



## COLUMNISTS

## Past Pieces

Olimpiu G. Urcan



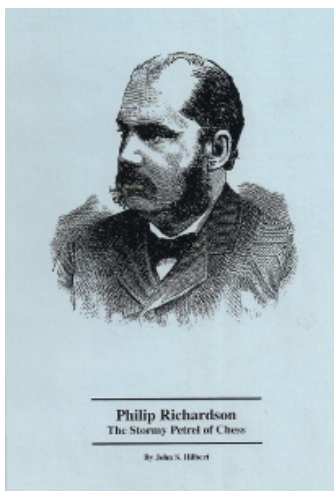
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## An Immortalizing Single Shot

Fans of chess history who are acquainted with John S. Hilbert's biographical works are very much aware of the high level of sophistication on display in these titles. Consider [\*Albert Beauregard Hodges: The Man Chess Made\*](#), recently reviewed in our column: Hodges received a full-fledged 543-pages of coverage. Most of Hilbert's previous efforts, the chess biographies of [William Ewart Napier](#), [Norman Tweed Whitaker](#), and [Walter Penn Shipley](#), were equally consistent with excellent documentation and illustrations. Some of the readers here would certainly remember that his Whitaker biography won the first ChessCafe Book of the Year Award in 2000. Even his somewhat slimmer [\*The Tragic Life and Short Chess Career of James A. Leonard\*](#) stood as a solid 200-page biography beautifully structured and written. Hilbert's most recent effort is *Philip Richardson: The Stormy Petrel of Chess* (Olomouc: Moravian Chess, 2009). This 146-page work is a much lighter affair by any measure. Yet, despite its smaller format and lesser level of sophistication in treatment, it struck us as an excellent book about a highly interesting American chess player, nowadays completely forgotten.



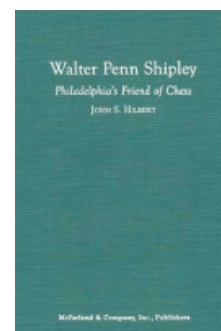
The subject of Hilbert's new book is the chess exploits of Philip Richardson (1841-1920), one of the few American chess players who, through their passion and consistent interest with the game, served as a link between the chess of the 1860s and that of the 1890s and early 1900s in the United States. Based on an unprecedented collection of games and the reports penned by his contemporaries, Hilbert investigates if Richardson was indeed one of the strongest chess players in America next to George H. Mackenzie and William Steinitz, both of whom had high praise for Richardson's play. Unlike with the majority of Hilbert's other works, the elaborate academic footnotes and the crafty contexts did not get a place in this particular work. The focus remains exclusively on Richardson with a twenty-three page biographical essay, 193 game scores and twenty-six chess problems and endgames. In his introduction, the author notes that "This volume has been written for ease of access by all lovers of chess history" [page iv]. This very much summarizes the concept behind this book: it was intentionally conceived as a lighter biographical work, yet to remain interesting and to offer a general view of the late Nineteenth Century American chess through the prism of Richardson's output over the chessboard.

In his biographical essay, Hilbert provides sufficient reasons to get us interested in Richardson's chess play. The twenty-three page text is somewhat short, but densely concentrated and well anchored in historical sources and

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[\*Napier: The Forgotten Chessmaster\*](#)  
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[\*Walter Penn Shipley, Philadelphia's  
Friend of Chess\*](#)  
by John S. Hilbert



[\*The Tragic Life and Short  
Chess Career of James A.  
Leonard, 1841-1862\*](#)  
by John S. Hilbert

documentation. The reader gets an authoritative introduction to Richardson's intriguing life. Born in London, he arrived in America in the spring of 1851 and in less than a decade, he would turn into one of America's most active chess players. Based on accounts from *Bretano's Chess Monthly* and Miron Hazeltine's *New York Clipper* chess column, Hilbert recounts Richardson's earliest moments with the game from his in-house duels with his chess-playing father and brother to his first appearances in chess clubs, crossing swords with men like Delmar, playing many odds games. As the biographer of both James A. Leonard and Richardson, Hilbert accounts with precision the relationship between the two in 1859-1861: Richardson tutored Leonard at chess before the latter emerged as the stronger of them and engaged in bigger (yet tragically much shorter) chess ventures. It was Leonard who introduced Richardson to the Morphy Chess Rooms and the 'Manhattan Chess Club' of 1860s New York. While in 1862 Leonard would die of a disease contracted while in a Confederate POW Camp, Richardson was more fortunate and continued to play chess in Brooklyn and New York alongside capable men such as Frederick Perrin, James Thompson, and Napoleon Marache. Hilbert provides the reader with useful excerpts from Richardson's contemporaries that reveal something about his character and personality. Piecing them together we get an overall impression of a pleasant personality: "By all accounts, Richardson was a gentle man, in the fullest sense of both words: dedicated, focused, modest, intelligent, considerate of others and unassuming" [page iii].

But chess was not to be Richardson's professional occupation. Hilbert relates that beginning in 1863 Richardson and his younger brother Robert got involved with photography as a business. According to accounts published in the American chess columns, and cited by the author, the two men owned a photography studio on Broadway. As one can easily imagine, photography in the 1860s and in the subsequent decades necessitated good weather and that particular aspect of his daily occupation left Richardson with little time for serious chess. As his biographer recorded, he would turn up in the chess clubs only when bad weather allowed it. Whenever that happened however, he was a dangerous opponent for many of his more famous contemporaries. Hilbert's research shows that after an absence of couple of years, Richardson returned to chess in 1866 by getting involved with consultation and blindfold games against opponents such as Delmar, Mackenzie, Thompson, Perrin, Brenzinger, and the young prodigy James C. Warner. As of 1873, Richardson found in James Mason a worthy opponent and Hilbert offers fourteen games played between the two with a score that eventually favored Mason [+8 - 5 = 1], but not without a good fight from Richardson.

Hilbert then touches upon matters such as Richardson's relationship with Mackenzie, his contribution to the Evans Gambit, his activities at Café International, and his role in founding Philidor Chess Club in New York, a club that would outlive many similar institutions across decades. In 1878, Richardson got involved with a more stable club: the Manhattan Chess Club. While it was an on-and-off period of involvement with chess, Hilbert was able to recover some interesting moments of Richardson's participation both in play and in internal disputes within the club's leadership. In 1884, Richardson finished second in the Manhattan Chess Club's championship behind the Irishman John Ryan, with whom he would contest many games in the next period. Recognized as a leading expert, Richardson was one of the members of the club's team when pitted against other metropolitan clubs. With his characteristic precision, Hilbert places Richardson at the meeting that founded the Brooklyn Chess Club and he recounts the way in which Richardson became more and more involved with the business of this particular club offering simultaneous exhibitions, serving as a regular member, and taking part in some high-profile exhibitions given by Steinitz or Emanuel Lasker. In fact, Richardson drew both of his more illustrious contemporaries in such exhibitions.

After some active play in the mid 1890s in New York, at a time when the chess activities in the country were on an evident ascension, Richardson slowed down. The last important occasion of his known play was his six-game exhibition match against S. Lipschütz in February 1900 [+ 1 - 1 = 4]. Hilbert is right to note that this was a success for Richardson since the thirty-six-year old Lipschütz was a far more established player in the country during

that period who dedicated more time to professional chess than Richardson ever did. In early 1900s, Richardson lived in Hyannis, MA and continued to be engaged in the business of photography. Hilbert admits that nothing much is known of Richardson's later years other than the brief announcements in the standard chess journals about his well-being in Hyannis and the amusing incident of him being proclaimed dead by *The Chess Amateur* in early 1919, more than a year earlier than his actual demise in October 1920.



Sam Loyd  
*The McCook Tribune*, June 22, 1911

The second part of the book [pages 25-131] represents a significant contribution by Hilbert to the existent literature: the full scores of 193 games (with a few game fragments within) played by Richardson between 1859 and 1906. By comparison, only a dozen Richardson games were to be found in today's common chess databases. The games are offered with two distinctive sets of annotations: one containing the historical annotations and comments found in the historical sources that reproduced the game; the other containing the author's own comments reserved for the critical moments of each game. These nearly 200 games contain many pleasurable moments that offer chess fans at large an opportunity to build up their own evaluation of Richardson's skill, but also to replay through a body of games until recently unavailable to the public. Herewith, we present a game that attracted our attention, a win over Sam Loyd from 1885 [Game 130, pages 89-90]. The major reason why this game is interesting is the theoretical dispute in the Two Knights Defense: 8.Qf3 and 8.Be2 were the mainstream lines of the time and only recently, after 8.Qf3 has been successfully challenged by 8...Rb8!?, the players taking white made a more consistent appeal to 8.Bd3. It is intriguing to note that Sam Loyd employed this puzzling move as soon as 1885. Steinitz, annotating this game in the *International Chess Magazine* of July 1885, wrote of it as being "new but not true." Today this very line represents the latest fashion in this variation and interested readers are referred to Daniel Stellwagen's essay from [SOS Volume 9](#) and Igor Stohl's article from [Chessbase Magazine 134](#).

#### **Sam Loyd - Philip Richardson**

New York CC vs. Manhattan CC

June 27, 1885 [C58]

[Olimpiu G. Urcan]

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Nf6 4.Ng5 d5 5.exd5 Na5 6.Bb5+ c6 7.dxc6 bxc6 8.Bd3**

8.Be2 and 8.Qf3 were more fashionable lines until very recently.

**8...Bc5**

8...Nd5! is considered to be the best move for Black. 9.Nf3 Bd6 10.0-0 0-0 11.Re1 Re8 12.Nc3 f5 13.Nxd5! cxd5 14.Bb5 Bd7 15.Bxd7 Qxd7 16.d3 Kh8 with equal chances.

**9.Ne4?**

9.0-0 0-0 10.Nc3 was the better path for White.

**9...Nxe4 10.Bxe4 Bxf2+!**

"Finely played," commented Steinitz. 10...Qh4 was another possibility: 11. Qe2 Bxf2+ 12.Qxf2 Qxe4+ 13.Qe2 Qd4.

**11.Kxf2 Qd4+ 12.Kf3?**

12.Kf1! was best: 12...Qxe4 13.d3 Qd5 14.Nc3 Qe6 and Loyd would have been much better than in the game.

**12...f5 13.Bxc6+?!**

Steinitz recommended instead 13.Qe1 fxe4+ 14.Kg3 and if 14...0-0 then 15.h3 But Black can play immediately 14...e3!.

**13...Nxc6 14.d3 0-0 15.h3 e4+! 16.Kg3**



**16...f4+**

"First class play" - Steinitz.

**17.Kh2**

If 17.Bxf4 Rxf4 18.Kxf4 Qf2+ 19.Kxe4 and mate follows.

**17...f3 18.dxe4 fxe4 19.Re1 Qxd1**

19...Qf2 20.Rg1 Rf3 was another option to close matters.

**20.Rxd1 Rf1 21.Kxg2 Rxd1 22.Nc3 Rd6 23.Nd5 Bb7 24.Bf4 Rg6+ 25.Kf2 Re8 26.Re1 Nd4 27.c4 Bxd5 28.exd5 Rf8 29.Re4 Rgf6 30.Rxd4 Rxf4+ 31. Ke3 Rxd4 32.Kxd4 Kf7 33.b4 Ke7 34.a4 h5 35.a5 g5 36.b5 g4 37.hxg4 hxg4 38.c5 g3 39.Ke5 g2 40.d6+ Kd8 41.b6 g1Q 0-1**

While the majority of the important games are presented with a diagram and some basic commentaries, some of the games are provided only with their full score and the historical source where they had been found. Yet, even within these scores the reader may very well find some "hidden joys." For instance, take the following gem played by Richardson at rook odds in 1859. It appeared in *New York Clipper* of August 13, 1859 and was given as Game Four on page 27 in Hilbert's book:

**Richardson - Amateur**

1859

Remove White's Queen Rook

[Olimpiu G. Urcan]

**1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Bc5 3.b4 Bxb4 4.f4 exf4 5.Nf3 Nf6 6.c3 Bc5 7.d4 Bb6 8.e5 Nh5 9.0-0 0-0 10.Ba3 Re8 11.Qb3 Kh8**

In an odds game, less risky was 11...Re6 than the text move.

## 12.Bxf7 Rg8

Better was 12...g6 13.g4 Ng7 14.Bxe8 Qxe8 15.Ng5 h6! and Black was still very much on top of things.

## 13.Bxh5 Na6 14.Qf7 c6?

Imperative was 14...c5 so to keep Ba3 unable to help the King's Side assault. For instance, 15.Qxf4 Rf8 16.Qg3 Qe7 with very unclear play.

## 15.Be7! Qc7 16.Ng5

Certainly Richardson was in a very pleasant position to be in and had plenty of good options to wrap up the game in his favor. More direct would have been 16.Qf5! which forces a mate in six moves.

## 16...h6 17.Bg4

17.Qg6 was more direct once again: 17...hxg5 18.Bf6.

## 17...Rd8



In the diagrammed position, Richardson announced mate in four.

Another game beautifully played by Richardson, again modestly presented without a diagram or a comment, appeared on page 110 as Game 158. It was an off-hand encounter, played no less than thirty-five years after the above game, against a certain Davidson at Manhattan Chess Club. It appeared printed in the *Brooklyn Standard-Union* of January 27, 1894:

### Richardson - Davidson

Manhattan Chess Club

Off-hand game, 1894 [C65]

[Olimpiu G. Urcan]

1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bb5 d6 4.d3 Nf6 5.c3 Bg4 6.Nbd2 a6 7.Ba4 Nd7 8.Nf1 Nc5 9.Bc2 Ne6 10.Ne3 Bh5 11.g4 Bg6 12.h4 h5 13.g5 Qd7 14.Bd2 Be7 15.Nd5 Bd8 16.Qe2 Na7 17.0-0-0 c6 18.Ne3 Nf4 19.Qf1 Nb5 20.Nc4 Ne6 21.Be3 Na7 22.d4! b5



## 23.Nfxe5!

Very forceful play.

### 23...dxe5 24.dxe5 Qe7

Even after 24...Qxd1+ 25.Qxd1 bxc4 26.f4 White wins easily due to the chronic lack of communication between Black's pieces and due to White's impressive pawn formation.

### 25.Nd6+ Kf8 26.f4 Bh7 27.f5 Nc7 28.g6 Bg8 29.Bc5

29.gxf7 Bxf7 30.Nxf7 Kxf7 31.Bb3+ Ke8 32.Qg2 was another path to victory.

### 29...Qxe5 30.Bd4 Qe7 31.f6! 1-0

Incidentally, while conducting some unrelated research in Hermann Helms's *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* chess column, we were fortunate to run into an exciting game played by Richardson that does not appear in Hilbert's book. The game was played against Charles Gilberg and appeared in *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of May 26, 1927. Helms prefaced it with the following telling words:

#### In the Good Old Days

In the "good old days" of chess in Brooklyn the names of Philip Richardson and Charles A. Gilberg were to be conjured with. Richardson was in the highest rank among American amateurs and very close to master rank. He was invariably among those invited to contest single games with visitors of reputation, like Steinitz and Dr. Lasker, for instance. A variation in the Evans Gambit bears his name. Gilberg, rated as a first-class player at the Brooklyn Chess Club, was president of that organization, as well as of the Manhattan Chess Club, a problem composer of high distinction and owner of one of the largest chess libraries in this country. Both are dead.

Richardson moved from Brooklyn to Hyannis, Mass., where, in partnership with his brother, Robert D., he continued to follow his profession of photographer of many years. From there the surviving brother sent The Eagle the score of a splendid game played between Gilberg and P. Richardson in Brooklyn on April 15, 1883, and treasured by Robert D. for the past 44 years. P. Richardson, at his 15th move, gave up his Queen for two minor pieces, and thanks to a series of problem-like moves at 44, 45 and 46, scored a really splendid victory. It is a remarkable game, which the present generation will hugely enjoy.

#### Charles Gilberg - Philip Richardson

Brooklyn, 15 April 1883 [C37]

[Olimpiu G. Urcan]

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 g5 4.Bc4 g4 5.Ne5 Qh4+ 6.Kf1 f3 7.d4 d5 8.Bxd5 fxe2+ 9.Kxe2 Qh3+ 10.Kg1 Nh6 11.Bf4 Bg7 12.c3 e6 13.Bc4 Nd7 14.Nd3 Nb6 15.Nf2



#### 15...Nxc4!?

15...Qh4 was the safer path to go. But Richardson displayed genuine



creativity through the text's combination.

**16.Nxh3 gxh3 17.Qd3 Nxb2 18.Qe2 Na4 19.Qd2 Ng4 20.Na3?!**

20.Kf1 Be6 21.Rg1 should have offered better play for White than the text.

**20...Nb6**

Better would have been 20...Be6 21.Kf1 0-0-0.

**21.Rd1 Nf6 22.Qd3 Nh5 23.Be3**

23.Bc7! with the clear intent to trade some of Black's pieces was a better idea.

**23...Bg4 24.Rf1?!**

24.Kf2! Gilberg should have return some of the material. 24...Bxd1 25.Rxd1 0-0-0 26.Rg1 and White clearly enjoys a decisive advantage.

**24...0-0 25.Nc4 Nxc4 26.Qxc4 Rae8 27.e5 Re6 28.Kf2 b5 29.Qc5 f5 30.Ke1 Rf7 31.Qb4 Bf8**

Black's only chance is to engineer a breakthrough and reach to the white king somehow. Richardson prefaced it with a series of inspired manoeuvre-moves.

**32.Qb3 Ng7 33.Rhg1 Rg6 34.d5 cxd5 35.Qxd5 Ne6 36.Qxb5 h5 37.Qd3 Kg7 38.a4 f4! 39.Bd4 Kh6 40.Qd2 Rg5 41.Qf2**

41.Qa2! was much better.

**41...Rd7! 42.Qb2?**

Superior was 42.Rxg4! hxg4 (42...Rxg4 43.Qb2 Rg2 44.Rf2 Rg1+ 45.Ke2 Rg5 was also possible although Black achieves nothing much.) 43.Qh4+ Kg6 44.Qh8 Re7 45.Qf6+ Kh5 46.Ke2 and White maintains the advantage.

**42...Nxd4 43.cxd4**



**43...Rxe5+! 44.Kf2**

Obviously, 44.dxe5 Rd1+ 45.Kf2 Bc5+ leads to mate.

**44...Rxd4! 45.Rxg4**



Panic. More resistance could have been offered by 45.Rc1 Red5 46.Rxg4 Rd2 + 47.Qxd2 Rxd2+ 48.Ke1 but still Black remains ahead either with 48...Bb4! or with the more modest 48...hxg4.

#### 45...hxg4?

Here Richardson missed the wonderful shot that would have completed his brilliant conception: 45...Bc5!!.

#### 46.Rc1 Red5 47.Rc2?

The decisive error that allows Richardson to claim the game with the same beautiful shot that he missed at his forty-fifth move. Gilberg could have defended with 47.Qb8! Bg7 48.Qe8 with chances for both sides.

#### 47...Bc5! 48.Rxc5 Rd2+ 49.Qxd2 Rxd2+ 50.Kg1 Rd4 51.Kf2 g3+ 52.hxg3 h2 53.Rc6+ Kh5 54.Rc5+ Kg4 0-1

The third part of Hilbert's biography focuses on Richardson's work as a problem composer [pages 133-139]. It offers twenty-six problems and endgames culled from sources such as the *New York Clipper*, *American Chess Nuts*, *American Chess Bulletin*, *Bretano's Chess Monthly*, *International Chess Magazine*, *Brooklyn Standard-Union*, and *The Field*. Hilbert noted that "Richardson did not consider himself a serious problem composer, and his output was never extensive," but his compositions saw print for many decades. Indeed, as the *American Chess Bulletin* of May-June 1919 (Vol. 16, No. 5, page 165) noted, Richardson was "the real problem dean" being one of the very few composers whose works appeared in *American Chess Nuts* (1868) and in a multitude of 1858 chess columns. Below we offer as sample a problem and an endgame composition created by Richardson as they appear in the book. The solutions are at the end of our column:

#### Chess Problem

by Philip Richardson

*American Chess Nuts* (1868), p. 180



#### White to Mate in Three

#### Endgame Composition

by Philip Richardson

*Turf, Field and Farm*, July 2, 1886





### White to Play and Win

In terms of illustrations, the book offers two line-engravings of Richardson, one of them serving as frontispiece. An interesting illustration featuring Richardson is provided on page 140. Titled "First Champions of the Metropolitan League Brooklyn Chess Club 1895," this rare photograph features many other late Nineteenth century players: William M. de Visser, John D. Elwell, John F. Barry, Edward N. Olly, S. Riccardo-Rocamora, Arthur J. Souweine, and others. Besides a "Note on Sources" [pages 141-142], the book ends with a basic opening and a games index.

In this newly penned biography of a forgotten chess player, Hilbert's intention was to revive the chess skill of a strong American player mainly through an unprecedented number of collected chess games and, uncharacteristically for the Hilbertian trademark, through a leaner biographical essay. It worked rather well. The book stands as a fine tribute to a Brooklyn-based photographer with excellent chess skills. When, however rarely, he entered the doors of various Brooklyn and New York chess clubs between late 1850s and early 1900s, this announced trouble for many a more famous opponent. While of course many of his games were played against opponents long forgotten, for a book about such a relatively unknown player, the reader will find to his delight a surprising number of well-known names. Consider, for instance, that the book contains no fewer than seventy games Richardson played against just seven masters: Steinitz, Pillsbury, Lasker, Mackenzie, Lipschütz, Delmar, and Mason. And this does not even count his games against other well-known nineteenth century players, such as Bird, Hodges, Leonard, Loyd, Napier, and Pollock. The games are all here, in this compact book. Until Hilbert decided to type up the first draft of this work, Richardson's chess work was, in essence, lost to us all. It remained inaccessible to today's readers. Through his most recent effort, much like a professional photographer armed with a modern camera looking to capture a beautiful scene for posterity, the award-winning American author revived Richardson's life and chess with an immortalizing single shot.

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### Solutions

**Chess Problem 1.** **Qb1 Qxb1** (1...Bxf2 2.Rc4) **2.Rc4** and Black cannot prevent 3.Ra4 mate.

**Endgame Composition 1.** **Nh6 gxf7** (1...Bf6 2.Qg8+ Qxg8 3.Nf7+ Qxf7 4.gxf7 and wins; Hilbert noted the following: "Computer analysis gives as relatively best 1...bxc6 2.Qg8+ Qxg8 3.Nf7+ Qxf7 4.gxf7) **2.Qxa1+ Kg8 3.Qa2+ Kh8 4.Qb2+ Kg8 5.Qb3+ Kh8 6.Qc3+** and White, by bringing his queen nearer the black king, finally mates him by Qxh7.

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