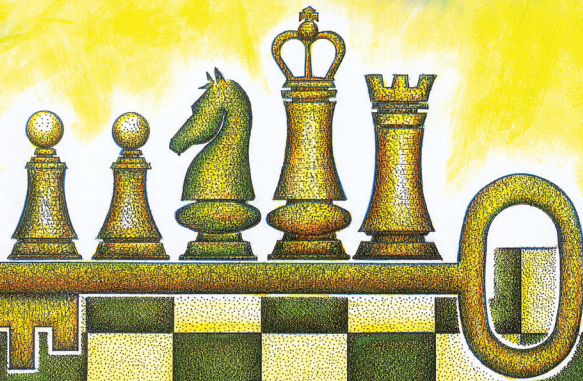


**Lasker's**

# **Manual of Chess**

**Emanuel Lasker**

*New 21st Century Edition!*



**Foreword by Mark Dvoretsky**

# Lasker's Manual of Chess

by

Emanuel Lasker

Foreword by  
Mark Dvoretsky



2008

Russell Enterprises, Inc.  
Milford, CT USA

# Lasker's Manual of Chess

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## Foreword

Can studying the classics be helpful? That depends. Many books that were popular in their day have grown dated, and are now of interest only to lovers of chess history. But *Lasker's Manual of Chess*, written by Emanuel Lasker, has not lost its relevance even now, some eighty years after it was first published.

In one of my own books, I analyzed the famous fourth game of the Tarrasch-Lasker match, and examined the “desperado” theme – that is, a piece which, compelled by circumstance, displays a powerful urge for self-immolation – which was first introduced in that book. While preparing the English edition, I was told that that English language chess literature treats the concept of “desperado” slightly differently. I went back to the source of this concept, *Lasker's Manual of Chess*, where I had first found this idea. And there I discovered that Lasker had not only invented the term, he had isolated and illustrated, by appropriate examples, *three* possible reasons why a piece might become a “desperado.” One of them applied to the previously mentioned game against Tarrasch. English-language authors, however, use this term for a different situation, which was only one of the three! As it turns out, this useful idea for practical players is, if not forgotten, then at least understood only in a simplified form.

I could also bring up other important ideas which were worked out in *Lasker's Manual of Chess*, but which have been only dimly reflected in contemporary chess literature, such as his conception of how to defend. But such things are not the the chief value of this notable book by the second world champion. That lies in something more general, more universal.

Being constantly in contact with talented chessplayers of varying levels, I have become convinced that only a few of them are able to find on their own the proper responses to general questions that interest them. Why do they constantly make the same errors over and over again? What are the strong and weak points of their game? What habits and techniques should they develop in themselves? What approach should they take to this or that particular chess problem, and where can they find the appropriate study materials, etc., etc. And if they do find answers to these questions, then more often than not, they turn out to be the wrong answers. The overwhelming majority of them naively believe that the key to their success lies in opening preparation, the endless honing of their opening repertoire.

Very few contemporary books help you work out a true chess philosophy; some even disorient their readers. But *Lasker's Manual of Chess* is philosophical to its core. It helps you examine different kinds of problems in the most varied positions and it is exceptionally important, both for practical players and for trainers. Many times I have re-read, with great pleasure and great benefit to myself, those portions of the book dedicated to combinations, positional play (here we find accurately laid out the vital principles of the theory of Steinitz, which form the basis of contemporary chess), and chess aesthetics.

The thoughts expressed in his concluding “On Education in Chess” still resonate today. Here are a few of them:

Education in chess has to be an education in independent thinking and judging. Chess must not be memorized, simply because it is not important enough. If you load your memory, you should know why ... You should keep in mind no names, nor numbers, nor isolated incidents, not even results, but only *methods* ... He who wants to educate himself in chess must evade what is dead in chess – artificial theories, supported by few instances and

upheld by an excess of human wit; the habit of playing with inferior opponents; the custom of avoiding difficult tasks; the weakness of uncritically taking over variations or rules discovered by others; the vanity which is self-sufficient; the incapacity for admitting mistakes; in brief, everything that leads to a standstill or to anarchy.

Throughout the course of my trainer's work, I have followed this advice; never have I regretted it. Of course, there is a well-known Russian proverb that goes, "For every bit of good advice, you need ten more bits to tell you how to carry it out." Thus, Lasker's ideas, in complete accordance with his philosophy, are not a dried-up end-product, but merely an excellent starting point for working out your own way in chess.

Lasker was both a great fighter and a deep thinker. His book forms the quintessence of many years of exceptionally successful experience, and his thoughts on the same. It teaches you what he considers to be most important, general principles and methods applicable to any situation. Once you have read the *Manual*, you will become wiser, which is bound to help you later on, both in chess and in life.

Mark Dvoretzky  
Moscow  
September 2008

## Fourth Book

### Position Play

Whereas by combination values are transformed, they are proved and confirmed by “position play.” Thus, position play is antagonistic to combination, as becomes evident when a “combinative player” meets with his counterpart, the “positional player.” The two often are wholly different in make up and constitution. The combinative player an adventurer, speculator, gambler, the positional player believing in rigid dogma, happy only in a firm position, afraid of all dangers, parsimonious with all he holds, even with the minute values; the former perhaps careless of detail and large-visioned, the latter penny-wise and pound-foolish. The combinative player calls the positional player Philistine, pedant, woodshifter; the positional player replies with invectives such as romancer, dreamer, presumptuous idealist. One meets with pronounced types of the two kinds and they poke fun at one another. Thus the following story is told of an onlooker at a game. He was a combinative player. Suddenly he interrupted the players: “I see a magnificent combination, a sacrifice of the queen,” he excitedly called to him who was to move. “If your opponent then takes the pawn, he is mated, and if he goes out of check, he is mated in two.” “Well,” replied the player, “but the principal question is: what am I to do if he captures the queen?” “That is the only variation,” replied the combination player, “which I have not yet looked into.”

However obviously the majority of chess players may be divided into two big classes of combination and positional players, in the chess master this antagonism is transformed into a harmony. In him combination play is completed by position play. By combination the master aims to show up and to defeat the false values, the true values shall guide him in his position play, which in turn shall bring those values to honor. The master is like a man in a learned dispute who knows sophistry but does not make use of it, except for the purpose of exposing the sly subtleties of an artful opponent who disputes a true, sound, vigorous thesis with mere trickery.

#### The Plan

The thought which gives life to a combination is called the *idea*, the thought behind position play is called the *plan*. The idea has a point which surprises, which changes at one blow the state of affairs; the plan has breadth and depth which are imposing and which, by slow, methodical building, give a structure to the position.

The methods followed in the analysis of a given position by combination and by the creation of plans are differentiated by the direction of the underlying thought. The combination player thinks forward: he starts from the given position and tries the forceful moves in his mind; the positional 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.

In looking for a combination the given position is the essential thing, in the conceiving of plans the intended position is the root of my thinking. When following the former process I seek to find out whether among the positions that I can derive from the present position by a succession of forceful moves I may not be able to detect one desirable to me and to envisage it; with the latter process I hope to be able to attain to a position that I have in mind and try to find out whether ways leading up to that conceived position may not start from the given position. Can I, by method, by systematic procedure, start my antagonist on the way to the position I aim at? This is the question uppermost in the mind of the positional players and this is the essence of plan making.

When looking at the results of analysis, it is true, I cannot determine by logical deduction through

which particular process of thought the result has been arrived at. But to this end, though logic fails me, psychology will aid me. A spirit with a large and roomy brain who without error could keep in mind millions of variations would have no need of planning. Frail, weak man can clearly keep in mind only half a dozen variations since he has but little time to spare for chess. And if he by chance had more time for it and in addition had genius for the game, to see through hundreds of variations would turn his brain. His reason was not made to be a substitute for a printed table. His mind has a marvelous faculty which enables him to conceive deep and farsighted plans without being subject to the necessity of examining every possibility. From the psychology of frail man I can decide whether this move belongs to a combination; that one to a plan.

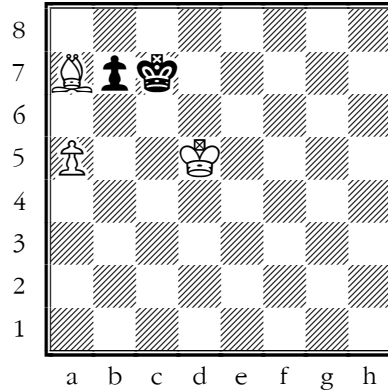
There are simple positions by the analysis of which one can practice combining and planning at the same time. One can understand such positions either way, and to do this is pleasurable. But let it be said at once that the method of planning has not been made for what is simple but only for what is complicated, immense, infinite. True, complication is merely relative; to a mathematician, for instance, the complex movements of the planets round the sun are very much simpler than the sequence of prime numbers. For all that, 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.

For the chess player the importance of planning is sufficiently manifest and is nowadays acknowledged. So says Nimzovitch (*My System*, 1929, page 33) "Settle on your objective is the rule ... Aimlessly to drift from one to another, this will expose you to a strategic disgrace."

The plan shall provide for long and manifold series of moves and conduce to a desirable end. In this the plan is different from a combination. Some combinations of artificial positions are long and complicated it is true, but they can be registered in a few lines or, at the utmost, in

several pages. In a contest of two well-matched masters the net of variations would fill volumes, they multiply indefinitely and the chess player, to grasp the immense number of possibilities, would have need of Ariadne's thread, namely, of a plan.

**Examples**



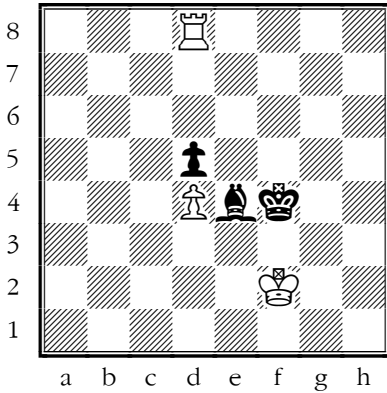
*Metger-L. Paulsen,  
White to play and win*

1. Let us contemplate this position without seeking for a combination. Black's ideal is to have his king on a8 or on b7 after his pawn has been got rid of. He sees his king in the corner, sure that the opponent cannot dislodge it. Alternatively he sees the bishop on a7, the white pawn on b6, his king on b7, moving to a8 and back to b7 and meanwhile the white king at bay lest it stalemate. He tries to bring one of these positions about, resisting every drift that would tend in another direction.

White sees the black king kept from a8. A move of the b-pawn, he thinks, must be countered by a5-a6. He aims at maneuvering his king so as to drive the opposing king off by *Zugzwang*. Out of this web of plans the following play logically results: **1. ♖d4** The b-pawn must not be allowed to advance with check, since the reply to that advance is to be a5-a6. **1... ♜c6 2. ♗b6 ♖d6** Of course, if **2... ♜b5 3. ♖d5** and conquers b7. **3. ♜c4 ♜c6 4. ♖b4 ♖d6 5. ♖b5 ♖d7 6. ♗g1 ♜c7 7. ♗h2+ ♜any 8. ♖b6** and wins.

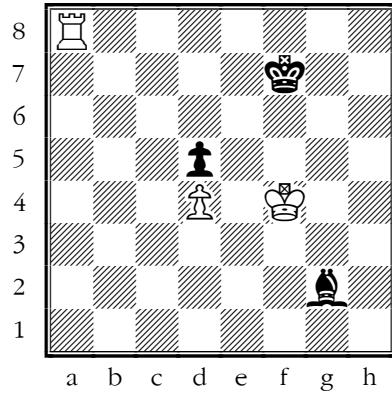
2. A somewhat more complicated example follows:





*White to play*

White conceives the plan of forcing the black king away from the square e4 and thus of dominating the important points d4 and d5 with king and rook. **1. ♖h8** Black resists. He wants to get his king to e4 or e3. **1... ♗f5 2. ♖h4+ ♗g4 3. ♖g2** White forces the black king by *Zugzwang*. **3... ♖g5 4. ♖g3 ♗f5 5. ♖h8 ♗g6 6. ♖f8 ♗e4 7. ♖e8** The black king is now driven off his fourth rank. **7... ♖f6 8. ♖f4 ♗g2 9. ♖a8 ♖f7** Here White is unable to take the opposition owing to his king on f5 being exposed to check by the bishop. **10. ♖e5**

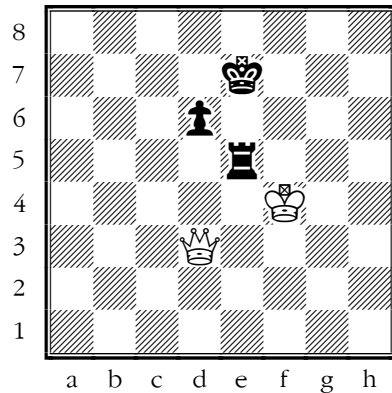


White dominates the important points. He has achieved what he set out to do. His plan now includes the capture of the pawn with the rook in a position where the single pawn would win, that is, when black's king has been driven away from the immediate vicinity of d7. **10... ♗e4 11. ♖a7+ ♖e8 12. ♖e6 ♖d8 13. ♖d6 ♖c8 14. ♖a8+ ♖b7 15. ♖g8 ♗f3 16. ♖g3 ♗e4 17. ♖c3 ♗g2 18. ♖c5** Now the king has been forced away from the vicinity of d7 and ♖×d5 follows decisively.

The above is not the only plan that would win. The white king might have marched to c3, the black king driven from the vicinity of the white pawn, the white king then proceeds to c5, the rook to e5 and if need be the black king is driven away from d7 as above.



**Lasker the Farmer:** In 1912 Lasker bought a small piece of land about 20 miles outside Berlin, with the idea of becoming a farmer and pigeon breeder. Neither effort met with success: Lasker got walnut-sized potatoes, and his birds did not breed. Consulting an expert, he learned the reason: they were all male.

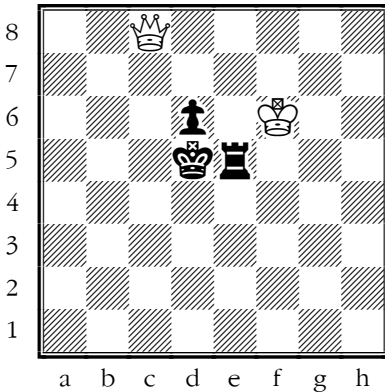


*Philidor  
White to play*

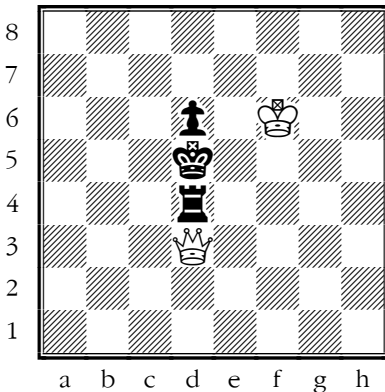
3. White's plan must be to separate the black king

from the pawn and also, if possible, to lead his king to attack the pawn. Now the king may be driven to e6 and then by a check at e8 to d5 where the king will obstruct the rook. Then *Zugzwang* may be utilized by placing the queen on c8 and Black gets into difficulties. Or the rook may be on c5, the queen on e8, the king on d5. Can Black resist? Can he turn the game to a different issue?

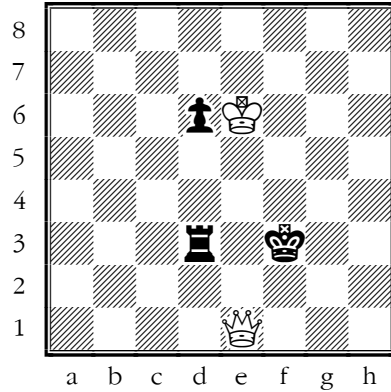
**1. ♖h7+ ♜e6** Or 1...♞d8 2.♞f7 ♞c8 3.♞a7 The rook has to guard the square e7, where the queen would be powerful, hence 3...♞d8 4.♞b8+ ♞d7 5.♞b7+ ♞d8 6.♞c6 ♞e7 7.♞c7+ ♞e6 8.♞d8. **2. ♞c7 ♞c5 3. ♞d8 ♞e4 4. ♞e8+ ♞d5 5. ♞c8 ♞e4+** There is no help for it. If the king moves, ♞c6 follows. To move the rook away from the king would permit fatal simultaneous attacks. **6. ♞f5 ♞e5+ 7. ♞f6**



The fifth rank has been forced by the king, but not yet the e-file. Now to force the rook from the e-file. **7...♞e4 8. ♞b7+ ♞d4 9. ♞b4+ ♞d5 10. ♞d2+ ♞c6 11. ♞c2+ ♞d5 12. ♞d3+ ♞d4**

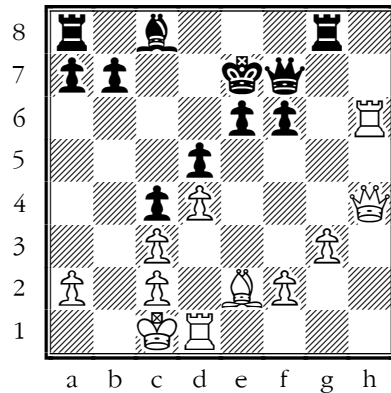


At last! Now the king to the vicinity of the pawn. **13. ♞b5+ ♞e4 14. ♞e6 ♞e3 15. ♞b6 ♞d3 16. ♞b3+ ♞e4 17. ♞c3 ♞d3 18. ♞e1+ ♞f3**



The black king and rook are separated. Now to keep them so and let *Zugzwang* do its work. **19. ♞d7 ♞d4 20. ♞c6 ♞d3 21. ♞b5 d5 22. ♞c5 ♞f4 23. ♞e2**, and the struggle is over.

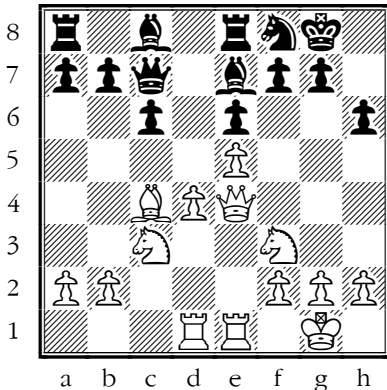
When we consider the amount of room required by the queen for the execution of the plan, we see that Black would not lose if the pawn had been on Black's second rank, nor if it had stood on the b-file. Of course, a pawn on the seventh rank would be so threatening as to make a sure draw. If the pawn is on the border, wholly different motifs present themselves. Obviously, the resources of the defense would thereby be further limited.



*Forgács-Spielmann,  
White to play*

4. White plans to get the pawns which obstruct

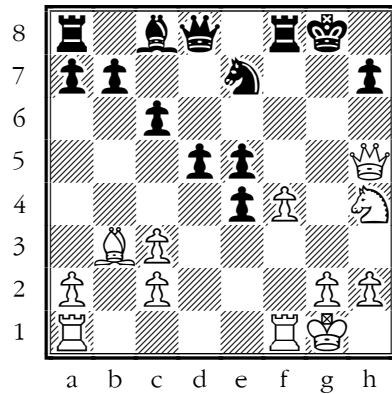
his pieces out of the way and to enter the black camp with his heavy artillery. **1.f4 ♖d7 2.f5 e×f5 3.♙×c4 ♜g4** If 3...d×c4 4.♞e1+, and if 4...♙any 5.♞×f6; if 4...♙e6 5.d5. The plan is realized. Now follows a brief struggle. **4.♞e1+ ♙e6** If 4...♙d8 5.♞×f6 wins. **5.♙h1 ♜d6 6.♞h7 ♙g8** The queen has to keep the bishop protected, else ♞×e6+. **7.♙b3 ♞e4 8.♞×b7 ♞c8 9.♙f1 ♞c6 10.♞×e4** Resigns.



*Forgács-E. Cohn,  
White to play*

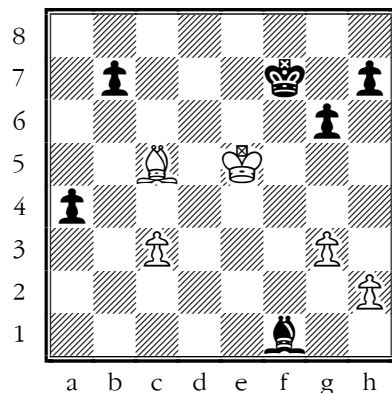
5. White plans to bring superior forces to bear against the black king and to throttle the resistance of the few black pieces which could be collected in that narrow quarter. Black plans to make an advance in the center, but he needs much time for the preparations necessary to put such a plan into effect with so little developed force. **1.♙g4 b6 2.♙h5 ♙b7 3.♞e4 ♙b4 4.♞g4** The march of the rook to the kingside, a difficult enterprise, has been accomplished. **4...♙×c3** One enemy less. **5.b×c3 ♙h8 6.♙g5 ♞e7 7.♙e4 ♞d8 8.♞d3 c5 9.♙f6** White threatens ♙×h6+. **9...♙g6 10.♞h3** and wins.

6. From the next diagram, White, who on the queenside is hopelessly inferior, resolves to abandon his queenside to its fate and to concentrate all his efforts upon the kingside. Therefore, he lets even the e-pawn go and advances his f-pawn so as to narrow down the space available to Black. **1.f5 ♞f6** Black must block the pawn which would otherwise advance impetuously with new threats at each move.



*Dr. Perlis-Salwe,  
White to play*

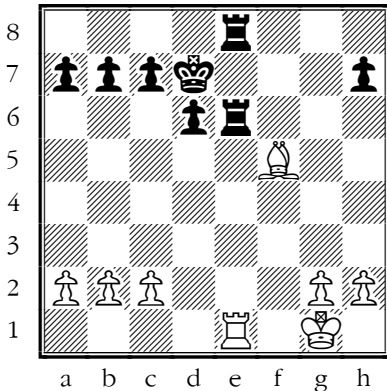
**2.♞ae1 ♙h8 3.g4 ♙d7 4.♙g6+ ♙×g6 5.f×g6 ♞×g6 6.♞f7 ♙b6+ 7.♙h1 ♞g7 8.♙×e5 ♞ag8 9.♞ef1 ♙b5 10.♞1f2 ♙c5 11.♞×g7** Resigns.



*Vidmar-Spielmann,  
Black to play*

7. Black, having a passed pawn on the queenside which will occupy at least one of the white pieces, plans to attack on the kingside with superior force and to keep a remote pawn there on a weak, unprotected spot, so as to have a target for his attack. **1...♙h3** Thus selecting as a target the white h-pawn which must not be allowed to march to safety. **2.♙a3 g5 3.♙b4 ♙g6 4.c4 ♙h5 5.♙a3 ♙g4 6.♙d6 ♙g2 7.♙f6 ♙f1 8.♙g7** By the pressure on the h-pawn Black has driven White from the center. Thence he can threaten attacks on either wing. **8...♙f5 9.c5** If

9. ♖×h7 ♗×c4 and wins with his two passed pawns of which one will cost the bishop while the other queens. 9...a3 10.c6 a2 11.g4+ ♕e4 12.♗e5 b×c6 13.♗a1 c5 14.♖×h7 c4 15.♖g6 ♖d3 16.♖×g5 c3 Resigns.

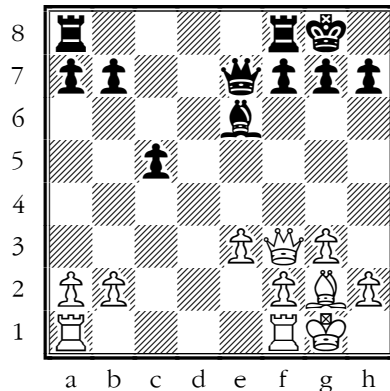


MacDonnell-Lewis,  
White to play

8. White has a pawn plus on the kingside, while Black is hampered in mobility and action by the pin of the rook. White plans to maintain the pin while his kingside pawns advance. Thus the game proceeds: 1.c4 To make difficult the liberation of the rook by d6-d5 and ♖d6. 1...c6 2.g4? Too soon! First 2.b4 was indicated. 2...d5 Black does not grasp the opportunity. First 2...a5, then (eventually after the interlude 3.a3 a4) 4...b6 and at last d6-d5. 3.c5 That maintains the pin indefinitely. 3...b6 4.b4 d4 5.♖e5 b×c5 6.b×c5 h6 Useless to advance the d-pawn, which White would stop with his inactive piece, the king. 7.♖f2 ♖8e7 8.♖e2 wins the d-pawn and the game easily.

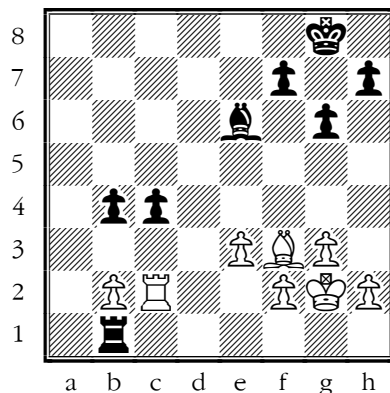
9. In his *Die Moderne Schachpartie*, p. 207, Dr. Tarrasch very pertinently makes the following comment which interests us not only for its bearing on this particular position but for its logical context: "Now the players have to conceive a plan, the natural plan, the plan manifestly indicated by the position. For White this plan was to advance his kingside pawns by e3-e4, f2-f4 and to make them count and, if possible, to evolve a kingside attack therefrom. But Marshall ... fails to grasp this plan, though it is the only suitable one, and therefore his play

appears to be guided by no recognizable plan and his opponent thereby gets the advantage."



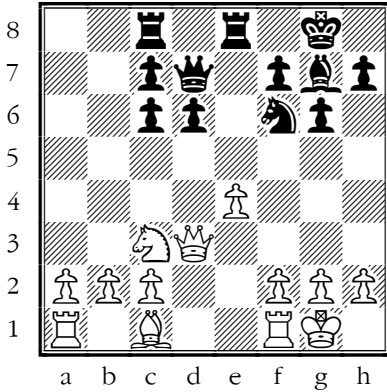
Marshall-Capablanca,  
White to play

The game proceeded as follows: 1.♖fc1 ♖ab8 2.♖e4 ♖c7 3.♖c3 Before now, for tactical reasons, White should have taken the open file. 3...b5 "Capablanca on his part conceives the appropriate plan, namely, to make his majority of pawns on the queenside tell, and conducts the plan to its logical conclusion." (Dr. Tarrasch) 4.a3 c4 5.♗f3 ♖fd8 "Capablanca demonstrates to his opponent all his omissions." (Dr. Tarrasch.) 6.♖d1 ♖×d1+ 7.♗×d1 ♖d8 8.♗f3 g6 9.♖c6 ♖e5 10.♖e4 ♖×e4 11.♗×e4 ♖d1+ 12.♖g2 a5 13.♖c2 b4 14.a×b4 a×b4 15.♗f3 ♖b1



16.♗e2 Stouter resistance was offered by 16.♖d2 ♖g7 17.♗e4 ♖a1 18.♖f3 ♖f6 19.♖e2, aiming to bring the king to the defense of the queenside. 16...b3 Adequate, but even stronger

was 16...c3! 17.bxc3 ♖f5 18.♖d2 bxc3 19.♖d8+ ♜g7 20.♖d1 c2 winning the bishop at less cost than in the actual game. **17.♖d2 ♖c1 18.♖d1 c3 19.bxc3 b2 20.♖b2 ♖xd1 21.♖c2 ♖f5 22.♖b2 ♖c1 23.♖b3 ♖e4+ 24.♜h3 ♖c2 25.f4 h5 26.g4 hxc4+ 27.♜xg4 ♖xh2** and White soon resigned.<sup>30</sup>



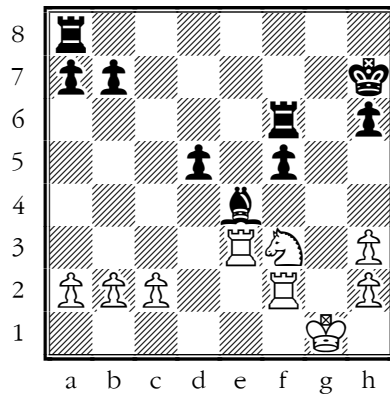
*Nimzovitch-Capablanca,  
Black to play*

10. Concerning this position Capablanca writes in *My Chess Career*, p. 143: "Evidently White's plan is to consolidate his position and finally win



*Lasker, with full beard.*

with the extra pawn. He fails, however, to take the best measures against Black's plan which consists in placing his rooks in the open lines, bringing his knight round to c4, if possible, and through the combined pressure of the bishop, the two rooks and knight, and the queen if necessary against the a- and b-pawns, to regain his material, keeping the upper hand at the same time. The plan in this case is masked by the direct attack against the e-pawn." **1...♜e6 2.f3 ♖d7 3.♖d2 ♜e5 4.♜e2 ♖c4 5.♖ab1 ♖a8** "The real attack begins. Black is bound to regain the pawn without thereby losing ground. If White now plays 6.b3, then 6...♖xd2 7.♜xd2 ♖a3 and the a-pawn must go. White however, having nothing better, should have adopted this line." **6.a4 6...♖xd2 7.♜xd2 ♜c4 8.♖fd1 ♖eb8 9.♜e3 ♖b4 10.♜g5 ♖d4+ 11.♜h1 ♖ab8** The rest of the game requires no comment. White, threatened by ♖xc3, tried the sacrifice of the exchange and lost.



*Dr. Kaufmann and Fahndrich-Capablanca,  
Black to play*

11. From Capablanca's *My Chess Career*, p. 130, we cite **1...♖b6** "The beginning of a very elaborate plan, the first object is to force the advance of one of White's queenside pawns, so that the white rooks cannot be free to maneuver and attack Black's queenside pawns." **2.b3** In citing above Capablanca and Dr. Tarrasch's remarks, our main object, of course, is to show in what manner great masters plan and how they judge plans. Here, as a matter of detail, I should have liked to know Capablanca's opinion of **2.♖b3**, which obviously would have given the