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## To Read the Passing Words...

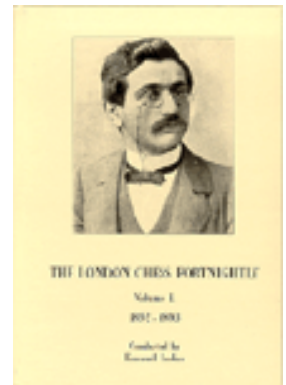
John S. Hilbert

“Although the title pertains to the English Metropolis, we nevertheless intend to chronicle, from time to time, all interesting chess matter from all parts of the world where chess is played.” *The London Chess Fortnightly*, inaugural issue, August 15, 1892

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*The London Chess Fortnightly*, 1892-1893, conducted by Emanuel Lasker (reprinted by Publishing House Moravian Chess), 178 pp., Hardcover, English Descriptive Notation, \$35.00

In retrospect, the words of those who later become great take on added luster to those who read them, offering, at times, a kind of inevitability, as it were, of what the future will bring. But only in retrospect. Rarely, if ever, at the time such words are written are they accorded weight sufficient to place them, exactly, in the minds of contemporaries. They pass by, are noted for a moment, and then are left for later readers, often later generations of readers, to recast them, as it were, in the forge of time into a purer form, suitable monuments to a greatness by then, often enough, already past.



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It is a rarer trick to read the passing words, the passing events, and yet keep in balance a recognition they both reveal and obscure the person who has uttered them. As with so many things in life, the more time that passes, the easier it is to separate the momentary passion from the sounder, more enduring, truths. Or at least one can hope so.

And so it is with the little remembered chess publication, *The London Chess Fortnightly*, “conducted” as each number tells us, by the young player Emanuel Lasker. Most of us, I suspect, when



we think of Lasker, think of him as he appeared in his later days, for instance when at age fifty-five he achieved his great tournament success at New York 1924, or when at sixty-six he finished a mere half a point behind Botvinnik and Flohr, yet ahead of Capablanca, at Moscow 1935. But when the first issue of his *London Chess Fortnightly* appeared on August 15, 1892, Lasker had not yet celebrated his twenty-fourth birthday. And he had not yet visited the United States, let alone fought for the championship of the world.



The publication he brought forth to the world that August well over one hundred years ago has now been reprinted by Publishing House Moravian Chess, the Czech Republic publishing house run by Vlastimil Fiala, a chess historian of prodigious appetite for reproducing works long lost to followers of the game. The text includes nineteen issues of the *Fortnightly* published between August 15, 1892 and July 30, 1893. Nineteen issues appeared during that time rather than the twenty-four one would ordinarily expect of a twice a month publication because of problems reportedly with the printer, which caused a break between issues seventeen and eighteen running from April 30, 1893, to July 14, 1893. At the end of the nineteenth issue, the conclusion of the first year of publication, the *Fortnightly* folded, as had, and would, so many chess publications. No reason for the ultimate failure of the enterprise was given. Each issue included a lead article by Lasker, followed by a game department where several games were annotated, for the most part by the young master, and after which came miscellaneous news of the chess world, including commentary on tournaments, brief biographical pieces, and on occasion correspondence with readers.



Lasker, much like Steinitz years earlier, had left the continent and traveled to England, where a stay of several weeks turned into a much longer one. His chess career to that date had been brief, but not without honor. In July 1889, Lasker had won the Hauptturnier A at Breslau, scene of the Sixth Congress of the German Chess Federation, and thus became generally credited with the title of master at chess. Tarrasch, with whom Lasker would have difficult exchanges in the future, at that same Congress dominated the principal event, the International Masters' Tournament, finishing at 13-4 a full point and a half ahead of Amos Burn. In March 1892 Lasker had finished first, with a score of 9-2, at the Seventh British Chess Association Tournament, held in London. The next month he won a small, double round event, also in London, defeating without a loss Blackburne, Mason, Gunsberg, and Bird.





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By this time, too, Lasker had defeated in matches von Bardeleben, Mieses, and Bird, and would in May and June 1892 dominate the great Blackburne, 8-2, and in August and September, face Bird once again, this time to demolish him in Fischer-like fashion, 5-0.

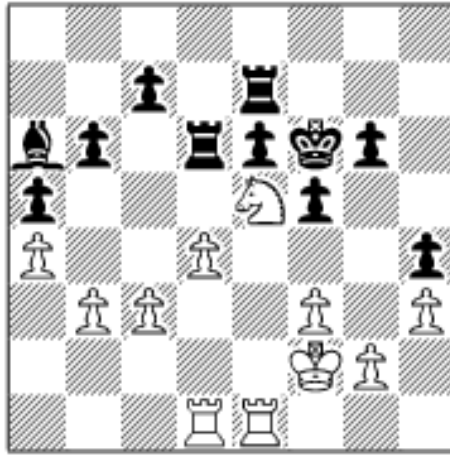
Curiously enough, if one wishes to learn about Lasker's first experiences in the United States, his London-based *Fortnightly* is the place to do it. Although the first issue of his magazine gave the first two games of his match with Blackburne, and his win over Van Vliet from the March 1892 National Masters' Tournament, by the fourth issue, published October 1, 1892, we learn that a few days earlier, on September 28, Lasker had sailed by a North German liner from Southampton for New York, where he was engaged for a month of exhibition games with the top players of the Manhattan Chess Club. By the sixth issue, Lasker was providing readers of his *London Chess Fortnightly* with annotated games from his ongoing trip to the United States.

Here, for example, is his effort against Dr. Charles B. Isaacson, then a twenty-six year old physician and dentist in New York City, whose life would be cut short at the age of forty-three, in 1909, following a six week illness of what was described in his brief *New York Times* obituary as "pernicious anemia."

### *Lasker – Dr. Charles B. Isaacson* [B00] Manhattan Chess Club New York City, October 13, 1892

**1.e4 b6 2.d4 Bb7 3.Nc3 e6 4.Nf3 Be7 5.Bd3 Nf6 6.Qe2** This move is of doubtful value, leading, as the game went, to an early exchange of Queens. **6...d5 7.0–0 dxe4 8.Nxe4 Qd5 9.Nc3** White cannot retire his knight to g3, on account of the answer ...h5, which would give Black a strong attack. **9...Qh5 10.Ne5 Qxe2 11.Nxe2 0–0 12.Rd1 Rd8 13.a4 Nc6 14.Nxc6 Bxc6 15.f3 a5 16.Bg5 Rac8 17.Bh4 Bb7 18.Bf2** Black tries to bring his c-pawn forward to c5, but in this moment White need not be afraid of 18...c5; after 19.dxc5 Bxc5 20.Bxc5, Black is compelled to take back with the pawn, as ...Rxc5 would be answered by 21.Bxh7+. **18...Bd6 19.Nc3 g6** Now Black wants to push his c-pawn. **20.Bh4 Be7 21.Ne4 Kg7 22.c3 Nd5 23.Bf2 f5** The knight, of course, is much embarrassing on e4; still Black had to consider his last move, as later on it allows White to put his knight at e5 into a commanding position. **24.Nd2 Bf6 25.Re1 Re8 26.Bg3 h5** To get rid of the dangerous Queen bishop. **27.Nc4 h4 28.Be5 Rh8 29.h3 Rhe8** Back again, as he has nothing more to do on the kingside. **30.Kf2 Rcd8 31.Bxf6+ Nxf6 32.Ne5 Nd5 33.Bb5 Re7 34.Bc6 Ba6** Of course, if Black exchanges bishops, he loses the exchange.

### 35.Bxd5 Rxd5 36.Rad1 Rd6 37.b3 Kf6



**38.f4** White threatens now Nf3; with this commences the final attack, which wins the game for White. **38...Bb7**  
**39.Rd3 Re8 40.Rde3 Bd5**  
 Black probably thought to force White to play 41.c4, when after 41...Be4 the White d-pawn is very weak. **41.g3**  
**Bxb3** Black cannot do any better; if he plays ...Rh8, or ...fxg3+, he only loses time,

without any equivalent in material or position. **42.gxh4 Bxa4**  
**43.Rg3 Rg8 44.h5 Be8 45.hxg6 a4 46.h4 b5** Black cannot play ...Bxg6, as Reg1 would immediately force the game. **47.h5 Rd8**  
**48.Reg1 c5** Nor does 48...Kg7 do any good. After 49.h6+ Kxh6 50.g7 Bh5 51.Rh3 followed by 52.Rxh5+ and 53.Rh1 mate. **49.h6 cxd4 50.h7 Kg7 51.hxg8Q+ Kxg8 52.g7 dxc3 53.Rh1 1-0**  
*London Chess Fortnightly*, Nov. 1, 1892

Reading through the issues of Lasker's first magazine, one gains some interesting insights, not only into the German's evaluation of positions, but also the dynamics between Lasker and others that would help form his future dealings with the greats of the chess world. Thus, for instance, in the September 1, 1892, issue, under "Miscellaneous," the patient reader will learn something of Lasker's first exchanges with Tarrasch, and no doubt something of why Lasker responded, later, the way he did toward him: "Some days before the conclusion of the Dresden Tournament, we requested Mr. Hoffer [*Leopold Hoffer, then editor of the Standard's chess column and arch-enemy of Steinitz*] to kindly address a private enquiry to the first prize winner, asking him if he would be prepared to play a match with us on English soil for 500 Pounds, sometime next year. Upon Dr. Tarrasch being declared the winner, he was approached by Mr. Hoffer, but gave as his reply that the duties of his calling prevented him from giving the matter any consideration. Some of the leading German papers and also the German Chess Journal stated, however, by way of reply, that he would reconsider the matter as soon as we had been awarded the first prize at an International Tournament. From this it would appear that Dr. Tarrasch does not consider us good enough yet to be able to compete with him. Whether he is right or wrong in this we leave to others to judge. In any case, we must confess that we hardly expected a public reply to our private

enquiry.” No doubt it was in part that very “public reply to our private enquiry” that colored Lasker’s later dealings with Tarrasch. How satisfying it must have been to Lasker merely a year and a half later to hold the championship of the world. A championship Tarrasch would not play for against his “not good enough” opponent, until another fourteen years had passed.

Surely, in any event, Lasker’s opinion of Tarrasch was deeply poisoned by this public reproof. His very first issue of the *Fortnightly* had told readers that in choosing games to publish he would “discard all games which do not contain some special feature, or points of merit, to entitle them to publication.” Yet it was only a few issues later, after Hoffer had approached Tarrasch on his behalf and had been rebuffed, that Lasker published the latter’s grandmaster draws from Dresden with Blackburne (11 moves) and Walbrodt (10 moves). After the game with Walbrodt, Lasker wrote “Here the players agreed upon a draw. Such a miserable game we scarcely ever have seen played by masters.” Though Tarrasch the man may have more than disappointed Lasker at this time, his personal view of Tarrasch did not interfere with his appraisal of the German doctor’s playing strength, as presented in his lead article in the March 30, 1893, issue, a piece well worth reading.

Lasker also published some interesting viewpoints on topical concerns. His lead article in his October 15, 1892, issue involved the unfortunate refusal of the City of London Chess Club to join the newly formed Southern Counties Chess Union. As a chess professional of the day, Lasker took a keen interest in attempts at unification of chess players everywhere, as such unions could only advance the cause of the game at every level. Lasker returned to the issue of unification in his November 1, 1892, issue, this time concerning the British Chess Association. Other issues would touch on timely questions concerning scoring in tournaments (November 15, 1892), the study of chess (December 14, 1892), as well as a multi-part series on Chess and Intellectual Force, commenced with the February 28, 1893, issue.

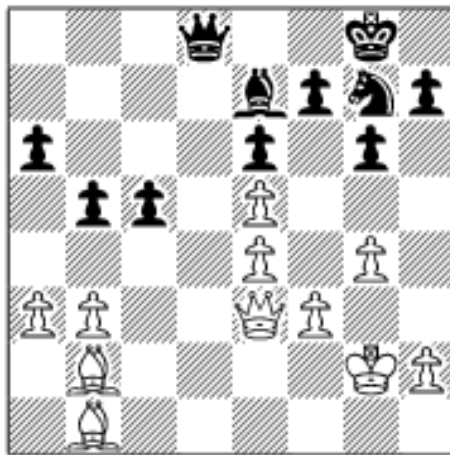
Readers will of course find substantial information on British chess matters. In addition to the issue of unification, Lasker remarked on the North versus South team match played at Birmingham on January 28, 1893, won by the South by the smallest of margins, 53½-52½. Lasker’s analysis of what the match results meant, especially in evaluating metropolitan players versus provincial players, makes for quite entertaining reading. He



also annotated the first board game between the respective team captains, two well-respected British amateur chess players, the Reverends William Wayte and John Owen. The annotations by world class masters of amateur games often give significant insight into the back-and-forth nature of advantages in chess, and just how quickly they can change hands. (Before one skips such local material, keep in mind that during his best five years of play, which admittedly were behind him, Owen, the loser of this game, sported an Elo Historical rating of 2380—not bad for your “amateur” player of the day.)

***Rev. John Owen – Rev. William Wayte [D02] South vs. North Team Match, Board 1 Birmingham, England, January 28, 1893***

**1.Nf3 d5 2.d4 e6 3.b3** This kind of development is theoretically of doubtful value, as the bishop at b2 has not sufficient power on his blocked diagonal, while it loses too much time—although practically it frequently is very difficult to take much advantage of that. **3...Nf6 4.Bb2 Be7** Here 4...Bd6 seems stronger. **5.e3 0–0 6.Bd3 c5** This relieves the White bishop at b2 and must therefore be considered as inferior, the more so as Black has castled already. **7.0–0** But this casts his opportunity away. 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.Ng5 h6 9.h4 with a fine attack, or after 7.dxc5 Bxc5 8.g4 gave him a strong game. **7...Nc6 8.Nbd2 Nb4** An excursion which consequently wins a clear move. **9.Be2 b6** For the same reasons as mentioned at White’s third, Black ought to proceed with ...Bd7 followed by ...Rc8. **10.a3 Nc6 11.Bd3 Bb7 12.Qe2 Nh5** Not a good place for the knight, nor has the knight there any prospect of development later on. 12...Nd7 was better, eventually followed up by ...Bf6 and a little attack in the center. **13.Rad1** 13.Ne5 was the obvious reply, as 13...Nxe5 of course would be met by 14.Bxh7+, and so on. **13...g6 14.g4** White gains nothing with this advance and only exposes himself to a strong attack against his kingside. **14...Ng7 15.c4** After depriving his King of some of its natural resources, this move as enlarging the power of Black’s bishop at b7 appears the more dangerous. **15...Qc7 16.Ne5 Nxe5** This exchange gives all his advantage out of hand. He ought to proceed with ...f5 to open the file for his rooks. **17.dxe5 dxc4 18.Nxc4 Qc6 19.e4 Rad8 20.f3 a6 21.Bb1 b5** Black’s advantage on the queenside is illusionary; by this advance he only exposes himself to danger. **22.Na5 Qb6 23.Nxb7 Qxb7 24.Qe3 Qc7 25.Kg2 Rxd1** Although this simplifies matters it is in no way to Black’s advantage. He cannot wait as his knight at g7 has no good square to move to at the present moment. **26.Rxd1 Rd8 27.Rxd8+ Qxd8**



**28.f4** A grave blunder. 28.Qd3 would have left him, with two bishops for the ending, in a slight advantage, which for instance after 28...Qxd3 29.Bxd3 Ne8 30.a4 Nc7 31.Bc3 could be utilized.

**28...Qd1** The Queen attacking bishop and the g4 pawn—this move decides the game.

**29.Bd3 Qxg4+ 30.Qg3 Qd1 31.Bf1 Nh5 32.Qf3 Qd2+ 0–1**

*London Chess Fortnightly*, Feb. 28, 1893

The chess events of 1892 are briefly summarized by the *Fortnightly* in the January 14, 1893, issue, which also devoted several pages to write-ups on Blackburne and New York's Albert B. Hodges. As with many of these reprints by Publishing House Moravian Chess, the photographs unfortunately do not come through as cleanly as one might desire.

What one will find, here, though, is a wealth of annotated games (78 are numbered in the issues), as well as something of the flavor of chess of the times. And of course, one will find some amusing anecdotes that reveal a side of players rarely seen under the best of circumstances, let alone in the mega databases where many of the greats of the past are reduced to merely the moves they once made. Here, for instance, is a highly revealing passage about a master of an even earlier day, Johann Jacob Löwenthal: "The late Herr Löwenthal was held in great esteem by London chess players, and was of a somewhat quiet retiring disposition and very nervous as a match player. Once, when one of his chess columns suddenly collapsed he caused some little amusement to his friends—and they were legion—by the lachrymose way he had of stating his grievance. 'Ah, my friends, I have lost my organ! I have lost my organ!' The poor fellow would say almost wringing his hands. On making this complaint to a certain waggish chess friend, the latter said gravely, 'Have you lost your monkey, too?' For once the gentle Löwenthal was roused. So linking his arm into that of his waggish friend, he said 'No! No! the monkey's all right. I've got him here.'"

For those who find pleasure in learning more about the players of the past, including a future world chess champion, and who enjoy learning something of the kind of chess world they inhabited,

adding *The London Chess Fortnightly* to their library will guarantee some entertaining reading through the cold winter months ahead. It will give them an opportunity to pause, and learn more from reading the passing words ...

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