



COLUMNISTS

From the Archives

Hosted by
Mark Donlan



From the Archives...

Since it came online many years ago, ChessCafe.com has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

Watch for an item to be posted online periodically throughout each month. We will update the [ChessCafe](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

One of the great unanswered questions in chess history is why Paul Morphy ceased playing chess. Did he lose interest? Did he suffer some mental imbalance as a result of not being able to play Staunton when he went to Europe? Alas, these questions may never be answered. There exists a letter, however, wherein for the first, and as far is known, the only time, Morphy states as best he ever did, why he no longer played chess.

Paul Morphy Letter

February 4, 1863

From: Paul Morphy
To: Daniel Fiske
Date: February 4, 1863

My dear Fiske,

Pray, do not be too prompt in condemning the tardiness of my reply, for in this case at least, it can be justified. I have purposely abstained from returning an immediate answer to your favor, in the hope of being enabled to take a trip to Vienna, not for the sake of chess-playing, but activated by the very natural desire to see you after such a lapse of time as has gone by since my last visit to New York, and inquire about old friends and associations made doubly dear by the sad events that are transpiring in our distracted America. Much as I would

enjoy a visit to Germany for those and other reasons, I am sorry to say that it will not be in my power to leave Paris at present. I am here with my brother in law and part of my family, the remainder being in New Orleans. We are all following with intense anxiety the fortunes of the tremendous conflict now raging beyond the Atlantic, for upon the issue depends our all in life. Under such circumstances you will readily understand that I should feel little disposed to engage in the objectless strife of the chess board. Besides, you will remember that as far back as two years ago I stated to you in New York my firm determination to abandon chess altogether. I am more strongly confirmed than ever in the belief that the time devoted to chess is literally frittered away. It is, to be sure, a most exhilarating sport, but it is only a sport; and it is not to be wondered at that such as have been passionately addicted to the charming pastime should one day ask themselves whether sober reason does not advise its utter dereliction. I have, for my own part, resolved not to be moved from my purpose of not engaging in chess hereafter. The few games that I have played here have been altogether private and SANS FACON. I never patronize the Cafe de la Regence; it is a low, and, to borrow a Gallicism, ILL FREQUENTED establishment.

Hoping that you will excuse my dilatoriness, and wishing you health and happiness,

I remain Yours truly, /s/ Paul Morphy

P.S. Lybrandt begs to be kindly remembered to you.



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