



COLUMNISTS

The Instructor

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Battle of the Heavy Pieces

Schlechter-Lasker
5th Match Game
Vienna/Berlin 1910

The classic game we now present for your inspection has already been reprinted many times. I would like to compare the annotators' opinions (some quite radically different), and add some analysis of my own.

But the point is not just the correction of errors in analysis. What I value most of all, in examining other people's analysis, is that they are able to present an overall picture of the struggle, and to describe the problems (some purely chess-related, others psychological) facing the players. Variations are chiefly required in order to demonstrate or to illustrate the author's point of view.

This was precisely the approach used by the famous Russian player and trainer, Pyotr Romanovsky, when commenting on this game for his book, "Middlegame - Positional Play" - a work which, although it has indeed been translated into English, has somehow escaped the notice of the entire English-speaking world. So it will be mostly Romanovsky's conclusions I shall cite here - even though I may have to disagree with some of them.

The game's opening stage is not very interesting, so we'll hurry past it:

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 Nc6 3. Bb5 Nf6 4. 0-0 d6 5. d4 Bd7 6. Nc3 Be7 7. Bg5 0-0 8. de

8. Bxc6 Bxc6 9. de de (9... Nxe4 10. Nxe4 Bxe4 11. Bxe7 Qxe7 12. ed Qxd6 13. Qxd6 cd 14. Nd4+/- - Schlechter) 10. Qxd8 Bxd8 11. Nxe5 Bxe4 12. Bxf6?! Bxf6 13. Nd7 Bxc3 14. Nxf8 Bxb2 15. Rab1 Ba3 (unclear - Keres) 16. Nd7 f6!-/+.

8. ... Nxe5

8. ... de 9. Re1 intending Bxc6 (Schlechter)

9. Bxd7

9. Nxe5 Bxb5 10. Nxf7? Qd7 (Schlechter)

9. ... Nfxd7 10. Bxe7 Nxf3+

10... Qxe7 11. Nd4 intending f4 (Schlechter)

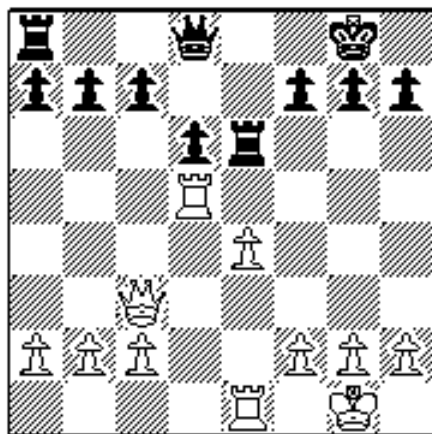
11. Qxf3 Qxe7 12. Nd5 Qd8 13. Rad1

Better 13. Qc3 - Schlechter

13. ... Re8 14. Rfe1 Nb6 15. Qc3 Nxd5 16. Rxd5

16. ed leads to too much simplification (Schlechter)

16. ... Re6 = (See Diagram)



17. Rd3 Qe7 18. Rg3 Rg6

18... f5? 19. Qb3 - Schlechter

19. R1e3 Re8 20. h3 Kf8 21. Rxc6 hg

"Can we aver that either side has any advantage here? Of course not. In fact, many players would be willing to shake hands and take a draw at this point.

The position teeters on the verge of an endgame - and this line remains uncrossed for many moves." (Romanovsky)

Here it should be noted that, in the above-cited book, Romanovsky spends a great deal of time examining positions with only rooks and queens on the board, even going so far as to label these positions "the fourth stage of a chess game". These positions feature both endgame and middlegame tendencies; their chief difficulty lies in deciding which features are currently the more significant. Should one centralize the king (as in an endgame), or shelter it (as in the middlegame); should one create pawn weaknesses for an attack that may never happen, and so on.

The game under discussion is an excellent illustration of this problem. Lasker treated the position as an endgame, gradually outplaying his opponent; but at the very end, he briefly lost his concentration, and fell under a mating attack.

22. Qb4 c6

"22... b6 would have led to a serious queenside weakening after 23. Qa4 a5 24. Qc6." (Tarrasch)

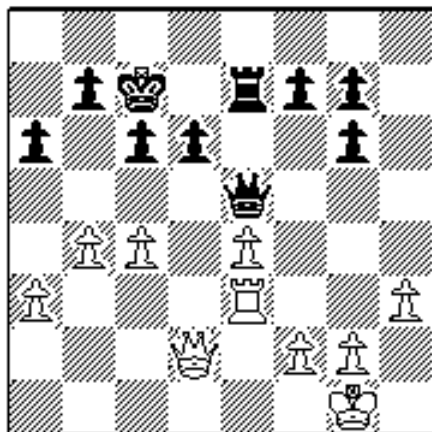
23. Qa3 a6 24. Qb3 Rd8 25. c4

"From an endgame standpoint, the c-pawn would have been better left at c2. The weakness of Black's d6-pawn proves illusory." (Romanovsky)

25. ... Rd7 26. Qd1 Qe5 27. Qg4 Ke8

"Using rear lines of communication, Lasker carefully moves his king closer to the center and the queenside. In the endgame, of course, the king is better placed near the main group of his pawns, which is the only spot from which an attack may be launched. Meanwhile, Black also undertakes a plan of stirring up queenside play. This also resolves another issue: giving the king the responsibility for the defense of the pawn at d6 frees the queen from this task. On g8 or f8, of course, the king stands more securely than it does at c7 - although here, too, it is hard to get at him. There aren't a lot of pieces remaining on the board, and Black's queenside pawn chain is quite sturdy." (Romanovsky)

28. Qe2 Kd8 29. Qd2 Kc7 30. a3 Re7 31. b4 (See Diagram)



31. ... b5!

"Very boldly and energetically played - as one should expect from a great master. Although this move does open up the king's position, at the same time, the White a-pawn is rendered backward. And Black hopes, at some point, to create a passed pawn of his own, by advancing the c-pawn." (Tarrasch)

"Black aims for a position in which the trade of queens will favor him. This allows him greater freedom of action, since White

will have to avoid an endgame. The bad side of this move is that the king's pawn cover will be somewhat loosened. But it's still a long way to the endgame - that is, if Black can reach one." (Romanovsky)

Before defining the pawn structure on the queenside, it would have been advisable to have first improved his position on the kingside, by ..g6-g5, ..f7-f6, and perhaps ..Re8. However, White would have responded to 31..g5 with 32. Qd1, followed by 33. a4.

32. cb

Evidently, Schlechter has decided to show his powerful opponent that there is still a middlegame on the board. However, White must be careful as well. In view of the weak pawn at a3 and the possibility of ..c6-c5, the rook endgame is quite unacceptable for him." (Romanovsky)

32. Qd3? Qa1+ 33 Kh2 Qa2! (33..Qc1? 34 cb ab 35. Qd4 - Dvoretsky) 34. c5 dc 35. bc Rd7 36. Qc3 Qd2! 37. Qe5+ Kb7-/+ (Romanovsky).

But this evaluation is wrong. White continues 38. Qxg7 (taking the pawn without playing Qe5+ first is even more exact) 38... Qxf2 39. Rf3 Qxc5 (39..Qa2 40. Qc3!/? or 40. Rf6!/?) 40. Rxf7 Rxf7 41. Qxf7+ Kb6 42. Qf6!/? , and White at least stands no worse. Instead of 32...Qa1+, a stronger move is 32... f6=/+.

32. ... ab 33. g3 g5! 34. Kg2 Re8 35. Qd1!

(Intending 36. a4) 35. Qa2?! Qe6 Romanovsky.

35. ... f6!

35... Ra8 36. Qh5, with counterplay (Tarrasch).

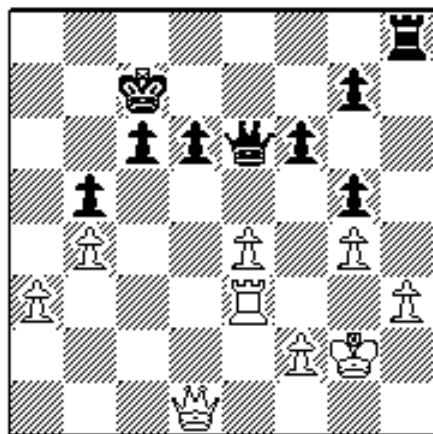
36. Qb3?

White could not bring himself to play 36. a4!/? , in view of 36... ba 37. Qxa4 Kb7, when 38. Ra3 results in a hard rook endgame for him after 38... Qxe4+ 39. Kh2 Qd4! 40. Qa6+ Kc7 41. Qa7+ Qxa7 42. Rxa7+ Kb6 43. Rxg7 Re4 (Romanovsky). This variation shows the point of the fine prophylactic move 35... f6! However, the sacrifice of the e4-pawn was hardly necessary; with

something like, say, 38. Qc2!?, White maintains good counterchances.

The text has no point, and only loses time for White. Viorel Bologan's suggested 36. Qh5! was stronger, preventing Black's plan of Qe6 and Rh8, and preparing to exchange the h-pawn if the occasion presents itself.

36. ... Qe6 37. Qd1 Rh8 38. g4 (See Diagram)



"White again weakens his position, refusing - quite rightly - to play 38. Qg4. Anything but an endgame!" (Romanovsky)

38. ... Qc4

A self-confident queen invasion. Black should undoubtedly have preferred 38...Ra8, to quash forever White's chief - in fact, probably only - counterchance: the advance of the a-pawn. But perhaps Lasker, seeing no clear way to strengthen his own position, decided to provoke Schlechter into this bayonet attack, banking on the fact that it

requires a pawn sacrifice." (Romanovsky)

And indeed, after 38...Ra8 39. Qc2, how is Black to strengthen his position? I think that Lasker played the best move.

39. a4!?

"White might never get another chance. Black will soon discover that defending an exposed king, even against a comparatively small number of pieces, is no easy task." (Romanovsky)

"A pawn sacrifice rich with opportunity: after 39. Qf3 Re8 40. Qf5 Re5 (40... Qf7 - Dvoretzky) 41. Qh7 Qf7 or 41. Qg6 Qg8, White has a difficult game." (Schlechter)

Tarrasch maintained the opposite opinion:

"White begins to panic at the implacable improvement of his opponent's position, and bets everything on one card, sacrificing a pawn for attacking chances. This continuation should have cost him the game, even if it did give him some chances. There were as yet no grounds for despair: all his weak spots (at a3, e4 and h3) were quite sufficiently defended by the rook; and as long as he avoided the exchange of queens, he might have continued play with a clear conscience."

Tarrasch is quite obviously right: a strategy of passive defense was quite appropriate in these circumstances. Continue: 39. Qe1 Re8 40. Kg1, and I can find no clear way to strengthen Black's position. Any further pawn advance will lead to the creation of weaknesses in his own camp.

In any event, if White had to play a3-a4, then it should have been done earlier, on move 36, when it would not have required a pawn sacrifice.

39. ... Qxb4?

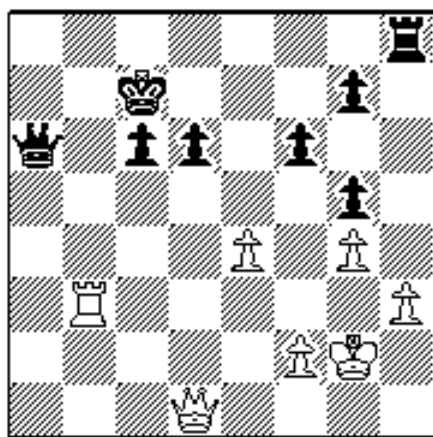
"No worse is 39...Ra8 40. ab Qxb5 41. Qb3 Ra1! 42. Rd3 Kb6, and if 43. Rxd6 (43. Qc3 Qe5! 44. Rd4 Rd1, or 44. Qxe5 de 45. Rd7 Ra7! - Dvoretsky), then 43... Qf1+ 44. Kg3 Qg1+, and wins. Lasker, however, hastens to win material, since there is no immediately visible threat to his king." (Romanovsky)

41. Qb3? in Romanovsky's line is a bad choice, allowing counterthreats to the White king. One might suggest 41. Rc3! instead, for example, preparing 42. Qd5 or 42. Qb3 (41... Qxb4 42. Rxc6+).

The strongest move, however, was one that went unnoticed by the commentators: 39... Rb8!-/+, bringing the rook in with an attack on the weak pawn at b4.

Taking the pawn at once allows White to create dangerous counterthreats.

40. ab Qxb5 41. Rb3 Qa6 (See Diagram)



42. Qd4?

Intending Qb4 and Ra3.

But Schlechter missed the strongest line, again pointed out by Bologan: 42. Rb4!, with the plan of 43. Qb3 or 43. Ra4 (43. Rb1 or b2 are apparently equivalent). For instance, on 42... c5 43. Ra4 Qb7 44. Qa1 Kb8 42. Qa2! Re8 46. f3, White has the extremely unpleasant threat 47. Ra3. Black would apparently have to repeat moves with 42... Qa3 43. Rb3 Qa6 44. Rb4.

42. ... Re8!

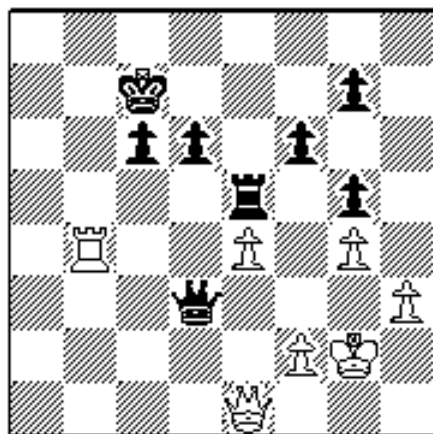
An excellent maneuver which Schlechter apparently underestimated. From e5, the rook will assist with the defense and simultaneously create counterthreats against the e-pawn.

43. Rb1 Re5 44. Qb4 Qb5

44... Rb5 45. Qc4

45. Qe1 Qd3 46. Rb4

Intending 47. Qa1 (See Diagram)

**46. ... c5?!**

46... Rb5 (Capablanca) 47. Ra4 Rb1 48. Qa5+ Kd7 49. Qf5+ (Romanovsky).

46... Ra5! (intending Ra3) 47. Rb3 Qxb3 48. Qxa5+ Kb7 (48..Qb6 - Schlechter) 49. Qd8 Qe6 50. f3 d5 51. ed cd 52. Qa5 Qd7 53. Qb4+ Kc7 54. Qd4. "The queen endgame is certainly not simple, and it is not clear whether Black could win it. Lasker was unsure of this; and since he quite underestimated White's chances, he decided that he was within his rights to try for

more." (Romanovsky)

47. Ra4 c4 48. Qa1 Qxe4+ 49. Kh2

Black has won a second pawn, but the open position of his king assures his opponent sufficient counterplay.

49. ... Rb5 (intending Qe5+) **50. Qa2** (intending Rxc4+ or Ra7+) **50. ... Qe5+**
50... Rb3?? 51. Qxb3 Qf4+ 52. Qg3+- (Schlechter).

51. Kg1 Qe1+ 52. Kh2?!

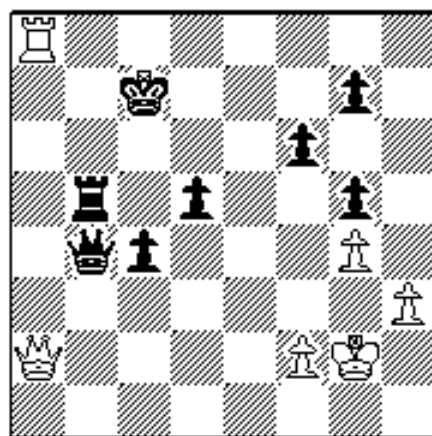
Better 52. Kg2 - Romanovsky.

52. ... d5 53. Ra8

Intending 54. Qa7+; if 53. Ra7+ Rb7.

53. ... Qb4

Black only gets a repetition of moves after 53... Qe5+ 54. Kg1 (54 Kg2 Qe4+ 55. f3? Qd4+- - Capablanca).

54. Kg2 (54. Qa6? Qd6+) (*See Diagram*)**54. ... Qc5?**

On Lasker's suggested 54... Rb8 there follows 55. Qa7+ Rb7 56. Qe3 Qd6, and now not 57. Qe8 (hoping for 57..Qd7? 58 Qf8! threatening 59. Qc5+), in view of 57... d4!, threatening to exchange queens (Dvoretsky), but 57. Rg8 (or 57 Re8) 57... d4 58 Qe4, maintaining a dangerous attack (Schlechter).

Schlechter suggested 54... Rb7!?

Vadim Zvjagintsev offered the most solid solution: 54... c3!? - White must reckon with the possible queen check at e4. The most likely outcome here would be a draw after, for instance, 55. Re8 Rb8 56. Qa7+ Rb7 57. Qa8 Rb8 58. Qa7+.

55. Qa6 Rb8?

Another bad line is 55... Rb7 56. Qe6 Rb8 57. Qf7+ (Schlechter). The only saving chances lay in sacrificing the queen for the rook by 55... Qb6!? 56. Qc8+ Kd6 57. Ra6 Qxa6 58. Qxa6+ Kc5 (Capablanca), or 55... c3!? 56. Rc8+ Kd7 57. Rxc5 Rxc5 (Lasker).

56. Ra7+ Kd8 57. Rxc7 Qb6 58. Qa3 Kc8

And Black resigned, in view of 59. Qf8+ Qd8 60. Qc5+; nor was 58... Qb4 59. Qa7 any improvement.

"The whole endgame can serve as an instructive example of underestimating the force of middlegame ideas in a battle of the heavy pieces. Strictly speaking, Lasker made only one error - but a highly significant one: he let himself get carried away by the ideas of the endgame." (Romanovsky)

Translated by Jim Marfia

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