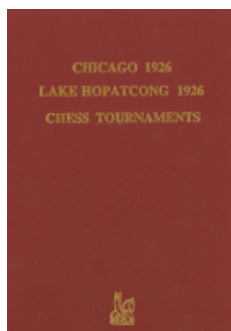




COLUMNISTS

Past Pieces

Olimpiu G. Urcan



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Historical Flavor

We always felt that the genuine value of a pre-1945 chess tournament book depends on the degree to which a twofold mission is accomplished: first, the amount of new data brought to light; secondly, the way in which known data is reevaluated and repackaged for today's reader. Within the realm of chess history, Anthony J. Gillam (*The Chess Player*) and Dale Brandreth (*Caissa Editions*) are well-known collectors, editors, and publishers who go to great lengths to recover and publish many lost games from old chess tournaments. In 2005, the two men actually collaborated on *Ostend 1906*, published by Caissa Editions, where Gillam did a remarkable job providing chess history buffs with a brilliant book of an important tournament in chess history. In 2007, Robert Sherwood and Dale Brandreth brought out an updated edition of Georg Marco's and Carl Schlechter's much appraised *Karlsbad 1907* tournament book. Both books are well researched and beautifully produced.

Two years later Sherwood and Brandreth published *Chicago 1926 and Lake Hopatcong 1926 Chess Tournaments* (Yorklyn, DE: Caissa Editions, 2009). The main goal of this 197-page work was to invite the reader to relive an interesting struggle involving thirteen chess masters gathered in Chicago between August 21 and September 2, 1926. The following international-class players took part: F. J. Marshall, G. Maróczy, C. Jaffe, A. Kupchik, I. Kashdan, S. D. Factor, Ed. Lasker, A. J. Fink, O. Chajes, N. W. Banks, J. W. Showalter, L. J. Isaacs and the twenty-year old Mexican talent, Carlos Repetto Torre. Sheltered from the noisy (and, indeed, dangerous) streets of Chicago of the prohibition era, these masters engaged in a thirteen-round chess tournament that received little coverage in the press, except, as Sherwood and Brandreth mention, for some reports penned by Hermann Helms for the *American Chess Bulletin*. The majority of the games played in this National Masters's Tournament of the Western Chess Association (as this tournament was named at the time) remained seemingly lost and no tournament book was ever published. The common databases contain only about a dozen games out of the seventy-eight played.

It took the resources and determination of a veteran collector such as Dale Brandreth to eventually attempt a fix for this missing slice of chess history. In the late 1980s, he managed to get his hands on a small treasure trove: "Although I have owned photostats of half of the original scores (all the games, but unfortunately not for both players in each game) for over twenty years," wrote Brandreth in the introduction, "I had hoped for a long time to find enough additional information to be able to decipher some of the excruciatingly poor scribbling that a few players kept as scores. I bought these photostats from Albert Buschke, but he never disclosed where he obtained them, so I assume that at one time the originals may still have been in someone's hands" [page iv]. Sherwood's task was to work from these photostats and reconstruct as many games as possible: "We would be working from photostats of the original score sheets," Sherwood wrote in the book's preface, "giving the project a decidedly historical flavor" [page i].

Throughout this project Sherwood's focus remained on the games themselves. Sherwood and Brandreth reconstructed almost all the games in full, although there are quite a number of cases where critical moments of the games could not be discerned. Besides reconstructing "lost" games, Sherwood contributed fresh and extensive analysis to all of them. These two essential tasks deserve great credit. It is not an easy job. Below is a copy of one of these tournament score sheets that proved difficult to decipher after White's twenty-third move [Game 36 on pages 69-70]. It was sent to us by Robert Sherwood through a recent email communication:

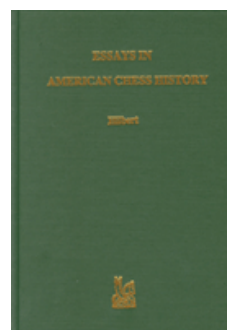
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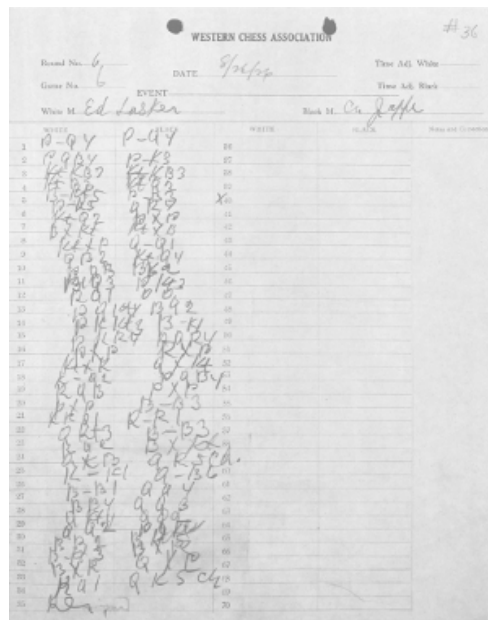
Ostend 1906
by Tony Gillam



Karlsbad 1907
by Marco & Schlechter



*Essays in American
Chess History*
by John Hilbert



The scoresheet of Lasker - Jaffe (Round 6)
[Courtesy of Robert Sherwood and Dale Brandreth]
[Click here to enlarge image.](#)

The tournament was an exciting struggle between Marshall, Maròczy, and Torre and the top prizes were decided in a nail-biting finish in the very last round. Many of the games played are exceedingly interesting since at least a third of the players involved in this tournament were capable of grandmaster level chess. The author made use of 152 pages for reproducing every game round by round and offering interesting computer-assisted analysis to every one of these games. To offer our reader a representative sample of how Sherwood treated the games, here is the game Marshall vs. Isaacs from the second round [taken from pages 15-17 of the book]:

Game 7. Marshall - Isaacs Queen's Gambit Declined

Marshall ventured a typically enterprising, but unsound, attempt on his 16th move. Isaacs missed the refutation and soon found himself in an inferior ending. Both players missed the best way at several points; Marshall was nevertheless able to score the point.

1.d4 d5 2.c4 c6 3.Nc3 Nf6 4.Nf3 e6 5.Bg5 Nbd7 6.cxd5 exd5 7.e3 Be7 8. Bd3 0-0 9.Qc2 Re8 10.0-0 Nf8 11.a3 11.h3, restraining Black's light-squared bishop, or 11.Ne5 gives better chances of an initiative. 11...Ng6 12.Rae1 Ne4 13.Bxe4 Bxg5 14.Nxg5 Qxg5 15.f4 Qf6



16.Bxd5?! Dynamic, but objectively dubious. The prudent choice is 16.Bd3 b6 17.f5 Ne7 18.Qf2, looking to play 19.e4!? dxe4 20.Nxe4 Qxf5 21.Ng5 Qxf2+ 22.Rxf2. But Marshall is Marshall. **16...cxd5 17.Nxd5 Qc6? 17...Qd8! 18.Nc7 Bf5-/+** refutes White's idea. **18.Qxc6 bxc6 19.Nc7 Bd7 20.Nxa8 Rxa8**



21.Rc1?! A lot more promising is 21.f5 Ne7 22.e4 followed by g2-g4 and bringing up the King. **21...Rb8 22.b4 Ne7 23.Rc5** If 23.e4, then 23...f5 24.e5 Kf7, followed by ...Be6, and Black has a fully defensible position. **23...Kf8** Very passive. Black might instead restrain White's center with 23...f5. **24.f5 f6 25.e4 a6** On 25...Nc8, White has 26.e5 Nb6 27.g4 Nd5 28.Kf2 Ke7 29.Kf3, with a plan similar to that outlined in the next note. Likely better for Black is 25...Rd8; e.g., 26.Kf2 Nc8 27.Rd1 Nd6 28.Kf3 Nb7 29.Rcc1 Nd6 30.g4 Ke7 +/- **26.g4 Be8 27.Kf2 Bf7 28.Rfc1 Rb6 29.Ke3 Bb3 30.Kf4 Bf7 31.h4 Ba2 32.g5 Bf7**



33.Kg4 The immediate 33.gxf6 gxf6 34.e5, prior to the opening of the position for White's rooks, is disappointingly inconclusive after 34...Bd5. **33...h6 33...Bb3** is less committal. **34.g6 Be8 35.h5 Bd7 36.Kf4 Rb8 37.Ra5 Rb6 38.Rc4** Marshall tacks about for a number of moves, gaining time to spot the most effective breakthrough. **38...Ke8 39.Rcc5 Kf8 40.Rc1 Ke8 41.Rac5 Kf8 42.Ra5 Bc8 43.Ke3 Bd7 44.Kd3 Ke8 45.Rac5 Rb8 46.Ra5 Rb6 47.Kc4 Kd8 48.Re1**



48...Nc8 48...Kc7 49.a4 leads to similar variations. Or 48...Bc8 49.a4 Kc7 50. Kc5 Bd7 51.e5 Nxf5 52.exf6 gxf6 53.d5 cxd5 54.b5 axb5 55.Ra7+ Rb7 56. Rxb7+ Kxb7 57.axb5, when White will win after either 57...d4 or 57...Kc8 by pushing the b-pawn and invading with the rook along the a-file. On 48...Bc8 49.a4 Kc7 50.Kc5 Rb8, White has 51.e5 fxe5 52.f6 gxf6 53.dxe5 fxe5 54. Rxe5 Kd7 55.Re1 Nf5 56.Rg1 Ng7 57.Rf1 Ne6+ 58.Kc4 Kd6 59.Rf6 followed by the advance of the g-pawn.



49.Kc5 The immediate 49.e5 is winning; e.g. 49...fxe5 50.f6 Nd6+ 51.Kc3 (threatening 52.fxg7 Be6 53.Rxe5 Bg8 54.Rf1 Ne6+ 55. Rf8) 51...Nb5+ 52.Kb2 gxf6 53.g7 Be6 54.dxe5 fxe5 55.Rg1 Bg8 56.Rf1+-. **49...Kc7 50.e5 fxe5 51.f6 gxf6** Or 51...Nd6 52.dxe5 Nb7+ 53.Kd4 Nxa5 54.bxa5 Rb8 55.e6 gxf6 56.exd7 Kxd7 57.a4 Kd6 58.Rg1 Rg8 59.Ke4 Ke6 60.Kf4 f5 61.g7+-. **52.dxe5 fxe5**



53.Rxe5 White has a win here with 53.g7 Ne7 54.Rxe5 Ng8 55.a4 Kb7 56.Re4 Kc7 57.Rf4 Be6 58.Rf8 Bb3 59.Rc8+ Kxc8 60.Kxb6. Now Black has good drawing chances. **53...Nd6 54.g7?** More testing is 54.Kd4 Nb5+ 55.Kd3 Kd6 56.Re1 Be6 57.Rf1 Rb8 58.Rxa6, but it is questionable whether White can win after 58...Rd8!. **54...Rb8 55.Rxa6**



55...Rg8? The way to resist is 55...Nb7+ 56.Kd4 Rg8 57.Re7 Kd6 58.Rf7 Ke6 59.Rf8 Rxe7 60.Rh8 Kf5 61.Rxe6 Re7 62.Rh8 Re4+ 63.Kd3 Nd6 64.Rh7 Be8 with a tough fight ahead. After the text move the win is a simple matter. **56.Ra7+ Nb7+ 57.Rxb7+! Kxb7 58.Re7 Kc8 59.Rf7 Be8 60.Rf8 Rxe7 61.Rxe8+ Kc7 62.Re5 Rg4 63.Re7+ Kd8**



64.Ra7 Rg5+ 65.Kd6 Rd5+ 66.Kxc6 Rxh5 67.b5 Rg5 68.Ra8+ Ke7 69.b6 Rg2 70.b7 Black resigns

Such analysis is always refreshing, especially with historical games often neglected or containing historical annotations that lack accuracy. Sherwood does an excellent job in analyzing these encounters and providing entertaining alternatives to the main text.

Out of the seventy-eight gamescores provided in the book, eighteen of them are incomplete or proved difficult to decipher from the score sheets at a certain stage. While we make no claim that we have conducted a thorough investigation on the matter of missing scores, below we dare to present the findings resulted from a basic search through our own (very incomplete) records, far away from world's best chess libraries. The fact that the author focused most of his energy in analyzing the seventy-eight games recovered and relied entirely on the photostats of the original score sheets to reconstruct the missing game scores was a double-edged sword. While the original score sheets are no doubt of valuable historical importance and an impressive find, we are rather puzzled by the fact that no other primary material appears to have been consulted. It is our impression that the simple existence of the photostats gave a false sense of assurance to the author, a surety that may have prevented further research and, as shown below, further clarifications on some games that are published as incomplete. Historical study necessitates a full research of multiple primary sources and not relying only on a singular source regardless of how valuable or previously unexplored it may be.



A young Hermann Helms, the long-time editor
of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle's* chess column
[Source: *Brooklyn Standard Daily Union*, April 22, 1893]

For instance, we find it exceedingly odd that the author did not make any mention of Hermann Helms's excellent tournament reports published in his *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* chess column. It is evident that the contents of this column were left unexplored by the author. Helms went to great length to offer detailed accounts and full scores of many of the games. We own copies of this column and a quick check reveals that where Sherwood relied entirely on score sheets, some games were left incomplete or unable to decipher certain sequences of the game, Helms provided full scores. Below we summarize some of these cases:

Jaffe - Torre
Round 1
August 21, 1926

The author gives this game on pages 5-7 of his book, but he stops at White's sixty-fourth move noting the following: "The rest of the score is unfortunately unreadable. Black resigned at 84th move." This was an important game for the whole tournament, as Torre's early loss contributed to him not winning this tournament. Sherwood's analysis stops at move forty-seven with the words: "White liquidates to an ending in which he has two extra pawns." This leaves the reader to assume that Jaffe pushed his advantage home with no trouble, but lacking the full score of the game, one's joy of following such an encounter is certainly interrupted. But Helms's September 23, 1926 column from *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* gave the full score of the game. We reproduce it below from where Sherwood left off at 64.Kg3 (the complete score can be replayed in the [ChessCafe.com game viewer](#)). A careful study of the resulting endgame reveals, there were still interesting moments:



64...Nxd5 65.Kf3 Nb4 66.a3 Nd3 67.Ke4 Nf2+ 68.Kf5 Nd1 69.Ke4 Nf2+ 70.Kf3 Nd3 71.Nd4 Ne5+ 72.Kg3 Nc4 73.Nb5 Ne5 74.Nd6 Kg7 75.a4 Kh6 76.Nf5+ Kh7 77.Ne3 Kg7 78.Nd5 Nc4 79.Kf3 Kh6 80.Ke4 Nd2+ 81.Kd3 Nf3 82.Ke4 Nd2+ 83.Kf5 Nc4 84.Kf6 Black resigned

The author offers the next game on pages 41-42 in the book and stops at White's twenty-seventh move writing, "The rest of the score is unreadable; the game was given up as a draw on move 32." Again, Helms provided the full score of this game in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of September 16, 1926. We offer it below from where Sherwood left off at 27.b4 (the complete score can be replayed in the ChessCafe.com game viewer):

Marshall - Jaffe
Round 4
August 24, 1926



27...a6 28.Rd6 Nd5 29.Rd8+ Qxd8 30.Qxe4 Nc3 31.Qd4 Qxd4 32.Nxd4 Nb5 33.Nxb5 axb5 Draw

Regarding the next game, the inaccuracy is far greater. On page forty-seven [Game 23], the author offers nineteen moves and writes, "The remainder of the score is clearly incorrect." The same September 16 edition of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* offered the full game. Our copy of this column is not of great

Kupchik - Chajes
Round 4
August 24, 1926

Sherwood offered forty-two moves of the next game on pages 43-44 [Game 21] of the book, concluding (based on the score sheet) that "the remainder of the score is incorrect; the game was agreed drawn at the 61st move." Sherwood's score was flawed because of the fact that 26.Rab2 was supposed to be 26.Rg2. The full score was provided in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of September 30, 1926 and it shows that Torre missed a clear win in the end. Here is the correct and full score following White's 25...Nh6 (the complete score can be replayed in the [ChessCafe.com game viewer](#)):

Torre - Fink
Round 4
August 24, 1926



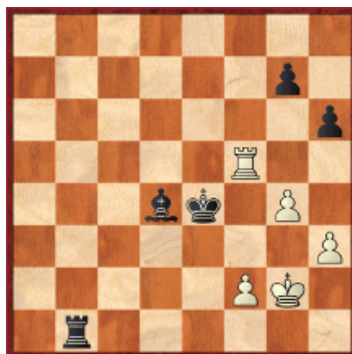
26.Rg2 Nhg4 27.Qe1 Rf7 28.Bd1 Qe8 29.Nh2 Re7 30.Nf3 Ne4 31.Ng5
Nxc3 32.Qxc3 Nf6 33.Qa3 Rh6 34.Rgb2 Ne4 35.Be2 Rc7 36.Nxe4 fxe4 37.
Qc3 Qg6 38.Kf2 Qf5 39.Rf1 Rf7 40.Bd1 Qh3 41.Ke1 Kh7 42.Rbg2 Be8 43.
Qb2 Qf5 44.g4 hxg4 45.Rxg4 Qf6 46.Qf2 Rc7 47.Qg3 Bg6 48.Rg5 Bf5 49.
Bg4 g6 50.h5 Rf7 51.hxpg6+ Rhxg6 52.Bxf5 exf5



53.Qh2+ Kg8 54.Qh5 Rxd5 55.Rxd5 Rxd5 56.fxd5 Qf7 57.g6 Qf6 58.Qh6 Qh8 59.Qg5 Qh1+ 60.Kd2 Qf1 61.Qh6 Qf2+ 62.Kd1 Qf1+ Drawn

The next game is given by Sherwood, on pages 55-56 [Game 30], up to White's fifty-second move, followed by the note "The remainder of the score is undecipherable" and acknowledging that Black won at move fifty-nine. Sherwood gave Black's fifty-first move as 51...g6 when in fact it was 51...Rb6. The *Eagle's* column (September 16, 1926) offered the full score. We present it following 51.Rf5 (the complete score can be replayed in the [ChessCafe.com game viewer](#)):

Banks - Kupchik
Round 5
August 25, 1926



51...Rb6 52.f3+ Ke3 53.g5 hxc5 54.Rxc5 Rb2+ 55.Kg3 Rb1 56.Kg2 Ke2 57.Rd5 Be3 58.Rf5 Rg1+ 59.Kh2 Kf2 Black won

Below is our last contribution to the matter of incomplete scores: the author offers this game up to White's twenty-eighth move on pages 149-150 [Game 77]. Although this was a decisive encounter, through which Kupchik managed to tie for fourth place with Jaffe, the actual ending of Kupchik's attack remained undisclosed. Once again, the full score is available in the September 9, 1926 edition of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. We present it following 28.Rh6 (the complete score can be replayed in the [ChessCafe.com game viewer](#)):

Kupchik - Jaffe
Round 13
September 2, 1926



28...Rg7 29.Qh1 Nd7 30.Qh3 Kf7 31.Rh8 Nf8 32.Bh6 Ra7 33.Rh1 Qa5 34. Bxg7 Nxg7 35.Rxf8+ Kxf8 36.Qh8+ Kf7 37.Rh7 White won

Helms's column may contain further useful information for problematic games from this tournament. The many gamescores he provided can be collected and checked against the scoresheets to discover any inconsistencies, as the scope of this research is beyond this present review. As with other primary sources that could have been more thoroughly researched for this project, Helms's *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* column would have offered not only more complete game scores, but it could have also offered material to build a livelier tournament narrative. The closer the cited chronicler was to the event in question, the more genuine historical flavor one gets.

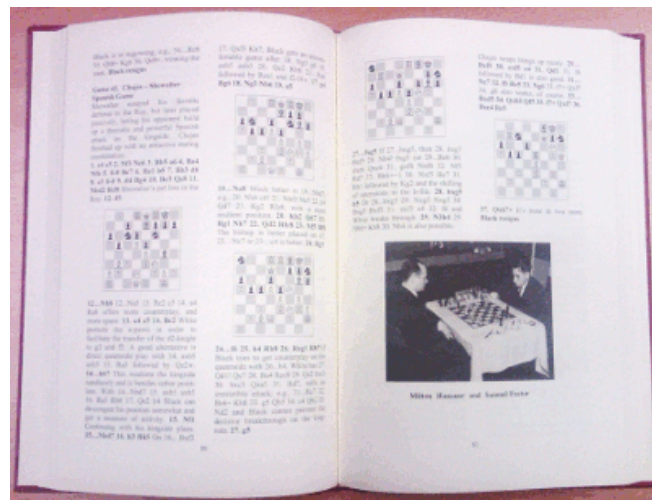
Simultaneously, we feel the exclusive focus on the tournament games alone

led to the neglect of the larger context of chess on the American East Coast of mid-1920s. The author makes no mention of the fact that during this annual meeting of the Western Chess Association held in Chicago there were consistent debates regarding the organization of a national chess body in America. This subject was raised at the banquet that followed the last round, where a motion referred the matter to the executive committee of the Western Chess Association, the actual organizer of the event. This forgotten tournament could have been an excellent opportunity to reassess the chess of the mid-1920s in America with a generation of new players emerging at the forefront (Kupchik, Kashdan, and Torre). The author clearly favored game analysis over a more subtle and more precise contextual framework full of relevant facts. Even the simple fact that the venue hosting the Chicago 1926 event was left unmentioned: the famed La Salle Hotel, a twenty-two story building touted as the most modern hotel outside New York.

The second part of the book, pages 153-197, contains twenty annotated games from the Lake Hopatcong 1926 chess tournament in which Capablanca, Kupchik, Maróczy, Marshall, and Edward Lasker took part. It was a curious decision to include the games of this tournament in addition to the main Chicago 1926 section of the book. The reasons were given in the Author's Preface: "Some of the scores proved impossible to decipher. In light of this, I suggested to Dale that we include the games from Lake Hopatcong 1926 tournament so that we could more than compensate for the incomplete games from Chicago. The two tournaments give us a clear idea of where American chess was in 1926, and it is absorbing to dig into these events and get a sense of the styles and strengths of the players of that time" [page i]. We are not really convinced this was a good idea. After all, the 1926 Lake Hopatcong event already received proper treatment with two tournament books on record (the 1926 edition being an excellent one with many unique photographs). Perhaps a more viable idea would have been to dedicate some space to a better presentation of the players involved in the Chicago tournament in the form of an up-to-date biographical profile for each of them. Page vi of the book offers only a very sketchy table with their life details with some of player's middle-names being completely ignored. Players like Showalter, Jaffe, Kupchik, Fink, Banks, or Chajes still lack a proper biographical treatment in chess literature. An elaborate biographical essay for each of the thirteen players alongside an illustration would have matched the book's main topic much more and would have made the book far more informative for certain readers. This brings us back to a conceptual definition of what a historical chess tournament should be when treated as a written project. Should it be a simple collection of annotated games brought together in a round-by-round chronicle? Should it also involve to a greater degree both the men/women who played these games, with their past, careers and ambitions, as well as the place and the general context of the event? Ideally, best of both worlds, we would conclude.

A more critical eye would notice in an instant that there are some spelling oddities throughout the work: to the best of our knowledge the standard spelling for Helms's first name is "Hermann" and not "Herman," as it appears repeatedly in the book. This sort of attention to detailed historical minutia should be taken more seriously by any author dealing with matters of the chess past. Such things may seem insignificant for the general reader interested mainly in the exciting battles unfolding over-the-board, but a limited edition such as this will certainly raise the interest of knowledgeable individuals in the field and thus invite stricter scrutiny.

There are thirteen illustrations offered in this book involving many of the players involved with the two tournaments. A couple of these photographs are really good finds (for instance, the Marshall vs. Kupchik illustration offered on page twenty-seven and the group illustration from Lake Hopatcong 1923 tournament offered on page 158). It remains an open question as to why the author did not offer at least one or two illustrations of the original scoresheets on which the player's handwriting would have been visible, especially since they were considered the main primary source material. The physical condition of this book, like all Caissa Editions products, is of excellent quality. The layout is attractive and the old-styled chess diagrams are a nice touch. Some basic indexes and crosstables are offered for each tournament.



Pages 80-81 of *Chicago 1926 and Lake Hopatcong 1926 Chess Tournaments* [Click here to enlarge image.](#)

In conclusion, we are pleased to own copy no. 296 of 600 of the limited edition of this work. The author did a lot of work in deciphering the valuable scoresheets and annotating every game. The main part of this book is a great addition to the genre of forgotten chess tournaments brought back to light. Both Sherwood and Brandreth deserve high praise for offering the general readers a great deal of forgotten chess games played by some of the top American chess players of the 1920s. However, we feel the book could have been further strengthened by a much wider appeal to other primary sources. With all scores corrected and historical narrative in place, this book would have had much more than historical flavor: it would have been a genuine dessert.

We end this column with the answer to an endgame composition by Karl Kondelik that appeared in *The Chess World* [May 1893, Vol. 1, No. 5, page 70]:



White to play and draw
(1.Ra4+ Kb8 2.Ba5 and 3.b4 with stalemate to follow)

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