the exponential growth of our databases.



(Exercise no 155)

Not only good things are discovered more than once. This position arose (or could arise) from studies by Hans Fahrni (early 20th century) and Daniel Harrwitz (mid-19th century). Both studies were meant to end in a win for White, but no matter who is to move (White in Harrwitz's, Black in Fahrni's case), it's a draw.

Actually, Harrwitz, one move before, let Black play 1... $\mathbb{Q}e6-f5$ (instead of 1... $\mathbb{Q}e6-e7!$ (1... $\mathbb{Q}e7!$), maintaining the distant opposition)

after which White won with (1... $\mathbb{Q}f5$) 2. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}e4$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$ 4.f5.

In Fahrni's case Black had to give up the distant opposition, and indeed he loses after 1... $\mathbb{Q}f7$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}d4$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}e4$.

But 1... $\mathbb{Q}d7!$ keeps the draw. To make progress White should play his king to f4, but that square is not available.

I guess that in chess history, the opposition theme and all its intricacies is the one that has been (re)discovered by independent researchers the most often.

These are only a few examples, but many of the great findings in chess history came into being in a similar fashion, little by little and with a lot of help from other players, opponents and Chance. Regarding 2. $\mathbb{W}e2$ in the French, Chigorin later admitted that he first pointed it out half in jest during a conversation with a group of players. Analysing it later, he found that it did deserve serious attention. He concluded:

'I think that, generally speaking, chance will time and again play a significant role in the development of an opening.'¹⁵⁹

In many cases, other players or theoreticians were close to the same findings, or even made them

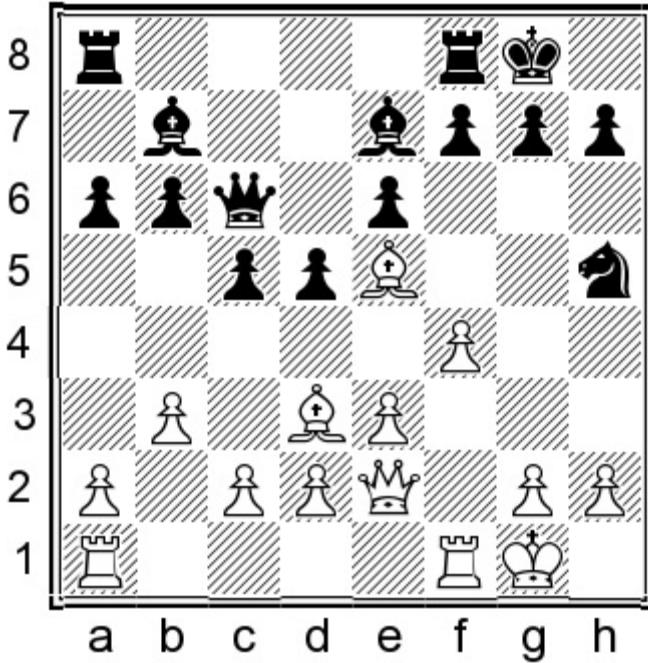
independently. Sometimes the name of the first to discover something has been attached to it, especially in the field of openings. But also typical tactics or strategic or endgame ideas sometimes go by people's names, as well as principles, rules or guidelines. There too authorship is often disputed: for example, the principle of 'improving your worst piece' has been attributed to different people. Of course, this is such a general principle that it can hardly be 'discovered' by anyone.

We saw Greco being honoured for the ♜xh7 sacrifice, which was called 'the Greek Gift'. But the ♜xh6 sacrifice we have looked at extensively hasn't been claimed by anyone. The much rarer double bishop sacrifice is most often referred to as the Lasker-Bauer combination. And though I don't want to diminish Lasker's brilliancy in any way, it surely would have been only a matter of time before someone else would have played it.

Emanuel Lasker

Johann Bauer

Amsterdam 1889



White to move

15.♘xh7+! ♖xh7 16.♗xh5+ ♖g8 17.♘xg7!!

Kasparov jokingly remarked that 'today Lasker might have tried to copyright this idea.' But well, had that been the practice, how many copyrights would Lasker already have had to violate to reach the above position?

17...♖xg7 18.♗g4+ ♖h7 19.♗f3 e5 20.♗h3+ ♖h6 21.♗xh6+ ♖xh6

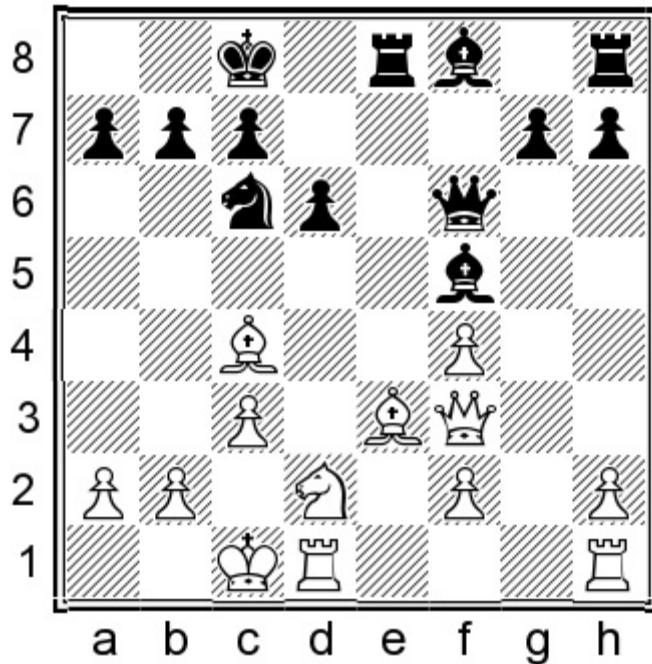
Black has escaped mate, but with

22. $\mathbb{W}d7!$

White won an extra piece and later the game.

Some typical mates also bear the name of the person who first played it. For example Boden, who we have met a few times before, has his own mate, with two bishops nicely cooperating:

R.Schulder
Samuel Boden
London 1860



Black to move

(Exercise no 156)

13...d5! 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd5$ $\mathbb{W}xc3+!!$ 15. $bxc3$ $\mathbb{Q}a3$ mate.

For Ridley, progress in technology is not the product of inspiration, but a gradual and unstoppable autonomous process in which ‘people are just pawns’.¹⁶⁰ One might consider this to be a bit extreme, but for chess history, which is so often presented as a history of big inventors, it is a welcome change of perspective.

Some good arguments can be brought forward against reducing the big thinkers in chess to mere pawns in an autonomous process. Were they not well aware of how much room there was for improvement and discovery, and weren’t they consciously looking to achieve this? This is an interesting question. How did they value the state of progress at their time and how much room for improvement did they think was still available?

I guess many players, also stronger ones, didn’t think about these questions at all and just tried to

play a good game. Morphy didn't say or write much about his views on chess. He didn't seem to be interested in investigating unknown territory and after he had beaten everyone he lost interest, and only wanted to play against odds. We don't know if he thought much improvement of his play was possible. Anderssen, after losing his match against Morphy, considered the latter's play near perfect.

Steinitz thought a lot about chess theory, but I couldn't find any statements about how much progress he considered to be possible. He evidently thought much had been achieved already, just as Tarrasch did. Considering his comments on his games around 1894, Tarrasch seemed to think his own play was close to perfection. Later on, Capablanca had the same opinion regarding his own play, fearing chess had gotten near to 'death by draw'.

For us, near to the 'end of chess history' (if I am not stepping into the same pitfall), it is tempting to describe this whole history as some sort of consciously planned project of improvement. But if those players of the past did imagine themselves at all as being part of a progressive scale, they mostly thought they were already close to perfection.

Well, maybe this applies to the complete history of chess – until the computer put us in our place. I guess we now have a reasonably accurate picture of the possibilities of chess and of what perfect chess more or less looks like. But maybe the best players of the moment disagree and think that their 3400 rating is still substantially different from the 3600 they are striving for. Could Morphy ever have imagined that one day *receiving* odds of pawn and move from somebody would still leave him without a chance?

Natura non facit saltus

Although this saying wasn't Darwin's invention, he was happy to embrace it, since his own theory gave such a fitting explanation for this fact. In chess there is no inherent reason (like heredity) why progress should not take place in big leaps, and in this book we've seen quite a few ideas or complete games that presumably were 'ahead of their time'. In the next chapter however, I will try to substantiate that in chess, too, progress is best understood as an evolutionary process, which basically proceeds via a multitude of rather small steps. In the conventional view on the part of history that is the subject of this book, one can find at least two, and maybe even three, big leaps.

The first is Philidor's 'discovery' of pawn play as the essence of chess. Now there was almost no theory about the nature of the game before Philidor, so every vision would be a new one, but in the basic dualism between aggressive attacking and slow positional chess, which had already taken shape in the combat between the Italians and Ruy Lopez, Philidor fitted in with the more positional style of play. Some say Philidor was misunderstood and too far ahead of his time to have a successful following. I think that, though he had a few concrete ideas, his main concept was rather vague and he didn't manage to convert it into acceptable lines of (opening) play.

Morphy is generally considered to have been a leap forward, mainly with regard to the level of his play. But he didn't leave behind any theory or vision; nor did he play in a different style compared to his contemporaries. If he showed anything about the essence of the game then it was that you can play very good chess without entertaining any theory at all.

Steinitz's theory is considered to be the second leap. Or better, *the* leap: the revolution that completely changed the way we play chess. However, as I have tried to show, most of Steinitz's style

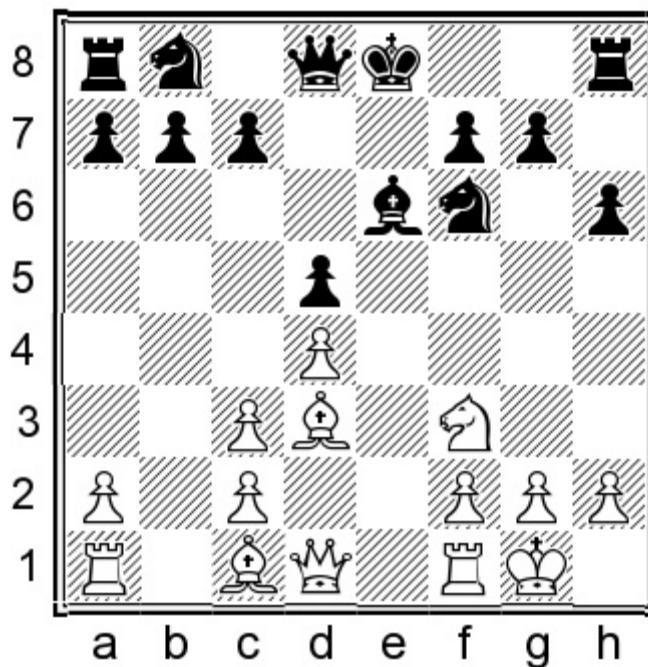
and ideas fitted in very well with already ongoing tendencies: away from gambit play and towards a slower, more positional type of play. His main invention, the king that can take care of itself, would have been a major leap, but alas, this concept has not survived.

The third leap has a somewhat special status and is actually a follow-up to the previous one, but I decided to name it separately, since it has had such an enormous influence on our perception of chess history: it is what I called the Great Lasker Hoax. By making an extreme caricature of chess before Steinitz, Lasker created an abrupt break, where I think a continuous development took place. The idea that they played a fundamentally different sort of chess before Steinitz is rather amazing, as is the fact that this idea has been dominant in chess history ever since.

For Lasker, the concept of struggle was all-important, and that shows some Darwinian inspiration. But his views on chess history, with its revolutionary leaps, and his ideas on the central role of planning, giving direction from above, place him in opposition to Darwin's line of thinking.

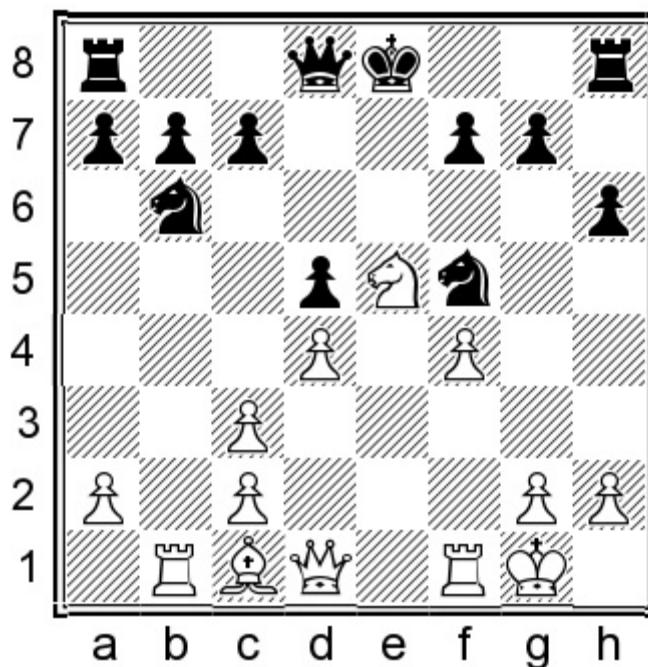
Exercises for Chapter 35

157 (*go to the solution*)



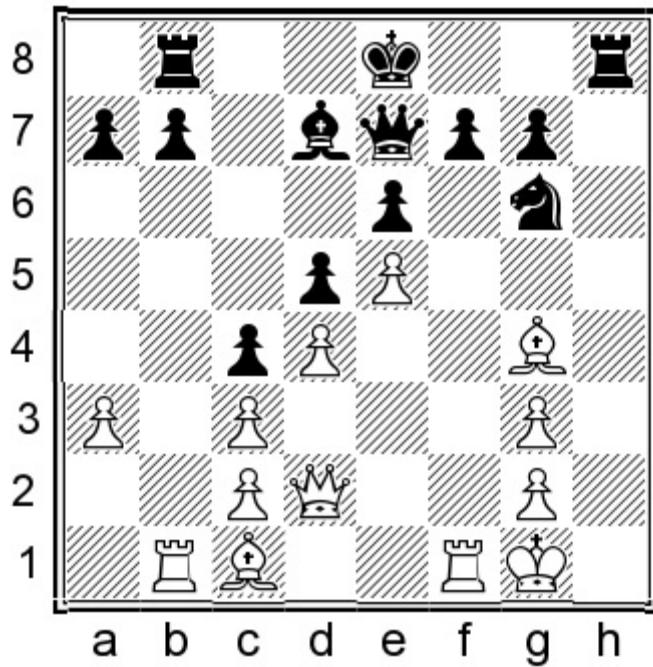
White to move

158 (*go to the solution*)



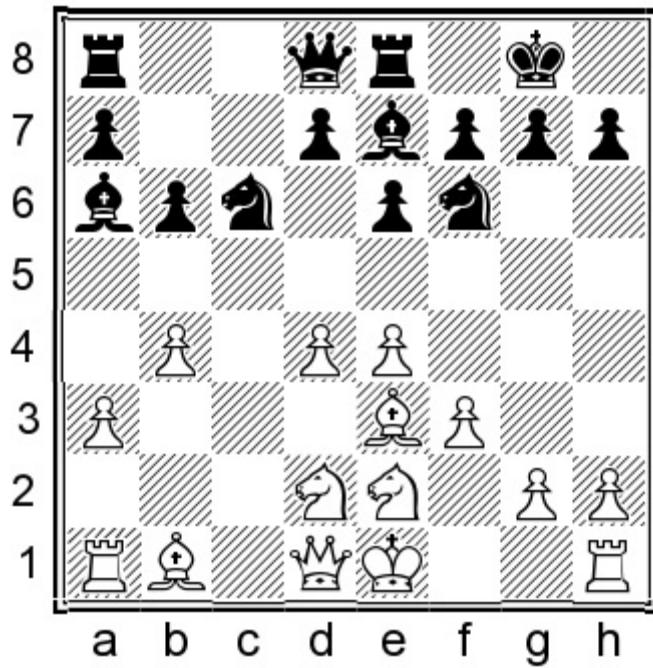
White to move

159 (*go to the solution*)



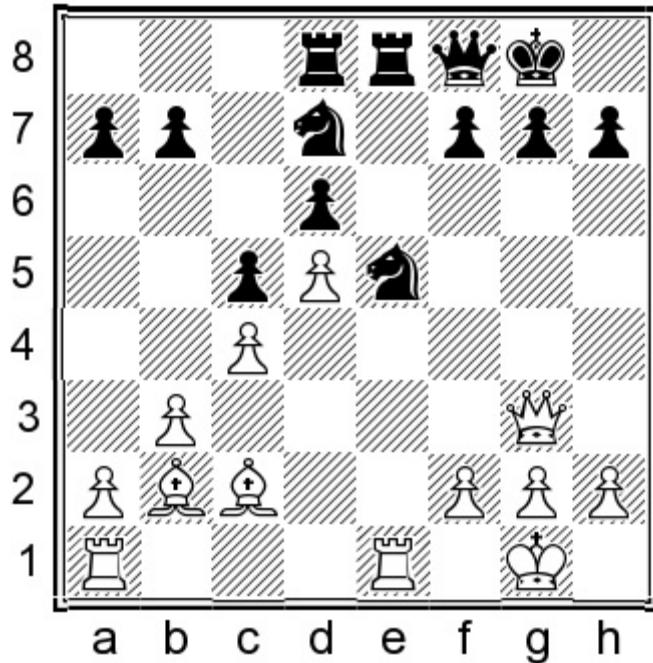
White to move

160 (*go to the solution*)



Black to move

161 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

Do you prefer the knights or the bishops?

35 Bottom-up development

Szymon Winawer

A central idea in evolutionary thinking, in both the strict biological and the wider sense, is that the direction of development is bottom-up instead of top-down. There is no creation, design or big plan from above that shapes the way things develop, but only the interaction of a multitude of elements that slowly develop from simpler into more complex organizations.

This contraposition is related to one of the biggest themes in philosophy: the relation between the concrete and the general. In *Move First, Think Later* I devoted quite some attention to this relationship, and for me it is still one of the main themes in thinking about chess. Regarding the way we learn chess and our thinking process during a game, I believe that essentially it is the concrete that leads to the general. However, to stay in a biological context, there are a lot of chicken and egg problems circling around this topic.



Returning to the question of how and what to learn from the history of chess, Euwe, Kasparov and many others have suggested that every beginner in chess has to get past some sort of primitive Romantic style, ‘the manner of play in the 16th and 17th centuries’. The follow-up to this is the idea that we develop from wildly attacking players into more positional ones, with Steinitz as the turning point in the historical part.

Neither at the historical nor at the individual level do I share this observation. It is more likely that most players develop from bad attacking and bad positional players into better ones on both terrains. This way, the resemblance between personal and general history that is left becomes very modest: throughout the history of chess we became better in all areas and you, as an individual, have also become better in all areas in your career as well – or are still in the process of trying to. So, to make the comparison fruitful, we have to look at a deeper level.

Getting better is essentially not a passage through styles, as Euwe and Kasparov make it appear, but an accumulation of small bits of knowledge: opening knowledge, endgame knowledge, and knowledge of typical tactics and typical strategic ideas. History books tend to hop from this style to that style, together with the typical features or big ideas that belong to them and their most prominent representatives. But beneath the surface there is an evolution going on of an enormous quantity of small concrete elements that are discovered, become part of common knowledge, and get developed further. We have seen a few of these elements in this book and followed some through time.

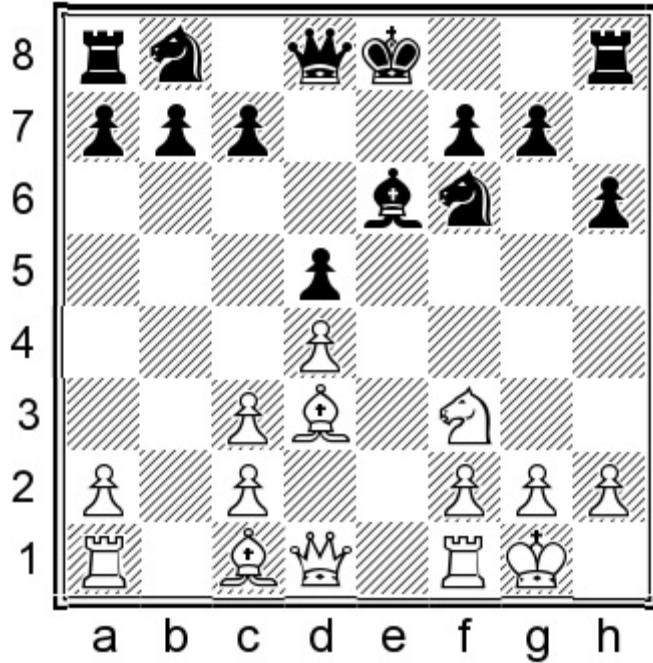
We will have to look once more at one of them, to exemplify this difficult relation between the general and the concrete, between top-down and bottom-up.

The ‘attack on the king in the centre’ is a very general topic. We have seen several games of Greco, Anderssen and especially Morphy in which the enemy king didn’t survive the opening stages of the game. We’ve also seen Steinitz trying to defend a revolutionary vision on the king’s capacities to take care of itself.

A general piece of advice for the attacker is to try to open lines towards the enemy king. On a more concrete level, I paid attention to the ♕a3 idea. You can’t get much more concrete than that: basically it is just one move (‘the move is the idea’, to quote John Watson). This move is an important asset in the Evans Gambit, and actually Evans himself was the first to play it, with this exact idea of keeping the king caught in the middle. But it can occur in many openings. The first two examples are from the French Defence.

Joseph Blackburne – Adolf Schwarz Vienna 1873

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♕b4 4.exd5 exd5 5.♕d3 ♕e6 6.♘f3 h6 7.0-0 ♕xc3 8.bxc3 ♘f6

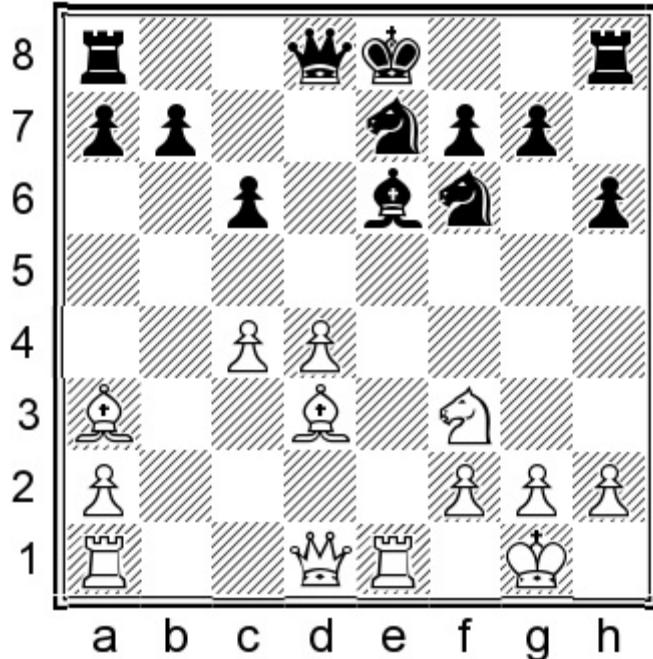


(Exercise no 157)

9.♕a3! ♜c6 10.♗e1 ♜e7

Trying to get the king to safety in a rather artificial way. White continues in the style advised, trying to open more lines towards the black king.

11.c4 c6 12.cxd5 ♜fxd5 13.c4 ♜f6



Now White played 14.♗b1 and after 14...♔c7 15.♗b3 0-0-0 16.♔a4 Black's king, though castled, was still under a heavy attack that finally proved decisive, but even stronger would have been 14.d5!, a

Morphy-style move, violently opening more lines.

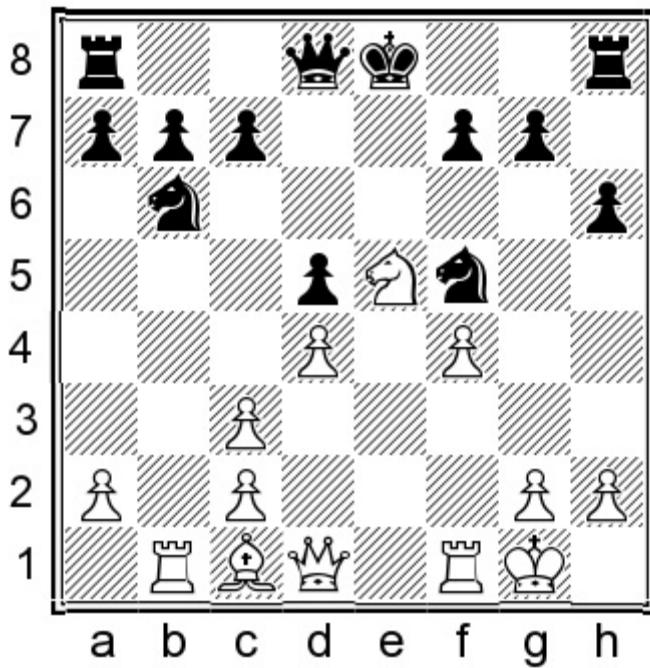
Blackburne may have known the following game by Steinitz, played a few years before.

The $\mathbb{Q}a3$ idea in the French occurs most often in the Winawer Variation (3... $\mathbb{Q}b4$) after a subsequent exchange on c3, as in the above game. As far as I know, Winawer wasn't the first to play the 3... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ line, but he played it against Steinitz, so that game caught people's attention, which may explain the name-giving. But it wasn't a very lucky introduction: Steinitz demonstrated that the dark-squared bishop can be badly missed.

This game is from the Paris 1867 tournament, and the story of Winawer's participation is remarkable. Initially he wasn't on the players list, and at the time he was in Paris for business by coincidence. However, his play in a coffeehouse drew attention, and since there was a spare place in the tournament he was invited. And Winawer, who'd never played in a serious event before, came second – one point behind the winner Kolisch, who quit his chess career directly afterwards to become a successful banker (and later a patron of several tournaments), but a point ahead of Steinitz in third place.

William Steinitz – Szymon Winawer Paris 1867

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 4.exd5 exd5 5. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 6. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ h6 7.0-0 $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 8.bxc3 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ 9. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ $\mathbb{Q}b6$
10. $\mathbb{Q}e5$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$ 11.f4 $\mathbb{Q}f5$ 12. $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$



(Exercise no 158)

Black is somewhat behind in development and White has several attractive ideas, like 13. $\mathbb{W}h5$, 13. $\mathbb{W}g4$ or 13. $\mathbb{W}d3$, and he also has ideas with a2-a4, but the move played is the best.

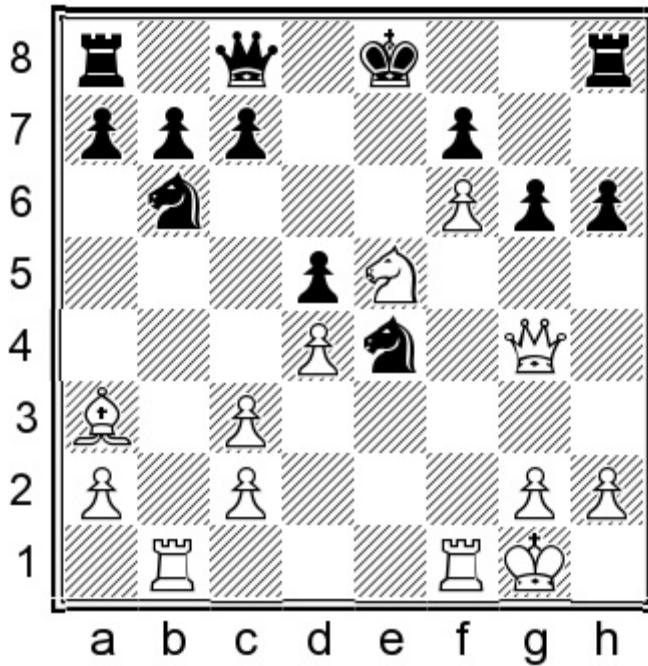
13. $\mathbb{Q}a3!$ $\mathbb{Q}d6$

Black is not in time for castling queenside with 13.... $\mathbb{W}f6$ because of 14. $\mathbb{Q}g4$ followed by $\mathbb{E}e1+$.

14.f5! $\mathbb{Q}e4$

Now Black finally can castle, but after 14...0-0, 15.f6 will demolish his kingside.

15.f6! g6 16. $\mathbb{W}g4$ $\mathbb{W}c8$



And now a nice finish:

17. $\mathbb{W}xg6!$ and White won after a few more moves.

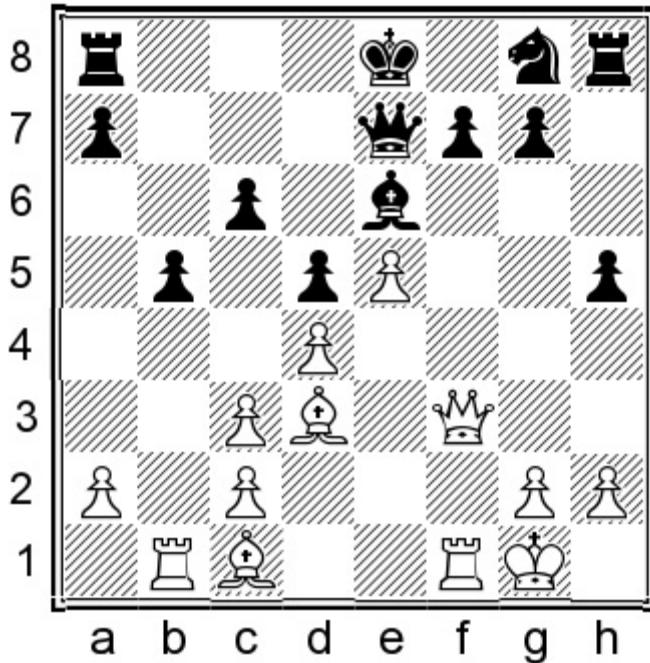
The next time these two players met, Winawer chose a different opening, but still managed to lose in almost exactly the same fashion.

William Steinitz – Szymon Winawer Baden-Baden 1870

1.e4 e5 2. $\mathbb{Q}c3$ $\mathbb{Q}c6$ 3.f4

An invitation to the gambit (3....exf4 4.d4 $\mathbb{W}h4+$ 5. $\mathbb{Q}e2$) Steinitz became fond of around this time. Winawer answers with his ‘own’ move.

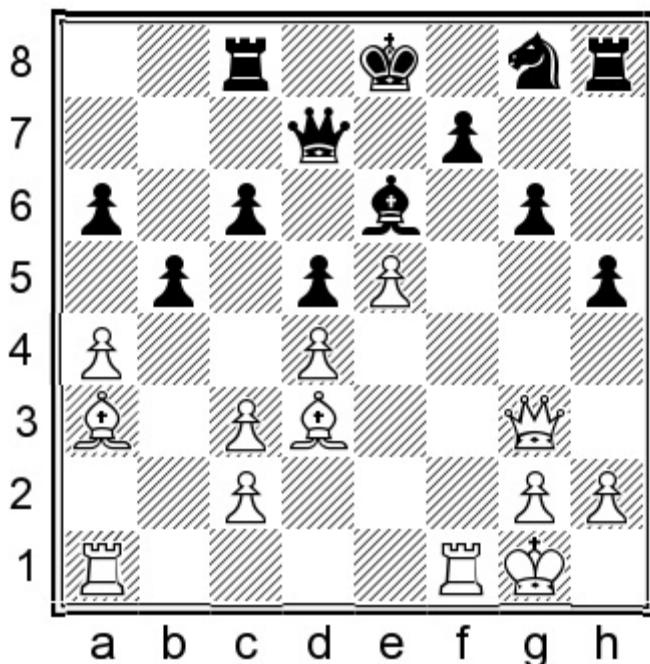
**3.... $\mathbb{Q}b4$ 4. $\mathbb{Q}f3$ $\mathbb{Q}xc3$ 5.bxc3 $\mathbb{W}e7$ 6.fxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 7.d4 $\mathbb{Q}xf3+$ 8. $\mathbb{W}xf3$ d5 9.e5 $\mathbb{Q}e6$ 10. $\mathbb{Q}d3$ c6 11. $\mathbb{Q}b1$ b5
12.0-0 h5**



Black has made a complete mess of his opening: bad development, king in the centre, no dark squares. At this point in history, the strengths of the $\mathbb{Q}a3$ idea were well known and more sophisticated versions of it started to appear in practice. Getting $\mathbb{Q}a3$ in is one of the objectives of White's next move – a profound idea, since the bishop isn't doing badly either on its 'main' diagonal.

13.a4! a6 14.Wg3 g6 15.Ea1 $\mathbb{Q}d7$

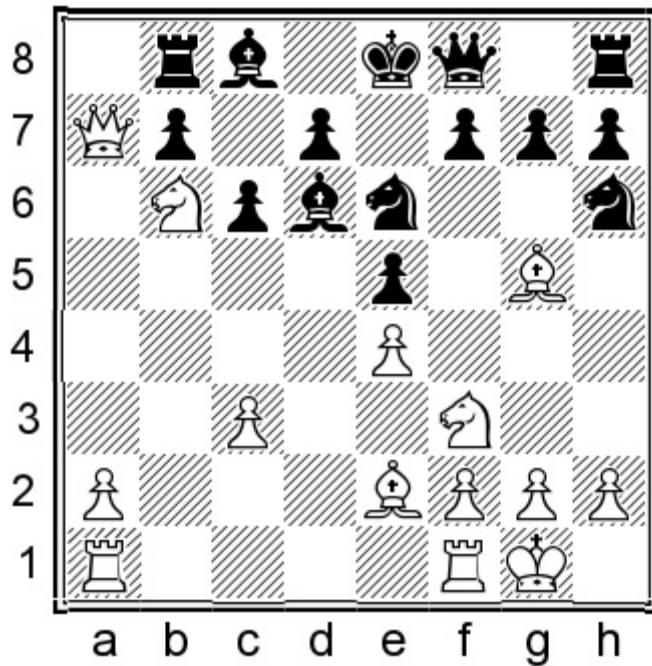
This doesn't answer White's threat of taking on b5. An amusing continuation would have been 15... $\mathbb{E}c8$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$.



And now, at exactly the same moment as in the previous game, 17. $\mathbb{W}xg6!$ would have settled matters.

16.axb5 $\mathbb{Q}c7$ 17. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}d6+$ $\mathbb{Q}d8$ 19. $\mathbb{W}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}c8$ 20. $bxa6$ 1-0

As we have seen before, in the telegraph match he played against Chigorin, Steinitz found himself on the wrong end of a deep version of this idea:



Black has just played 16... $\mathbb{Q}e6$, attacking the bishop. Now continuing development with 17. $\mathbb{Q}fd1$ or 17. $\mathbb{Q}xh6$

and 17. $\mathbb{Q}e3$ are all obvious options,

but Chigorin's redeployment of the bishop with 17. $\mathbb{Q}c1$! 'bears the stamp of genius' as Steinitz generously praised this move in his later analysis.

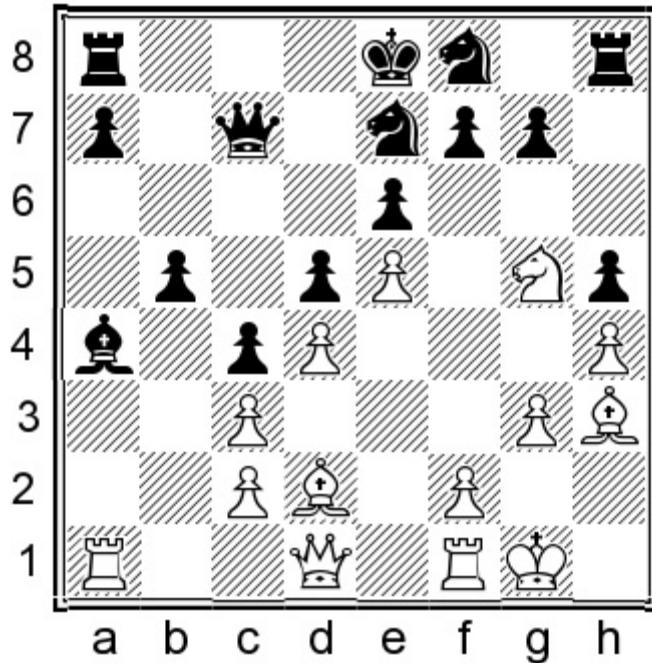
White threatens 18. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ because the bishop on d6 has to keep the rook on b8 guarded. Steinitz saw nothing better than 17... $\mathbb{Q}g8$ 18. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ c5, which from a 'holistic' point of view – if I may introduce an alternative use of this word – is of course disastrous.

The $\mathbb{Q}a3$ idea is indispensable in the (Winawer) French and a quick a3-a4 to make room for the bishop is one of the main lines. The next two games show some sophisticated ways of implementing this idea by the strong Soviet grandmaster Leonid Stein in the 1960s.

Leonid Stein

Samuel Schweber

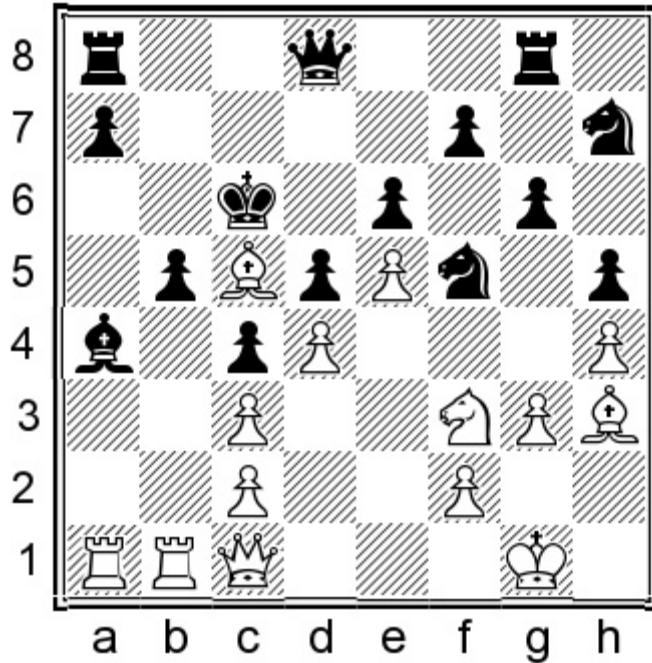
Mar del Plata 1966



White to move

The bishop already is developed on its common diagonal but the a3-f8 diagonal is more attractive:

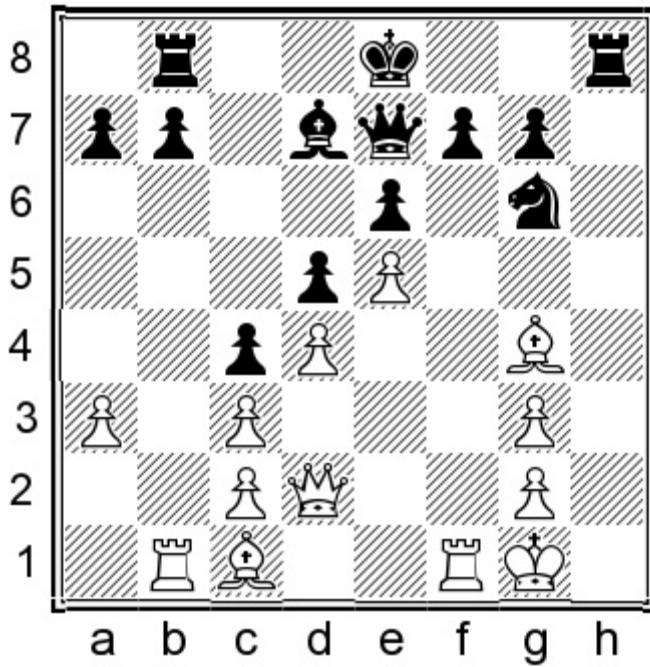
19.♗c1! g6 20.♗a3 ♜h7 21.♗f3 ♜d8 22.♗d2 ♜d7 23.♗fb1 ♜f5 24.♗c5 ♜c6 25.♗c1 ♜g8



26.♗xa4! bxa4 27.♗a3 ♜a5 28.♗xf5

Now Black didn't take back the piece and lost after some more moves; if 28...gxsf5 29.♗e7! White will enter on the dark squares.

Leonid Stein
Tigran Petrosian
Moscow 1961



White to move

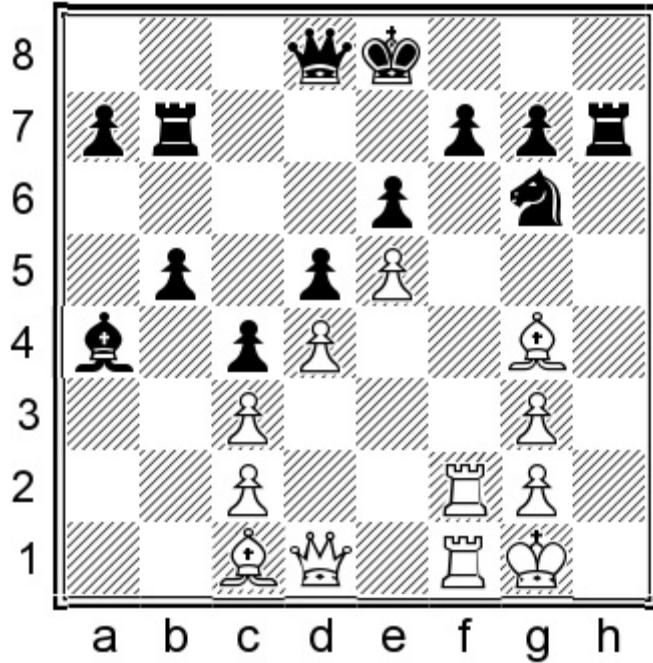
(Exercise no 159)

There are many cases in the French where the black king stays safely in the centre. Here at first sight the situation might not look too menacing, but in less than ten moves Stein unfolds a decisive attack, starting with the by now well-known plan. Sacrificing a pawn is the right way to go: on 19... $\mathbb{Q}a1$ Black has 19... $\mathbb{Q}a4$ and the bishop will not reach the longed-for diagonal.

19.a4! $\mathbb{Q}xa4$ 20. $\mathbb{Q}a1$ b5 21. $\mathbb{Q}a3$ $\mathbb{W}d7$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}f2$ $\mathbb{Q}b7$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}af1$ $\mathbb{W}d8$ 24. $\mathbb{W}d1!$ $\mathbb{Q}h6$ 25. $\mathbb{Q}c1!$

Back again.

25... $\mathbb{Q}h7$



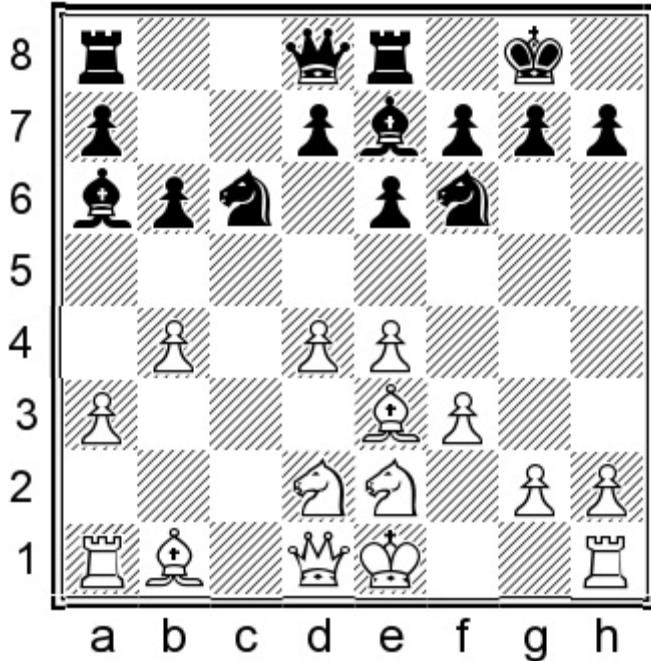
26.♕xe6!

On 26...fxe6 there is 27.♔g4, so Black resigned.

Our last example is a game from the Black perspective (...♝a6). I incidentally hit upon this one whilst preparing a sideline against the c3-Sicilian, but this little-known game is one of my favourites on the topic of attacking the king in the centre.

Salauat Izmukhambetov – Eugenio Torre Kolkata 2001

1.e4 c5 2.c3 b6 3.d4 ♜b7 4.f3 e6 5.♗e3 ♜f6 6.♗d3 ♜e7 7.♗e2 0-0 8.♗d2 ♜a6 9.♗b1 ♜c6 10.a3 ♜e8
11.b4 cxd4 12.cxd4



(Exercise no 160)

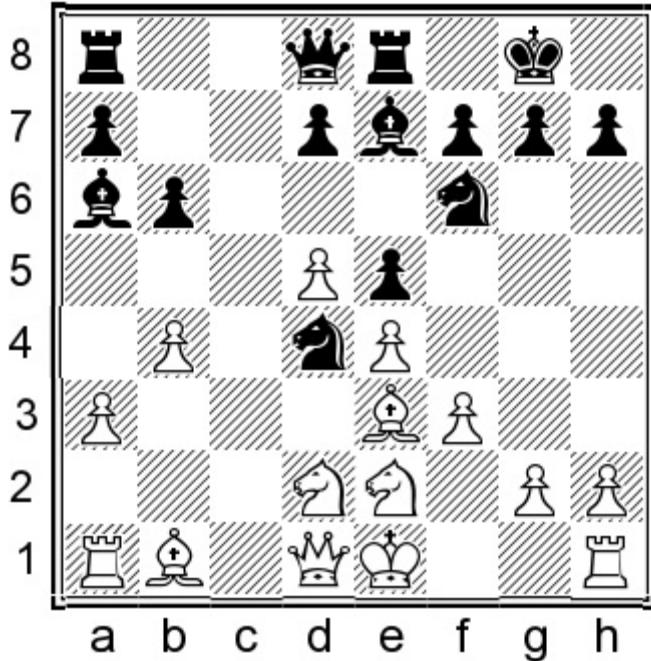
White seems to be doing reasonably well, and if he manages to complete his development and improve his pieces, his nice centre is promising. Apart from trying to achieve something along the open c-file, which looks very reasonable, Black might look for action in the centre. Maybe you thought about 12...d5, but after 13.e5 $\mathbb{Q}d7$ this is, from a positional point of view, not a good French and, more importantly, it loses directly to 14. $\mathbb{W}c2$.

But the other advance in the centre is extremely powerful.

12...e5!! 13.d5

The logical move, trying to develop with 13.dxe5 $\mathbb{Q}xe5$ 14.0-0, gives Black beautiful play after 14...d5!.

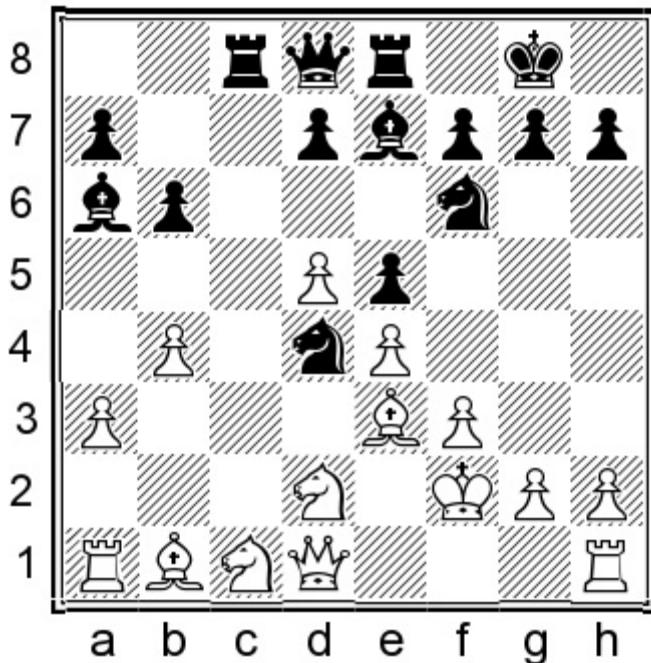
13... $\mathbb{Q}d4!$



The justification of Black's play. In training sessions I like to draw, at this moment, or even better in the previous diagram, a green arrow from e8 to e1, asking 'Do you feel the power of the rook eyeing the king on e1?' 'Well, no', the students reply, since the e-file is completely blockaded.

But in the line that justifies Black's move, in just a few moves the e-file gets cleared completely:
 14. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ exd4 15. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{Q}xd5!$ 16. exd5 $\mathbb{Q}h4$ mate! (Boden's mate, now I come to think of it.) So White chose an alternative solution, but because of the bishop on a6, his king remains stuck in the centre.

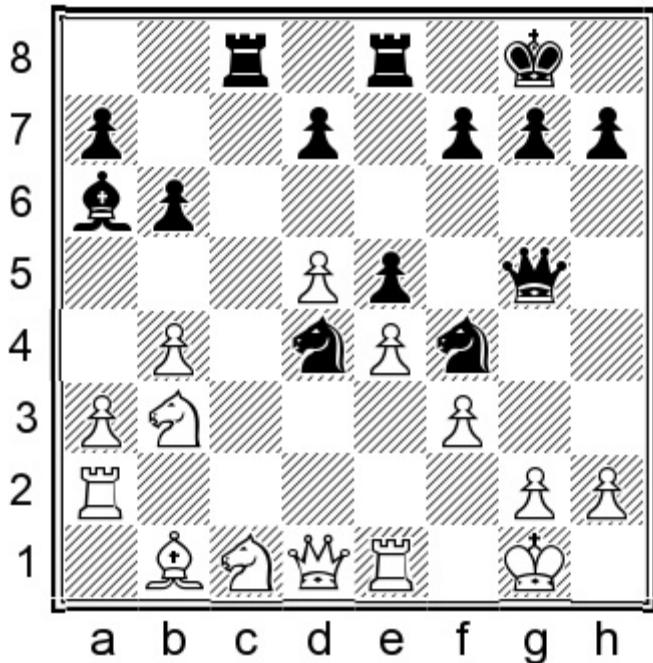
14. $\mathbb{Q}c1$ $\mathbb{R}c8$ 15. $\mathbb{Q}f2$



This would have been a nice moment as well to ask for your move. Actions along the c-file, for example starting with 15... $\mathbb{R}c3$, would be strong, but Black's next move might be even stronger,

bringing his least active pieces ($\mathbb{Q}f6$ and $\mathbb{K}e7$) into play and preparing for ... $\mathbb{Q}g5$, the idea we encountered in Chapter 17, trying to exchange the defending dark-squared bishop.

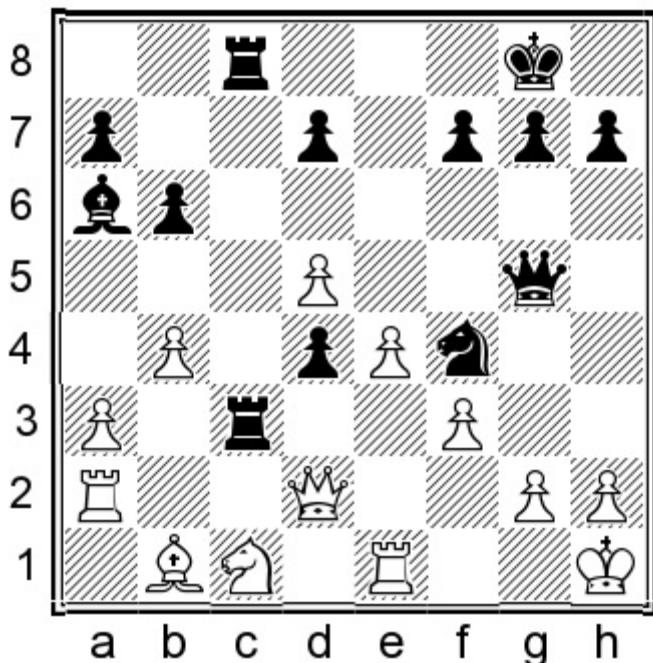
15... $\mathbb{Q}h5!$ 16. $\mathbb{Q}db3$ $\mathbb{Q}g5$ 17. $\mathbb{K}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}xe3+$ 18. $\mathbb{K}xe3$ $\mathbb{W}h4+$ 19. $\mathbb{Q}g1$ $\mathbb{W}g5$ 20. $\mathbb{K}e1$ $\mathbb{Q}f4$ 21. $\mathbb{K}a2$



Though White's king has castled in an artificial way he is still in great danger. Continuing his model play, Black brings in his last inactive piece:

21... $\mathbb{K}c3$ 22. $\mathbb{Q}xd4$ $\mathbb{K}xd4$ 23. $\mathbb{Q}h1$ $\mathbb{K}ec8$ 24. $\mathbb{W}d2$

And now some nice tactics to wrap things up:



24.... $\mathbb{Q}e2!$ 25. $\mathbb{B}xe2$ $\mathbb{B}xc1+$ 26. $\mathbb{B}e1$ $\mathbb{W}xg2+!$ 27. $\mathbb{W}xg2$ $\mathbb{B}xe1+$ 28. $\mathbb{W}g1$ $\mathbb{B}cc1!$ 0-1

Brilliant and very instructive.

The $\mathbb{Q}a3$ idea to attack or keep the king stuck in the centre was discovered relatively early in the history of chess and thanks in particular to the Evans Gambit it soon found wide application. And with that, the plans and lines that the move was used in became more sophisticated.

Of course, this idea is only one of many different moves and plans to attack the king in the centre. Some are very regular guests, some are almost unique. And the more of them you master the better your sense for the greater theme – how safe is this king in the centre – will develop.

Likewise, mastering a lot of actions towards the castled king (like the Greek Gift, the Lasker-Bauer and the $\mathbb{Q}xh6$ sacrifice, to name just a few) helps to develop your general feeling for the safety of the castled king.

An analogy can be seen with the relation between technology and science. The obvious idea is that science creates the necessary foundation for concrete technologies, but according to Ridley, more often than not it works in the other direction. It's the people on the shop floor who, by means of ‘guesswork, learning by doing, accidental findings, experimenting and messing around’, bring science forwards.¹⁶¹ One good reason why an evaluation in chess is more a result than a starting point is that the question ‘what works?’ is such an integral part of it.

The idea of slow accumulation of knowledge is not as spectacular as the idea of passing through several distinct styles: start as a primitive attacker, then get a Philidorian hint of pawn play, next become a brilliant attacker at all costs and finally become a master of position play. But I think that on the historical as well as the individual level the first concept of improvement is the most adequate.

The $\mathbb{Q}a3$ idea is a nice example of the resemblance between the two. The beginning player will start to look for activity for his dark-squared bishop solely on the c1-h6 diagonal. Getting better, he will at some point become acquainted with the possibility of development to (b2 or) a3. And when these options have been well established in his repertoire, he might find more sophisticated ways of employing these ideas, for example rerouting a bishop to a3 that has already been developed on its main diagonal.

Returning to the philosophical issue of the opposition between the particular and the general, we can distinguish two extremes. On the one hand there's the idea of playing chess as a methodical application of general principles in concrete positions. The other extreme follows the bottom-up route: out of all the pieces of concrete knowledge we have gathered, we slowly build up a feeling for the fundamentals in chess. The controversy between Steinitz/Tarrasch and Chigorin can partly be explained in terms of this opposition.

Note that the word ‘concrete’, which I have used a lot, does not have a clearly defined meaning in chess. There is no atomic particle in chess theory. Although we make one move at a time, even the $\mathbb{Q}a3$ idea takes something more (i.e. at least the uncastled king on e8) to describe it. The concept of ‘patterns’ is often used to describe those near-to-atomic aspects of our game, but typical moves or typical ideas are just as good. And in addition to this ‘action’ (or dynamic) feature, the other (static)

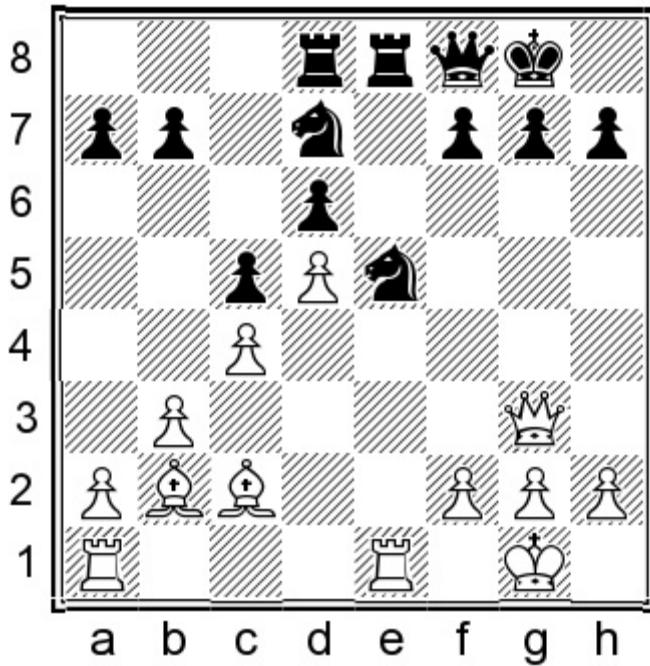
half of our knowledge consists of a lot of typical (parts of) positions. But this is merely a theoretical distinction, both aspects are closely entwined.

If we recall the scale from concrete to general, the question arises of where things become too abstract to be useful in deciding on your move, and maybe the answer is personal. In the history of philosophy, from Plato onwards, this question keeps returning in different forms, without ever reaching a definite answer. In chess, I am not on Plato's side, who valued ideas much more highly than the world as it appeared.

To explore the part of the scale where things become rather general but are still useful, I think Steinitz's handling of the pair of bishops, and especially his technique to drive the knights back, is a good example. Though it can take place everywhere on the board, you still feel there is a strong similarity between Steinitz's 16...c5 against Rosenthal, Grischuk's 40.b4 against Topalov and the following fragment.

As we approach the end of this book, I pay my own small tribute to Steinitz, as compensation for him not having become the undisputed star of our story.

Willy Hendriks
Valentin Buckels
Mülheim 2016



White to move

(Exercise no 161)

I hope you did not prefer the knights or contented yourself with a nuanced 'a bit better for the bishops'. White already has a winning advantage. Sometimes it is mentioned that the knights are better in closed positions, and here the position is partly closed, but with little space the knights are often terrible.

Had the white f-pawn been on e4, Black's position would have been very nice, with the outpost on e5, but here the Steinitz strategy leaves Black in a hopeless situation: driving back the knights with pawns and at the same time taking care that these pawn advances do not create new holes the knights can take advantage of.

21.f4! ♗g6 22.h4!

In exercise books where points are handed out, you sometimes get rewarded for moves further along in a line. Here this follow-up move would have earned you extra points. Maybe you remember the Anderssen-Guibert game, where the knight on g6 likewise triggered the advance of the h-pawn.

22... ♗e7 23.h5

and White's kingside attack soon ended the game.

If our general understanding of chess develops out of a multitude of small pieces of knowledge, on the historical as well as the individual level, if chess theory is not the mother but the daughter of chess practice, we might even try to take this idea a step further towards the level of a single game.

Of the views on chess history that have passed the review in this book, the one that contrasts the most with an evolutionary perspective is Lasker's. Where planless progress is the hallmark of evolutionary processes, Lasker describes the history of chess as a history of Planning. And he made Steinitz the great hero of this history, as the inventor of the principle of making plans based on evaluations. In his struggle with the enormous amount of possible continuations, the Plan is, according to Lasker, a chess player's thread of Ariadne, his magic wand or philosopher's stone. Evaluating the position and making a plan leads to finding the right moves at the end of the process – from the general to the concrete.

If there is any direction in a chess player's thinking, I believe bottom-up to be a better description. We bring to the board an enormous amount of concrete bits of knowledge, moves for a large part, that immediately start coming to mind when we look at a position. Working with them quickly leads us to the essence of a position and the plan may just as well be the result instead of the guide.

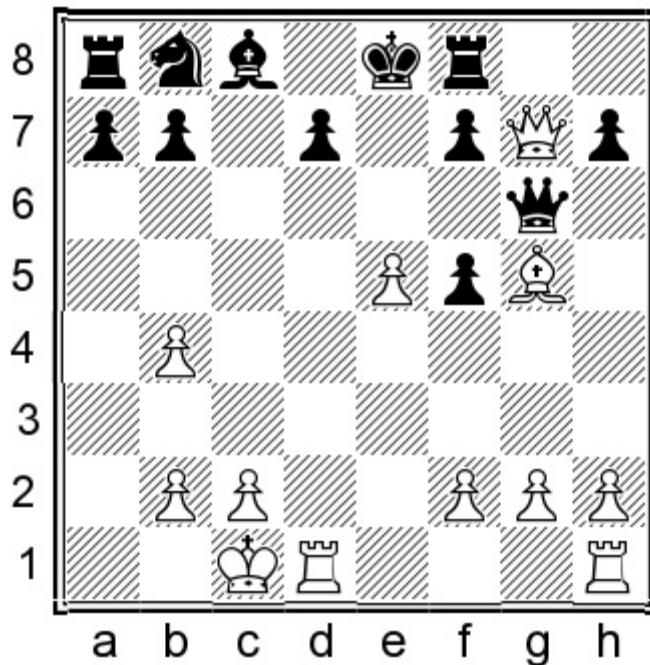
Instead of deductive reasoning, the principle of recognizing similarities (with all the bits and pieces of knowledge gathered before) is a better way to describe chess thinking. When looking at a position, the similarities directly start to suggest what the position is about and what might be good moves. One way to define talent in chess is the ability 'to see much with little input'. Well-known stories about prodigies feature four-year-olds, who had not even been taught the rules, watching their father play a game and afterwards reprimanding him for having missed a mate in three.

For a great talent, it might be sufficient to have seen one double attack to subsequently recognize them all. Others have to learn all the different forms and rehearse them several times to achieve the same level. The same applies to more complicated tactics or strategic manoeuvres. Today we have a pretty accurate picture of the multitude of tactical or strategic possibilities of our game. The history of chess shows us the accumulation and refinement of this huge quantity of basic elements. Some of us (the Morphys) only need to see little of all this to achieve much, but most of us are well advised to absorb as much as possible.

In doing so, we slowly develop a feeling for the generalities. Unfortunately or not, the history of chess hasn't provided us with a short-cut route in the other direction.

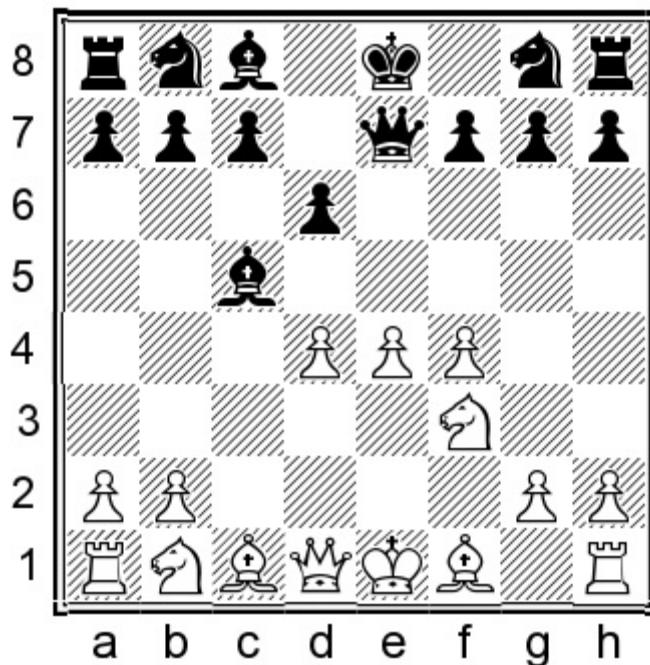
Exercises for Chapter 36

162 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

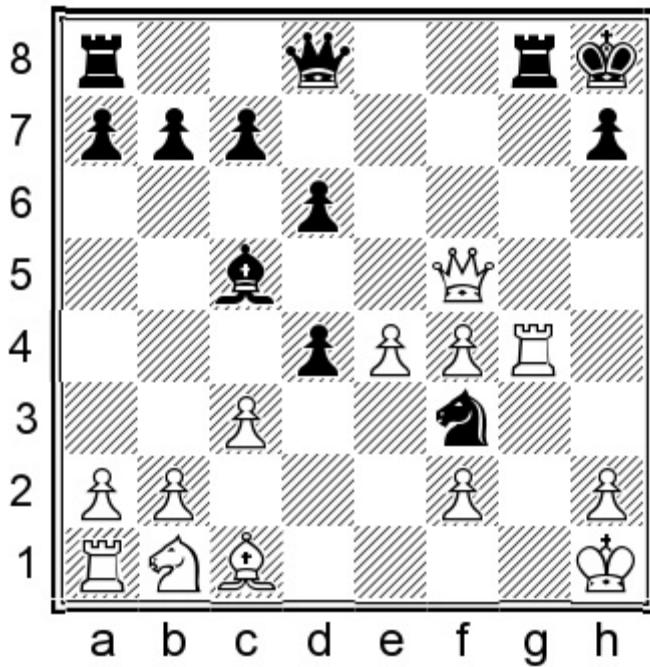
163 (*go to the solution*)



Black to move

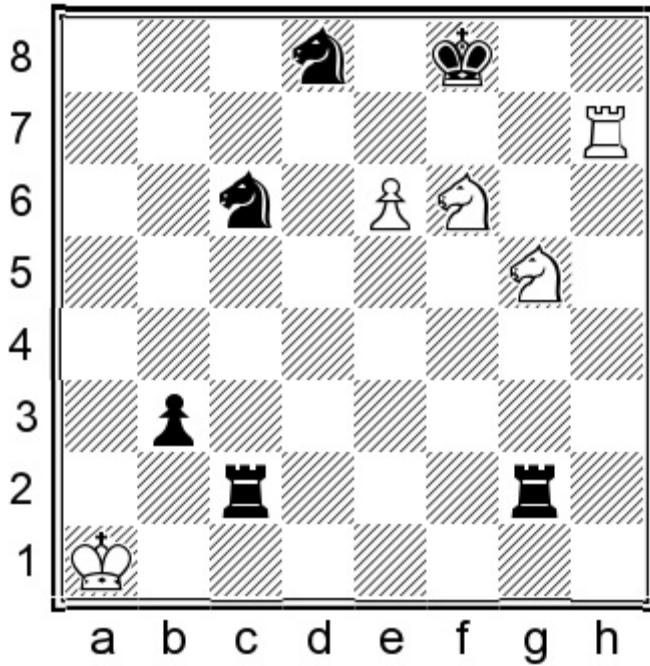
Is the pawn on e4 poisoned?

164 (*go to the solution*)



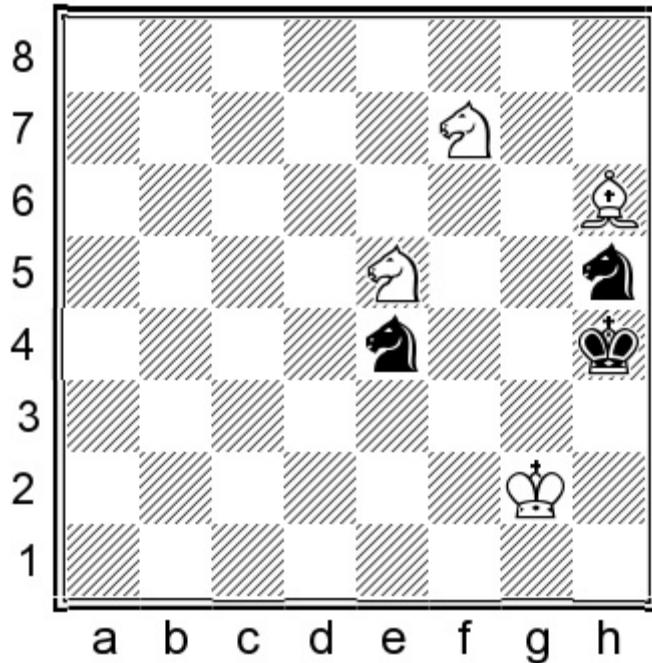
Black to move

165 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

166 (*go to the solution*)



White to move

36 On the origin of good moves

Richard Réti

This book started with the ‘recapitulation theory’, the idea that the individuals in their development recapitulate the development of the species. This theory was invented by Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) and was actually inspired by Darwin’s theory of evolution, though Haeckel made something very peculiar out of Darwin’s ideas. The idea of recapitulation was very popular from the end of the 19th century until the first half of the 20th century, and it was also applied outside the sphere of biology, for example in psychology and pedagogics. It was believed that as children develop, their mental capacities resemble those of their ancestors, and so they develop over a lifetime in the same way that species develop over eons.

We saw Euwe, Kasparov and also Réti apply exactly this idea to chess development: ‘We perceive after a careful consideration of the evolution of the chess mind that such evolution has gone on, in general, in a way quite similar to that in which it goes on with the individual chess player, only with the latter more rapidly.’



Starting from this idea, Réti and Euwe (and many others) made some sort of a caricature of chess history, dominated by distinct phases or styles that have to be overcome, and by great thinkers and big ideas that lead to new phases or styles. In science the recapitulation theory has been abandoned, but in chess it's still alive, together with its rather stereotyped view of the past.

I think a lot can be learned from chess history, but for this I would like to link to more modern forms of evolutionary thinking.

A rather big problem for Darwin was that he didn't know how heredity actually worked. With the rediscovery of Gregor Mendel's experimental work on inheritance, an enormous step forward was made and with the discovery of DNA the science of genetics really took off.

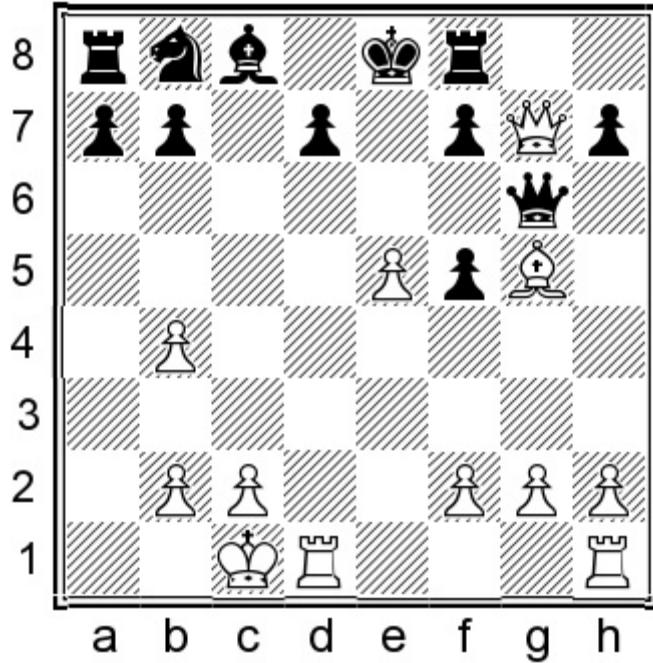
This made a change of perspective possible, in which the species or the individual are no longer the motor of evolution, but the gene. Richard Dawkins's famous book title, *The Selfish Gene*, expresses this idea in a provocative way. One can imagine the process of evolution as a flow in which the genes are the main characters, hopping from one individual to the next, and helping to build them for the sake of their own reproduction. The genes are what gets replicated and the individuals are only the vehicles used for this purpose.

This perspective has also been applied to cultural evolution. Here the focus is not on the 'inventors' but on what are called 'memes', as some sort of gene-like basic elements (like ideas), who reproduce themselves, hop from one individual to another and eventually evolve in the process.

In culture, the room for development is practically unlimited. Chess is a very rich game, but not that unlimited, and developments are bound by what they contribute to better play. Nonetheless I think a comparison can be made. Dawkins, who introduced the term, chose 'memes' because it sounds like genes, but it was meant as a kind of shorthand for the Greek 'mimesis', meaning imitation or similarity. Since I believe that 'recognizing similarities' is a good description of the essence of chess thinking, the concept of meme-like moves fits very well into that terminology.

The mate we saw Morphy deliver in the opera game was later given the name 'opera mate' by Jonathan Tisdall in *Improve your Chess Now*. He himself once managed a sophisticated version of this 'opera mate'.

Jonathan Tisdall
Graham Lee
London 1981



White to move

(Exercise no 162)

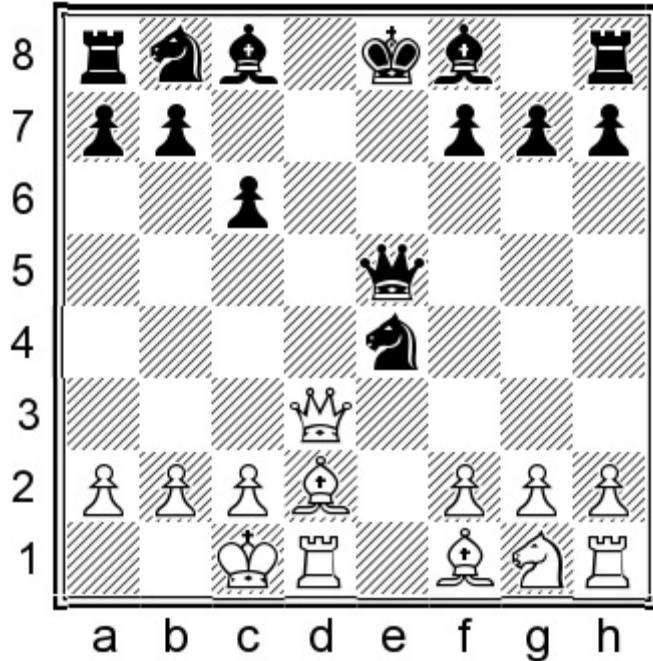
White decided the game with the beautiful

15.e6!

Black has many answers but none of them helps; the main line gives an opera mate after 15... $\mathbb{W}xg7$ 16.exd7+ $\mathbb{Q}xd7$ 17. $\mathbb{E}he1+$ $\mathbb{Q}e5$ 18. $\mathbb{E}d8$ mate.

An earlier and very famous example is the next one:

Richard Réti
Savielly Tartakower
Vienna 1910



White to move

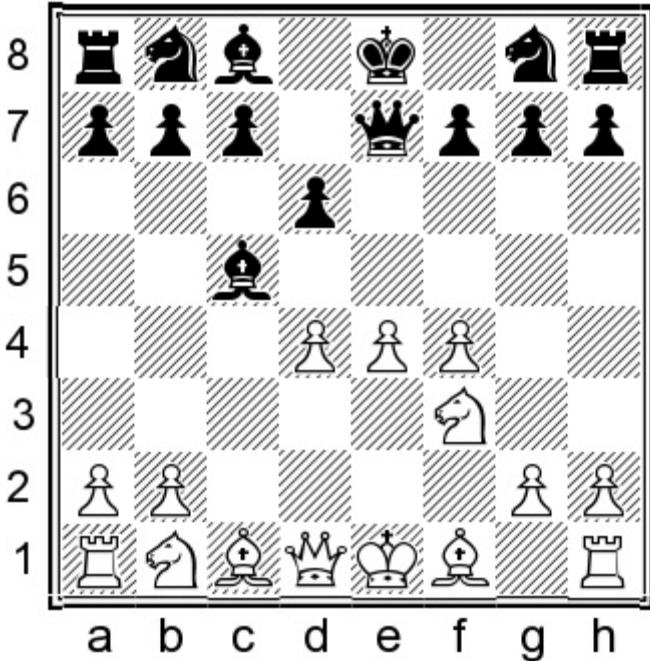
9.♕d8+! ♖xd8 10.♗g5+ ♖c7 11.♗d8 mate.

The final position is a different mating pattern, 10...♖e8 11.♗d8 would have led to the standard opera mate.

Tisdall wanted to use ‘Morphy’s mate’ instead of ‘opera mate’, but that name had been taken by another pattern. This opera mate has claimed many victims throughout history, but are they all ‘footnotes’ to Morphy or is there an origin to be found even further back in time? Yes, there is.

Gioacchino Greco – NN Around 1620

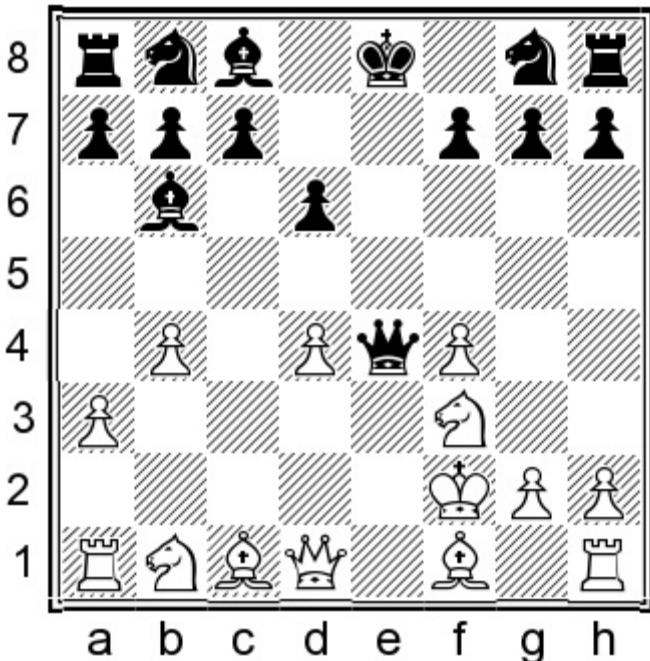
1.e4 e5 2.f4 ♜c5 3.♘f3 d6 4.c3 ♜e7 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4



(Exercise no 163)

The pawn is indeed poisoned.

6... $\mathbb{W}xe4+?$ 7. $\mathbb{B}f2!$ $\mathbb{B}b4$ 8.a3! $\mathbb{B}a5$ 9.b4 $\mathbb{B}b6$



Having driven the bishop away from covering the e1-square, White can now execute the, well, how to name this mate? We know little about Greco's life, but there weren't many opera performances in his day.

10. $\mathbb{B}b5+$ $\mathbb{Q}f8$

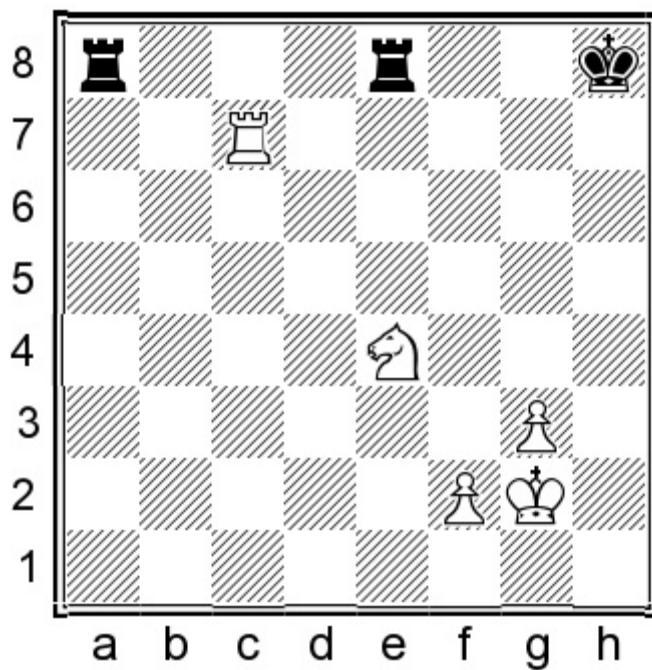
10... $\hat{Q}d8$ 11. $\hat{E}e1$ leads to the standard form, while 10...c6 11. $\hat{E}e1$ wins the queen.

11. $\hat{E}e1$ $\hat{W}f5$ 12. $\hat{E}e8$ mate.

I have no answer to the last question. Unfortunately, the name ‘Greco’s mate’ has been taken by another pattern as well.

Greco, however, was also standing in an – albeit small – tradition, and building on earlier discoveries. Some of these go back as far as the ‘prehistory’ of our form of chess. Chess the way we play it was shaped around 1500, when the bishop and especially the queen became more powerful pieces. In the medieval form of chess, introduced in Europe probably around 800 by the Arab conquerors of Spain, the rook and the knight, however, had the same power as today. Some patterns that date back to these days are still as vital as ever.

In his book from 1512, Damiano gives the next position:



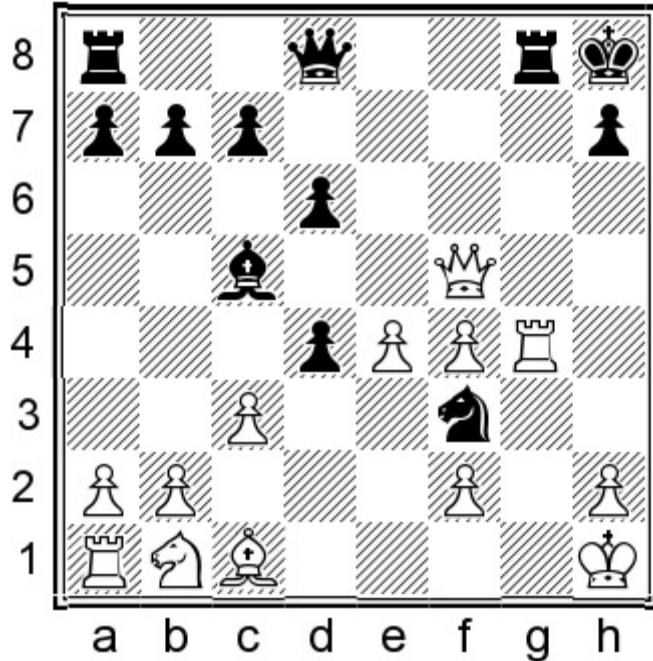
After 1. $\hat{Q}f6$ Black is helpless. Damiano took the idea for this position from the legacy of the earlier game and it has become known as the Arabian mate. I guess every player has been confronted with this at least once, finding out to his horror (and surprise) that there is nothing to be done. A simple but extremely effective construction, claiming daily victims ever since.

In the early days of his career, Steinitz managed a nice version of this mate.

Reiner

William Steinitz

Vienna 1860



Black to move

(Exercise no 164)

16... $\mathbb{W}h4!$ 17. $\mathbb{B}g2$

White can refuse the queen once but not twice:

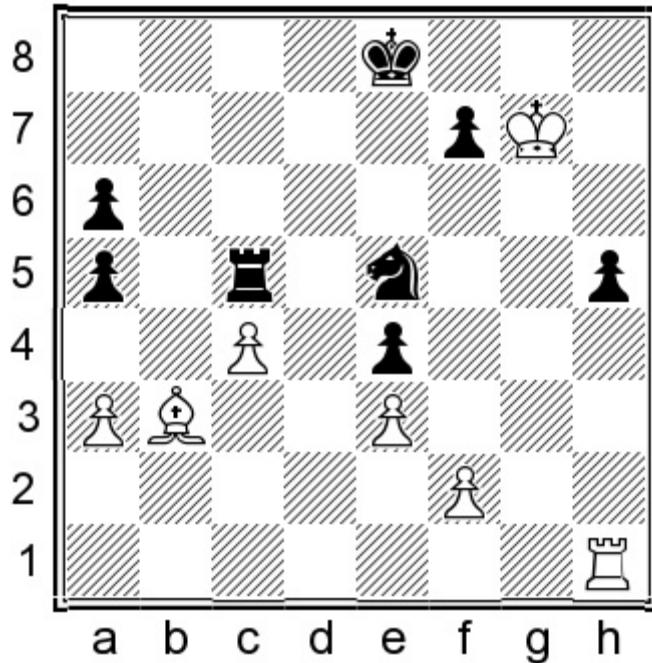
17... $\mathbb{W}xh2+!$ 18. $\mathbb{B}xh2$ $\mathbb{B}g1$ mate.

As always, more advanced versions start to appear over time. Bent Larsen showed that you can mate not only the black king on h8 in this way but also the white one!

Mark Taimanov

Bent Larsen

Havana 1967



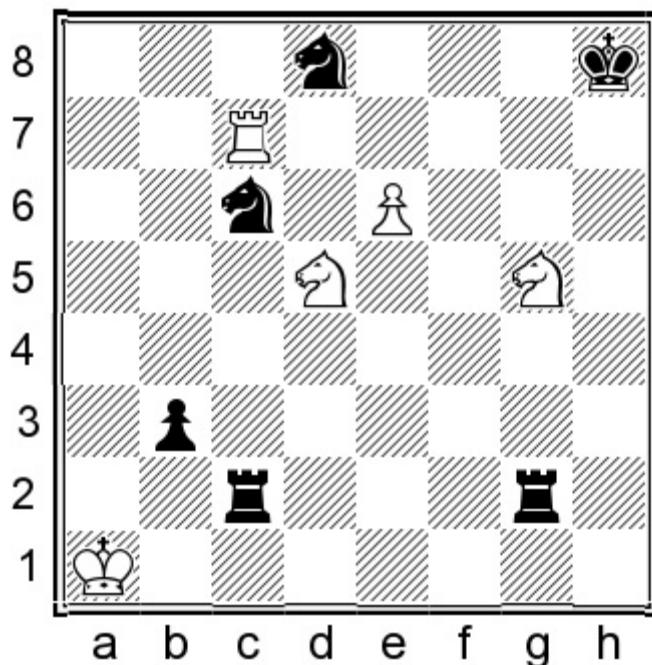
Black to move

An active king can be a great asset in the endgame but here White has underestimated the dangers.

39... $\mathbb{Q}g4!$ 40. $\mathbb{Q}d1$ $\mathbb{Q}g5+$ 41. $\mathbb{Q}h8$ $\mathbb{Q}f6$ 42. $\mathbb{Q}a4+$ $\mathbb{Q}e7$

And White resigned.

The changes that occurred in chess around 1500 gave the game more speed, but it's a pity that as a consequence the heritage of the older game lost most of its meaning. Players had already obtained a high level, as the next study from medieval times demonstrates.¹⁶²

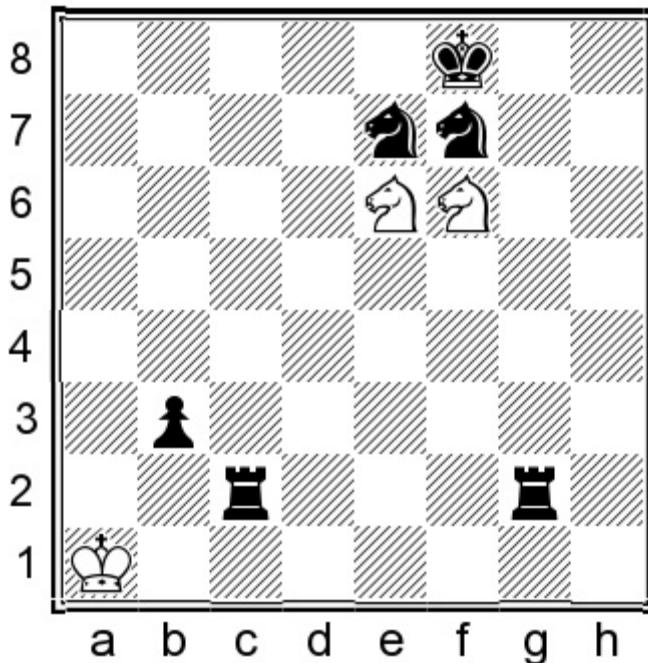


The unknown composer made it clear that White is in need of a forced win, otherwise he will be mated himself:

1. $\mathbb{E}h7+$ $\mathfrak{Q}g8$ 2. $\mathfrak{Q}f6+$ $\mathfrak{Q}f8$

(Exercise no 165)

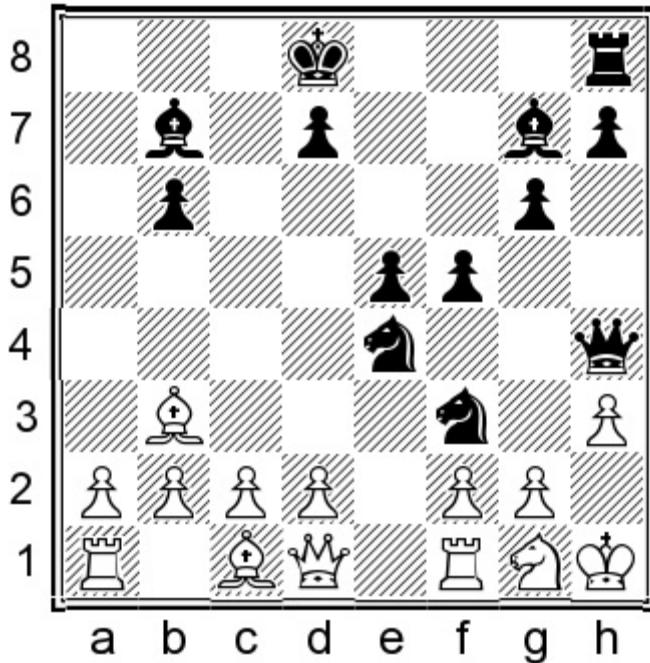
3. $e7+!$ $\mathfrak{Q}xe7$ 4. $\mathbb{E}f7+!$ $\mathfrak{Q}xf7$ 5. $\mathfrak{Q}e6$ mate.



Beautiful!

All chess players hope to end a game in this fashion once in their life. And it is rather horrific to find out later if you missed a chance like this. That happened to Black in the following game – a correspondence game, to make things worse.

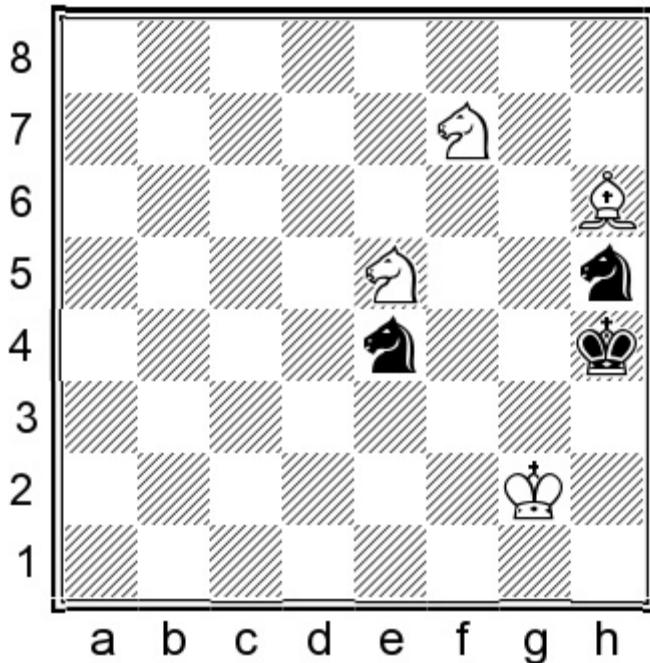
Von Feilitzsch
Wildegans
cr 1939



Black to move

Black played 18... $\mathbb{Q}eg5$,

missing the two knights mate with 18... $\mathbb{W}xf2!$ 19. $\mathbb{E}xf2$ (the alternatives aren't much better) 19... $\mathbb{Q}xf2$ (or 19... $\mathbb{Q}g3$) mate.

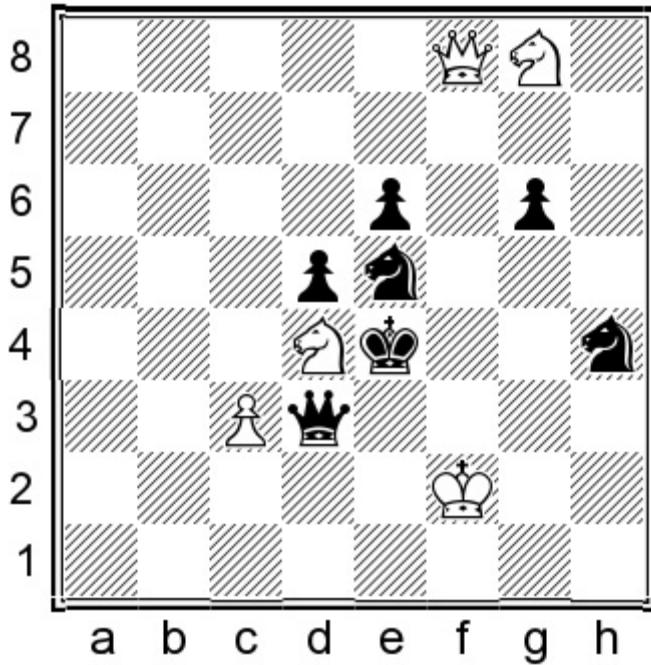


(Exercise no 166)

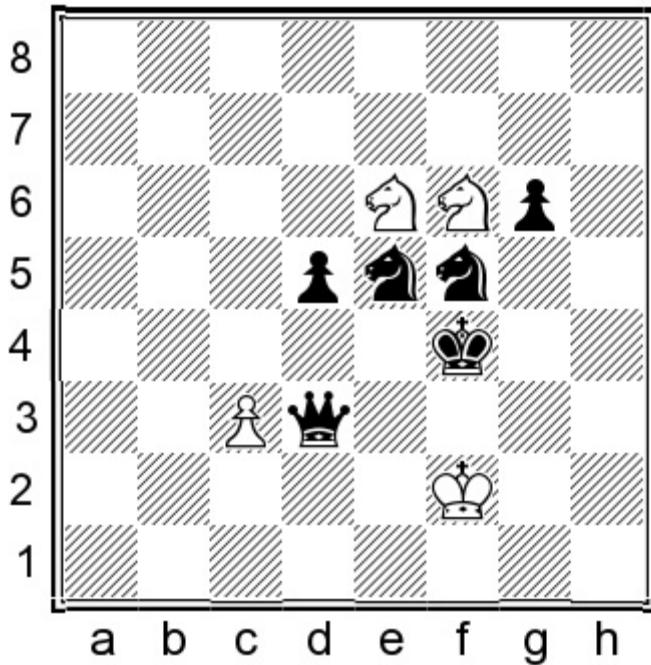
A study from 1957 by Bondarenko and Kakovin reached, after some preparatory manoeuvres, the above position. The nice finish was 1. $\mathbb{R}g5+$ $\mathbb{Q}xg5$ 2. $\mathbb{Q}g6+$ $\mathbb{Q}g4$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}h6$ mate. An exact copy of the

earlier Arabian mating pattern. Quite probably the composers were unaware of this, but either way it is impressive to see this mate persist over a period of nearly thousand years.

Before he became known as a strong player, Anderssen published a collection of middlegame problems, *Aufgaben für Schachspieler* (1842). He too ‘re-invented’ this mating pattern, in a nice mate-in-three problem.



1. $\mathbb{W}f5+!$ $\mathbb{Q}xf5$ (1...exf5 or 1...gxsf5 make no difference) 2. $\mathbb{Q}f6+$ $\mathbb{K}f4$ 3. $\mathbb{Q}xe6$ mate.



These three mating patterns belong to the oldest bits of good knowledge still in use today. They are important, but at the same time these are just three out of the enormous quantity that have slowly but steadily developed since the early days of chess playing.

In our research, we have looked upon some of these basic elements of chess knowledge – tactical and

positional, opening and endgame knowledge. We saw them being invented, or hit upon, or appearing for the first time, although their origin might lay back further in time. They were often reinvented and modified, and they evolved and became more complex, getting combined with other typical moves, ideas, patterns, combinations, (small) plans, scenarios, structures or whatever name is suitable for those elementary bits.

The human history of chess, with all its theoretical struggles and its remarkable personalities, is a fascinating one. However, the general theories that supposedly unify and systematize all those pieces are in my opinion more the result than the cause of the progress made, and as a guide to finding the best moves they are of only limited use.

As in nature, variety and complexity in chess aren't the result of some sort of plan from above. It works the other way around, on all levels, even the individual one. As soon as you start looking at a position, all those basic bits of knowledge you gathered before start working. They come up with plans and moves to be played. You can almost sit by and wonder. And watch the good moves replicate.

Endnotes

- 1 Kasparov, p. 11
- 2 Euwe, p. 10
- 3 Réti, Chapter 1
- 4 Euwe, p. 13
- 5 Vukovic, p. 64
- 6 Von der Lasa, p. 239
- 7 Hendriks, p. 70
- 8 Murray, p. 865
- 9 Von der Lasa, p. 228
- 10 Purdy in Keene, p. 3-4
- 11 Euwe, p.24
- 12 Guliev, p. 204
- 13 Kramer, p. 18
- 14 Lasker, p. 180
- 15 Murray, p. 867
- 16 Keene, p. 8
- 17 *Chess Archaeology*, La Bourdonnais-MacDonnell matches
- 18 Golombek, p. 126
- 19 *Chess Notes*, 10394
- 20 *Chess Notes*, 10394
- 21 Golombek, p. 130
- 22 *Chess Archaeology*, Staunton-Saint-Amant match
- 23 *Chess Archaeology*, Staunton-Saint-Amant match
- 24 Harding, p. 47
- 25 Harding, p. 177
- 26 Lawson, p. 277-278
- 27 *Chess Archaeology*, Staunton-Saint-Amant match
- 28 See Staunton (CTL) for this and all his following commentaries on the London 1851 tournament
- 29 Nimzowitsch, p. 75
- 30 Jeremy Spinrad, *New Stories about Old Chess Players*, ChessCafe.com

- 31 Kmoch, p. 27
32 Golombek, p. 132
33 Chernev, p. 184
34 Nunn (SPC), p. 98
35 Adams (MC), p. 187
36 Kasparov, p. 106
37 Adams (MC), p. 545-546
38 Kmoch, p. 92
39 Shibus, p. 42
40 See Lawson and Edge
41 Kasparov, p. 31
42 Landsberger, p. 128
43 Landsberger, p. 309-310
44 Keene, p. 25
45 Keene, p. 25-26
46 Keene, p. 22
47 Lawson, p. 270
48 Euwe, p. 54
49 Euwe, p. 42-43
50 Marin, p. 150-151
51 Réti, chapter 1.4
52 Marin, p. 139
53 Lasker, p. 223
54 Megabase
55 Soltis (WTE), p. 148
56 Von Gotschall in Megabase
57 *Chess Notes*, Attacks on Howard Staunton
58 C. Sander in Adams (JZ), p. 19
59 Edge, p. 199
60 Landsberger, p. 27
61 Fiske in Lawson, p. 67
62 Staunton (CP), p. 501-502

- 63 Frans Helmond in *De Klokketoren*, december 1984
64 Schonberg, p. 50
65 Adams (MC), p. 712
66 Kunnen, p. 69
67 Linder & Linder, p. 118
68 Robert Byrne, *New York Times* 23 october 1988
69 Hooper in Landsberger, p. 468
70 Chernev, p. 168
71 Euwe in Kunnen, p. 76
72 De Rivière in Megabase
73 Suhle & Neumann, p. 195
74 Suhle & Neumann, p. 31
75 Von der Lasa in Keene, p. 15-16
76 Suhle & Neumann, p. 106
77 Suhle & Neumann, p. 176
78 Linder & Linder, p. 20
79 Sergeant in Landsberger, p. 50
80 *Chess Notes*, Steinitz Quotes
81 *Chess Archaeology*, Anderssen-Steinitz match
82 *Chess Players Quarterly*, September 1978
83 New In Chess magazine, 1990/7
84 Kunnen, p. 131
85 Hooper in Landsberger, p. 467
86 Hooper in Landsberger, p. 465-470
87 Von der Lasa in Kunnen, p. 77
88 Boden, p. 132-136
89 Hooper in Landsberger, p. 467
90 La Bourdonnais in Levy, p. 4
91 Chernev, p. 187-188
92 Landsberger, p. 53
93 Steinitz, p. 31-32
94 Steinitz, p. 42

- 95 Golombek, p.157
- 96 Steinitz in Adams (JZ), p. 32-35
- 97 Schonberg, p. 54
- 98 Harding, p. 179
- 99 Chernev, p. 13
- 100 Adams (JZ), p. 432
- 101 Murray, p. 889-890
- 102 Steinitz, p. 42-45
- 103 Soltis (WTE), p. 162
- 104 Landsberger, p. 282
- 105 Landsberger, p. 44
- 106 Landsberger, p. 67
- 107 Landsberger, p. 66
- 108 Jeremy Spinrad, *New Stories about Old Chess Players*, ChessCafe.com
- 109 Golombek, p. 125 (others give 3 or 4 days)
- 110 AlphaZero
- 111 Harding, p. 223
- 112 Landsberger, p. 376
- 113 Landsberger, p. 40
- 114 Steinitz, p. 32
- 115 Landsberger, p. 131
- 116 Steinitz, p. 189-208
- 117 Kramnik interview on e3e5.com
- 118 Landsberger, p. 44
- 119 Landsberger, p. 233-234
- 120 Adams (MC), p. 128-130
- 121 Landsberger, p. 236
- 122 Linder & Linder, p. 153
- 123 Adams (MC), p. 19
- 124 Euwe, p. 69
- 125 Linder & Linder, p. 66-67
- 126 Lasker, p. 166-260

- 127 Schonberg, p. 64-65
128 Landsberger, p. 233
129 Tarrasch (300), p. 474
130 Landsberger, p. 214
131 Tarrasch (DMS), p. 450-451
132 Tarrasch (300), p. 393
133 Vidmar, p. 34-35
134 Nunn (CPB), p. 68
135 Tarrasch (DMS), p. VII
136 Harding, p. 209
137 Harding, p. 108
138 See www.edochess.ca
139 Schulz, p. 68
140 Adams (MC), p. 144
141 Adams (MC), p. 19
142 *Chess Notes* 3888
143 Kunnen, p. 131-132
144 Linder & Linder, p. 167-168
145 Silbermann & Unzicker, p. 124
146 Kunnen, p. 164
147 Alapin in the *Wiener Schachzeitung* 1913/15
148 Lasker, p. 167
149 Soltis (HTC), p. 148
150 Lasker, p. 168-169
151 Staunton (CPH), p. 43-44
152 Euwe, p. 10
153 Euwe, p. 131
154 Murray, p. 881
155 Kmoch, p. 61
156 Darwin, p. 66
157 Krabbé, chapter II
158 Koltanowski, p. 97

159 Adams (MC), p.162

160 Ridley, p. 148

161 Ridley, p. 154

162 Murray, p.297

Index of names

(numbers refer to pages)

A

Adams 123

Alapin 350-351, 355

Alekhine 307, 312, 337

Anand 63-64, 240

Anderssen 10, 14, 41, 82, 88, 90-93, 95-100, 102-104, 107, 145, 149, 154, 156-162, 164-166, 168-173, 175, 177-178, 183-184, 191, 194, 198-200, 210-211, 213-214, 216, 220, 222-223, 226-227, 237, 244, 255-256, 275, 277, 291-292, 328, 337-340, 344-345, 348, 360, 382, 394, 398, 408, 417

Aronian 50, 169

B

Baird 126

Bannerjee 132-133, 202

Barbier 386-387

Bareev 240

Barnes 62

Bauer 393, 406

Bekker 252

Benko 120

Berkes 341

Bijlsma 36

Bird 146, 273, 317

Bischoff 376

Blackburne 146, 171, 194, 198, 200, 216, 243-245, 266, 268-270, 313-314, 398-399

Boden 204, 221, 393, 404

Boi 16

Bondarenko 417

Botvinnik 179-180, 264

Brunswick 138

Buckels 407

Buckle 176

Byrne 183, 264

C

Capablanca 262, 307, 383, 394

Carlsen 11, 200, 233, 296, 311

Caruana 11, 200

Chernev 108, 184, 191, 232-233, 246, 250, 273, 349

Chigorin 10, 31, 123-124, 134, 146, 181, 191, 225, 257, 261-262, 271, 275-280, 282-283, 305-308, 313, 319, 321, 323-324, 326-333, 335-337, 348, 350-351, 355-356, 360, 392, 401, 406

Cochrane 132-134, 148, 202, 366

Cook 387-388

D

Damiano 58, 414

Darwin 384, 394-395, 411

Dawkins 412

Del Rio 59-61, 344

Dennett 381

De Rivière 185

Deschapelles 266

De Vere 195-196, 205-206

Dubois 202

Dufresne 165

E

Ebralidze 179-180

Englisch 230

Ernst 375

Euwe 9, 17, 46, 53, 145, 154, 156, 160, 184, 218, 235-237, 284, 348, 356, 381-383, 397, 411

Evans 190, 398

F

- Fahrni 392
Fedorowicz 113
Feistenauer 112
Fenton 386
Fischer 120, 153, 172, 361-362
Forgacs 354
Fraser 197, 230

G

- Gadia 362
Gaprindashvili 120
Gerritsen 178
Gillhausen 343
Giri 376
Golombek 68-69, 72, 77, 79, 107, 244
Göring 172-173
Greco 10, 16-24, 27-28, 30-38, 40-41, 44-45, 59, 62, 65, 70, 73, 116, 186, 214, 237, 266, 314, 337, 339-341, 345, 359, 371-372, 382, 393, 398, 413-414
Grimshaw 267
Grischuk 234, 407
Guibert 165, 408
Guliev 50, 153
Gunsberg 277, 279-281, 295, 300, 360

H

- Haba 260
Haeckel 411
Hampton 139
Hania 362
Hannah 232-233
Hansen 112
Harding 84, 209, 317-318

Harmonist 304-305

Harrwitz 14, 118, 153, 180, 392

Hebden 113

Heberla 114

Hendriks 36, 127, 138, 142, 181, 362, 375, 377, 407

Hoffer 243

Hoffman 138

Hooper 183, 218-219, 229

Horwitz 266, 371, 373, 387-388

Hovestadt 41

Hracek 255

I

Isouard 138

Ivanchuk 128

Izmukhambetov 403

J

Jaffe 126

Janowski 123-124, 146, 320

Jussupow 49-50

K

Kakovin 417

Karjakin 50, 128

Karpov 326

Kasparov 9, 16-17, 41-46, 53-54, 123, 145-146, 156, 160, 164, 166, 173, 211, 239, 268, 285, 311, 326, 337, 381, 393, 397, 411

Keene 148, 359

Kerkmeester 181

Kieseritzky 41, 90-91, 165

Klausewitz 289

Kling 371, 373, 387-388

Kloos 170

Kmoch 102, 108, 133, 383

Kolisch 185, 399

Koltanowski 389

Kotov 305, 352

Krabbé 389-390

Kramer 53

Kramnik 63, 169, 276

Kunnen 218, 348-349

L

La Bourdonnais 54, 68-71, 73-75, 77-78, 182-183, 194, 203, 230, 237, 303, 310, 314-317, 320, 335, 360

Landsberger 175-176, 209, 266

Lange 340

Larsen 415

Lasker 10, 53, 66, 123, 146, 160-162, 177, 181, 217-219, 226, 229, 251, 257, 284-292, 295, 307, 320, 342, 347-348, 351-352, 354, 356, 360, 371, 381, 383, 387-389, 393, 395, 406, 408

Lechtnsky 260

Lee 412

Leonardo 16

Leonhardt 312

Lewis 75, 383

Lichtenhein 147

Lilienthal 50

Linder 209, 349

Lolli 59, 374-376

Löwenthal 116-117, 180-181, 266, 354, 371

M

Machiavelli 289

Mackenzie 146, 238, 273

Maiwald 376-377

Marache 140
Marco 300
Marcus 264
Marin 156-158, 160, 164, 177
Markowski 255
Mayet 338
McDonnell 54, 68-75, 77, 79, 182-183, 203, 303, 314-317, 335
Meek 141, 147, 151
Mendel 411
Metger 254, 352, 371-372
Mieses 146
Minckwitz 195, 200-201, 210, 328-329
Mongredien 149, 367
Monin 119
Morphy 10, 20, 31, 44, 62, 85, 121, 135, 137-142, 145-154, 156-158, 160-162, 164-165, 169-170, 175-178, 184, 191, 197, 203-204, 210, 221, 226-227, 237, 273-274, 285, 314, 336-337, 344-345, 360, 367, 382-383, 394-395, 398-399, 409, 412-413
Mucklow 106
Murray 40, 58, 77, 84, 250, 383

N

Napoleon 289
Nardus 320
Nataf 166
Neishtadt 160
Neumann 189, 191, 194-195, 197, 204, 220, 235-237, 359
Nijboer 227
Nimzowitsch 28-30, 82, 93, 108, 307, 350
Nunn 17, 311-312, 314, 318

O

Orev 343
Ortueta 390-391

Owen 149, 202

P

Panov 123-124

Paulsen 133, 147, 152, 170, 173, 175-176, 197, 205-206, 210, 215, 220, 232-235, 270, 336, 352, 354, 371-372

Peters 213

Petroff 85

Petrosian 213, 248-249, 335-336, 340, 403

Philidor 10, 17, 21, 27, 30-31, 38, 40-54, 58-66, 68, 70, 73, 79, 81, 103, 145, 183, 200, 210-211, 247, 286, 300, 314, 337, 359, 374, 382-383, 395, 406

Pillsbury 123, 146

Plato 16, 407

Polerio 16

Polgar 341

Ponziani 59

Potter 245-246, 266, 386

Purdy 217-218, 229, 284, 288, 351

R

Ragger 363

Ragozin 179-180

Ree 218

Reiner 415

Repplinger 377

Réti 9, 104, 158-161, 232, 307, 381, 383-384, 411, 413

Ridley 381, 385-386, 394, 406

Riemann 303

Rosanes 164-165

Rosenthal 199, 231-232, 244, 407

Rousseau 121

Rubinstein 384

Ruy Lopez 16, 58, 66, 395

S

- Saavedra 387, 389
Saint-Amant 54, 77-86, 90, 150, 314
Salvio 16, 59
Sanz 389-391
Sarratt 86
Sarychev,A. 378
Sarychev,K. 378
Schallopp 259
Schlechter 146
Schonberg 290
Schulder 393
Schulten 164
Schwarz 398
Schweber 249, 402
Seirawan 123, 264
Sellman 239, 331
Shankland 376-377
Sheldon 64
Shumov 186
Silbermann 66
Singer 114
Smagin 119-120
Soltis 352
Spassky 49, 172, 340
Spielmann 312, 354, 383-384
Stamma 344, 377, 388
Stanley 121
Staunton 10, 54, 77-88, 90-91, 95, 97-100, 103, 106-109, 111, 116-117, 132, 134-135, 145, 150, 158, 175, 177, 194, 210, 230, 237, 245, 299, 314, 359, 365-366, 386
Stein 402-403
Steinitz 6, 10, 13, 16, 31, 52, 58, 84, 123, 145-146, 149, 152, 164, 169, 171, 175, 181-185, 188, 190,

194, 196-197, 199, 204, 209-211, 213-219, 222-227, 229-232, 234-239, 243-252, 254, 257-259, 261-262, 264-271, 273-278, 280-292, 295-297, 299-300, 302, 305-306, 308, 313-314, 318-319, 321, 323-329, 331, 333, 335-337, 345, 347-351, 355-357, 359-360, 364, 366, 382-383, 394-395, 397-402, 406-408, 414-415

Stern 194-195, 198

Suhle 189, 220

Szen 90, 92, 94-96

T

Taimanov 50, 415

Tal 179-180, 227, 335-337

Tarrasch 52, 102, 123, 134, 146, 153, 232, 252, 254-255, 259, 261-262, 295-308, 313-314, 316, 329, 342, 349-350, 356, 394, 406

Tartakower 108, 172, 307, 312, 332, 413

Teichmann 251

Thompson 147, 150

Tisdall 412-413

Topalov 234, 407

Torre 403

Tylkowski 390-391

U

Unzicker 66, 213, 349

Urusoff 85

V

Van der Heijden 388

Van Heeswijk 127

Van Meegen 142

Van Rijn 181

Van Schaardenburg 181

Van Wieringen 178

Velimirovic 361

Vidmar 307, 318

Von Bardeleben 183, 282-283, 342

Von Bilguer 87

Von Brühl 65

Von der Lasa 58, 87, 90, 188-190, 221, 359

Von Feilitzsch 416

Von Gottschall 303

Von Jaenisch 186

Von Scheve 298

Vukovic 17

W

Walbrodt 295-296, 298

Walker 72-73, 87, 148, 372-373

Watson 398

Welling 203

Wildegans 416

Williams 100-102, 106-112, 116, 118, 121, 137, 175

Winawer 185, 200, 243, 399-400

Wisker 266

Wojciechowski 390-391

Wyvill 90, 100-104, 106, 108-109

X

Xiong 363

Y

Yanvarjov 248

Ypma 252

Yudovich 305

Z

Zukertort 243-248, 257-258, 270, 288, 296, 300, 360, 386

Selected bibliography

Books:

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Table of Contents

Title page	7
Explanation of symbols	8
Preface	10
Exercises for Chapter 1	16
Footnotes to Greco	2
Exercises for Chapter 2	33
Exercises for Chapter 3	53
Exercises for Chapter 4	75
Exercises for Chapter 5	90
Exercises for Chapter 6	103
Exercises for Chapter 7	121
Exercises for Chapter 8	145
Exercises for Chapter 9	162
Questions for Chapter 10	184
Exercises for Chapter 11	192
Exercises for Chapter 12	205
Exercises for Chapter 13	220
Exercises for Chapter 14	229
Exercises for Chapter 15	246
Attack at all costs	257
Exercises for Chapter 17	267
Exercises for Chapter 18	292
The Great Steinitz Hoax	305
The concept of balance	307
Exercises for Chapter 21	317
Exercises for Chapter 22	337
Exercises for Chapter 23	350
Exercises for Chapter 24	366
Exercises for Chapter 25	378
Lasker making history	394
Exercises for Chapter 27	403
Exercises for Chapter 28	423

Exercises for Chapter 29	442
Exercises for Chapter 30	461
Exercises for Chapter 31	479
Exercises for Chapter 32	492
Exercises for Chapter 33	506
Exercises for Chapter 34	522
Exercises for Chapter 35	543
Exercises for Chapter 36	562
Endnotes	576
Index of names	582
Selected bibliography	592