

Zenón Franco

Lasker

move by move

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About the Author

Zenón Franco is a Grandmaster from Paraguay, now living in Spain. He represented Paraguay, on top board, in seven Chess Olympiads, and won individual gold medals at Lucerne 1982 and Novi Sad 1990. He's an experienced trainer and has written numerous books on chess.

Also by the Author:

Test Your Chess

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Rubinstein: Move by Move

Keres: Move by Move

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Preface

The Danish Grandmaster Bent Larsen spent many years living in Spain and Argentina and he noted that Spanish speakers, as your author is, hold José Raúl Capablanca in particularly high esteem, due to the linguistic connection, and as a consequence we have tended to seriously undervalue two of his great rivals, the Russian Alexander Alekhine and the subject of this book, Emanuel Lasker of Germany.

It is possible that Larsen was right; it's certainly true that until recently there were not many good books about Lasker. Recently, however, an excellent book, *John Nunn's Chess Course*, was published, in which Nunn deeply analyzes Lasker's play.

As soon I was assigned the gratifying task of writing the present book I naturally studied Lasker's games more deeply than I had done in the past, and for more than a year there has scarcely been a day when I haven't marvelled at his strength. 'What a good player Lasker was!' was a spontaneous thought every day, providing a great degree of justification for Larsen's assertion.

I found so much to admire: often it was how Lasker conducted the defence; at other times, it was for his handling of the endgame, or his astonishing ability to find tactical resources in defence, or the way in an inferior position he could create serious difficulties for the opponent, or provoke errors in balanced positions, or handle equal positions in such a way that he would keep accumulating small advantages with quiet manoeuvring, etc. In short, Lasker was a complete chessplayer.

Regarding the openings, in Lasker's day these were not given the same importance as began to be the case some decades later, but all the same Lasker introduced new ideas. Several lines carry his name, as we'll see.

One of the greatest surprises to me was that Lasker's famous advice "If you find a good move, look for an even better one" was not something to which he himself always gave priority, or to be more precise, at least not when he had a much superior or winning position. Then he would frequently prefer a safe continuation, eschewing complications.

On the other hand, when Lasker stood worse, he certainly searched for the best moves; in such positions he had no equal in finding the best chances for resistance and counterat-

tack. I don't think that there has been any other world champion who drew or even won from so many inferior positions.

As in my previous books in the *Move by Move* series, I shall give voice to the wisdom of other chess masters who have provided annotations, many very instructive, to Lasker's games during the past one hundred years or more.

With the appearance of ever-stronger analysis engines, it has become apparent that the annotators of the past sometimes made analytical errors and today's engines help us correct these. However, I think a degree of moderation is required, since there is a danger of going over the top and quoting long lines of computer-generated analysis. Moreover, in complicated positions care is required with the results of engine analysis; their calculations and evaluations are different today from those of ten years ago and presumably they will be different again within a short time.

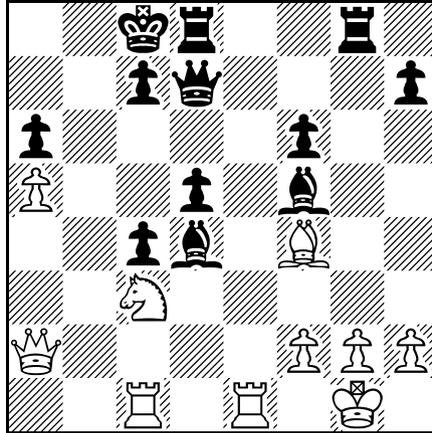
Finding the best continuation in a complex position requires accurate calculation of many moves and over the board this is sometimes beyond the powers even of the best players in the world, with limited time for reflection, the onset of tiredness, etc. And then the objective truth of the position doesn't always match the practical needs of the player, as Lasker shows us.

One of the most important parts of Lasker's legacy is that he demonstrates with his play that chess is a fight. Lasker himself gave one of his books the title of *Struggle*. Even in worse positions there are usually ways to fight and chances of putting up resistance, no matter what the engines say. That's why in my annotations I try to convey the practical situation as well as the objective evaluation.

When I was very young I read somewhere that Lasker had not created a recognisable 'school', because he had no definite style. I don't think that's really true; it's easy to recognise Lasker in the manoeuvring play of classical players such as Petrosian and especially Karpov. Lasker's wide range of defensive skills is evident in the games of Petrosian and Korchnoi. Nevertheless, in the present day the player who most resembles Lasker is the world champion Magnus Carlsen, especially in his capacity to extract an advantage in seemingly barren positions and also in his excellent handling of the endgame.

It has been a pleasure to 'rediscover' the second world champion, Emanuel Lasker, in this, the 150th anniversary of his birth. I hope that the reader will also share that emotion.

Zenón Franco,
Pontareas, October 2018



Exercise: Lasker now finished the game in the quickest possible way. What did he play?

Answer: 25...♖xg2+!

The quickest and most attractive finish, since after 26 ♔xg2 ♕h3+ 27 ♔h1 (or 27 ♔g1 ♖g4+ 28 ♕g3 ♗f3) 27...♗g4 forces mate.

26 ♔h1 ♖xf2 0-1

After the first half of the tournament Pillsbury was in the lead with 6½/9, followed by Lasker with 5½, Steinitz on 4½ and Chigorin just 1½.

Lasker had only managed to score half a point from his three games so far against Pillsbury, whom he faced in the first round of the second half of the St. Petersburg tournament. A further defeat for Lasker would have given Pillsbury an almost unassailable advantage in it, but let's see what happened.

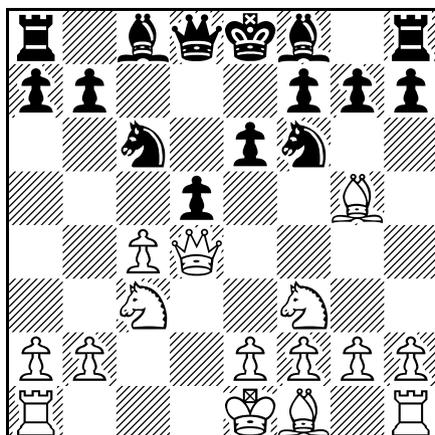
Game 14
H.Pillsbury-E.Lasker
St. Petersburg 1896
Queen's Gambit

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 ♘c3 ♘f6 4 ♘f3 c5 5 ♕g5

Subsequently the main lines became 5 cxd5 and 5 e3, which is still the case today.

5...cxd4 6 ♗xd4 ♘c6

Black could have avoided possible complications with 6...♕e7, according to Lasker.



7 ♖h4?!

Pillsbury's idea was to castle queenside and attack. Since this met with no success, the conclusion was reached that the correct continuation was 7 ♙xf6. Pillsbury himself beat Lasker with this at Cambridge Springs 1904; after 7...gxf6 8 ♖h4 dxc4 9 ♙d1 ♙d7 10 e3 ♘e5?! (sacrificing a pawn to speed up his development) 11 ♘xe5 fxe5 12 ♖xc4 ♖b6 13 ♙e2!, Lasker didn't manage to bring his into safety and went down under a spectacular attack.

Nevertheless, this evaluation may not be definitive. Euwe suggested 10...♙e7, while in his *Manual of Chess*, Lasker suggested 10...f5, reaching the conclusion that Black is not worse "since the doubled pawn is compensated for by the two strong bishops and good development, for instance, 11 ♖g3 h5 12 ♙xc4 h4 13 ♖f4 ♙g8 14 ♘e5 ♘xe5 15 ♖xe5 a6 16 0-0 ♙c8".

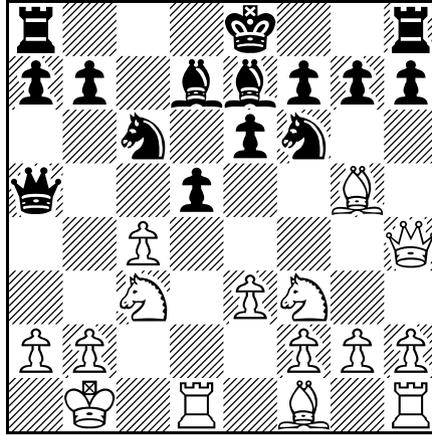
This opinion hasn't been questioned until now either by practice or analysis, but 15...♙g7 seems even better, since 16 ♖f4? allows 16...♖a5, with the idea of ...♙e5 and ...♙c6, with a strong initiative, while if 17 ♖d6 then 17...♙c6, with good play.

11 ♖xc4 has also been played, but with 11...♙g7 preparing kingside castling, prefaced by ...♖e7 if necessary, Black is fine.

7...♙e7 8 0-0-0?!

Consistent, but 8 e3 or "8 cxd5 exd5 9 ♙d1 is perhaps more solid", according to Kasparov, who then added, "but it was not for this that Pillsbury played 5 ♙g5 and 6 ♖xd4".

8...♖a5 9 e3 ♙d7 10 ♖b1

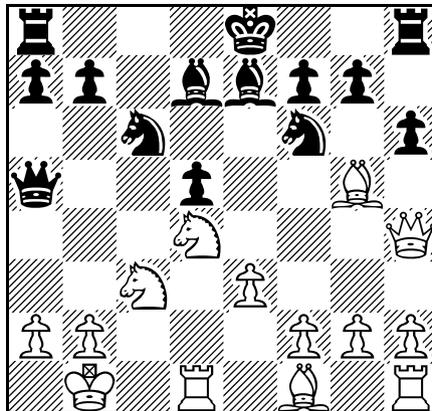


Exercise: With 8...♔a5 and 9...♙d7 Lasker made useful developing moves without compromising the security of his king. Now he could continue in the same spirit with 10...♖c8, which is good, but in fact he chose something slightly better. What did he play?

Answer: 10...h6!

“Thus either the bishop must be exchanged or the white queen stay where it is” (Lasker), and Black still retains ...♖c8 as a possibility, such as after 11 ♙d3.

11 cxd5 exd5 12 ♘d4



Question: Instead of moving an already developed piece, why didn't White pursue his attacking plans with one developing move, such as 12 ♙d3?

Answer: Because his own king would be in danger after 12...♖c8, threatening ...♘b4, and if 13 a3 then 13...♙g8! is very strong, forcing White into 14 ♕xf6, which would spell disaster for the white king after 14...♕xf6.

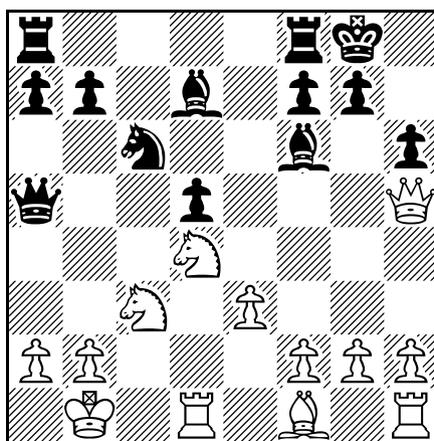
12...0-0!

Black could continue to wait with decent moves such as 12...♖c8 or 12...♖d8, or perhaps 12...♘d4, but tactical factors allow him to make this more useful move, even though it looks risky.

13 ♕xf6

Of course conceding the bishop-pair wasn't part of the plan, but White didn't continue with his aggressive idea with 13 ♕xh6?, because then simply 13...gxh6 14 ♖xh6 ♘g4 would be good, and 13...♘e4! is even stronger, since after 14 ♖h5 ♘xc3+ 15 bxc3 ♘xd4 16 ♙xd4 Black has 16...♖b6+ and ...♖xh6, winning.

13...♕xf6 14 ♖h5



Black is better. White has had to exchange his dark-squared bishop and soon it will be clear that his king is in more danger than Black's.

14...♘xd4

A good move, saddling White with a weak pawn on d4, but for tactical reasons it's perhaps not the more precise. It was possible to play 14...♕e6 immediately to defend d5, since White can't seriously consider 15 ♘e6? fxe6, when there would be no good defence against 16...♕xc3 and 17...♙xf2, or 16...♘b4.

15 exd4 ♕e6

Lasker's idea seems very provocative, inviting a quick f4-f5, but he had a clear idea in mind.

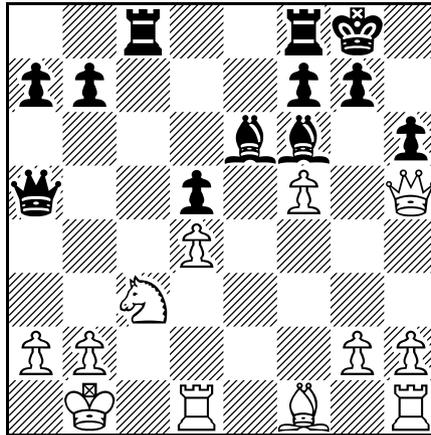
16 f4

Pillsbury needs no provocation to launch the attack; he is planning f5, maybe followed by ♖f3, attacking the weakness on d5 again.

However, in the light of the eventual result, it's logical to think that it was preferable to

focus first on defence. Now that Black has played 14...♗xd4, it was possible for White to go 16 ♖c4, followed by 17 ♖b3, giving his monarch more protection and putting pressure on d5 more quickly. Black's position would still be somewhat preferable after 16...♗ad8 (16...♗fd8 and 16...♗b4 are the alternatives) 17 ♖b3 ♗b4!, threatening 18...♗xd4, when 18 ♗e2?! wouldn't be good due to 18...a5.

16...♗ac8 17 f5



Exercise: What was the idea that Lasker had prepared?

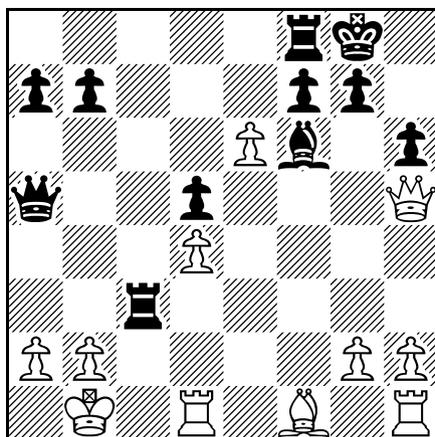
Answer: 17...♗xc3!

“A fine, deeply calculated combination, which any grandmaster could be proud of even today. It's beyond the powers of even a strong computer - here additional forces are needed...” (Kasparov).

It's also much better than 17...♗d7 18 ♗f3 ♖c6, which was slightly better for Black. Regarding Lasker's decision to sacrifice when he had a good alternative, Nunn commented: “To embark upon a sacrificial combination when there's no choice is not especially brave, but to do so when you have a perfectly good positional alternative requires courage,” and he added, “Nevertheless, this is one of the keys to success in chess. If you genuinely believe that a particular continuation is best then you should have the self-confidence to play it even if it involves a degree of risk”.

18 fxe6

In the event of 18 bxc3 the simple 18...♗d7! is good, followed by 19...♗c8, but more crushing is the immediate 18...♗c8! and after 19 fxe6 ♗xc3 20 exf7+ ♗f8 Black's attack is decisive: 21 ♗e2 ♗xd4 or 21 ♗e2 ♗b4+ 22 ♖a1 ♗c1+! and mate with ...♗xd4+.



Exercise: What had Lasker planned to play here?

Answer: 18...♖a3!!

Marvellous. This move unsurprisingly attracted great admiration and praise. It's hard not to have the same reaction as upon seeing a move like 11...♘a4!! in D.Byrne-R.Fischer, New York 1956, or 18 ♜xf7!! in M.Botvinnik-L.Portisch, Monte Carlo 1968, or the sequence beginning with 24 ♜xd4!! in G.Kasparov-V.Topalov, Wijk aan Zee 1999, to quote just a few examples of the highest expression of the art of chess.

Nunn wrote: "This is the difficult move to see. The threat to the a2-pawn forces White to take the impudent rook, exposing his king to a check along the b-file. However, the queen and bishop by themselves cannot press the attack home and the key factor is whether Black can include his remaining rook in the attack".

"The point of the combination! This paradoxical rook sacrifice forces the white king to begin a fight for its own existence", commented Kasparov, while Amos Burn called it "The finest combination ever played on a chess board", while it's noteworthy that Lasker commented simply, "This was the point".

19 exf7+?

This capture reduces the tension in the position and makes Black's task easier, since it activates the rook immediately.

Lasker commented: "Or 19 e7 ♜e8 20 bxa3 ♜b6+ 21 ♔c2 (if 21 ♔a1, Black would soon win by 21...♙xd4+ 22 ♜xd4 ♜xd4+ 23 ♔b1 ♜xe7) 21...♜c8+ 22 ♔d2 ♙xd4 and White has no defence". In the event of 21 ♙b5 here, Black could play 21...♜xb5+ 22 ♔a1 ♜xe7, with huge compensation for the small material investment.

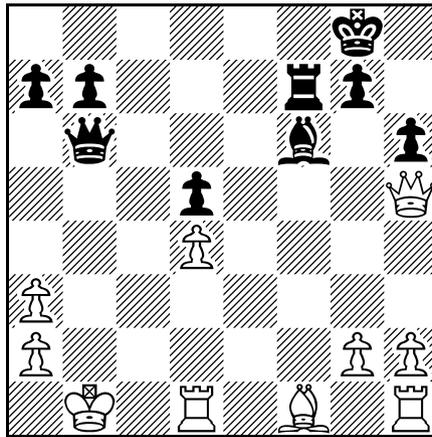
After 19 e7 Lasker preferred 19...♜e8 to the more active move 19...♜c8, because White could then exploit the fact that the rook was unprotected with 20 ♜g4! and at the same time defend d4, enabling him to capture the rook on a3 under more favourable conditions.

White had to play 19 bxa3, to which the reply would be 19...♖b6+. Then 20 ♔a1? loses to 20...♙xd4+ 21 ♗xd4 ♕xd4+ 22 ♚b1, after which the f8-rook would join in the attack with 22...fxe6!, threatening ...♗f2, amongst other things. Then after 23 ♙e2 ♖e4+ 24 ♔a1 ♗f2 Black is winning: for example, 25 ♗e1 ♕d4+ 26 ♚b1 ♕d2, etc.

20 ♔c2? also loses: 20...♗c8+ 21 ♔d2 ♕xd4+ 22 ♔e1 (22 ♙d3 allows mate with 22...♗c2+! 23 ♔xc2 ♖b2#) 22...♖e3+ 23 ♙e2 fxe6, and despite White's extra rook, with his king stuck in the centre, his position is indefensible after, say, 24 ♖h3 ♙c3+ 25 ♔f1 ♗f8+ 26 ♙f3 ♙a5 27 ♖g3 ♙b6, followed by 28...e5 and 29...e4.

As such, the only viable option for White would be to return some of the material with 20 ♙b5!, although after 20...♖xb5+ 21 ♔a1 fxe6 Black's compensation for the exchange should be more than sufficient.

19...♗xf7 20 bxa3 ♖b6+



Exercise: What should White now try?

Answer: 21 ♙b5!

As in some lines we've already seen. "Against other moves the attack becomes overwhelming" (Lasker). Indeed, 21 ♔c2? loses quickly after 21...♗c7+ 22 ♔d2 ♕xd4+ 23 ♔e1 ♖c3+ 24 ♗d2 (or 24 ♔f2 ♙d4+) 24...♗e7+ (not 24...♙g5?? 25 ♖e8+ ♗h7 26 ♙d3+) 25 ♙e2 ♙g5.

21...♖xb5+ 22 ♔a1 ♗c7?

"Fifteen moves an hour were prescribed and I had consumed nearly two hours. Thus I have to make these moves in a hurry; 22...♖c4 was the logical continuation. It would have made it impossible for White to guard his second rank" (Lasker).

The rook could become active on either the f-file or the e-file, while with 22...♖c4! the threat is to take on d4 with decisive effect, and after 23 ♖g4 ♗e7! (or the curious computer suggestion 23...♙e5!, with the threat of 24...♗f2), Black threatens both 24...♗e2 and

24...♖e4. There is no better defence than 24 ♖h3 ♗xd4+ 25 ♘b1 ♕e2 26 ♗b3 ♖b2+ 27 ♗xb2 ♗xb2 28 ♘xb2 ♗e2+ and 29...♗xg2, with a winning endgame, in view of the material advantage and White's exposed king.

23 ♗d2!

"Now White can breathe again" (Lasker). White defends against the invasion of his second rank and gains a tempo to bring the h1-rook into play.

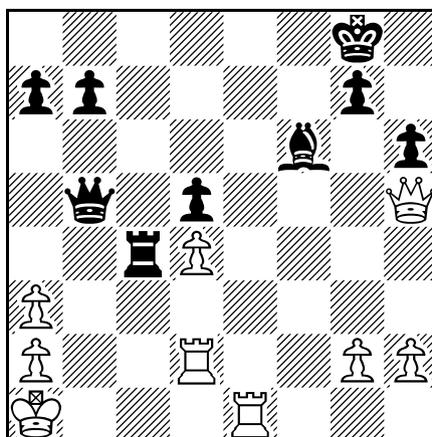
23...♖c4

Attacking d4, and with the idea of ...♗c6.

24 ♗hd1?

It's understandable to want to bolster the defence, but this gives Black the possibility of becoming more active.

With the more active defence 24 ♕e1! White defends d4 indirectly, due to the threat to invade on e8, and this would have been sufficient to draw the game, although White would have had to show some ingenuity.



Exercise: How can White equalize after 24...♗a5 25 ♕e8+ ♘h7 26 ♗f5+ g6?

Answer: Only one move draws, 27 ♕e7+!, and there is perpetual check after 27...♗xe7 28 ♗f7+ ♘h8 29 ♗e8+.

24...♖c3?

Black also misses the most active move and gives White a free hand. 24...♗c6! was winning. After 25 ♘b1 ♗g5 Black regains the exchange, as with 26 ♕e1 ♘h7! 27 ♗e2 ♗xd2 28 ♗xd2 ♗b6+ 29 ♘a1 ♖xd4 30 ♗c2+ ♗g6, and Black emerges with a winning rook ending, in which he is a pawn up with better pieces.

25 ♗f5!

Exploiting the fact that there is no very strong threat at present, White's queen takes up a more active position.

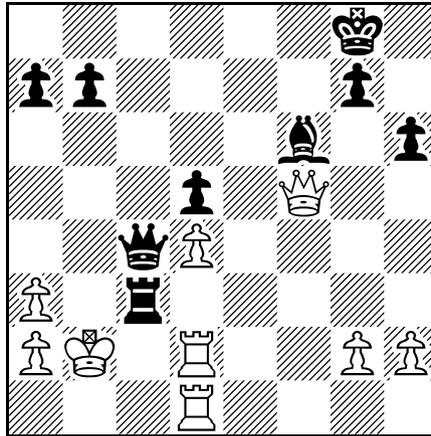
25...♔c4

Threatening to win with 26...♖c1+.

26 ♖b2?

“A mistake. 26 ♖b1 was indicated” (Lasker).

It's quite surprising that Pillsbury's move loses, whereas with 26 ♖b1! he could have retained the advantage after, for example, 26...♖xa3 27 ♖c1! ♗b5+ and now White can either keep the queens on with 28 ♖a1 ♖e3 (forced, due to the threat of 29 ♖c8+, forcing Black to go 29...♖f7, after which 30 ♖b2 wins) 29 ♖b2 (now 29 ♖c8+ ♖f7 30 ♖b2 fails to 30...♖e1+) 29...♗e8 30 ♗xd5+, or head for the ending with 28 ♖b2 ♗d3+ (forced) 29 ♗xd3 ♖xd3 30 ♖xb7 ♗xd4 31 ♖d7.



Exercise: How did Lasker continue?

Answer: 26...♖xa3!!

“This is some kind of mysticism: the second rook is also sacrificed on the very same square! I think that Pillsbury must have been unable to believe his eyes...” (Kasparov).

27 ♗e6+

If 27 ♖b1 then Black can play 27...♗xd4 28 ♖e1 ♗b4+ 29 ♖c1 ♗c3+ 30 ♗c2 ♗a1+ 31 ♗b1 ♖c3+ 32 ♖c2 ♗e3+ 33 ♖xe3 ♗xb1+ 34 ♖xb1 ♖xe3, and the rook ending should be a win for Black.

27...♖h7

Quicker was 27...♖h8 28 ♗e8+ ♖h7 29 ♖b1 ♗xd4, but there is nothing wrong with repeating moves.

28 ♖xa3

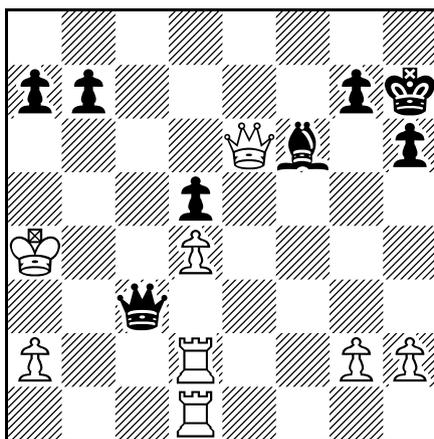
“If 28 ♖b1 ♗xd4 29 ♗f5+ g6 30 ♗d7+ ♗g7 wins” (Lasker). In this line 29 ♗e2 is no better, in view of 29...♗b4+! regaining the exchange, with a decisive advantage.

Instead, if 28 ♗f5+ Black should avoid 28...♖h8? because of 29 ♖b1! and as 29...♗xd4??

loses to 30 ♖f8+ and ♜xa3, he must play 29...♙a2 30 ♜xa2 ♜b3+ 31 ♚c1, when 31...♜xa2? loses to 32 ♜c8+ ♚h7 33 ♜c2+, so Black must force a draw with 31...♙g5+ 32 ♜ad2 ♜c3+ 33 ♜c2 ♜a1+.

Here Lasker would have repeated moves with 28...♙g8!, and now if 29 ♙b1 then 29...♙xd4 is winning, since with the king on g8 there is no 30 ♖f8+, while 29 ♜e6+ ♚h8 transposes to the line given in the note to move 27, above.

28...♜c3+ 29 ♙a4



Exercise: How Lasker finish off this impressive game?

Answer: 29...b5+!

It's mate in three moves.

30 ♙xb5 ♜c4+ 31 ♚a5 ♙d8+ 0-1

Later Lasker called this game the best of his career.

“Too many mistakes, you say? Please don't rush to write off this game, and just remember its unique historical importance! That day Caissa chose Lasker, and as we know today, the chess goddess did not err. Her cruel decision marked a fork in the lives of both players.

“Lasker, inspired by this victory, won the tournament convincingly. Later that year he crushed Steinitz in a rematch and kept his title for 25 more years, while Pillsbury, after the above disaster, collapsed and lost five games out of the remaining eight, ending up third behind Steinitz. He never achieved the same peak of playing strength as in that magnificent year and died eight years later at the age of 34.

“Who know how often Harry Nelson Pillsbury remembered that traumatic day in St. Petersburg and the chances he had missed – chances that would have changed his entire life and the course of chess history” (Kasparov).

The cause of the collapse of the only 23-year-old Pillsbury in the second half was apparently that he had contracted syphilis, an illness which began to be curable only in 1908. He

43...♖c5

This wins, but it isn't the strongest move. It was better to play either 43...♗b4, threatening 44...c3, or the combination 43...♗xe5! 44 ♗xe5 c3 45 ♗d3 c2 46 ♗c5 ♕xa4 47 ♗xa4 ♗b1, as given by Tarrasch.

44 ♗g4+ ♗h7 45 ♗xc4 ♗xd2 46 ♗xd2 ♗e8

Lasker has had several opportunities to shorten White's sufferings. Although in this case objectively the win was never in danger, what happens in practice is that the longer you take to finish off a won game, obviously the more chances of salvation you give the opponent.

Here the quickest way was to play 46...♗b4 47 ♗g3 ♕d5, followed by capturing the a4-pawn, preventing any white counterplay.

47 ♗f3?!

Now though, the win is easy. Better practical chances were offered with 47 ♗xb3 ♗xb3 48 f6, but with 48...♗g8 49 ♗c4 h5 Black could slowly reel in the win: for example, 50 ♗c6 (threatening 51 ♗b6 ♗c5 52 ♗b5) 50...♗b8, followed by ...♕g6 and at the right moment ...♗b4, capturing the a4-pawn.

Nunn indicated another way: 48...h5 49 ♗g7+ ♗h6 50 ♗xf7 ♗xe5, pointing out that although Black is winning, given how little material remains, he will need to play with the utmost care. As a sample winning line, Nunn gives: "51 ♗f8 ♗d4 52 ♗d8 ♗e6 53 ♗g8 ♗g5 54 h4 ♗h7 55 f7 ♗f5 56 ♗a8 ♕g7 57 ♗a7 ♗f6 58 ♕h2 ♗g4+ 59 ♕g3 ♗h6 and the f-pawn falls".

47...♗d3 48 ♗g3 ♕d5 49 e6 fxe6 0-1

After the fifteenth round Lasker was now leading the tournament with 11/14, followed by Maróczy with 9½.

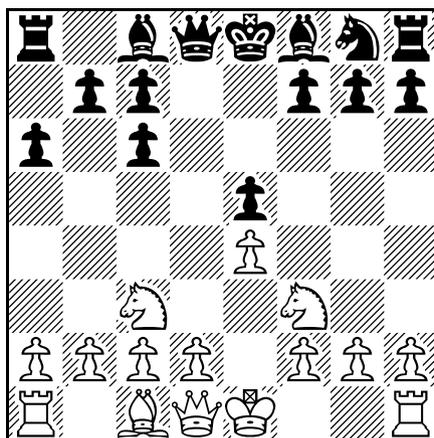
In the 18th round there came the encounter between Lasker and Tarrasch. Lasker was in the lead with 12½/16, followed by Tarrasch himself and Pillsbury, with 11. Let's see what happened in this great duel.

Game 18
E.Lasker-S.Tarrasch
Nuremberg 1896
Ruy Lopez

1 e4 e5 2 ♗f3 ♗c6 3 ♕b5 a6 4 ♕xc6

Lasker used the Exchange variation in many important games, and generally with success. He didn't necessarily reach advantageous positions, but his skill in the endgame, both simple and complex ones, was often sufficient to overcome the majority of his opponents, especially in the so-called "queenless middlegames", as Kasparov categorized the 'Berlin endgame'; that label could also be applied to many endgames arising from the Exchange variation.

4...dxc6 5 ♖c3



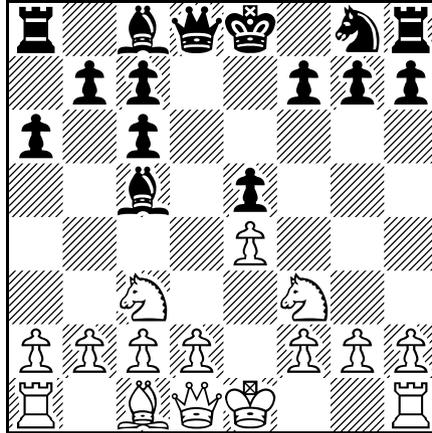
“For a change, Lasker does not adopt here his usual variation 5 d4”, commented Tarasch. However, this was only the third time that Lasker employed the Exchange variation in a serious game.

Lasker had played 5 d4, and lost, against Steinitz in the thirteenth game of their 1894 world championship match and, curiously, on his debut with the Exchange variation, against Mortimer in London 1892, for the only time in his career he played ‘Fischer’s move’ 5 0-0.

We can deduce that Lasker didn’t like to decide the location of his monarch so soon, and subsequently he alternated between 5 ♖c3 and 5 d4.

Capablanca, annotating his win against Janowski in St. Petersburg 1914, wrote that he and Alekhine had analyzed this position on several occasions. Alekhine considered at that time that 5 ♖c3 was superior to the more popular 5 d4, and in the St. Petersburg event he played it against Lasker himself, “And gained a superior position, and if he subsequently lost, it was due to a serious error on his part”, according to Capablanca.

5...♗c5



As $5 \dots \text{Nc3}$ does not threaten anything, there are many ways to reply. All of $5 \dots \text{Bg4}$, $5 \dots \text{Nd6}$ and $5 \dots \text{Qd6}$ have been played, but both Tarrasch and later Capablanca stated that $5 \dots \text{f6}$ was the most precise, and that remains the main move.

Question: But $5 \dots \text{Bc5}$ is a developing move, and it prepares castling. What can possibly be wrong with it?

Answer: Yes, it's a developing move, but that's not the priority in this position. The snag is that after a later Be3 by White, if the bishops are exchanged, Black loses one element of his compensation for his damaged pawn structure, which is the bishop-pair.

6 d3

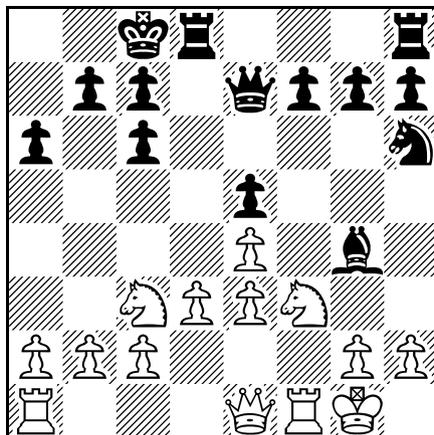
6 Nxe5 gives White no advantage because of $6 \dots \text{Bxf2+}$, regaining the pawn after 7 Qxf2 Bd4+ .

6...Bg4 7 Be3

I recall that in my youth the Argentinean master, Gregorio Lastra, emphasized to me that Fischer "always" put the question to the bishop in such situations, to force a decision: either exchange or have just one diagonal. In the event of 7 h3 Bh5 White has gained the extra possibility of playing $g4$ at some point.

7...Qd6

Tarrasch was convinced that this was the best move available to Black, since $7 \dots \text{Bxe3}$ 8 fxe3 "would have opened the f-file, giving White chances for future operations". After $8 \dots \text{Qe7}$ 9 0-0 Black made a move that Capablanca described as "bold play, typical of Janowski", which curiously reduced the opening of the f-file to merely secondary importance; he played $9 \dots \text{0-0-0}$, and after 10 Qe1 Nh6 , we now challenge you with an exercise which for once isn't drawn from one of Lasker's games.



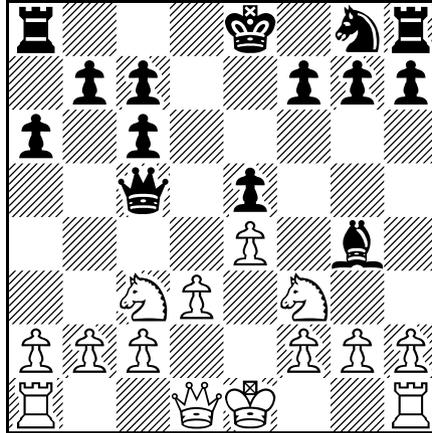
Exercise: What would you play with White?

Answer: Let's hand over to Capablanca: "The problem for White now is to advance his b-pawn to b5 as fast as he can. If he plays an immediate b4, Black will take it. If he plays first a3 and then b4, he will have to protect his b-pawn before he can go on and play a4 and b5. Here White played a quite unusual move, but which, given the circumstances, was the best, since White can play b4 and a4 right away, to continue with b5."

The continuation was 11 ♖b1! f6 12 b4 ♘f7 13 a4, 1-0 in 31 moves, J.Capablanca-D.Janowski, St. Petersburg 1914.

8 ♘xc5 ♚xc5

Tarrasch considered that Lasker's decision to exchange pieces came about because this was the final phase of the tournament and "he preferred not to run any risks"; it is difficult to agree that this was the only reason. Lasker was an excellent endgame player and it can't be ruled out that he was relying on his strength in that area.



Exercise: White has neutralized Black's bishop-pair and must decide how to continue. How do you think Lasker continued here?

Answer: 9 ♖d2

Question: What? Letting his pawns be doubled? Why not the natural 9 h3?

Answer: We can suppose that Lasker considered that 9 h3 ♟xf3 10 ♖xf3 ♞e7 wasn't very promising and in fact it's hard to see any problems for Black here. He can castle on either wing, he has no problems of mobility and there is no obvious plan by White that Black needs to fear.

Lasker's move threatens to win with 10 ♖g5 ♟xf3 11 ♖xg7. It's easily prevented, but it also gives Black the chance to damage White's pawn structure. But is this really good for Black? Lasker thought not.

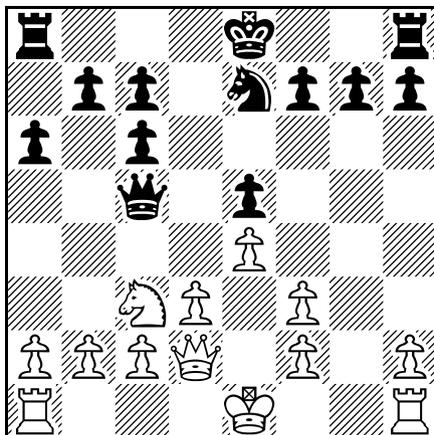
9...♟xf3?!

As in similar positions from the Exchange variation, this damage to the white structure isn't disadvantageous for White if can play a later f4, getting rid of the pawn in order to end up with more pawns in the centre.

After the game Tarrasch criticized his decision: "A grievous misjudgement, bringing disadvantage to Black. 9...f6 was indicated".

The threat of 10 ♖g5 can also be parried with 9...♞e7, since then 10 ♖g5 can be answered with 10...♟xf3 11 gxf3 ♞g6.

10 gxf3 ♞e7



Exercise: How to continue now as White?

Answer: 11 0-0-0

A really surprising decision; Lasker lets the opportunity to play f4 slip by. This advance would have given White the advantage in the centre.

11...♞g6 12 ♖e3!

Tarrasch: “An excellent move which accentuates all Black’s weaknesses”.

12...♚xe3+?!

This is a clearer inaccuracy; now White’s task of playing f4 is made easier, and Black is completely passive.

Tarrasch admitted his error: “Not good, because it strengthens White’s centre. But after 12...♚e7 Black could not have castled Q-side on account of ♖a7, whereas castling K-side would have been dangerous on account of the open g-file. Black is paying the penalty of his mistake on the 9th move.”

Everything indicates that this evaluation is too pessimistic. In this line with 12...♚e7, followed by 13...0-0, Black isn’t obliged to await execution along the g-file, but instead can react with ...f5, reaching a reasonable position: for example, after 13 ♘e2 0-0 14 f4 (or 14 ♙dg1) Black can play 14...f5!, and isn’t worse after 15 fxe5 fxe4 16 dxe4 ♘xe5, or 16...♚f7. The resource ...f5 is something that we should keep in mind for the rest of the game.

Preparing queenside castling wasn’t bad either, in this case with 12...♚d6, and after 13 ♘e2 c5! (preventing the incursion ♖a7) and 14...0-0-0, Black doesn’t stand badly.

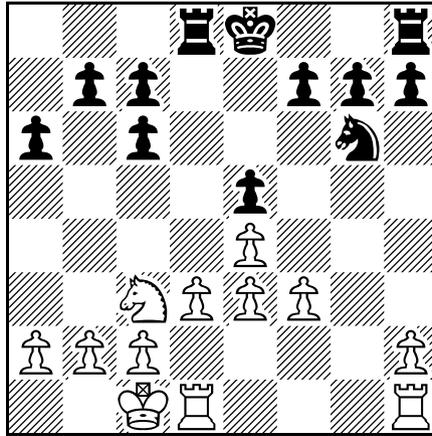
13 fxe3

“The exchange of queens has also allowed White to restrict the enemy knight and prevented it from jumping to the square f4”, commented Tarrasch.

Nunn described the position in this way: “White’s advantage in this queenless middle-game may be slight, but it’s permanent. Black has few active possibilities, while White can

easily play f4 and this, when combined with the action of his rooks on the f- and g-files, will put Black's kingside under pressure".

13...♖d8



As in the most endings, although this is a 'queenless middlegame', the king is fine in the centre.

Question: I understand, but wouldn't it also be good here to play 13...0-0, to look for counterplay with ...f5?

Answer: That was possible, but wouldn't equalize. After 13...0-0 White shouldn't rush to play 14 d4?! because, as you say, Black has 14...f5!, and White can't keep his structure intact; it can be considered neither weak nor strong. However, before defining his central structure White can play 14 h4!, answering 14...h5 with 15 ♖dg1, while if 14...f5 then 15 h5 ♗e7 and, say, 16 ♖h3, defending f3 to be able to recapture with the knight on e4, when White can continue to improve his position with ♗d2, ♖g1, etc, before eventually advancing in the centre.

14 ♗e2!

There were several attractive moves here, such as 14 h4, but Lasker first makes the 'obligatory' move, the most flexible one, which will be useful for advancing his pawns either with f4 and/or d4.

Tarrasch praised his move: "The appropriate strategy for White is to play f4".

14...f6

After 14...0-0 White could also continue with 15 f4, and if 15...exf4 16 exf4 f5 he could obtain a passed pawn with 17 e5; another option is 15 h4 f5 16 h5 ♗e7 17 f4, with a preferable position in each case.

15 ♖hg1 ♗f7

"Here the king is too exposed against the possible opening of the f-file. Therefore cas-

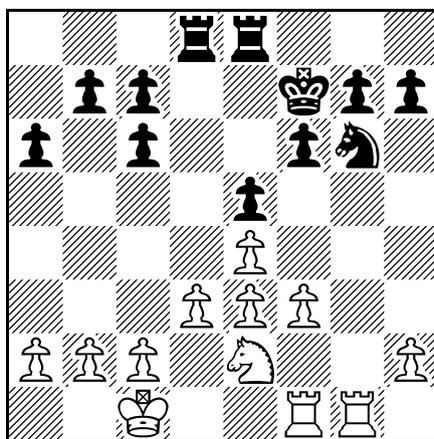
ting would have been preferable”, according to Tarrasch. Curiously today’s engines disagree; it’s true that in the game having the king on the f-file was decisive in the end, but only due to an error by Tarrasch later.

16 ♖df1

Lasker continues to prepare f4; he wants to advance only when he has all his pieces in the best positions.

16...♗he8

Tarrasch: “Black takes precautions against the advance of White’s centre pawns after the eventual advance of the f- pawn”.



Exercise: How did Lasker continue?

Answer: 17 ♘g3!

Once again Lasker is in no hurry. He postponed his break because after 17 f4 Black is well placed to blockade the passed pawn that could be created after 17...exf4 18 exf4 f5 19 e5 with 19...♘f8 and ...♗e6, so first Lasker controls f5.

17...♘f8

The knight retreats before being dislodged with h4-h5. “With the hope that the knight will obtain a dominant position, but it will be demonstrated that this isn’t feasible.” (Tarrasch).

18 f4

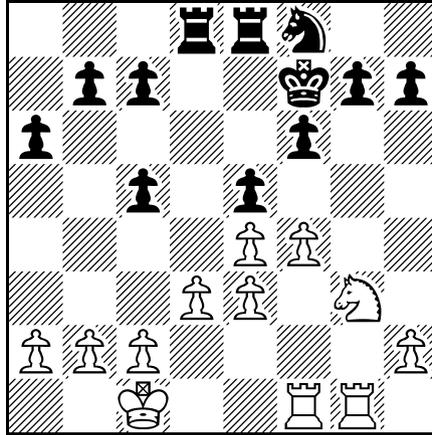
Now, finally, after all the preparations, Lasker carries out his planned break, with a concrete threat that Tarrasch overlooks.

18...c5?

A tactical error, which allows White to exploit the ‘X-ray’ pressure of the f1-rook against the black king.

Playing 18...exf4 19 exf4 would be a concession; White would have improved his central

structure. It was better to play either 18...♞d7, in order to recapture on e5 with the knight, or else 18...g6, when 19 fxe5 ♜xe5 20 d4 ♜e6 21 e5, threatening ♞e4, looks very good, but after 21...♞d7 22 ♞e4 ♚g7 it isn't clear that the inevitable exchanges will be in White's favour. In both cases it would be better for White to advance 19 h4!, increasing the pressure on the black position before advancing the d- and/or f- pawn(s).



Exercise: How did Lasker now gain a decisive advantage?

Answer: 19 ♞h5!

19 h4 was possible, with advantage, but Lasker's move is crushing.

"Lasker has played admirably since move 12 and now forces a decisive gain of material", commented Tarrasch.

19...g6

There is nothing better; 19...♞e6 is answered with 20 f5 ♞g5 21 h4.

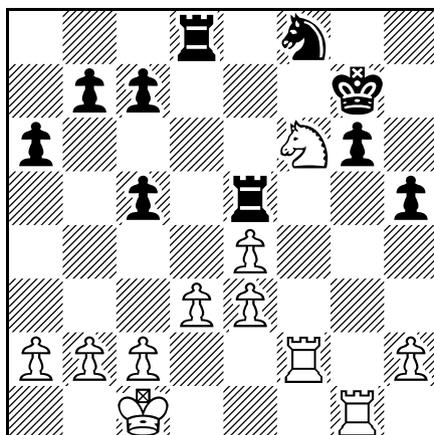
20 fxe5!

Tarrasch overlooked this 'petite combinaison'.

20...♜xe5

Resigning himself to the loss of a vital pawn. Instead, 20...gxh5? allows mate with 21 ♜xf6+ ♚e7 22 ♜g7#.

21 ♞xf6 ♚g7 22 ♜f2 h5



Exercise: White's advantage is decisive. The advance of his central pawns can't be prevented. Among several good moves here, Lasker selects the best one – what is it?

Answer: 23 ♘d5

Before the knight is immobilized with 23...c6.

Going back, 22...c6 was more tenacious, preventing ♘d5; 22...h5 prevented ♘g4, but from d5 the knight has greater mobility.

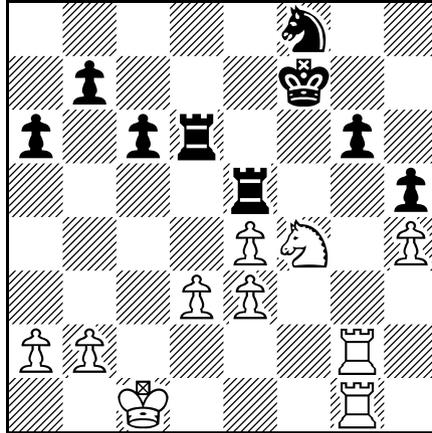
23...c6 24 ♗f4 c4

This exchange of pawns doesn't change the situation, there is no way to put pressure on the white centre.

25 ♖fg2 ♗d6 26 h4

Lasker continues to prepare the advance of his centre pawns; first he improves everything as well as he possibly can.

26...cxd3 27 cxd3 ♕f7



Exercise: How did Lasker now continue to make progress?

Answer: 28 ♖g5!

The exchange of rooks removes the obstacle preventing the vital advance of the e4-pawn.

28...♗xg5 29 ♖xg5 ♗f6 30 e5 ♗f5 31 ♗xf5+ gx5 32 d4

White has an ideal position, with an extra pawn and a dominating knight, which is also attacking the pawn on h5.

32...♔e7 33 ♔d2

One of the ideas is to play 34 ♔e2 and 35 ♔f3, when he would be ready to play 36 ♖xh5, since after 36...♗g6 the h4-pawn could be defended with 37 ♔g3.

33...c5

This break grants White two connected passed pawns, but by now there was no defence.

34 ♔d3 cxd4 35 exd4 ♗d8 36 d5 ♗d7 37 ♔d4 ♗c7 38 b4 ♗d7 39 ♔c5 ♗c7 40 d6+ ♗d7 41 ♔d5 1-0

With this game Lasker won the tournament earlier than expected, but he lost in the last round to the young Charousek. Lasker was impressed with his talent and prophesied a great future for him. He forecast that Charousek would be challenging him for the world title within a few years, a prophecy that could not be fulfilled, because of the (at that time) fatal illness tuberculosis which 'Comet Charousek' caught shortly after.

Second Steinitz-Lasker World Championship Match: 1896/97

Immediately after losing the world title to Lasker, in the middle of 1894, Steinitz challenged him to a return match, which Lasker accepted, but he did not want to play immediately.