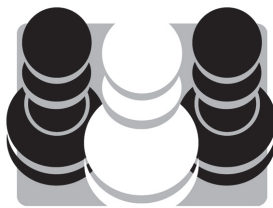


Chess Classics

Soviet Middlegame Technique

By

Peter Romanovsky



Quality Chess
www.qualitychess.co.uk

Foreword by the UK Publisher

Many of the classics of Soviet chess literature have struggled to see the light of day, but none more so than *Soviet Middlegame Technique* by Peter Romanovsky. The original version of this famous guide to the middlegame was published in 1929 when Romanovsky was Soviet Champion. Romanovsky later decided to update and improve his work. As he finished his work in 1942, World War II was underway and Romanovsky was trapped in the notorious siege of Leningrad. The author barely survived and his manuscript was lost.

Romanovsky was undeterred and finally recreated his improved book in 1960. His writing was later translated into English and published in two titles – one on Planning and the other on Combinations. In this fresh translation we have included both works to create the ultimate version of a classic of Soviet chess literature.

As with our previous Soviet classics, the original editing in Russian was done by IM Ilya Odessky, before John Sugden skilfully translated the work into English, then the editors of Quality Chess made our contribution. Modern players and computers can of course improve on some of the original analysis, so we have corrected various tactical oversights. However, the true value of Romanovsky was always based on his insightful words and that remains the case today.

Peter Romanovsky had to fight hard to get his work published, so we hope the readers will appreciate this classic text from the Soviet chess school.

John Shaw and Jacob Aagaard
Glasgow, February 2013

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Chapter 1

Two Wins by Wilhelm Steinitz – Their Creative and Technical Substance

The two games given in the present chapter vividly convey the views on chess held by Wilhelm Steinitz – the first strategic theorist of the chess struggle. By conscious choice we are illustrating Steinitz's strategy not by reference to his theoretical deliberations, which were sometimes unfortunately doctrinaire in character, but rather on the basis of his praxis. We hope that the immense creative canvas of the great master's chess thought will once again spur the reader to look into the nature and details of the planning process, which the later chapters of this book are dedicated to investigating.

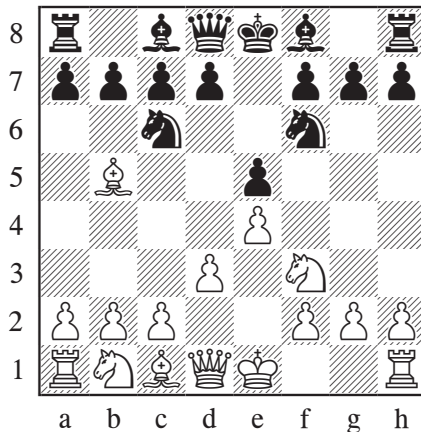
In both games, Steinitz's opponent was Emanuel Lasker.

W. Steinitz – Em. Lasker

Ruy Lopez

World Championship (2), USA/Canada 1894

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♗c6 3.♙b5 ♘f6 4.d3



This modest opening move already contains within itself the seeds of a grand strategic design, which was executed with logic and precision both in this game and in numerous others from Steinitz's career. Its essence lies in creating a sturdy centre by fortifying the e4-pawn, and on this basis organizing an energetic attack on the kingside. With these aims in view, the queen's knight travels on the route ♗b1-d2-c4/f1-e3-f5 – a manoeuvre that was worked out and introduced

into widespread practice by Steinitz himself. Meanwhile he would generally shelter his king on the queenside, but in some cases, as for example in the present game, he left it in the centre.

From the very first moves of the opening, then, we can see that Steinitz's thoughts are focused on definite aims extending far beyond the confines of the opening stage. Steinitz is here shedding light on two important principles of creative thinking, by which contemporary masters are still guided: a flank attack needs to be prepared by conquering the centre or solidly fortifying it; and the foundations for a middlegame plan must already be laid in the opening.

4...d6 5.c3 ♖d7

By unpinning his knight and then developing his king's bishop on g7, Lasker was apparently seeking to exert maximum pressure against d4. Steinitz, however, has no intention of joining battle in the centre, and for that reason the deployment of forces that Lasker has in mind does not prove effective enough.

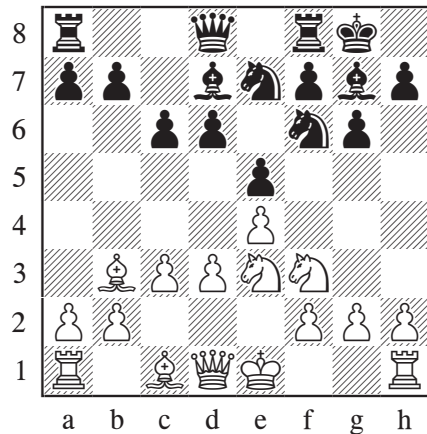
On the other hand, four years before this game was played, an interesting plan of defence for Black had been demonstrated in a match game between Gunsberg and Chigorin. It involved very fast preparation for an advance in the centre with ...d5.

6.♗a4

The bishop is destined for b3 to attack the kingside, or else for c2 with the aim of fortifying the centre.

6...g6 7.♘bd2 ♗g7 8.♘c4 0-0 9.♘e3 ♘e7 10.♗b3 c6

Black has to expend several tempos in preparation for ...d5 which will begin his aggressive operations in the centre. This permits Steinitz to "show his cards" at once.



11.h4!

This tactical device – bringing the rook's pawn very quickly into contact with the opponent's pawn that has moved forward on the knight's file, and thus opening lines for the attack on the king – is also one of the modern procedures.

Starting with this move, Steinitz goes about implementing the main part of his plan – a direct attack on Black's castled position.

11...♗c7 12.♘g5

White threatens, after 13.h5 ♘xh5, to sacrifice the exchange with 14.♖xh5.

12...d5

Lasker also considered 12...h6, but rejected it in view of 13.g4 hxg5 14.hxg5 ♘h7 15.♘f5 gxf5 16.gxf5 ♘xf5 17.♗h5 etc. Black could, however, defend successfully with: 17...♘h6 18.gxh6 ♗f6 19.♗g5! ♗d8! (If the knight or bishop takes on g5, White plays 20.♗g6† with unavoidable mate on g7.) 20.♖g1 ♘h8

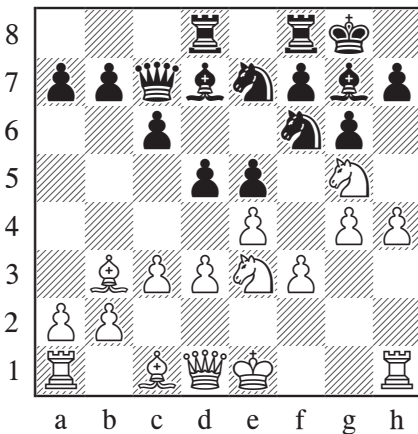
In fairness we should add that in answer to 12...h6 White could continue the attack with 13.♗f3. Then after 13...hxg5 14.hxg5 ♘h7 (or 14...♘h5) an obscure position would arise, demanding great ingenuity and a high level of technique in conducting the attack and the defence. At any rate, neither Lasker nor Steinitz would have been capable of working

out all the multitude of variations over the board.

In the initial period of his chess career Lasker avoided such lines, in which there was much that could not be foreseen. Steinitz was a good deal more willing to take risks, especially when the risk could to some extent be justified by reference to his positional principles.

Broadly speaking, the question of how much risk is permissible on the basis of a general assessment of the position has remained unresolved from Steinitz's day to ours.

13.f3! ♖ad8 14.g4!



14...dxe4

This exchange of pawns, presenting the white queen with the f3-square, deserves censure.

At this point 14...h6 is met by 15.♖e2, when Black should not take the knight: 15...hxg5 16.hxg5 ♖h7 (Or 16...♖e8 17.♖h2 f6 18.exd5 cxd5 19.♖xd5 ♖xd5 20.♙xd5† ♖f7 21.♖h7† ♖f8 22.♖xg6 ♙c6 23.♖xf7† ♖xf7 24.♙xf7 ♖xf7 25.♖e2, and for the bishop and knight White has a rook and three pawns.) 17.♖f5 gx f5 18.♖h2 ♖fe8 19.♖xh7† ♖f8 20.gxf5 and the attack is irresistible.

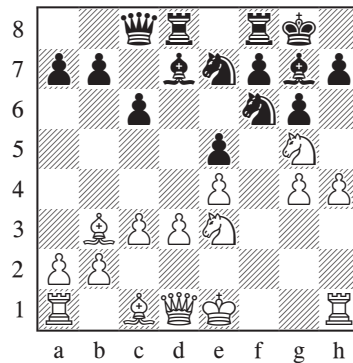
However, after the stronger 15...d4, the knight must retreat (the sacrifice on f5 is clearly inadequate), and White's attack is delayed for a considerable time.

15.fxe4 h6

As things turn out, Lasker resorts to this move after all. White's threat, apart from any direct attacks with ♖f3 or h4-h5, was to play ♖e2 and ♙d2, then castle queenside and bring his queen's rook into the battle. However, the move selected by Lasker fails in its aim, and the black king's position proves to be compromised.

Black could have tried attacking the g4-pawn a third time with:

15...♖c8



16.h5!

This assures White of a very strong initiative. If instead White defends the pawn with 16.♖g1, then 16...h6. To sustain his attack, White could try sacrificing both knights, but after 17.♖f3 hxg5 18.hxg5 ♖h7 19.♖f5! gxf5 20.gxf5, Black can return one piece with 20...♙xf5 21.exf5 ♖xf5, and the attack peters out.

16...♙xg4

16...♖xg4 17.hxg6 hxg6 18.♖e2 gives White a winning attack.

16...h6 17.♖xf7 ♖xf7 18.hxg6 ♖xg6 19.♙xf7† ♖xf7 20.♖f5 is also promising for White.

17.♖xg4 ♖xg4 18.♖xg4 ♖xg4 19.hxg6 hxg6

Now White has the pleasant choice between the spectacular 20.♖e6! and the leisurely 20.♖e2, when in spite of the queen exchange, the danger to the black king has not passed.

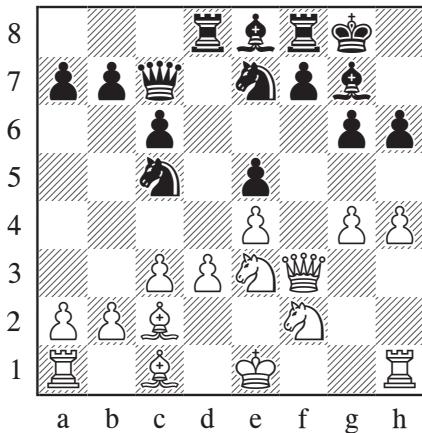
16. ♖f3! ♔e8

In this case the knight cannot be taken, for after 16...hxg5 17.hxg5 ♘h7 18.♘f5! gxf5 19.♖h3 ♜fe8 20.♖xh7† ♘f8 21.gxf5 it is time for Black to resign.

17. ♘c2 ♘d7 18. ♘h3

A sensible retreat, but one which also harbours thoughts about the further continuation of the attack.

18... ♘c5 19. ♘f2



These last moves of White's, fortifying the d3-point, are evidence of Steinitz's strict adherence to the principle he formulated himself, which states that the success of a flank attack is only possible with a stable centre.

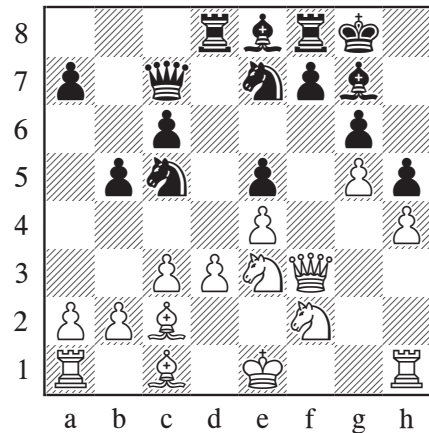
In this context the range of action of White's pieces is noteworthy. A mere three moves ago, his bishop stationed on b3 and his knight on g5 were directed against the f7-point. Now they have entirely switched over to fulfilling defensive functions. Great flexibility in manoeuvring with the pieces was a characteristic feature of Steinitz's play. At the same time we must observe that Steinitz has still maintained his attacking position on the kingside and, as the following events will testify, has even resolved to carry on the attack without mobilizing his queenside reserves.

From Lasker's next move, we can see that the entry of these reserves into the fray was just what he feared.

19...b5

A very cunning idea, aimed at working up a counterattack in the centre and on the queenside, and designed to meet the natural 20.♘d2. In that case, there would follow 20...b4 21.cxb4 (or 21.0-0-0 bxc3 22.bxc3 ♖a5 with a queenside initiative) 21...♘e6! 22.♘c3 c5 23.bxc5 ♖xc5 or 23.b5 ♘d4, completely refuting White's plan. Steinitz figures out Lasker's scheme and immediately throws himself into the attack which is founded on a bold and attractive knight sacrifice.

20.g5 h5



21. ♘f5! gxf5

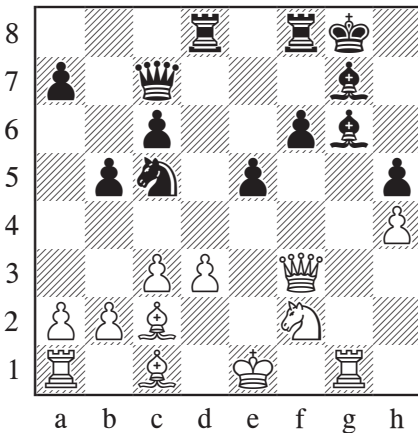
Now the knight *has* to be taken, as passive defence would hold out no hope. The only active move that Black has available, aside from acceptance of the sacrifice, is 21...f6, but this fails to 22.♘xg7 ♘xg7 (22...fxg5 23.♘xe8) 23.gxf6† ♜xf6 24.♔h6† ♘f7 25.♖e3, when Black is in a bad way.

22. exf5 f6 23.g6 ♘xg6

Obviously forced, given the threat of ♖xh5. As a result of the initial "bloodshed" Black

gains a pawn, but an open g-file makes its appearance and White takes control of it. And the g-file is the direct route into the “palace” of the monarch himself. This circumstance is what is specially menacing to Black.

24. **fxg6** ♙xg6 25. ♖g1



Now how is Black to defend?

If the bishop on g6 moves, White plays 26. ♙h6.

If 25... ♖h7, then 26. ♖xg6 followed by d3-d4†.

Finally 25... ♗f7 is answered by: 26. ♗g2 ♙h7 (26... ♖h7 27. ♙e3! ♖xd3†? 28. ♖xd3 ♙xd3 29. ♙xd3† ♖xd3 30. ♗e4†) 27. ♙h6 ♖d7 (27... ♖e6 28. ♙b3) 28. ♙xg7 ♗xg7 29. ♗h2 ♙g6 30. d4 and White wins material.

25...e4

An interesting attempt at saving the day is 25... ♙xd3! (it was Chigorin who first drew attention to this move).

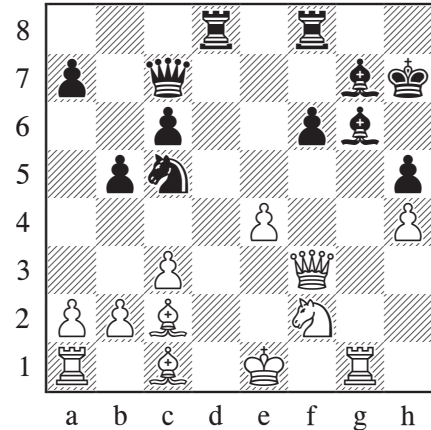
In the event of 26. ♙xd3 ♖xd3! 27. ♖xd3 e4 28. ♗xh5 ♖xd3†, Black has good chances of at least reaching a draw.

If White answers with 26. ♙h6, then after 26... ♗f7 27. ♙xg7 ♖xg7 28. 0–0–0 ♙xc2 he fails to extract anything from the exposed position of the black king.

The existence of this possibility testifies to the complexity of the struggle. Having missed it, Lasker suffers material losses, after which the fight enters its largely technical phase.

26. **dxg6** ♖h7

Or 26... ♗f7 27. b4 ♖e6 28. ♙b3 ♖fe8 29. ♖h3, and the knight reaches f4.



27. ♖xg6! ♖xg6 28. ♗f5† ♖f7 29. ♗xh5† ♖g8 30. ♗xc5

White not only has bishop, knight and pawn for a rook – in itself an advantage sufficient to win – he also maintains direct threats. His two bishops are operating with great strength. The threat at present is the lethal 31. ♙b3†.

30... ♗e5 31. ♙e3 a6 32. a4

With the queenside reserves brought into the battle, the game is decided at once.

32... ♖fe8 33. axb5 axb5 34. ♗xe5 ♖xe5 35. ♖a6

Invasion! What is notable is that the rook's energetic sally to a6 is its first and last action in this game. Just one move! The rook paralyses the opponent's forces and thereby lends powerful support to White's crowning attack with his minor pieces. Interestingly, his king's rook has similarly made only two moves – ♖h1-g1xg6.

Minimum effort, maximum gain! Such is the principle of economy, of which Steinitz spoke more than once in his theoretical works, and which he also demonstrated many a time in his own games.

35...♖c8 36.♘g4 ♜e7 37.♙c5 ♜ee8 38.♘e3
♙f8 39.♙d4 ♜f7 40.h5 ♙e7 41.♙b3† ♜f8
42.♘f5

In conclusion, a permanent knight appears on the scene. Under its cover, and with help from the superbly placed bishops, a free path to the dream square h8 is opened for the white h-pawn. Black therefore resigned.

1–0

W. Steinitz – Em. Lasker

Queen's Gambit
St Petersburg 1895/6

1.d4

With the Queen's Pawn opening Steinitz inflicted a large number of defeats on his contemporaries. Of course this was not a matter of the very first move, but of those well-ordered, purposeful plans which he executed in this opening with persistence and logic.

1...d5 2.c4 e6 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♙f4

Steinitz also played 4.♙g5; he had done so as early as 1873 against Anderssen at the international tournament in Vienna.

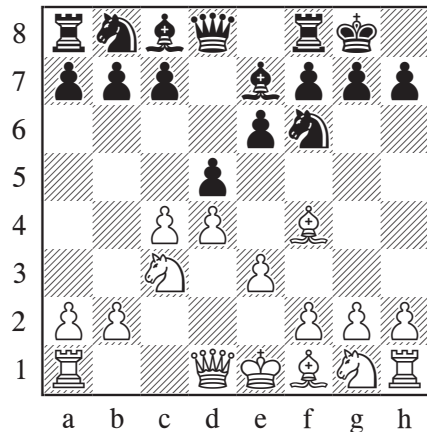
4...♙e7

A colourless reply, ignoring White's plan and allowing him – just as in the previous game – to set up a sturdy centre and afterwards undertake an energetic flank attack.

Yet Black had at least two ways of responding actively to Steinitz's scheme – the immediate 4...c5, undermining White's pressure against the e5-point, and also the well-known attack against the c3-knight by means of ...c6, ...♞a5

and ...♙b4. The latter plan, known to opening theory as the Cambridge Springs system, increases even more in strength with the white bishop on f4 (instead of g5).

5.e3 0–0



6.c5!?

White's plan founded on 4.♙f4 emerges with full clarity. He forestalls the counterattack with ...c5 and builds a solid structure in the centre.

In advancing his pawn to c5, Steinitz had to take care to weigh up his opponent's undermining possibilities with ...b6 or ...e5. He was probably convinced by the variation 6...b6 7.b4 a5 8.a3, when Black fails to shake the c5-outpost.

[Editor's note: Many years later, Geller discovered a way to create counterplay: 8...axb4 9.axb4 ♜xa1 10.♞xa1 ♘c6 11.♞a4 bxc5!! 12.♞xc6?!(12.bxc5 is more circumspect, leading to equal chances after 12...♙d7 13.♙b5 ♞a8) 12...cxd4! Black obtained an extremely dangerous initiative for the piece in Lerner – Geller, Riga 1985.]

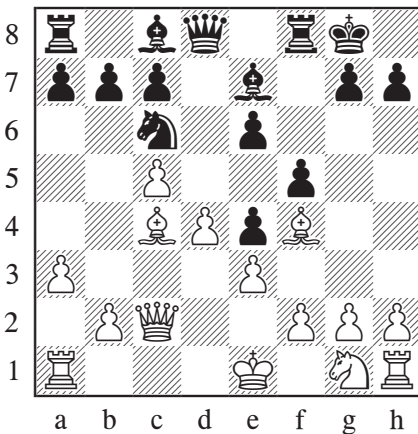
6...♘e4

Threatening to meet 7.♘f3 or 7.♙d3 by exchanging on c3 and starting an undermining operation with ...b6 afterwards. If White exchanges on e4 himself, Black will prevent

the white knight from developing on f3 and thereby weaken his opponent's pressure against e5. All the same, Lasker's reasoning is not especially far-sighted. The black pawn switching to e4 becomes the target for a break with f2-f3. Furthermore Black is freeing the square c4 for White's bishop, which will conveniently station itself there for the attack.

Black ought to be concentrating his attention on the central point e5. To this end he needed to play 6...c6 in preparation for developing his queen's knight on d7 (if 6...♘bd7 at once, then 7.♘b5 forces the other knight to retreat to e8). The game might continue as follows: 7.♘f3 ♘bd7 8.♙d3 ♘h5, and then, according to circumstances, ...f5 or ...♘xf4.

7.♘xe4 dxe4 8.♙c2 f5 9.♙c4 ♘c6 10.a3



While resolutely pursuing the main theme of his plan, White displays some useful prudence. Black was threatening ...♘a5 to deal with the formidable bishop, but now that move would be met by 11.♙a2.

10...♙f6 11.0-0-0 ♘h8

This and Black's next move serve to prepare ...e5, which is his only way of undertaking something against White's f2-f3 break.

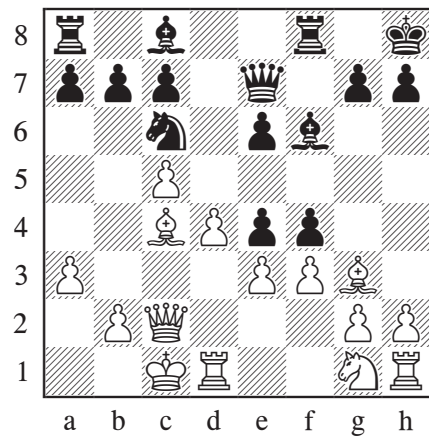
12.f3 ♙e7!

Very astutely played, presenting White with a serious problem. Now 13.fxe4 will be met by 13...e5; and if 14.d5 then 14...exf4 15.dxc6 ♙xc5, and the initiative is already with Black.

13.♙g3

So as to meet 13...e5 with 14.d5 ♘a5 15.♙a2.

13...f4



This thrust looks highly promising. Thus, on 14.♙xf4 Black plays 14...e5 15.dxe5 ♘xe5 16.♙xe4 ♙f5! 17.♙xf5 ♘xc4 with a winning attack. However, Steinitz has a surprise prepared for his opponent.

14.♙xe4!

A beautiful sacrifice which Black is compelled to accept. White obtains two pawns for the bishop, keeps his chain of eight pawns intact, takes possession of the centre, and – most importantly – obtains a very dangerous attack on his opponent's king, thanks to the opening of the h-file.

14...fxg3 15.hxg3 g6

Black decides to give up one more pawn for the purposes of defence.

Indeed 15...h6 would be answered by 16.♔d3 or 16.f4 ♔d7 17.♖f3, with g3-g4 to follow.

Nor is 15...g5 satisfactory; Steinitz tells us he intended to meet it by 16.f4 g4 17.♗e2 ♔d7 18.♚c2, with the threat of e3-e4-e5. White would also be threatening to double rooks on the h-file.

16.♚xg6 ♔d7

Not 16...e5, on account of d4-d5-d6.

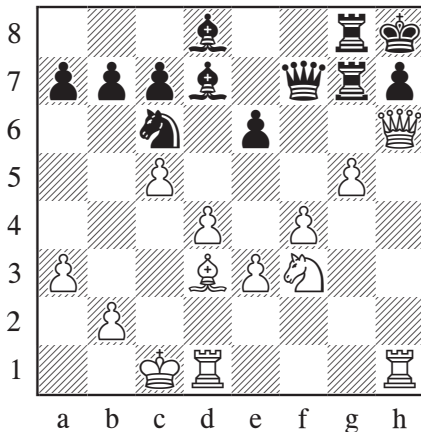
17.f4 ♚f7

[Editor's note: 17...♚g8 (Kasparov) was more stubborn.]

18.g4 ♚g7 19.♚h6 ♚xg4 20.♔d3 ♚g7 21.♗f3 ♚f7 22.g4 ♚ag8

Black can't take the g4-pawn, as after 23.♚hx7† he loses the bishop on d7.

23.g5 ♔d8



24.♚h2!

This is much stronger than winning the exchange with 24.g6. The threat of ♚dh1 is unanswerable.

24...♚g6 25.♚h5 ♚g7 26.♚dh1 ♚hx5 27.♚hx5 ♚f8 28.♚hx7† ♚hx7

Or 28...♔g8 29.♚xg7† ♔xg7 30.♚h7†, and the bishop on d7 perishes.

29.♚hx7† ♔g8 30.♚xd7 ♚f7 31.♔c4!

1-0

Black loses a fourth pawn after 31...♚xd7 32.♔xe6† ♚f7 33.g6.

The entire game may serve as a model of concrete planning and of harmony in the actions of the forces (attacking the point h7).

Both games are distinguished by clear, purposeful thought. Steinitz's play in them speaks for itself. Nonetheless we would like to conclude this opening chapter by recalling once again how skilfully Steinitz operated with the pawns, and how economically he deployed the energy of his pieces.

Minimum effort, maximum gain! This was Steinitz's motto in strategic play; it urges a prudent attitude to time as measured in chess tempos. In repeating it, we may say that this motto is inscribed on the creative banner of chess art in our own day.

In Steinitz's manual *The Modern Chess Instructor* we find an interesting statement about the pawns:

"The skilful management of the Pawns ... is one of the most important items in the conduct of the game ... Owing to the privilege of promotion to a Queen, ... the loss of one of them is in the large majority of cases fatal among first-class masters. It is, moreover, now recognized among experts that not alone the weakness of one single Pawn but also that of one single square into which any hostile man can be planted with commanding effect, will cause great trouble, and often the loss of the game, and that by proper management of the Pawns such points of vantage need not be opened for the opponent."

There is no need to say how much these thoughts are in tune with our own times.