

Willy Hendriks

On the Origin of Good Moves

A Skeptic's Guide to Getting Better at Chess

New In Chess 2020

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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.♘bxd2 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!?

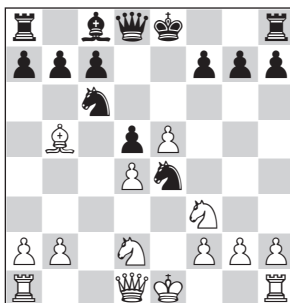
Years ago in my chess club's magazine there was a regular quiz that looked a bit like the one I presented to you at the start. This was in the pre-computer era. Of course, I hope you tried my quiz without computer help. Nowadays we are used to having engines running almost all the time. That makes it 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.♘bd2**

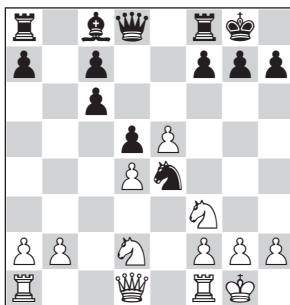


10...0-0

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

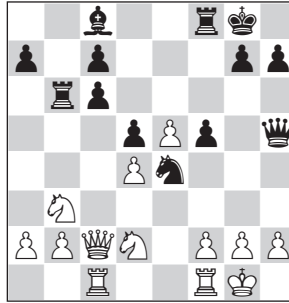
11.♙xc6 bxc6 12.0-0

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



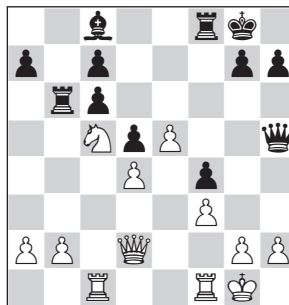
The weaknesses on the c-file are Black's major problem and now is his last chance to address this with 12...c5!, after which White is only slightly better. Black's next move not only doesn't help with his problems on the c-file, but also gives White a protected passed pawn and blocks his bishop on c8. 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.♖c1 ♕e8 14.♕c2 ♖b8 15.♘b3 ♖b6 16.♘fd2 ♕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.♘b7 ♖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.

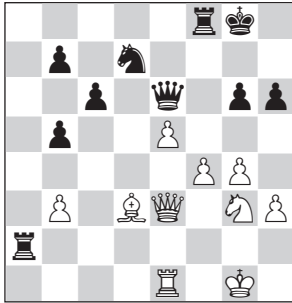
Adolf Anderssen (1818-1879), the great protagonist of the so-called Romantic chess era, playing purely positional chess years before this was invented? That raises a few questions. Is this game some sort of anachronism, an occasional lucky shot? Or is there more to be found in the history of chess that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

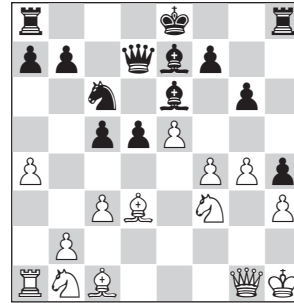
Exercises for Chapter 3

15



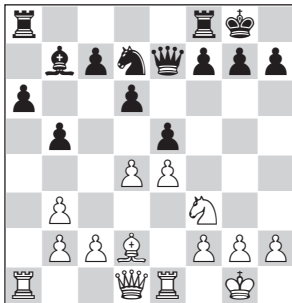
Is White's compensation sufficient?

16

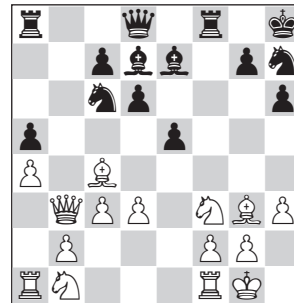


And the same question here.

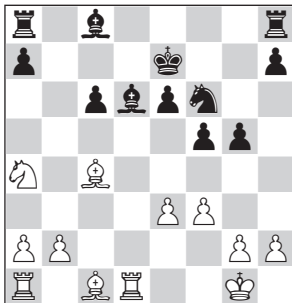
17



18



19



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!'

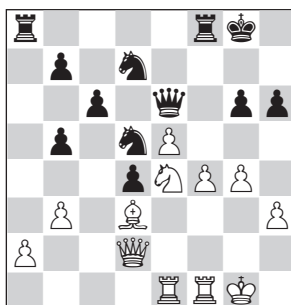
In this book I'll try to avoid as much as possible the well-known games that are shown in every textbook, but have a look at the needlework in the photo, which I encountered in the collection of Dutch chess historian Leo Hovestadt. He unfortunately couldn't tell me anything about its origin but the fact



Needlework of 'The Immortal Game'.

that someone created a work like this is a nice illustration of the great impression this game has left upon earlier generations.

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'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.

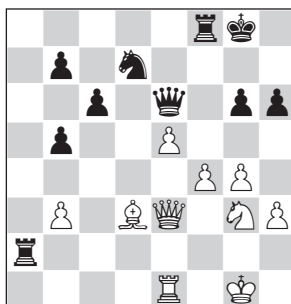
24... dxe3 25. ♙xe3 ♜xa2

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.

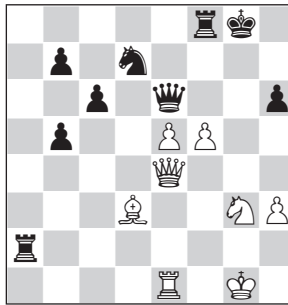
Basically, Black is an exchange up, f4-f5 is not that much of a threat, and he has all sorts of counterplay, White's king is exposed and his pieces, though active, are a bit loose. And Black's pieces aren't that bad either.

Best was 26...♖b2. If 27.f5, Black can choose between 27...♕d5 and 27...♗xe5 28.♗xe5 ♘xe5 29.♖xe5 ♖xb3, both giving a decisive advantage.

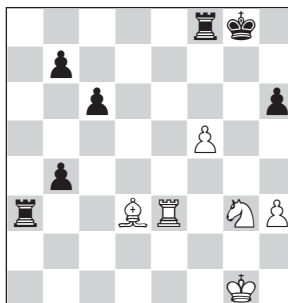
26... ♗xb3 27. ♖e4 ♗e6 28.f5!

One more exclamation mark for this, but 28.♗xg6+ would have been much better. Now 28...♗b3 would be winning, threatening 28...♘c5, and 29.f6 is nicely met by 29...♘xe5 30.♗xe5 ♗xd3 (after 31.♗e6+ ♔h8 32.♗xa2 Black has 32...♗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...♗xe5 30.♗xe5 ♘xe5 31.♖xe5 ♖a3 32.♖e3 b4.

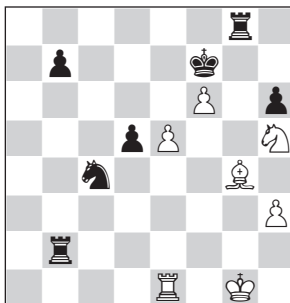


Here something like Philidor’s dream is developing on the other side of the board.

29... ♗d5 30. ♗xd5+ cxd5 31. ♘xb5 ♘b6

Better was 31...♘c5 with Black still on top. After some more mutual errors White's pawns finally manage to break through.

32.f6 ♖b2 33.♙d3 ♔f7 34.♙f5 ♘c4 35.♘h5 ♜g8+ 36.♙g4



36...♘d2 37.e6+ ♔g6 38.f7 ♜f8 39.♘f4+ ♔g7 40.♙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 [...]

8

Williams and the Wyvill formation

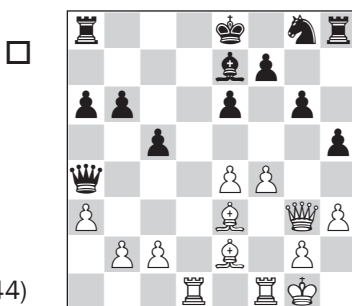
For Staunton it was disappointing to be eliminated before the final, but his bad luck didn't end there. In the play-off for third and fourth place he lost to his countryman, Elijah Williams. To him, Staunton notes, he 'has always given the odds of the Pawn and two moves, and beaten easily.' If you look 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 manoeuvring 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

(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...♖xe4 21.♙d3. I hope you chose 20.f5; I'm sure Anderssen would have played like that. Instead White played the defensive 20.♖f2, preventing 20...♖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.



Marmaduke Wyvill

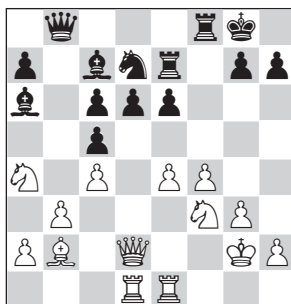
Just one more Staunton quotation (on one of his games with Williams) to end this topic for the time being:

‘But when a player, upon system, consumes hours over moves when minutes might suffice, and depends, not upon outmanoeuvring, 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



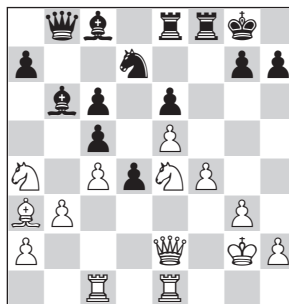
In the semi-final, Williams took a 3-0 lead against Wyvill, who then successfully played against match point for the next four games. But in the fifth game Williams came close. Some sort of Wyvill formation has been

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.♙a3 ♘b6 24.♖c1.



Here we see some typical features of the strategy against the Wyvill formation. The ♖a4 and ♙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...♖c8 25.♖e3 d4 26.♖e2 ♖ee8 27.♗g5 ♖b8 28.♗e4 ♙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.

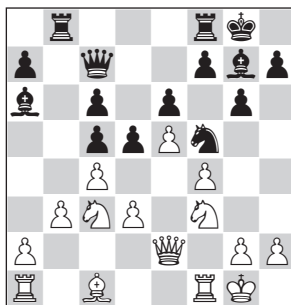


In the game Williams chose another move, 22.f5 (in the first diagram) – not bad either, but in the ensuing complications he finally went down.

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 ♘c6 3.♗f3 e6 4.♙b5 g6 5.♙xc6 bxc6 6.c4 ♙g7 7.♖e2 ♖b6 8.e5 ♗h6 9.♗c3 ♗f5 10.♗e4 0-0 11.d3 ♖b8 12.0-0 d5 13.♗c3 ♙a6 14.b3 ♖c7



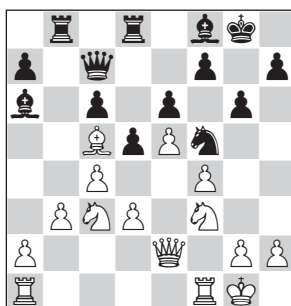
(Exercise no 45)

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...♗f8 16. ♕xc5 ♕f8



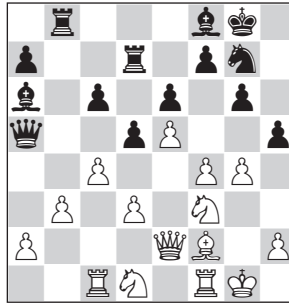
(Exercise no 46)

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.

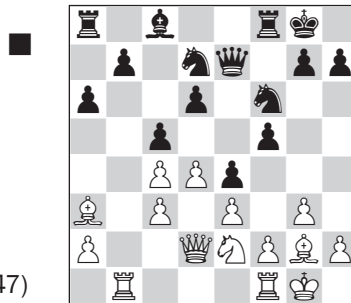
In the struggle for control over weak squares, the exchange of the defending bishop is of frequent occurrence, but apparently this basic scenario wasn't standard knowledge in Williams's day.

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



(Exercise no 47)

**Howard Staunton
Elijah Williams**

London 1851

15... ♜f7!

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

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 ♗e5.

16... ♜xc4 17.fxe4 fxe4 18.♗h3 b5 19.♗f4 ♗b6 20.♗g2 ♜f7 21.dxc5 ♗c4 22.♜c1 ♜a7 23.♝e1 dxc5 24.♖b2 g5 25.♗e2 ♗g4 26.h3 ♗f3 27.♗h2 ♜ad8 28.♗a1 ♜d2

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

The king can take care of itself

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



Simpson’s Divan

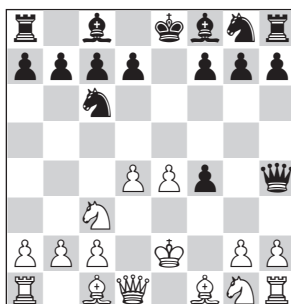
It is significant that this aspect is the first he brings forward when asked in an interview about how Morphy would do in those days: ‘Well, the game has made immense strides since his time. For one first-class player then, there are twenty now, and the science has developed. Morphy would have to alter 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...♔h4 Scotch. Likewise, throughout his whole career he was an avid supporter of the gambit that was named after him:

1.e4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.f4 exf4 4.d4 ♔h4+ 5.♚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:



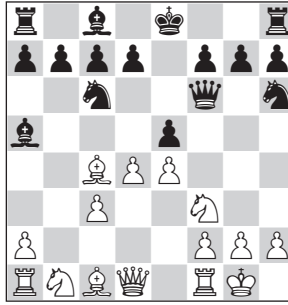
This diagram is the result of an important piece of analysis in *The Modern Chess Instructor*, which eventually led to the famous telegraph match between Steinitz and Chigorin. It has all the features of the modern school: Black is a pawn up for the moment; his king, which has lost the right to castle, 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...♘ge7 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...♘h6 and afterward ...♘e7, instead of ...♘d8.’



Steinitz continues his analysis with:

8.d5 9.e7 9. ♖a4 ♙b6 10. ♗g5 ♜d6 11. ♘a3 c6 12. ♝ad1

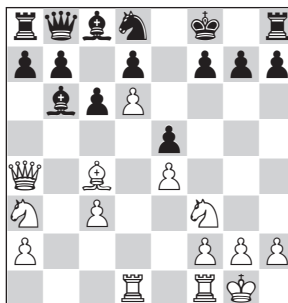
‘At this juncture Black has to take the choice between retarding his development for a long time or allowing two holes to be formed in the center. As will be seen the two holes are more dangerous to his game than the block that White will create.’

12... ♜b8 13. ♙xe7 ♘xe7 14.d6+ ♙e8 15. ♜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:



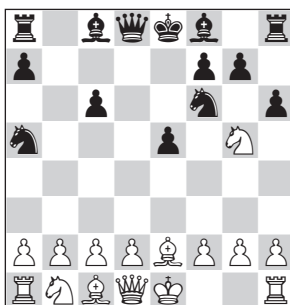
Discussing his predecessors, Vladimir Kramnik said: ‘One would want to resign in such a position [...] the position at the diagram is absolutely hopeless for Black.’¹¹⁷

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

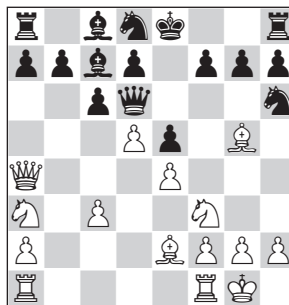
This match was played by telegraph from 1890 to 1891 and it aroused enormous interest. A special feature was that Steinitz in his chess column commented on the games while in progress. That led to some characteristic and (with hindsight) rather funny quotes.

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