

My Best Games of Chess 1905-1954



by **Savielly Tartakower**

Foreword by Andy Soltis

21st Century Edition

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1905-1954

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Savielly Tartakower

Foreword by
Andy Soltis



2015
Russell Enterprises, Inc.
Milford, CT USA

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Savielly Tartakower
1887-1956

Editor's Preface

*If, with the literate, I am
Impelled to try an epigram,
I never seek to take the credit;
We all assume that Oscar said it.*

- Dorothy Parker, on Oscar Wilde

To those familiar with chess history and literature, Savielly Tartakower occupies a unique place, rather analogous to Oscar Wilde, as the game's foremost wit and aphorist. His pungent observations have become so ingrained in common chess parlance that when one is used (e.g., "The winner of a chess game is he who makes the next-to-last mistake," or "Dubious, therefore playable," or "Any opening is good if its reputation is bad enough," to mention only three of many) chances are the speaker is not aware that he's quoting Tartakower.

And, on the other hand, as with Dorothy Parker's above quip about Wilde, when a bit of chess wit *is* credited, chances are it's assumed to be Tartakower's, whether it is or not. His cosmopolitan breadth of intellect, his sophisticated vocabulary, his erudite allusions, his talent for eloquence, satire, irony, paradox, epigram, and sardonic drollery make his writings among the most sparkling and enjoyable in all of chess literature, and they stand in sharp contrast to the usual dry "if ... then" recitation of analytical variations so common to modern game collections.

Yet, well deserved though this widespread recognition of Tartakower's literary talent is, it has involved a certain injustice (or at least imbalance) because it has tended to overshadow his talents as a chess player. In this regard, I present myself as Exhibit A. While a half-century's immersion in chess literature has enabled me to recite from memory dozens of Tartakower witticisms and anecdotes – of course, I knew he was one of the greatest players of all time – until editing this book, I had, except for some of his losses to more famous contemporaries such as Lasker, Capablanca, and Alekhine, played through probably no more than a half-dozen of his games.

Working on this book has corrected that imbalance in my chess education. Had I realized what I was missing, it would have been corrected long ago for Tartakower's play is, if anything, more sparkling, pungent, and enjoyable than his writing. And, like his erudition, it is both broad and deep. He is capable of wild flights of tactical fantasy; see, for example, his games against Schlechter at St. Petersburg 1909 (game 16), Maróczy at Teplitz-Schönau 1922 (game 43), Lazard at Paris 1929 (game 89), Sultan Khan (11th match game, 1931; game 104) or Wood at Southsea 1949 (game 182). Yet, he was also a master of positional play, as his games against Asztalos at Budapest 1913 (game 23), Thomas at Hastings 1945-46 (game 162), and Benkner at Paris, 1953 (game 198) attest. His endgame technique was truly that of a world-class grandmaster, as demonstrated by his games against Rosselli at Semmering 1926 (game 67), Réti at Hastings

Editor's Preface

1926-27 (game 74), Keres at Warsaw 1935 (game 135), and Klein (Position XXVIII); bearing special mention in this vein is his remarkable zigzag queen maneuver against Lowcki at Jurata 1937 (game 150).

He was also a master of psychology, always varying his opening and style to put his opponent off-balance. See, for example, how he discomfits Schlechter with a new twist on the Old Indian Defense (game 31), or Rubinstein with the Blumenfeld Counter-Gambit (game 45), or Tarrasch with the Nimzovitch Sicilian (game 87), or Pilnik with the Barry Attack (game 189). On the other hand, he could also neutralize over-eager ambition with solid play, as against Takacs at Budapest 1926 (game 69).

In openings, Tartakower had one of the most varied repertoires ever seen. He was as comfortable in romantic gambits (King's, Vienna, Evans, Falkbeer, etc.) as in ultra-closed lines (e.g., the Réti and Catalan Systems). He was fond of eccentric and experimental lines (e.g., the Orangutang, the Basque, 2.g3 against the both the French and Sicilian), and games 20 to 23 practically constitute a primer on Bird's Opening (1.f4). He had a well-deserved reputation as a leader of the Hypermodern movement, even coining the term and playing, besides the Réti and Catalan as White, just about every Indian Defense there is as Black, often fianchettoing both bishops with either color. Yet, he loved reviving dusty old double king pawn lines (e.g., the Ponziani, Philidor's Defense, and 3.♗e2 in the King's Gambit), and one of the most frequently seen openings in both volumes is the decidedly un-hypermodern Orthodox Defense of the Queen's Gambit Declined.

The games are highly instructive. The notes explain opening theory, strategic ideas, and tactics in a manner very accessible and helpful to the average player. A recurring theme throughout is *energy*. Tartakower always strove to make his pieces active, to give them scope, to keep the game alive; seeing how he does this cannot help but improve one's play.

Another recurring theme is the struggle for the center, in particular the e4- and e5-squares. Over and over, we see Tartakower striving to control them, especially in order to post a knight on e5 as White or on e4 as Black. As he says in his game against Lajos Steiner at the 1935 Warsaw Olympiad (game 136), "The art of chess is simple: You play ♖e5 and then, sooner or later, ♜xf7 is decisive." Of course, it's not that simple, but the complexity becomes comprehensible as one watches Tartakower's skillful handling of such knight outposts.

While modern versions of some chess classics (e.g., Capablanca's *Chess Fundamentals* or Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games*) have suffered considerable alteration (if not harmful defacement), we have kept this edition true to the original. The main differences compared to the British editions of 1953 and 1956 are:

- Combining and collating both volumes and indices into a coherent whole
- Conversion to figurine algebraic notation from English descriptive
- Modern opening nomenclature and ECO codes
- Additional diagrams (at least twice as many as before)
- American spelling and punctuation

My Best Games of Chess, 1905-1954

- Explanations for Tartakower's Latin sayings
- Correction of typographical errors in notation and text (without, one hopes, introducing new ones!)
- Modern annotation symbols

To explain the last item, we see that the British editions used but two evaluation symbols, \pm and \mp , whereas today we have a broader range (\pm , \pm , $+-$, \mp , \mp , $-+$); these have been substituted for the originals as indicated by computer analysis. Also, the British editions used “?!” and “!?” in the exact opposite of their current sense (i.e., “?!” to mean interesting and probably good, and “!?” to mean dubious and probably bad). This has been reversed.

Additionally, in the process of conversion to algebraic notation, each game was subjected to computer analysis. Since even great grandmasters, being human, make mistakes, this inevitably reveals them. These have been compiled in an analytical appendix, which the publisher is making available to all buyers of this book. It may be downloaded at: <http://russell-enterprises.com/excerptsanddownloads.html>.

Along with his reputation for wit, Tartakower was also regarded as rather a cynic. If so, one could hardly blame him; losing one's parents in a pogrom and struggling to survive two world wars (in both of which he saw military service, first with Austria-Hungary and then with the Free French) could embitter anyone. He occasionally brings out a poison pen in these pages; see, for example, the sarcastic barbs aimed at Lasker in game 17, or his comments about the “Yugoslav variation” in game 64. Yet, taking the book as a whole, it is clear that whatever cynicism Tartakower felt hardly made him a misanthrope, quite the opposite. Any such tendencies were more than balanced by genuine joy: joy in life in general, and joy specifically in the thrills, beauty, infinite variety, depth, and mystery chess offers. We invite the reader to explore with him.

Taylor Kingston
San Diego
November 2014

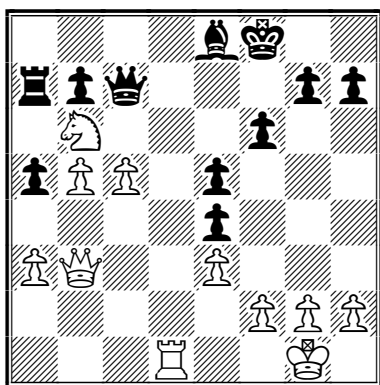
With the aim of getting some compensation in the event of 22. ♖c8 ♙xc8 23. ♗xc8 ♘xc5, but White is not going to be content with so little!

22. ♗xe4 dxe4 23. ♖fd1! f6 24. ♖b3+ ♖f8

If 24... ♗f7, 25. ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 26. ♖d1! ♖c7 27. ♖c2 ♗e6 28. ♖d6 ♖f7 29. f3 exf3 30. gx f3 a4 31. ♖xe6! ♖xe6 32. ♖c4+ ♖f5 33. ♖g4#.

All these variations, and others like them, illustrate the throes afflicting Black, and this always because of the imprisoned queen's rook.

25. ♖xd8 ♖xd8 26. ♖d1 ♖c7
(D)



If 26... ♖e7, 27. ♗c8 (or even 27. ♖d6) 27... ♖xc5 28. ♗xa7 ♖xa7 29. b6, and Black is harassed without respite. He still has hopes of deliverance after the text move (e.g., in the event of 27. ♖c4 a4 28. ♗xa4 ♖a5), but this hope is cruelly deceived.

27. ♗d7+!

A most disagreeable surprise, but, to tell the truth, it would be rather a surprise if such an eventuality were not possible in a situation so cramped as Black's.

27... ♖xd7

Desperation, but, if 27... ♗xd7, 28. b6 ♖xc5 29. bxa7 ♖xa7 30. ♖xd7.

28. ♖xd7 ♗xd7 29. ♖d5

Relentless pursuit. Black cannot

reply 29... ♗xb5 because of 30. ♖d6+ ♖f7 31. ♖b6, attacking three enemy units at the same time. And, if 29... ♖e7, 30. ♖d6+. So,

29... ♖e8 30. ♖g8+ 1-0

For, after 30... ♖e7 31. ♖b8, the sad lot of Black's rook is accomplished.

(43) *Maróczy – Tartakower*

Teplitz-Schönau 1922

Dutch Defense [A85]

Massive Sacrifices

“Revenge for Pistyan!” It was with this idea that I came to the tournament at Teplitz-Schönau in 1922. Indeed, my initial dash in this tournament was worthy of the utmost praise, since not only did I win the first four games, but I also found myself at the head of the table on the eve of the last round!

However, losing this last encounter to Teichmann, through playing too impetuously, I was not only outstripped by a half-point by Réti and Spielmann, but also was overhauled by Grünfeld, with whom I consequently shared third and fourth prizes.

My style at Teplitz-Schönau was a vigorous one, as is shown by the following victory, gained in the fourth round, when I was still being carried along by my initial impetus!

1. d4 e6 2. c4 f5

With this delayed Dutch Defense, Black avoids the Staunton Gambit (1. d4 f5 2. e4), but allows the adversary, if he likes, to transpose into the French Defense (1. d4 e6 2. e4).

3. ♗c3 ♗f6 4. a3

This little move, advocated by Steinitz in his time, prevents a counter-attack by ... ♗b4 and prepares for eventual queen's wing operations by b4; but, on the other side, it sacrifices a quite

Göteborg 1920 to London 1922

Teplitz-Schönau 1922

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Total
1 Réti	*	1	1	½	1	1	1	1	0	½	1	1	0	0	9
2 Spielmann	0	*	½	1	½	1	½	1	½	1	½	½	1	1	9
3 Tartakower	0	½	*	½	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	½	8½
4 Grünfeld	½	0	½	*	½	1	½	½	½	1	½	1	1	1	8½
5 Rubinstein	0	½	0	½	*	0	1	½	1	1	1	½	1	1	8
6 Kostic	0	0	0	0	1	*	1	1	1	½	½	½	½	½	6½
7 Teichmann	0	½	1	½	0	0	*	½	½	½	½	1	½	½	6
8 Treybal	0	0	1	½	½	0	½	*	1	0	1	0	1	0	5½
9 Wolf	1	½	0	½	0	0	½	0	*	½	½	½	½	1	5½
10 Maróczy	½	0	0	0	0	½	½	1	½	*	½	0	1	1	5½
11 Tarrasch	0	½	0	½	0	½	½	0	½	½	*	1	½	½	5
12 Sämisch	0	½	0	0	½	½	0	1	½	1	0	*	0	1	5
13 Mieses	1	0	0	0	0	½	½	0	½	0	½	1	*	1	5
14 Johner	1	0	½	0	0	½	½	1	0	0	½	0	0	*	4

precious tempo that might have been spent in piece development.

Therefore, modern strategy advocates here 4.g3, so as to forestall Black in the occupation of the long white diagonal. More precisely, this should be played on the previous move, 1.d4 e6 2.c4 f5 3.g3, and, if 3...♗b4+, 4.♗d2 ♗×d2+ 5.♖×d2!, followed by ♗c3 etc.; or even on the second move, 1.d4 e6 2.g3, and, if 2...f5, 3.♗g2 ♗f6 4.♗h3! ♗e7 5.0-0 etc., when White has some useful positional advantages.

4...♗e7

The first strategic objective: the king's security. Also playable is 4...b6, but, if immediately 4...d5, then 5.♗f4! c6 6.e3 assures White, in this premature stonewall, the advantage of successful development of his queen's bishop, whereas Black's remains shut in.

5.e3 0-0 6.♗d3 d5

To prevent the central advance 7.e4, which would follow after either 6...b6, or 6...d6. In addition, this de-

layed stonewall, which Black has just created, comprises many attacking ideas.

7.♗f3

If 7.♗ge2, 7...c6 8.f3 ♗d6 9.c5 ♗c7, and White is still unable to arrive at the e4-advance.

7...c6

The thematic 7...♗e4 is, as yet, premature because of 8.c×d5 e×d5 9.♖b3, with double attack on d5 and e4.

8.0-0 ♗e4 9.♖c2

Pursuing a waiting policy. To the counter-stonewall 9.♗e5, Black can reply 9...♗d7 (and not 9...♗d6 10.f4) 10.♗×d7 ♗×d7 11.f3 ♗×c3, with a shade the advantage since White's queen wing is somewhat weakened.

9...♗d6 10.b3 ♗d7 11.♗b2

Full of confidence in the scientific basis of his play, White treats the game from a purely positional point of view, whereas Black regards the given position as a vast problem: Mate in 25 moves!

11...♖f6 12.♖fe1

With a view to clearing f1 for the king's bishop, or eventually for the f3-knight, when the royal rampart would be impregnable.

12...♖h6

Forcing the adversary to parry the immediate threat 13...♗xh2+ 14.♗xh2 ♖h4.

13.g3

White thinks he can rest content with this waiting strategy since the little text move not only meets the above-mentioned threat, but also completes the plan for defense by ♗f1-g2.

13...♗f6 14.♗f1

But not 14.♗d2? because of 14...♗xf2 15.♖xf2 ♖xh2+ 16.♖g1 (16.♖f3 ♖g5) 16...♗xg3, followed by ...♖h4.

14...g5 15.♖ad1

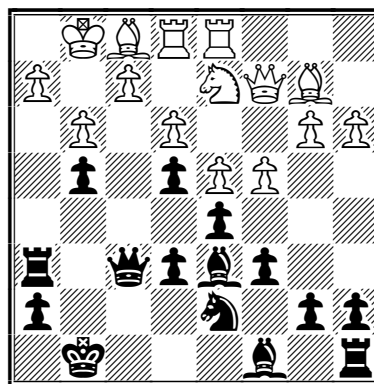
Too many preparatory moves! The direct defense by 15.♗g2, followed by ♗d2-f1, was in order. However, Black could reply to 15.♗g2 not with 15...g4 (which would close the critical sector), but with 15...♖g6, followed by ...♖h5 and ...♗df6-g4, with a fierce attack.

15...g4 16.♗xe4

This preliminary capture opens up another attacking line for the opponent, but it is clearly necessary for, if at once 16.♗d2, there again follows 16...♗xf2 17.♖xf2 ♖xh2+ 18.♗g2 ♗xg3+!, and Black wins.

16...fxe4 17.♗d2 (D)

If one casts a glance over the board, it will be observed that, at the moment, the white king has as its only real defense the bishop on f1, whereas all the other pieces are mere units or even simple spectators; but that, on the other hand, the entire black queen's wing is in an embryonic state of devel-



opment. The question that presents itself to Black is, therefore, the following: "Prepare or pillage?"

17...♖xh2!!

This sacrifice of a major piece without immediate, striking consequences exacted the most elaborate calculation. *Positively*, Black has to foresee if he would succeed in carrying out certain essential quiet moves (...♗f6-h5-g3 as well as ...♗d7) before the adversary can throw his rescue troops into the fight. *Negatively*, Black had to work out that a slow and methodical reinforcement of his attack (by 17...♗f8 and then ...♗d7, ...♗g6, ...♖f8) would also allow his opponent to consolidate, e.g., 17...♗f8 18.♗g2 ♗d7 19.♗f1 ♗g6 20.♗c3! a5 21.♖d2, and White is trying to displace the center of gravity of the struggle in the direction of the queen's wing.

18.♖xh2

White is, in any case, forced to accept the generous sacrifice for, if 18.♗xe4, 18...♖h6!, defending the rook and menacing mate.

18...♖xf2+ 19.♖h1!

White defends himself, and not unskillfully. After 19.♗g2, Black continues not with 19...♖xg3+ 20.♖g1 etc., nor whit 19...♗xg3+ 20.♖h1 ♖f6 21.♖e2 ♗f2 22.♖xf2 ♖xf2 23.♖f1 ♖xe3 24.♖d1 etc., but, on a parallel

with the game continuation, with a quiet move, 19...♖f6 20.♚c3 (if 20.♗e4, 20...♙xg3+, followed by 21...♚xc2) 20...♚xg3+ 21.♜g1 ♚h2+ 22.♞f1 ♗h5 23.♗e4 (otherwise there comes 23...♙d7 and ...♚f8+) 23...dxe4 24.d5 e5 25.dxc6 ♗g3+ 26.♞f2 ♙e6, and Black wins.

19...♗f6!

The first point of the sacrifice. Since White's whole second rank of pieces remains paralyzed, Black has just sufficient time to bring his reserve troops into action. Weak would be the plausible line 19...♚xg3? because of 20.♗b1, immediately allowing the queen to come to the aid of the king.

20.♚e2 ♚xg3 21.♗b1

Or 21.♚c3 ♗h5 22.♚g2 ♚h4+ 23.♜g1 ♗g3 24.♚h2 ♚g5 25.♚f2 ♗f5, with winning and decisive threats.

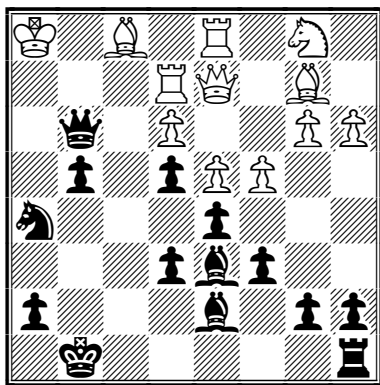
21...♗h5

And not 21...♚h4+ 22.♚h2.

22.♚d2

This defends the e-pawn and intends 23.♚e1.

22...♙d7! (D)



The second point, consisting once again in a quiet move. Not good enough is 22...♚f3+ (or ...♚h4+), on account of 23.♜g1.

23.♚f2

To prevent the enemy rook from occupying this file. If 23.♚e1, then not

23...♚f8 (because of 24.♗d2), but 23...♚f3+ 24.♚g2 ♚h3+ (if 24...♙g3, 25.♗d2!) 25.♜g1 ♚f8 26.♗d2 ♙g3 (26...♗g3? can be mastered by 27.♚h2, and 26...♚f3 by 27.♗xf3 exf3 28.♚c2) 27.♚xg3 ♚xg3+ 28.♚xg3 ♗xg3 29.♙c3 ♗f5 30.♚e1 h5, and the united passed pawns are worth more than the piece.

23...♚h4+ 24.♜g1

Or 24.♚h2 ♙xh2 25.♚xh2 ♚g5!, with continued pressure.

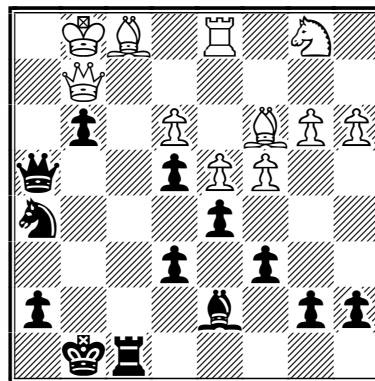
24...♙g3!

The beginning of harvest time. Much less convincing is 24...♗g3 (because of 25.♚h2!), and so too is 24...g3 (because of 25.♚g2).

25.♙c3

White is already forced to throw some ballast overboard. Indeed, if 25.♚g2, 25...♚f8 26.♚e2 ♚f3 27.♙c3 ♙d6 28.♙e1 (otherwise, 28...♚h3) 28...g3 29.♗d2 ♚g4, followed by ...♗g7-f5, and wins. The best way of giving up the exchange lies, however, in 25.♚h2, so as to finish, eventually, with 25...♙xh2+ 26.♚xh2 ♚xh2+? 27.♜xh2 ♚f8 28.♙g2 ♚f2 29.♚d2, in an endgame with somewhat nebulous chances.

25...♙xf2+ 26.♚xf2 g3 27.♚g2 ♚f8 (D)



At length, it can be said that Black's development is more or less

complete. The threat is 28...♖f2 29.♚h1 ♖h2, winning the queen.

28.♙e1

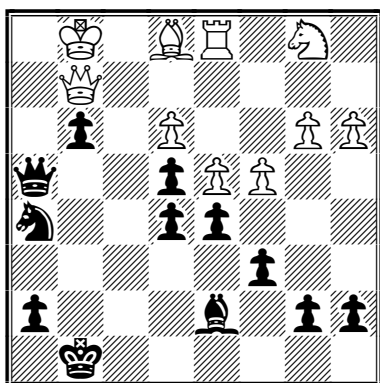
White's game is already compromised, whatever he played. If (a) 28.♚h1, 28...♚g5 29.♖e1 ♖f2 30.♙g2 ♗f6 31.♗d2 h5 32.♗f1 h4 33.♙b4 e5! 34.dxe5 ♗g4 35.♙d6 ♖xf1+ 36.♙xf1 ♗h2 37.♙g2 ♙g4, and wins; or if (b) 28.♖d2, 28...♖f3 29.♖e2 ♚g5 30.♙e1 h6! 31.♙d2 ♗f6 32.♗c3 ♗g4 33.♗d1 ♗h2 34.♖e1 h5 35.♙e2 h4! etc.

With the text move, White accomplishes the plan formed on his 25th move and, at the same time, prevents the threat mentioned above (28...♖f2); he even sets a pretty trap for, if Black now hastens to regain his piece by 28...♚h2+ 29.♚xh2 gxh2+ 30.♚xh2 ♖xf1, then comes 31.♗d2 ♖f8 32.♙h4, and, White's pieces being freed, he has the undeniable positional advantage.

28...♖xf1+!

The second assault. It is a question of gaining sufficient time by this fresh sacrifice to bring his bishop, hitherto inactive, into the thick of the fight. Inconclusive, on the other hand, would be a preparation for the sacrifice by 28...e5, because of 29.♖d2 exd4, and now not, as Dr. Tarrasch thought in his somewhat one-sided analysis, 30.exd4 ♖f4±, but 30.♖f2!, by which White gets rid of a dangerous enemy piece.

29.♚xf1 e5 30.♚g1 (D)



Only an illusion of preservation is afforded by the immediate capture 30.♙xg3 for there follows 30...♗xg3+ 31.♚f2 ♙g4! 32.♖e1 ♗e2+ 33.♚f1 ♚h8, and the loss of the white queen by 34...♙h3 remains inevitable. Also insufficient is the attempt to escape with the king by 30.♚e2 because of 30...♙g4+ 31.♚d2 ♚h2 32.♚xh2 gxh2, and Black wins.

30...♙g4 31.♙xg3

A painful but necessary decision for, if 31.♖d2, 31...exd4 32.exd4 ♙f3 33.♙xg3 ♗xg3 34.♚h2 ♚xh2+ (the simplest) 35.♖xh2 ♗e2+, followed by ...♗xd4, and Black obtains three pawns for the exchange.

31...♗xg3 32.♖e1 ♗f5!

Black works with direct threats and unceasing bludgeoning blows.

33.♚f2 ♚g5 34.dxe5

A slow death would result after 34.♚f1 ♚h5 35.♚g1 ♚h4 (menacing 36...♗g3+ 37.♚g2 ♗e2 38.♖xe2 ♚h3+, followed by mate in two moves) 36.♗c3 ♗g3+ 37.♚g2 ♗h1 38.♚f1 ♚f6+, with mate in two moves.

34...♙f3+ 35.♚f1 ♗g3+ 0-1

If 36.♚g1, 36...♗h1+. The judges awarded this game the third brilliancy prize, although the majority of them declared in peremptory fashion that such sacrifices are incalculable in all their ramifications in advance and that, in consequence, they deserve no encouragement.

(44) Tarrasch – Tartakower

Teplitz-Schönau 1922

Caro-Kann Defense [B15]

Live Pawns

1.e4 c6 2.d4 d5 3.♗c3

Against the line that contains so much venom despite its seeming sim-