



C O L U M N I S T S

The Kibitzer

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The London-Vienna Correspondence Match (Part 2)

The Kibitzer last month introduced the great 1872-74 London v Vienna correspondence match in which Wilhelm Steinitz was a leading participant. Two games were played simultaneously for a stake of 100 Pounds. We looked in detail last month at the game where Vienna played White. In this article, I discuss the game which actually decided the match

Contemporary comments to the game are taken from the notes written by Steinitz and Potter, London's principal players, which were published in *The Field* and afterwards with some amendments in the *City of London Chess Magazine* which Potter edited.

The game in which London played White has received less attention than the one we saw last month. In many ways it is a much harder game to understand. Whereas the "Vienna Game" feature a theory debate with excellent defence by Steinitz and Potter, together with their opponents missing an opportunity, the "London Game" was much more positional in character. London anticipated a variation of the English Opening that has started to become trendy in the past decade, but modern theoreticians have overlooked this important game!

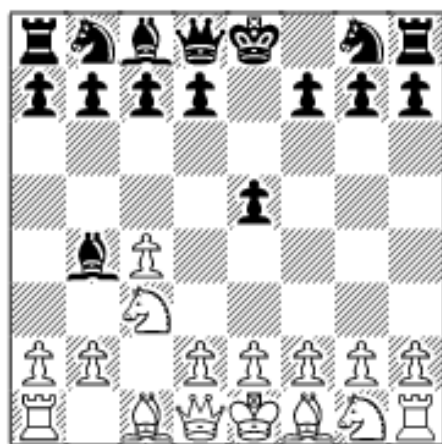
Vienna can therefore be forgiven for misjudging the opening but their error at move 11 was compounded by a mistake at move 21 which the London players also mis-analysed. Steinitz and Potter then brought home the point with some delicate endgame play.

I am preparing much more detailed annotations for a future anthology of great correspondence chess games, so I would welcome comments from masters and grandmasters about the turning points of the game.

The "London" Game (English Opening, A21)**White: London Black: Vienna****1 c4 e5 2 Nc3**

"This deviation from the trodden path of 2 e3 or 2 a3 was adopted as a novel experiment, and as far as the present game goes to prove, it does not lead to any disadvantage for the first player." That comment reads strangely today because White's almost invariable choice in recent decades has been 2 Nc3. The only reason to play 2 a3 would be to prevent Black's next but surely it does not need to be prevented?

2...Bb4



This is a line which even today is not well known or deeply studied.

Steinitz and Potter call it “A very good move which, if properly followed up, should have enabled Black to obtain a perfectly even game.”

3 Nd5

“Compulsory, as White could neither afford to allow their pawns to be doubled at this early stage of the game, nor could they without disadvantage protect the N

with the Q.”

Most modern sources agree this is the only testing reply.

3...Be7

Though Black have played the Bishop twice, they do not really lose a move, as it is now placed in a position where, as the sequence shows, White are compelled to exchange it for one of their active pieces.”

This is the best defence according to Carsten Hansen’s recent book, *Guide to the English Opening 1...e5*, which gives far more detail on the 2...Bb4 line than any other book I have seen. Even so, the author does not appear to have been aware of the present game. Inadvertently revealing his inadequate research, he states that 2...Bb4 was first played in the 1970s

Other bishop retreats – to a5, c5 and even d6 – have been tried. Hansen goes so far as to give 3...Ba5 a ‘?’ and says it “leads to a solid edge for White without too much difficulty”. Play normally goes 4 b4 c6 5 bxa5 cxd5 6 cxd5 leaves Black with a soft spot on d6 says MCO citing some recent master games. 6...Qxa5 (6...Nf6 7 Qa4!) 7 e4! Nf6 and now both 8 f3 and 8 Bd3 have been successful for White in master practice.

If 3...Bd6!? (intending ...c6 and ...Bc7) the best reply is 4 d4! c6 5 dxe5 Bxe5 6 Nf3 (Salov-Kramnik, Linares 1993) but there has been very little experience with Black’s third move.

Attempts to refute 3...Bc5!? have been unconvincing according to De Firmian in his recent edition of *Modern Chess Openings*. White obviously would like to reply 4 b4 (Others lead to nothing clear.) but now there is not general agreement about where the bishop should go next.

The main line in NCO and Hansen’s book goes instead 4...Bf8 5 Qa4 c6 6 Nc3 d6 7 Nf3 Nf6 8 g3 g6 9 Bg2 Bg7 10 0–0 0–0 11 b5 e.g. 11...Re8 12 bxc6 bxc6 13 Ba3 Qc7 14 Rac1 Nbd7 15 d3 with pressure on the Black queenside (Banas-Rausis, Viernheim 1992);

MCO, however, recommends 4...Bd4 when after 5 Rb1 a5 (or 5...c6) there has not been sufficient experience to know if White can get any advantage.

4 d4

Many books do not mention this natural follow-up. Instead 4 Nf3 is the only move mentioned in *Winning With The English* (by Ribli and Kallai) and in *English Opening, Classical and Indian* by Bagirov.

4...exd4

This move is positionally suspect but has hardly ever been played Hansen's book is about the only one to mention the possibility.

Instead, 4...d6 is recommended in Carsten Hansen's book. He says: "Black does best to keep the situation in the centre fluid; the alternatives lead to more comfortable positions for White." Whether Black can equalize is a different matter, e.g. 5 e4 Nf6 (5...c6 6 Nxe7 Qxe7 7 Ne2 f5 8 dxe5 Qxe5 9 exf5 Nf6 10 Qd4 Bxf5 11 Bf4 Qa5+ 12 Qc3! Qxc3+ 13 Nxc3 favoured White in Kasparov-Shirov, Novgorod 1994) 6 Nxe7 Qxe7 7 f3 exd4 8 Qxd4 Nc6 (8...c5 9 Qd2 Be6 10 Bd3 Nc6 11 Ne2 Karpov-Illescas, Dos Hermanas 1992) 9 Qc3 0-0 10 Ne2 Nh5!? 11 g4 Qh4+ 12 Kd1 Nf6 13 Ng3 Be6 14 Qe3 gave White an edge in Lalic-Shirov, Moscow ol 1994.

5 Bf4!?

This actually looks strong? London avoided 5 Qxd4 which they thought drawish. Hansen's book reckons White may get an edge with 5 Nf3!?

5...c6!?

"London did not consider this move as good as 5...Na6, but the Viennese no doubt gave it sufficient examination, and must have arrived at a different conclusion." To the modern eye, 5...Na6 looks passive, as does 5...d6.

After the move played by Vienna, White cannot win material by 6 Nc7+ because of 6...Qxc7! 7 Bxc7 Bb4+ 8 Qd2 Bxd2+. So London obtains the bishop pair and regains the pawn.

6 Nxe7 Nxe7 7 Qxd4 0-0 8 e4 d5 9 0-0-0 Be6

"If 9...Qa5 instead, White would have obtained a splendid game as follows: 10 Bd2! Qxa2 11 Bc3+- f6 12 cxd5 cxd5 13 exd5 Bf5 14 Bc4 Qb1+ 15 Kd2 Qc2+ 16 Ke1 with a winning attack".

10 Nf3 Nd7 11 Ng5



11...h6?

“In selecting this move, the Viennese players probably did not sufficiently take into account the effect of White’s reply. We should have considered 11...c5 followed by ...d4 preferable, as Black would then have obtained a passed pawn, though White would still have kept a good game even in that case.”

Modern computers agree with this opinion. London now played superbly to prove an advantage.

12 exd5 Bf5

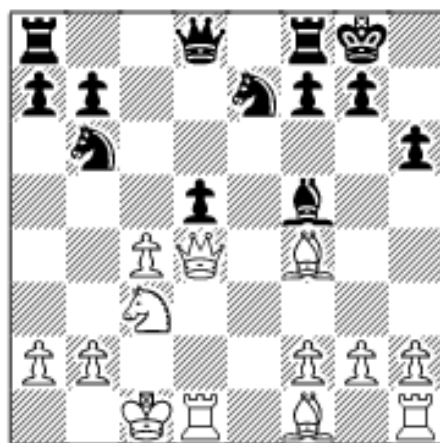
“Best. If 12...hxg5 13 dxe6 remaining with a pawn ahead and a fine position” (Steinitz and Potter) while 12...cxd5 13 Nxe6 fxe6 14 cxd5 exd5 15 Kb1 with advantage was a variation that Chess Tiger 14.0 came up with when I showed it this position.

13 Ne4 cxd5 14 Nc3

“By a series of manoeuvres, White have now accomplished the long-desired object of bringing their N round to the protection of their exposed King.”

Thus we see that a 19th century world champion, Steinitz, came up with a concept that is totally beyond today’s computers which either want to play the N to d6 or (at move 13) to exchange the knight for the inferior bishop on e6. It can be seen that the move 11 Ng5, apparently creating kingside threats, was a feint by which the knight from c3 was transferred to c3 without loss of tempo. Tactical variations enabled the intermediary square e4 to be cleared at the right moment. That is why 11...h6 was such a bad idea: since the knight could not be captured on either of the next two turns, it actually assisted White to carry out his hidden plan, whereas the correct 11...c5 followed by ...d4 would have hindered it and obliged White to try a new tack.

14...Nb6!



“A very strong move which seemed to give Black the best of the game in the vast majority of variations examined by us, and in our opinion could only safely be met by the reply actually adopted.”

15 Be5!

“The turning point in the game, as by this move Black’s contemplated attack is completely frustrated. 15 cxd5 or 15 c5 were much inferior.” The variations given by Steinitz and Potter were as follows:

a) 15 cxd5 Rc8 16 d6 Ned5 “with a splendid attack, for if 17 Bd3 (17 Be2 Re8 threatening Rxe2 or Re4, winning easily.) 17...Bxd3 18 Rxd3 Rc4 winning a piece”. Chess Tiger 14 prefers 15...Nexd5 16 Qe5 Nxc3 17 bxc3 Qc8 for Black.

b) 15 c5 Nd7 16 Bd6 Be6 “threatening ...Nf5”. Here 17 Qd2 counters the threat and renders this variation unconvincing.

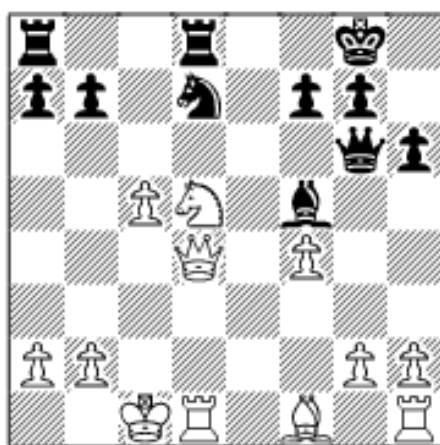
15...Nc6 16 Qf4 Nxe5 17 Qxe5 Qg5+ 18 f4 Qg6 19 c5

Not 19 cxd5? Rac8 20 Bb5 a6 and Black wins.

19...Nd7 20 Qd4!

Not 20 Qxd5?! Rac8 21 Qxb7 Nxc5 and Ne4, “with a fine game”.

20...Rfd8 21 Nxd5



21...Kf8?

“At this point, many beautiful variations had been prepared for by London if Black had played otherwise. Of these we give the two most important.”

a) 21...Kh8 22 b4 Be4 23 Nc3 Nf6 24 Qxd8+ Rxd8 25 Rxd8+ Kh7 26 Rd4 Qf5 27 g3 Bxh1 28 Bd3 Be4 (Best for if 28...Ne4 White replies by 29 Nxe4 and the Q has no escape) 29 Nxe4 Kh8 best 30 Ng5 and wins, for if 30...Qc8 White wins the Q by 31 Rd8+ Qxd8 32 Nxf7+;

b) 21...Qe6! was underestimated by Steinitz and Potter. They originally printed the following variation which I and my computers find very fishy: 22 Nc7 (22 Bc4? Nxc5!) 22...Qxa2 23 Nxa8 Re8 (23...Rc8 24 Kd2) 24 Bd3 Bxd3 25 Qxd3 Nxc5 26 Qa3 Nb3+ 27 Kc2 Rc8+ 28 Kd3 Nc5+ 29 Ke3 Qe6+ 30 Kf2 Ne4+ 31 Kg1 “and White are out of danger”.

Although he may be right about the final position, this whole variation looks like typical Steinitz wishful thinking and strong improvements for Black are likely at various stages. I wasn’t surprised therefore to find a partial and rather pompous retraction in a later issue.

“*The Illustrated London News*, in annotating the London Game in the Vienna match, has drawn attention to variation (x) of Messrs. Steinitz and Potter’s analysis of that game. Our contemporary has pointed out a preferable move for Black at move 28 of the variation, viz.,...Nc1+, which ultimately would end in Black having a drawn game by perpetual check. We think our contemporary is right in drawing the inference that 21...Qe6 was a better move for Black than that which they adopted, though the position from which our contemporary deduces a drawn game is necessarily a suppositious one, and it is not certain that it must have been arrived at from the best play on both sides.

“Variation (x) is so far invalidated that it gives only a drawn game, but Vienna had to take into account the other replies at White’s command, and which, though not touched upon by Messrs. Steinitz and Potter, would require to be examined before it could be proved that the Austrians had power to force a draw at that point. The game, however, was then, comparatively speaking, in its youth, and it is possible enough that it was not until 22 Ne3 that London had a winning position”

Presumably “our contemporary” was Johannes Zukertort, the great rival to Steinitz at this period. The “variation x” referred to is the line 21...Qe6! above, replacing Black’s 28...Nc5+? by the obviously superior 28...Nc1+! e.g. 29 Ke3 (29 Rxc1? Qd5+ 30 Ke3 Re8+ 31 Kf2 Qd2+ winning Q for R after 32 Kg3 Re3+) 29...Qe6+ 30 Kf3 Qc6+ 31 Kf2 (31 Ke3 Re8+) 31...Qc2+ 32 Kf3 (32 Kg3 Ne2+) 32...Qc6+ 33 Kf2 drawing by repetition.

22 Ne3!

“We consider this to be the move which decided the game in our favour. At first sight it may appear very hazardous to leave the King exposed to the attacks arising from Black’s moving ...Rac8, and moreover Nc3 would appear on the face of it the proper line of play to adopt; but a searching analysis convinced us that the last-mentioned move gave London an unsatisfactory position, if properly replied to. The move in the text exerted a commanding influence during the subsequent portion of the game, both for offensive and defensive positions.”

22...Kg8

Had Black played ...Nf6, this is the point referred to in the notes to the first game where White would have sacrificed the queen for two rooks, “followed by Rd6 with a splendid game”.

23 Bc4 Rac8 24 Rhe1 Be4

If 24...Be6 25 g4 Nxc5 (25...Bxc4 26 Nxc4 Nxc5 27 Qxd8+ Rxd8 28 Rxd8+ Kh7 29 Ree8 Nd3+ 30 Kd2) 26 Qxd8+ Rxd8 27 Rxd8+ Kh7 28 f5 Qf6 29 fxe6 Qxd8 30 exf7 b5 31 Rf1 Nd7 32 Rd1 bxc4 (32...Qg5 33 Rxd7 Qxe3+ 34 Kc2 Qf2+ 35 Rd2 and ultimately wins) 33 Rxd7 Qf6 34 Nf5 c3 35 b3. Black, after exhausting their waiting moves with the pawns, must ultimately move ...Kh8 when White wins as follows Re7 Kh7; Re6 Qxe6; 40 f8N+ and wins. “The foregoing variations afford most striking illustrations of a principle...namely that rook and one minor piece and a well-supported passed pawn on the 7th rank win in the large majority of cases against the queen.”

25 b4 b6 26 Qd6 bxc5

“This move involves the loss of a piece for three pawns, leaving Black two pawns ahead. Vienna must otherwise either have submitted to the exchange of queens, with a bad position, or else, if attempting to win the Q, the game would have proceeded thus:- 26...Nf6 27 Qxd8+ Rxd8 28 Rxd8+ Kh7 29 c6 Bxc6 30 Rd6 Be4 31 g4 followed by h4, winning easily.”

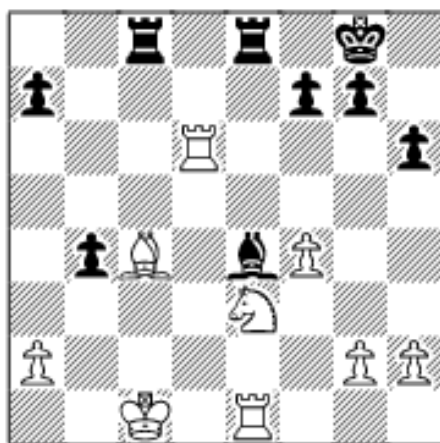
Note that 26...Qxd6 27 Rxd6 Nf6 28 Rxd8+ Rxd8 29 cxb6 axb6 (with clear advantage to White) was preferable according to Chess Tiger 14.0 which

gives 26...bxc5 a double question mark. That may be rather harsh as the tricky endgame that arose was maybe Vienna's best practical chance.

27 Qe7 cxb4 28 Rxd7 Re8 29 Qd6 Qxd6

"If Black had played here 29...Re6 White's only reply would have been R checks followed by Qf8, as it would have been fatal for them to have made the more natural-looking move of (30 Qd4?? Rxc4+ 31 Nxc4 Bb1 32 Ne3 Rxe3)..

30 Rxd6



30...Bxg2!? 31 Rd4

"It was extremely difficult to determine here the policy which should be adopted. The variations arising from 31 Kd2!? Rxe3 32 Bxf7+ Kxf7 33 Rxe3 were carefully examined, but seemed to leave too many possibilities open for a draw. By the move in the text, London preserves the piece but will remain with two pawns behind. In playing thus, we intended to reject the various lines of play which would have preserved the pawns on the K

side, arriving at the conclusion that by abandoning these pawns we could win with the single pawn on the QR file."

"Of course, many curious variations might have arisen afterwards which, from want of space, we cannot enter into. We may mention that in analysing the different variations at this time, now twelve months since, we assumed that the best line of play would in all probability lead to the identical positions in which the game actually terminated. This can be vouched by the various leading players of the City of London Chess Club, to whom we, from time to time, showed the results of the conclusions at which we had arrived."

31...Bd5 32 Rxd5 Rxc4+ 33 Nxc4 Rxe1+ 34 Kc2 Re4 35 Rd8+ Kh7 36 Kb3 Rxf4 37 Ra8 g5 38 Rxa7 h5 39 Kxb4 g4 40 a4 Rf2 41 a5 h4 42 Rd7! Rxh2

"An important diversion from the main line of play might have arisen here, viz.:- 42...g3 43 hxg3 hxg3 44 Rd1 f5! had to be tried. Then 45 a6 Ra2 46 Na3 Rb2+ 47 Ka5 Rb8 best 48 Nb5 f4 49 a7 Ra8 50 Rd7+ Kg6 51 Nd4+- and wins, as the N and R stop the two pawns, while White brings the K to the support of his pawn and attacks the R at b7."

43 Rxf7+

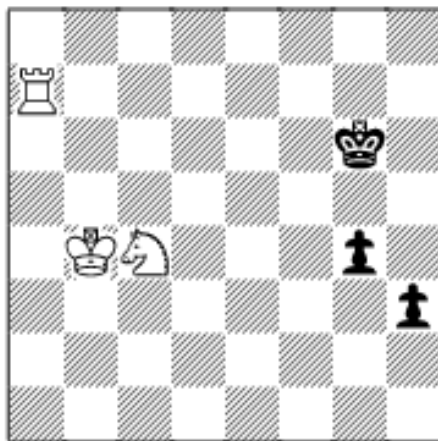
Apparently a Viennese newspaper reported that White could not win after 42 Rd7, overlooking that White would be able to leave the rook en prise.

43...Kg6 44 a6 Re2

If 44...Kxf7, White plays 45 a7 and Black cannot then stop the pawn from

queening, e.g.:- 45...Ra2 46 Na3 Rb2+ 47 Kc3 and wins

Again, if Black play 44...Ra2 the following continuation ensues:- 45 a7 (Threatening Na3 as above) 45...Rxa7 (best) 46 Rxa7 h3 (see Analysis Diagram):

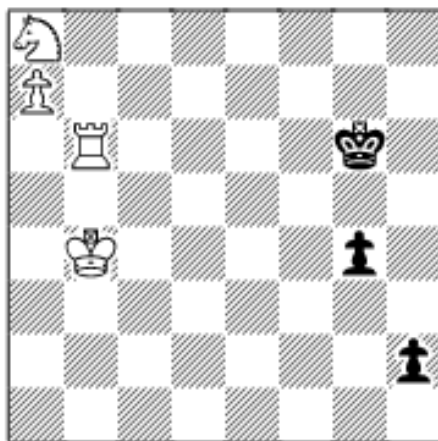


47 Ne3 g3 (if 47...Kg5 instead, White wins by 48 Rf7) 48 Ra1 Kg5 49 Rf1 h2 50 Kc3 Kh4 51 Kd3 Kh3 52 Ke2 g2 53 Rf3+ and wins as N takes g-pawn with a check.

45 a7 Re8 46 Rb7 Ra8 47 Nb6 h3

“Several variations arise here from 47...Rxa7 but London wins in all of them, being able to force the same play of play as last above mentioned, by bringing the N to c4 and then to e3.”

48 Nxa8 h2 49 Rb6+! 1-0



“Vienna were playing for their last chance of drawing the game; for if London had not given the check in the last move, Vienna, queening first, would have been able to draw the game by perpetual check. As it stands, the following continuation might have arisen, which will show the object of White’s last move: 49...Kg5 50 Nc7 (White will also win here by giving another check, with the R at b5.) 50...h1Q 51 a8Q Qxa8 (If Black, instead, here begin to check with the Q, White will be able to reach the square b7, and

afterwards move to a7, where R or N can interpose; for which purpose the R has been removed on White’s 49th move.) 52 Nxa8 g3 53 Nc7 g2 54 Ne6+ and wins, for if Black moves the K to g4 or h4 or f5 White wins by Nd4, threatening check with the R or with the N accordingly,. Against all other moves, Nf4 wins. Kc4 on the 53rd move would also win.

Conclusion of the match

Thus an epic contest came to a close, which does seem on the whole to have been played in a very sporting spirit. Steinitz and Potter had evidently put in hundreds of hours of work on these games, and also met quality opposition, which accounts for a standard of play which was probably a good deal higher than most of the intercity matches played at this period. Indeed these were probably two of the highest quality correspondence games played in the 19th century, at least prior to the rise of Chigorin.

Finally, Potter could not help but gloat a little:

“Various curious rumours came over here during the progress of the match. First, there was the information brought by some one now not better known

than he “who spoke to Priam at dead of night.” It was to the effect that Anderssen, having inspected the games, pronounced them both to be lost by London. This was at an early stage.” (Perhaps it was when Anderssen was in Vienna for the 1873 Congress?)

“Afterwards came a message which, the bearer stated, he was deputed to deliver by Herr Schwarz (one of the Vienna Council, vice Csank resigned). It was in these terms:- “The Vienna players present their compliments to the London players, and the Scotch Gambit is lost for London, while the other must end in a draw.” This, we think, was somewhere about the middle or end of October last, at which time the London players could have sent Zadkiel a diagram of the very position with which the London game terminated, for they knew it must be one of two, which would have given the prophet an even chance of being right for once. Whether the bearer of the message was authorised we cannot say, all we know is, that he delivered it...”

“Very good humoured was Herr Weinbrenner upon the occasion of Mr. Down’s visit to Vienna during the time of the Congress. Said the Vienna secretary to the London secretary, “We shall have to put our hands into our pockets for you,” alluding to the probability of their having to hand over the stake of £100. Mr. Down speaks very cordially of his reception by the Viennese. They made him very comfortable, and behaved as brothers in Chess usually do when visited by each other.”

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