BOOK REVIEWS

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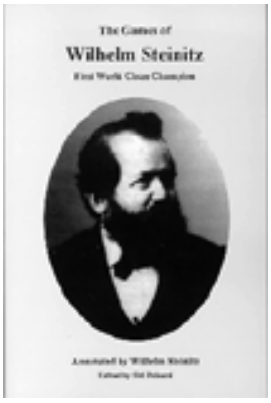
# Less Hype, More Notes

## Taylor Kingston

*The Games of Wilhelm Steinitz, First World Chess Champion*, edited by Sid Pickard, 1995 Pickard & Son, Dallas, Texas, USA, paperback, 260 pages, English algebraic notation, $19.95.




Pickard & Son are a small publishing operation with a fondness for the "complete games of …" kind of collection, examples being *The Chess Games of Adolph Anderssen* (1996) and the CD *Grandmaster Efim Bogoljubow* (2000; see the ChessCafe archives for reviews). Our subject here, *The Games of Wilhelm Steinitz*, was actually their first chess book, debuting in 1995. It is being reissued now partly on its own merits, and partly to generate advance publicity for a forthcoming CD-ROM version.

For most readers, Wilhelm Steinitz (1836-1900) surely needs no introduction. The first official world champion, Steinitz was a great player, with the arguable exception of Morphy the best ever until the emergence of Lasker. He had an excellent tournament record, and in match play he dominated chess for 30 years, scoring +163 -54 =52 (70%)

and winning 27 consecutive even-strength matches 1862-1892, until finally losing the world title to Lasker in 1894. He elevated chess professionalism above the coffee-house level, his style and ideas changed the way chess is played and understood, and his writings both popularized the game and raised the standard of its literature.

For all that, Steinitz has suffered a certain literary neglect. While mention of him is obligatory in any general history of chess, his own books have become rare collector's items, and books solely about him have been relatively few. The two major Steinitz collections, Bachmann's *Schachmeister Steinitz* (four volumes 1910-21, reprinted 1980) and the Steinitz volume of the *Weltgeschichte des Schachs* series (compiled by Hooper, 1968), are in German and out of print. Devidé's *A Memorial to William Steinitz* (1901, reprinted 1974) was perhaps the only major biography in English until *William Steinitz, Chess Champion* by Kurt Landsberger (McFarland, 1993), but neither of those has many games. Therefore this book fills a definite void. The question is, how well?

First a description of the book's basic features. There are 1,022 games, divided into five categories:

1) Serious matches and tournaments (559 games)

2) Informal games (156 club and offhand games)

3) Odds games (103, ranging from pawn-




and-move to rook-and-pawn, though some from "odds tournaments" are actually at even strength)

4) Simultaneous and blindfold exhibitions (149)

5) Miscellaneous (55 consultation and correspondence games)

Within each section the games are arranged chronologically, and headings indicate the event, its date, and where appropriate Steinitz's result, e.g. "The Dublin Chess Congress, 1865 (November-December), Steinitz: +4, =1, -0, First Place," or "The Steinitz-Mackenzie Match, 1883 (February 7 - February 13), Steinitz: +3, =2, -1" or "Games 711-715 were played during off days at the 1897 Vienna International Tournament." They span the years 1859-1899. Most of the games (795, 78%) are unannotated; 227 have annotations of a sort, about which more below. There are 243 diagrams. There are lists of Steinitz's tournament and match results, but no crosstables. There is an index of players but not openings. There is no narrative text, only a 3-page foreword.

It appears Pickard has been conscientious in the collection process; though the book adds few or none to the number of known Steinitz games, it has omitted few, if any. Your reviewer does not have the old collections at hand, but according to *The Oxford Companion to Chess*, the Bachmann collection has "about 1,000 games," i.e. about the same as Pickard's 1,022, and the *Weltgeschichte*'s 575 Steinitz games include "all that could be found

from his serious match and tournament play." Thus Pickard's total of 559 serious games seems as close to complete as could be expected, though according to the tournament and match tables Steinitz actually played at least 705 serious games, leaving 146 unrecovered. The book does improve on some databases: a header search on *Chess Assistant* 5.0 found only 497 Steinitz games, while *MasterChess 2000* yielded 805.

For qualitative comparison we have to look at book-form collections of other players. The gold (or even platinum) standard is Skinner & Verhoeven's *Alexander Alekhine's Chess Games 1902-1946* (McFarland, 1998), which by any measure outstrips every other work of its type, especially in that it provides much narrative as well as all known games, many annotated. The drop-off from there is a bit steep, but of the books known to this reviewer the silver medal goes to *The Collected Games of Emanuel Lasker*, by Ken Whyld (The Chess Player, 1998). Though its binding, paper and print quality are sub-par, the scholarship is very good. Great care was taken to determine correct scores and weed out spurious games. Sources (e.g. *Deutsches Wochenschach*, *London Chess Fortnightly*, *The Field*, etc.) and crosstables were invariably supplied, and exact dates given wherever possible.

This Steinitz collection is roughly comparable to the Lasker book, though its strengths and weaknesses are different. Similar care about duplicate and bogus games seems to have been taken. Dates are not as exact, and sources and crosstables are absent, but the physical product is better, with larger print and better binding. The

main feature the Lasker book lacks, but the Steinitz book has, is annotation. The 227 annotated games come mostly from major tournaments (London 1872 and 1883, Vienna 1873 and 1882), from non-title matches with Zukertort (1872), Blackburne (1876), Sellman (1885), Vasquez (1888), Golmayo (1888), and Carvajal (1889), and from world championship matches with Zukertort (1886), Chigorin (1889 and 1892), Gunsberg (1890), and Lasker (1894). Also some of the less serious games are annotated.

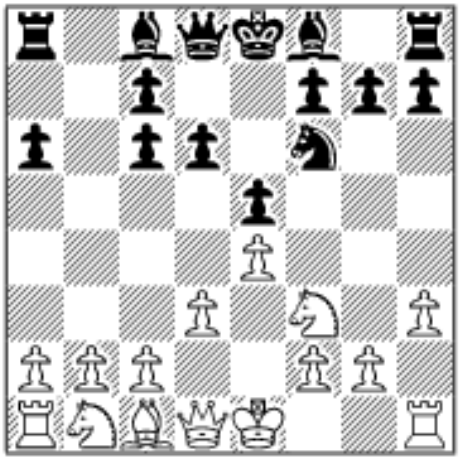
I suspect that in his career Steinitz annotated more than 227 games, but I can't say with certainty. Checking what books I have with Steinitz annotations, I found one minor omission on Pickard's part: Steinitz-Rainer, offhand, New York, 1885, was briefly annotated in Steinitz's *Modern Chess Instructor* (1889), but is unannotated here.

However the real problem with the annotations is more qualitative than quantitative. Plus, they are not quite what they are billed to be. The cover says plainly "Annotated by Wilhelm Steinitz." The back-cover blurb expands on this to say the "World Champion has provided deep and careful annotations for his best games to increase our understanding!". True only to a point. Steinitz was a "deep and careful" annotator, but what he wrote, and what appears in this collection, are two different things. His original analysis, which had both analytical variations and prose commentary, has been reduced to a sort of *Informant*-style shorthand, with very uneven results.

It works well enough some of the time. Consulting

*The Games played in the London International Chess Tournament 1883*, we see that after White's 8th move in the game Steinitz-Winawer, Steinitz wrote "The identical position occurred between Steinitz and Paulsen at Baden in 1870. The latter, however, played here Q to R4, whereupon White answered B to K2." Pickard simply shrinks this to "8…Qh5 9.Be2: Steinitz-Paulsen, Baden-Baden 1870" with no real loss of information. And when just analysis is involved, the old descriptive translates easily, e.g. from "If 39…R to B6 ch, 40 K to B4, R to B6 ch (or 40 … P to K6, 41 R to K7) 41 K to Kt 5, and should win" to "39…Rc3+ 40.Kf4 Rf3+ [*40…e3 41.Re7*] 41.Kg5+-".

Other passages, however, are not so amenable to condensation. Consider Steinitz-Mortimer, London 1883. After **1.d4 d5 2.c4 e6 3.Nc3 Bb4** Steinitz wrote "Not a good move. Its main object is evidently to double White's Q B P, which, if anything, is, in the present position, to the advantage of White on account of Black's Q P being already advanced to the 4th. This will enable White to exchange the front B P at his own convenience and in the meanwhile his centre, in combination with two Bishops, remains strong." Admittedly a tad verbose, but in reducing it to a mere "**3.Nc3 Bb4?!**" the modern translation loses a lot. An even clearer example is this position, from ***Anderssen-Steinitz***, after **1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 Nf6 5.d3 d6 6.Bxc6+ bxc6 7.h3**



In *The Modern Chess Instructor* Steinitz wrote “P-Q4 is, we believe, better. But Professor Anderssen had previously adopted successfully the same tactics, as in the present game, against first-class players ... and his manoeuvering was, we believe, based on the idea that Black will have to exhaust himself in his efforts to undouble his QBP. The line of play adopted here for the defence shows that the open QKt file and the two bishops are sufficient recompense for the doubled pawn.” Pickard’s condensed translation, “**7.h3!?** (7.d4)”, boils away almost everything, leaving only the merest trace of Steinitz’s thought, if even that. Furthermore several of his purely prose notes to this and other games were omitted entirely.

At least a partial remedy would have been to use the many *Informant* symbols that convey ideas otherwise requiring words: space advantage, development, center control, open file, initiative, attack, queenside majority, isolated, doubled, backward, passed or connected pawns, bishop pair, opposite-colored bishops, only playable move, *Zugzwang*, etc. These would have made the condensed notes more informative without using much more space, yet no use was made of them at all, in fact it appears the font used does not even have the *Informant* symbols.

Granted, a collection of this size must condense wordy notes considerably (unless it has the kind of budget McFarland gave the Alekhine collection). Imperfect annotations are probably better than none, and to collect Steinitz's full annotations in their original form, even in modern reprints, might cost one several hundred dollars. However, a better job could have been done without enlarging the book much more.

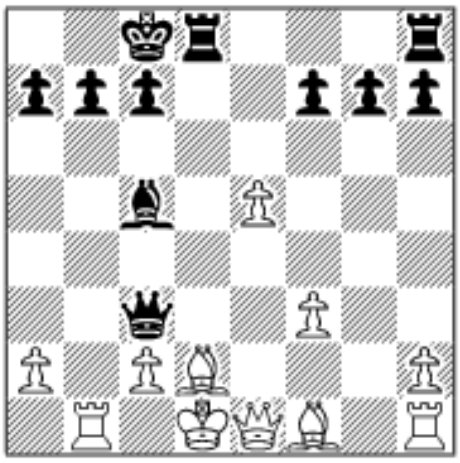
And more objectionable than the condensation is the misrepresentation. I refer to the cover blurb, which states: "Here the reader will find 1022 games of chess as it was meant to be played, and 227 of them (nearly twenty-five per cent!) beautifully annotated by Steinitz himself." No, these are not really what Steinitz wrote, and much of their beauty is lost. I can't help but think that old Wilhelm, a rather argumentative man, would object to these being call "his" annotations. The blurb continues "the World Champion guides us through a chess course never to be forgotten," and concludes that Steinitz is "the greatest figure in the history of the game."

Up until 1894, quite probably true, but this is 2002, and such people as Lasker, Capablanca, Alekhine, Botvinnik, Fischer, Karpov, and Kasparov, to name a few, have been heard from in the meantime. And while this kind of book does have its market niche, 'instructional course' is not really it. This is not to say Steinitz's games are not instructive. Far from it — for example, of the 59 games considered the most instructive of all time in Rashid Ziatdinov's *GM-RAM:*

*Essential Grandmaster Knowledge*, 13 involved Steinitz. However, with many more user-friendly instructional books and CDs available, I cannot imagine that the average player will want to learn chess fundamentals from this sort of book. In my experience, most club players looking for instruction consider comprehensive game collections of this sort about as interesting as actuarial tables. More likely its real market lies with writers, scholars, collectors and historians, an audience on whom this sort of transparent hype is wasted. For that readership, the games themselves matter most.

A feature of complete collections like this is that they allow one to see the player's development. Here is the earliest known Steinitz game, thought to be from a club championship. It shows that at age 23 the future world champion had much to learn. ***Hamppe-Steinitz*, Vienna, 1859** (notes by the reviewer)**: 1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nf6 3.f4 d5 4.exd5** — Later theory favored 4.fxe5. **4…Nxd5 5.fxe5 Nxc3 6.bxc3 Qh4+ 7.Ke2** — Ironically similar to a line Steinitz would come to champion himself, the Steinitz Gambit: 1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.f4 exf4 4.d4 Qh4+ 5.Ke2. The early Steinitz was very much a gambiteer. **7…Bg4+ 8.Nf3 Nc6 9.d4 0-0-0 10.Bd2?**

**10…Bxf3+?!** — The young Steinitz is not as tactically alert as he would later become, missing 10…Rxd4! 11.cxd4 Nxd4+ 12.Kd3 *(12.Ke3 Nxf3 13.gxf3 Bc5+ and mate shortly)* 12…Bf5+ 13.Kc3 Nxf3 and wins. **11.gxf3 Nxe5! 12.dxe5??** — 12.Qe1 was necessary. **12…Bc5 13.Qe1 Qc4+ 14.Kd1 Qxc3 15.Rb1**



**15…Qxf3+?** — Again missing a win: 15…Rxd2+! 16.Qxd2 Qxf3+ 17.Ke1 and either 17…Re8 or the simple 17…Qxh1 clinches it. The text allows White to save himself with 16.Be2, but instead he blunders in return. **16.Qe2??** — One suspects a typo here, but only this move is consistent with the rest of the game score. **16…Rxd2+** Finally getting the idea, though simply 16…Qxh1 was quite good enough. **17.Kxd2 Rd8+ 18.Kc1 Ba3+ 19.Rb2 Qc3 20.Bh3+ Kb8 21.Qb5 Qd2+ 22.Kb1 Qd1+** An elementary queen sac ends it. **23.Rxd1 Rxd1 mate**.

Steinitz continued in typical 19th-century gambit style for some years. For example, in four of his seven games as White in the 1866 match with

Anderssen, he opened **1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 g5 4.Bc4 g4 5.Ne5 Qh4+ 6.Kf1**. Here is the finish of one such, the 10th game of the match:

**34.Rh1! Ng4+** (34…Qxh1 35.Qg5+ Kf8 36.Qg7+ Ke8 37.Qd7+ Kf8 38.Ne6+ Kg8 39.Qg7#) **35.Kg1 f2+ 36.Kg2, 1-0**. Contrary to popular belief, Steinitz never really lost his zest for gambit play; for example in the 20th and final game of his 1886 title match with Zukertort he opened with the wild **1.e4 e5 2.Nc3 Nc6 3.f4 exf4 4.d4 d5 5.exd5 Qh4+ 6.Ke2 Qe7+ 7.Kf2 Qh4 8.g3 fxg3+ 9.Kg2**. Yet he won, and the book shows many similar examples from late in Steinitz's life.

It was around 1873 that Steinitz's stylistic shift occurred. In the Vienna tournament of that year he used more close openings, playing 1.c4, 1.d4 and even 1.a3, and he displayed a more positional style based on the accumulation of small advantages. An instructive example is ***Rosenthal-Steinitz***, Vienna 1873. This position

was used in *The Amateur's Mind* by Jeremy Silman as a lesson in how to reduce the effectiveness of a knight by depriving it of good squares: **16…c5 17.Nf3 b6 18.Ne5 Qe6 19.Qf3 Ba6 20.Rfe1 f6 21.Ng4** — The knight ends up trapped after 21.Nc6 Rde8 22.Bf2 Qd7 23.Rad1 Qc7 and …Bb7 etc. **21…h5 22.Nf2 Qf7 23.f5? g5 24.Rad1 Bb7** —

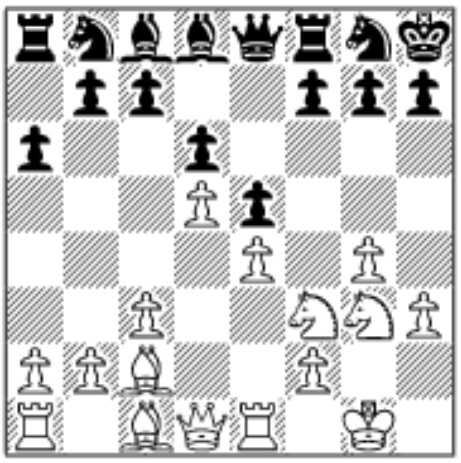
White's Nf2 is a non-factor and Black's Bb7 has become the most powerful minor piece on the board. After **25.Qg3 Rd5 26.Rxd5 Qxd5 27.Rd1 Qxf5** Steinitz won a pawn and eventually the game.

Steinitz also was ahead of his time in some ways. For example, in ***Steinitz-Weiss*, Vienna 1882**, he opened with **1.e4 e6 2.e5 c5 3.f4 d6 4.exd6 Bxd6 5.g3 Bd7 6.Nf3 Bc6 7.Bg2 Nf6 8.0-0 Nbd7 9.d3 0-0 10.Nbd2 Nb6 11.Qe2 Qc7 12.b3 Be7 13.Bb2 a5 14.a4 Nfd5 15.Nc4 Nb4 16.Rae1**

Steinitz's double-fianchetto, and control of the center without occupation by pawns, foreshadowed hypermodern openings, and his concentration of forces on e5 presaged Nimzovitch's idea of "overprotection."

Steinitz also developed a penchant for maneuvering in closed, underdeveloped positions, though on occasion he took this to extremes. **Lasker-Steinitz, Hastings 1895: 1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 a6 4.Ba4 d6 5.0-0 Nge7 6.c3 Bd7 7.d4 Ng6 8.Re1 Be7 9.Nbd2 0-0 10.Nf1 Qe8 11.Bc2 Kh8 12.Ng3 Bg4**

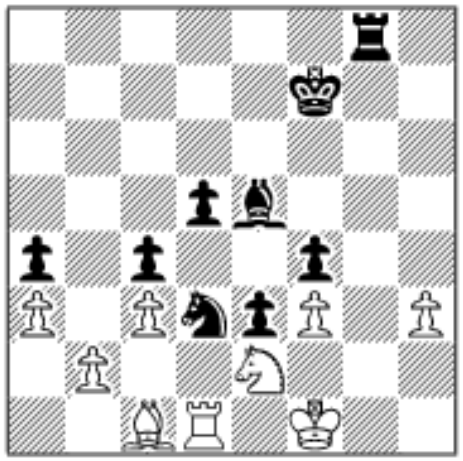
Logical enough so far, but now a bizarre trend develops. **13.d5 Nb8 14.h3 Bc8 15.Nf5 Bd8 16.g4 Ne7 17.Ng3 Ng8**



Small wonder Steinitz was considered eccentric by many of his contemporaries. Games such as this may have given rise to the now cliched parallel between Steinitz's style and the trench warfare of World War I.

After losing to Lasker in 1894, Steinitz was no longer pre-eminent, but still he remained a very strong competitor for another five years. Only in the last year of his career was a serious decline evident. This game, a typical Steinitz positional crush, is from his last tournament. ***Mason-Steinitz,*** **London 1899:**

**30…c4 31.dxc4 bxc4 32.Re2 Nc5 33.Rde1 a4 34.Kg1 e4 35.Rf1 Qg6 36.Kh1 e3 37.Qxg6 hxg6 38.Nh3 Bh6 39.g3 g5 40.gxf4 gxf4 41.Rg2+ Kf7 42.Ng1 Rg8 43.Rxg8 Rxg8 44.Ne2 Nd3 45.h3 Rb8 46.Kg2 Bg7 47.Rd1 Be5 48.Kf1 Rg8**



White is almost in *Zugzwang*; if 49.Nd4 Bxd4 50.cxd4 Rg3 etc., and 49.h4 only delays the inevitable. **49.Ng1 Rxg1+! 50.Kxg1 e2, 0-1**. One of the old lion's last roars. Less than a year later, he died in New York.

Thus a sample of Steinitz's games. As mentioned earlier, Pickard plans to reissue the collection in CD-ROM format. They have said that for the CD version, Steinitz's original prose annotations will be restored. This is a very good idea. If they also add crosstables and an openings index, and rewrite the cover blurb, there will be little to fault and much to praise.

For the moment potential buyers face a minor dilemma: get the book now, or wait for the CD? The CD promises to be a better product, but some prefer to move real pieces on an actual set, rather than click-and-drag on a screen, and for that a book is preferable. Such players, I think, will not be disappointed in *The Games of Wilhelm Steinitz*, as long as they do not believe the publisher's hype. Readers should not expect "a chess course never to be forgotten," but for a reasonable price they will get the games of a great player presented in a well-organized, informative and readable manner.

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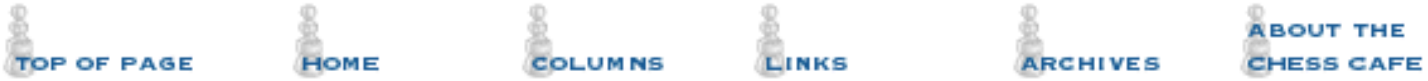


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