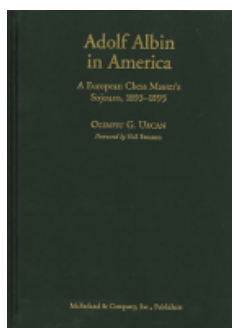




## COLUMNISTS

## Past Pieces

Olimpiu G. Urcan

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## An Unfortunate Christmas

## The Suicide Attempt of Harriet Worrall

On May 16, 1897, on a pleasant Sunday with a light breeze and a cloudy sky, the sixty-year old Harriet Worrall stepped on board the steamer *Buffalo*, sailing to England. She was America's only representative at the First Ladies' International Chess Tournament, to be held in London that June and July. Her friends, among them some strong Brooklyn players, accompanied her onto the *Buffalo's* deck before they saw her off. "Mrs. Worrall was in excellent spirits when she arrived aboard," the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of the next day wrote, "and chatted cheerily with her friends on the prospects of her success on the other side." She was optimistic, saying anything less than a first or second prize would be a disappointment. This "middle aged, motherly woman, very self-possessed and of pleasing address," as the reporter of the *Eagle* described her, said the following:

Upon the urgent invitation of Mrs. Rhoda Bowles, the secretary of the congress, I determined some time ago on making this trip, being moved to do somewhat by a desire to revisit my native land and my relatives residing there. Needless to say, therefore, I have ever since been looking forward to my departure with unusual anticipation of pleasure, for I have always been very fond of the game of chess, taught me by my late husband. Thanks to the kindness of a number of Brooklynites, who are all very strong players, I have been able to obtain some invaluable practice, thus giving me a pretty thorough preparation and placing me in good trim for the task before me.

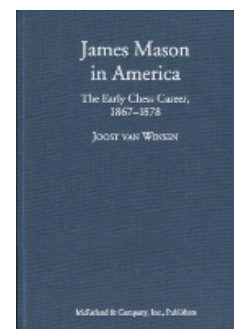
Although the event would debut only in the second half of June, Harriet Worrall sailed early in order to spend some time with her relatives in North of England. She also planned some further practice at the Ladies' Chess Club in London before the competition started. She was gratified to learn that the Brooklyn Chess Club was so impressed by her intentions of representing America that the club committee considered electing her as an honorary member, a distinction never accorded to a woman player before. "As a representative of this club," Harriet Worrall said, "I shall feel an additional weight of responsibility resting on me, and I will be all the more anxious to do my best."



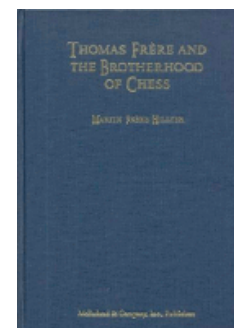
Harriet Worrall  
*Edwardsville Intelligencer*, December 18, 1894

As Harriet Worrall wrote in a letter to the *Eagle*, which in turn summarized it for print, during the voyage Worrall had little opportunity for practice, "only

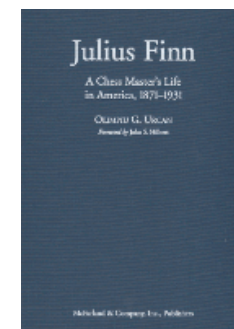
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the ship's doctor and a woman passenger being able to play chess and both of them she defeated with ease." For an experienced woman player who confronted over-the-board brilliant men like Paul Morphy, Captain George H. Mackenzie, Jackson W. Showalter, Albert B. Hodges, Harry N. Pillsbury, John F. Barry, William Steinitz, and Dawid Janowsky, such laymen as the ship's doctor and female passengers could hardly qualify as serious practice indeed. But they could, and perhaps very much did, qualify as congenial interlocutors during the long trip across the Atlantic. If so, they possibly enquired about Worrall's life-long love for a game mastered almost exclusively by men. Or perhaps they didn't. Had they asked, and had Worrall been willing to share it, she could have told them much more than about her successful chess story. For indeed, her trials at chess were nothing compared to some of the ones she suffered in life.

If life were a chess game, Harriet Worrall gained a great advantage in the opening, only to find herself in a very difficult position in the middlegame and beyond. She was born in London on October 7, 1836 (née Harriet Jona). Her husband, Thomas Herbert Worrall (1807-1878), whom she married in 1856, was a strong chess amateur who played against some of England's best and even against Paul Morphy in London in 1858-1859. In 1864, after serving as British Commissioner in Mexico as part of the British Mexican Legation, Worrall, a former officer of the British Army, moved to New York with his wife, where he continued his own chess exploits. He would also speak publicly about his experiences in Mexico. He was scheduled, according to *New York Commercial Advertiser*, November 30, 1867, for instance, to present a paper on the subject the evening of December 2, 1867, at the New York Historical Society.

Harriet Worrall learned chess from her husband. She apparently learned fairly well, at a relatively early age, as she met Paul Morphy over-the-board in New York in the mid-1860s and managed to snatch half a point from him in an odds game, an accomplishment she would be proud of for the rest of her life. The Worralls were also on excellent terms with Captain George H. Mackenzie, one of the strongest American players. Their lives were led in wealth and privilege, in society, with wonderful moments punctuated by accomplishment and success.

Nothing lasts forever. When her husband died in New York on September 6, 1878, the forty-two-year old Harriet was left with little money. Most of her husband's fortune had been lost shortly before his death. Left in modest circumstances, by 1880 she found asylum at College Point, a small community of working people, in the house of Arthur Cole, a friend. The lack of stable finances did not stop Harriet from continuing to be a first-hand witness to the most prolific chess battles in New York and Brooklyn throughout the 1880s. But as the years passed after her husband's death, widowhood and financial struggles wore her down. By mid-1886 she was suffering from epileptic attacks, which were followed by what people who knew her described as "periods of mental depression and melancholia." It was while in such a difficult mental state, some six and a half years before sailing to England to compete in the women's international tournament, she almost followed her husband into the grave. She likely would have, had it not been for one courageous boy.

The end nearly happened just before Christmas 1890, while Worrall was living in College Point, in the house of her friend, Arthur Cole. On Sunday morning, December 21, the Cole family members, in a household on Fulton Avenue and Fifteenth Street, were ready to have their customary breakfast in the living room. With only four days to go before Christmas, the weather was showing no signs of improvement following the violent blustery storm that rocked the area just a few days earlier. As seen through the windows of Cole's house, while the high wind and the low temperature joined hands, the heavy fall of snow covered the streets in College Point, and, as newspapers reported, wreaked havoc in Brooklyn's traffic and businesses. Arthur Cole was proud to have been Worrall's friend and landlord for the past ten years. She was known in Brooklyn, and arguably throughout every part of America where newspapers were diligently read, as the country's strongest woman chess player. That Sunday morning, as the Coles sat around the table, Worrall didn't come down for breakfast. There was nothing alarming about that, as Worrall

had no regular schedule for meals.

Worrall kept to herself for much of the morning. But at about 11:00 a.m., groans were heard from her private room. Alarmed, Alfred Cole Jr. tried to open the door, only to find it locked. Exercising the agility of youth, the boy went outside into the cold, climbed through Worrall's unlocked window, and unlatched the door for his father. They found Harriet writhing in agony on the floor. A bottle of carbolic acid, which the Coles bought for a disinfectant months earlier, was found open on the table. The sweet smell of the white, toxic substance filled the room. They hastily sent for a doctor who, upon his arrival, administered a copious amount of emetics to provide relief. Three days later, when Harriet Worrall was still struggling between life and death, the doctor estimated the poison must have been in her stomach for at least twenty minutes. Even then, all he could offer was a "possibility" of her recovery. Had she not been found for another half hour, death would have been certain. Worrall spoke very little; she was reported to be "despondent" and to hardly know "what she was about." As the Coles frequently heard her speak of taking her life during her moments of deep depression, the suicide attempt may not have been a total surprise to them. Though there is a world of difference between talking about it and attempting it.

It couldn't have been a more unfortunate Christmas for Harriet Worrall. And yet despite the paralyzing snow, the people around her were celebrating the season—at the same time she was left in bed, her body painfully fighting off the horrible effects of an acid that her mind had intended would end her suffering. Whether she was cognizant of the multiple ironies of her situation is unknown. What is certain is that Worrall had much time in which to think through her plight. The news regarding her attempted suicide traveled quickly to the chess fraternity. Two days before New Year's Eve, the following appeared in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle's* chess column: "Mrs. Worrall, a noted woman chess player, who last week attempted suicide during a fit of mental despondency, is in a fair way to recover. Mrs. Worrall was a great admirer and friend of Captain Mackenzie." Two other brief announcements were published in the same newspaper on December 27th and 29th.

Her recovery, emotionally, if not physically, must have taken a long time. Between January 1891 and mid-1894, a period of over three years, Brooklyn's leading chess columns had almost nothing to say regarding her chess endeavors. A moment of self-reflection was perhaps offered by what some considered the successful suicide of her friend, Captain Mackenzie. On April 14, 1891, less than four month since the incident that threatened her own life, he was found dead, through what might have been an overdose of morphine, in a room on the second floor of the Cooper Union Hotel. Whether Mackenzie was a suicide or not, his impoverished end after long illness could not have been other than a cause of regret for Harriet Worrall.



Nellie Showalter and Harriet Worrall  
*Muskegon Chronicle*, December 18, 1894

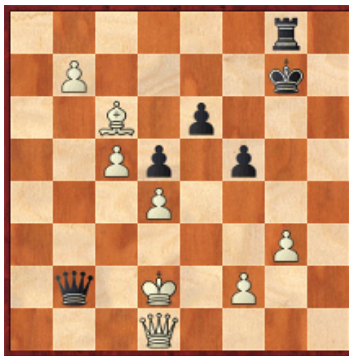
Worrall recovered slowly. By mid-1894 she was back to chess and was sending solutions to problems given in newspaper columns. In early November of that year, besides visiting the masters' tournament that started in New York with Steinitz getting into the fray, she began a match for the United

Worrall switched to harrassing mode in an attempt to pose as many problems as possible to her opponent.

37.Nxf4 Qxf4 38.Qc2+ f5 39.Bc1 Qg4 40.h3 Qg7 41.b6 Rg8 42.g3 Ng6 43.Qd3 Nh4 44.Nxh4 Bxh4 45.Bf4 Bf6 46.Be3 Kh8 47.Kf1 Bg5 48.Bxg5 hxg5 49.Qe3 Qh6 50.Qe5+ Kh7 51.b7 Qxh3+ 52.Ke2 Qh5+ 53.Kd2 Qf3 54.Qe2 Qb3 55.Qh5+?!

Nellie Showalter started to make errors. Best was 55.Qxe6 Qb2+ 56.Ke1 Qb1 + 57.Ke2 Rg7 58.Bxd5 Rxb7 59.Bxb7 Qxb7 60.Qxf5+- and it's all over for Black.

55...Kg7 56.Qxg5+ Kf7 57.Qh5+ Kg7 58.Qd1 Qb2+



[FEN "6r1/1P4k1/2B1p3/2Pp1p2/3P4/6P1/1q1K1P2/3Q4 w - - 0 59"]

59.Ke1?!

Another error. Worth trying was 59.Ke3 f4+ 60.Kxf4 Qxf2+ 61.Ke5 Qf6+ 62.Kd6 e5+ 63.Kxd5 Rd8+ 64.Kc4 and if 64...Rxd4+ 65.Qxd4 exd4 66.b8Q Qxc6 then 67.Qe5+- wins for White most likely.

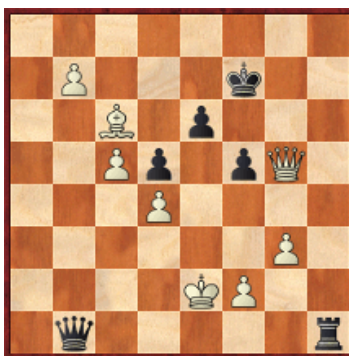
59...Rh8 60.Qd2?

This succession of errors could have gotten Nellie Showalter in real trouble ending up losing the game. Better was 60.Qf3 Qxd4 61.Qb3 Qxc5 62.Qb2+ d4 63.b8Q Rxb8 64.Qxb8 Qc1+=.

60...Rh1+?

Missing the lucky break with 60...Qa1+! 61.Ke2 (61.Qd1 is met, of course, by 61...Rh1+) 61...Qa6+ 62.Kf3 Qxc6 and Black wins.

61.Ke2 Qb1 62.Qg5+ Kf7



[FEN "8/1P3k2/2B1p3/2Pp1pQ1/3P4/6P1/4KP2/1q5r w - - 0 63"]

63.Be8+!

Despite this attempt, White will be unable to win this despite holding a clear advantage right from the opening.

63...Kf8 64.Qf6+ Kxe8 65.Qxe6+ Kf8 66.Qd6+ Kg7 67.Qe7+ Kg6 68.Qe8+ Kg7 69.Qe7+ Kg6 70.Qe8+ Kg7 1/2-1/2

Source: *New York Sun*, November 12, 1894.

Below is Worrall's only win in this incomplete match:

**Worrall, Harriet – Showalter, Nellie**

Match Game (5), M. R. Favor's Residence

Italian Game [C50]

**1.e4 e5 2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.0-0 Nf6 5.Nc3 0-0 6.d3 d6 7.h3 h6 8.Be3 Nd4 9.Bxd4 Bxd4 10.Nxd4 exd4 11.Ne2 c5 12.f4**

12.Nf4!?! deserved some attention, too.

**12...Re8**

12...d5! 13.exd5 Nxd5 14.Bxd5 Qxd5 15.Ng3 Bd7=+/+ was offering Black very good play.

**13.Rf3 b6**

Again, 13...d5! was the best way forward.

**14.c3 dxc3 15.Nxc3 Bb7 16.Qb3 Re7**



[FEN "r2q2k1/pb2rpp1/1p1p1n1p/2p5/2B1PP2/1QNP1R1P/PP4P1/R5K1 w - - 0 17"]

One more chance for Black to push the d-pawn was 16...d5!? 17.exd5 (17. Bxd5 Nxd5 18.exd5 Qd6 19.Qc4 Rad8=; 17.Nxd5 Nxd5 18.Bxd5 Bxd5 19. Qxd5 Qxd5 20.exd5 Rad8=+/+) 17...a6 18.a4 Qd6 19.Rff1 Re3 20.Rfe1 Rae8 21.Rxe3 Rxe3 22.Rf1 with balanced play.

**17.g4 Qd7?!**

17...d5! 18.exd5 a6 19.a4 Rd7 would have helped maintain the balance.

**18.g5 Ne8**

If 18...hgx5, then 19.fxg5 Nh7 20.Bxf7+ Kh8 (20...Rxf7 21.g6 Nf6 22.Qxf7+ Qxf7 23.gxf7+-) 21.g6 Nf6 22.Raf1 Re5 23.Rf5± and White has good reasons to be more than satisfied with this position.

**19.Nd5 Bxd5 20.Bxd5 Rd8 21.g6**





[FEN "3r1k1/p2qrpp1/1p1p2Pp/2pB4/  
4PP2/1Q1P1R1P/PP6/R5K1 b - - 0 21"]

**21...Nc7 22.gxf7+?!**

22.Bxf7+ Kh8 23.Bd5 looks better than the text.

**22...Kf8 23.Raf1 Nxd5 24.Qxd5 Rxf7 25.f5 Rf6 26.Qb3 Re8= 27.Kh1**

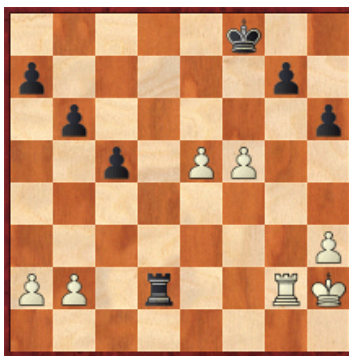


[FEN "4rk2/p2q2p1/1p1p1r1p/2p2P2/  
4P3/1Q1P1R1P/PP6/5R1K b - - 0 27"]

**27...d5!**

Finally, Black managed to enact the critical push of the d-pawn.

**28.Qc2 dxe4 29.dxe4 Qb7 30.Rf4 Re5 31.Qg2 Rd6 32.Rg1 Rf6 33.Rg4 Re7  
34.Rd1 Rd7 35.Rg1 Rfd6 36.e5 Qxg2+ 37.R1xg2 Rd1+ 38.Kh2 R1d2 39.  
Rxd2 Rxd2+ 40.Rg2**



[FEN "5k2/p5p1/1p5p/2p1PP2/  
8/7P/PP1r2RK/8 b - - 0 40"]

**40...Rxcg2+?**

40...Rd3! was the way to continue. The text move allows White to play for a win.

**41.Kxg2 Kf7 42.Kf3+- b5**

42...g6 White still wins after 43.fxcg6+ Kxcg6 44.Ke4 Kf7 45.Kd5 Ke7 46.a4+-.

**43.Ke4 c4 44.Kd5 Ke7 45.Kc5 a6 46.a3 Kf7 47.h4 h5 48.Kb6 g6 49.fxcg6+  
Kxcg6 50.Kxa6 Kf5 51.Kxb5 Kxe5 52.a4 Kd6 53.Kb6 1-0**

Source: *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 21, 1894.

With few serious matches and no tournament play in which she participated, Harriet Worrall made a habit of taking a board against any visiting master who entered the doors of the Brooklyn Chess Club. On November 17, 1894, she lost a game to Albert B. Hodges in a sixteen-board simultaneous exhibition at the Brooklyn Chess Club (+10 – 4 = 2). On December 1, Worrall was one of the seventeen players sitting across from Jackson W. Showalter in another simultaneous exhibition at the local club. She lost a King's Gambit to the Kentuckian, who otherwise was struggling to score well (well after

midnight his score stood  $+3 - 6 = 4$ , with four games unfinished).

On October 16, 1895, Worrall took part in a seven-board simultaneous given by Harry N. Pillsbury at the Old Armory Hall on Flatbush Avenue. Pillsbury won all his games despite Worrall's "gallant resistance" and a young W. E. Napier's stubborn play. She met Pillsbury again on November 9, when he gave a fourteen-board simultaneous to players in consultation at the Brooklyn Chess Club. According to the *New York Herald Tribune* of November 11, 1895, a total of thirty-five players grouped in twos or threes plotted against the young American champion, who scored  $+4 - 4 = 6$ . On the first board, Worrall, in consultation with Walter Frère, held the hero of Hastings to a draw.

Harriet Worrall also became involved with the British Ladies' Chess Club, curiously enough founded in New York, in 1894. Fellow female companionship and chess was a fortunate mixture, as can easily be imagined. In mid-November 1895, Worrall was the heart and soul behind a "Junior Chess Club," an organization of young people affiliated with the Ladies' Chess Club. At the end of that month, when the latter organized a musical séance in New York, she was in charge of offering "chess practice," while the other ladies provided musical entertainment with their violin or piano skills.

On January 11, 1896, when Showalter gave a fourteen-board exhibition at the Brooklyn Chess Club, Worrall occupied one of the three tables reserved for consultation games. She and Frère won against the master. On April 19, the same duo lost a game at the club in a fourteen-board simultaneous display offered by Bostonian John F. Barry. At the end of the same month, she took a board on her own in Hermann Helms' fourteen-board simultaneous exhibition ( $+12 - 1 = 1$ ). She was the only one who scored against Helms, while the draw was earned by Charles Helms, his brother. "Mrs. Worrall," the *Eagle* of May 1, 1896 recorded, "who won her game, is the strongest woman player in the city. She played with the famous Mackenzie and is one of the best players in the Heights Club. She played a strong game all the way through, and Mr. Helms spent more time at her board than at any other. He made a blunder in the endgame, however, which lost him a piece and he then resigned."

At the end of June 1896, when Brooklyn, like much of the rest of the country's chess fraternity, was celebrating the victory in the cable match against the British, a special séance was arranged at the Brooklyn Chess Club: an exhibition game between Nellie Showalter and Harriet Worrall, watched by a large crowd. In addition, celebrations included consultation games involving Pillsbury, Showalter, Barry, Hymes, Burille, and Hodges, who all dropped by the club that evening. Worrall played the opening with the nonchalance of a genuine hypermodern thinker:

#### **Showalter, Nellie – Worrall, Harriet**

Exhibition Game, Brooklyn Chess Club, 06.1896  
Nimzowitsch Defense [B00]

**1.e4 b6 2.d4 Bb7 3.Nc3 e6 4.Bd3 g6 5.Nf3 Bg7**



[FEN "rn1qk1nr/pbpp1pbp/1p2p1p1/8/3PP3/2NB1N2/PPP2PPP/R1BQK2R w KQkq - 0 6"]

Similarly to a few other games of the 1890s, Worrall's choice of opening system is certainly in the spirit of future hypermodernism.



**6.e5 Ne7 7.Ne4 h6 8.c3 Ba6 9.0-0 Bxd3 10.Qxd3 a6 11.b3**

11.c4 g5!? 12.Bd2 Ng6 13.h4! was a more aggressive way to get some advantage.

**11...d5?!**



[FEN "m1qk2r/2p1npb1/pp2p1pp/3pP3/3PN3/1PPQ1N2/P4PPP/R1B2RK1 w kq d6 0 12"]

It is very tempting to push the d-pawn so to secure some breathing space. Refraining from doing so, allows White to slowly grab more space. For instance, 11...Nbc6 12.Re1 0-0 13.h3 Nd5 14.c4 Ndb4 15.Qc3 a5 16.a3 Na6 17.Bf4 Re8 18.h4+/=.

**12.Ng3**

The alternative was 12.exd6 cxd6 13.Bf4 Nc8 14.Rac1 (14.d5?! e5! with equality if not a more pleasant structure for Black. ) 14...0-0 15.Rfe1 d5 16.c4!?= is recommended by engines yet Black is more than fine still. 16...e5! (16...dxe4 17.Qxe4 Ra7 18.Bxb8 Nd6 19.Bxd6 Qxd6 20.c5+/=) 17.Bxe5 Bxe5 18.dxe5 dxe4 19.Qxe4 Ra7 20.h4 and it rests with White to prove that the two pawns and the d-file worth the missing knight.

**12...Nd7 13.Ba3 c5! 14.Rac1 0-0 15.Rfe1 Qb8!? 16.c4 Rd8 17.Bb2 Qb7 18.cxd5 Qxd5**



[FEN "r2r2k1/3nnpb1/pp2p1pp/2pqP3/3P4/1P1Q1NN1/PB3PPP/2R1R1K1 w -- 0 19"]

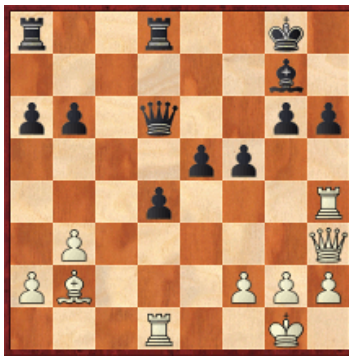
**19.Re4?**

Missing an obvious tactic. 19.Qe2 then 19...cxd4 20.Bxd4 Qb5! with very active play for Black. If 19.Rcd1 cxd4 20.Bxd4 Qa5 21.Qc2 Nd5=/+ Black begins to build up a solid positional advantage.

**19...Nxe5! 20.Nxe5 Bxe5 21.Rh4**

If 21.Ne2, then 21...Nc6 22.h3 Bxd4 23.Nxd4 e5!—+ and Black wins.

**21...Bg7 22.Ne4 f5 23.Nc3 Qd6 24.Ne2 Nc6 25.Qh3 Nxd4 26.Nxd4 cxd4 27.Rd1 e5**



[FEN "r2r2k1/6b1/pp1q2pp/4pp2/3p3R/1P5Q/PB3PPP/3R2K1 w - - 0 28"]

White's initial pawn center has been destroyed.

### 28.Bc1

28.Rxh6 was not offering any redemption either: 28...Bxh6 29.Qxh6 Rac8 30.f4 Rd7 31.fxe5 Qxe5 32.Qd2 Qe4! and Black wins easily.

### 28...f4

28...h5 was preferable although the text move works as well. Worrall had to be careful still not to allow Showalter any counterplay.

### 29.g3

29.Qd3 was best met by 29...Qc6!.

### 29...g5 30.Rg4 Rf8 31.gxf4 exf4 32.Qg2 Ra7



[FEN "5rk1/r5b1/pp1q3p/6p1/3p1pR1/1P6/P4PQP/2BR2K1 w - - 0 33"]

32...f3! 33.Qf1 Rac8 was far more forceful.

### 33.h4! gxh4 34.Rxh4 Rf5 35.Bb2

35.Rg4! was a better way to carry on the search for counter-chances.

### 35...Rd5?

With 35...Qe7! 36.Rg4 Qe2 37.Rb1 Qc2 38.Qf1 Rg5, Showalter would have been forced to resign, as the whole counterplay affair would have been shut down. The text move allows her however to get back in the game.

### 36.Rxh6! Qc5 37.Rg6 Rad7 38.Rc1 Qb5 39.Rc8+ Kh7 40.Qe4 Re5 41.Qb1

Pragmatically, better was 41.Rxg7+! Kxg7 42.Bxd4 Rxd4 43.Qxd4 Kg6 with equal chances.

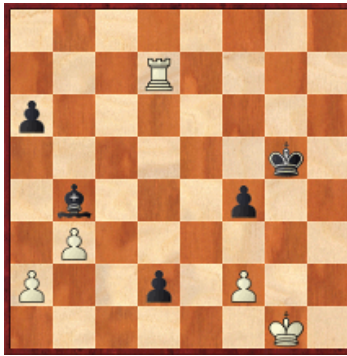
### 41...Re1+ 42.Qxe1 Kxg6 43.Qe6+ Kg5 44.Ba3 Qf5 45.Be7+ Rxe7!

Not 45...Kg4 because of 46.f3+!.

#### 46.Qxe7+ Qf6

46...Kh5! 47.Rc7 Qg6+ 48.Kh1 Bf6 was a more accurate defense.

#### 47.Qxf6+ Bxf6 48.Rc6+- Be7 49.Rxb6 d3 50.Rb7 d2 51.Rd7 Bb4



[FEN "8/3R4/p7/6k1/1b3p2/1P6/P2p1P2/6K1 w - - 0 52"]

#### 52.Kf1??

After an excellent uphill fight and with a winning advantage, White blunders, perhaps overlooking Black's next move. 52.a3 Bc3 53.f3 was winning easily.

#### 52...f3! 53.Kg1 Kf4 54.Kh2 Kg4?

54...Ke4 was still winning.

#### 55.Rd4+?

The wrong check. White should have played 55.Rg7+! Kh4 56.Rg1 and Black cannot win this anymore.

#### 55...Kf5 56.Kg3 Ke5 57.Rd3

57.Rxd2 Bxd2 58.Kxf3 was the last chance for some resistance even if Black can win this endgame without problems.

#### 57...Ke4 58.Rd7 Bc3 59.Re7+ Be5+ 0-1

Sources: *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 26, 1896; *New York Daily Tribune*, June 28, 1896.

By the time Showalter gave a fifteen-board simultaneous exhibition at the Brooklyn club at the end of April 1897, and lost again to the Worrall/Frère duo, Harriet Worrall was already determined to go to England and represent America in the First Ladies' International Chess Tournament to be held in June and July of that year during the Queen's Jubilee. And now we have reached the deck of the *Buffalo* on Sunday, May 17, 1897, where this article began.

In England Worrall was cordially received by Rhoda Bowles, the secretary of the congress. "Mrs. Bowles confided to her the fact that her reputation had preceded her," the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of June 17, 1897, reported, "and that her future opponents were already filled with a wholesome dread of her powers. All of the latter, she [Worrall] says, have been practicing steadily during the winter and she realized fully the necessity of exerting her utmost endeavours."

The twenty-player tournament (held between June 23 and July 3, 1897, with Pillsbury acting as arbiter) involved a hectic schedule of two games a day. The venue was the Masonic Hall of Hotel Cecile and Ideal Café on Tottenham Court Road. Worrall finished fourth with 13 points out of nineteen games, behind Mary Rudge (18½), L. M. Fagan (15½) and Thorold (14). In early September 1897 Worrall returned to America. She was disappointed in her

performance, believing she could have done better had she been more accustomed to playing with a time limit and clocks.

A reporter of the *Eagle* wrote the following in the September 17 edition: "Her appearance last evening indicated that three months in England had been beneficial in other ways than chess ways, and her talk gave the impression that the sixty years which have passed in her life must have been smooth ones." How far Harriet Worrall had come, since rolling in agony on the floor of her room in Arthur Cole's home, appears to have been measured in more than simply the passing of time.

Worrall's life, once to her mind not worth living, was now focused on gaining experience with the practicalities of chess competition. Dissatisfaction with the past gave way to hope for the future:

I had a most enjoyable trip so far as the social arrangements were concerned, but the tournament was a severe strain. Two games a day under a time limit of twenty moves an hour and with the necessity for keeping one's score and watching two clocks was most trying. I lost hours of time by not stopping my clock when it was my opponent's turn to move and lost one game in this way. I hope to have practice with clocks before I enter another tournament.

Worrall also provided readers with a curious glimpse of the realities of play during the international tournament:

The players were somewhat of a mixed party and it was confusing to me. Miss Hertzsch, the youngest contestant, was only 18 years of age; she could not speak a word in English. Lady Thomas was afflicted with a nervous ailment which caused her hands to shake constantly when she made her moves; her hair was white and she is nearly 70 years of age. Mrs. Muller Hartung of Germany, who received the amiability prize, talked constantly while she was playing with me. I do not see why they gave her the prize. Conversation was unrestrained while the games were in progress and during the tournament, the weather in London was so oppressive that fans were kept in constant motion in the playing room. The jubilee crowds made the rooms uncomfortable, particularly after we went to play at the home of the chess club during the final rounds. The confusion and the strain of eight hours' chess every day, with only a two hour intermission, was very hard on all the players, and it was frequently remarked that the tournament was more a test of endurance than of skill. Under the circumstances I am satisfied with my score. With more familiar surroundings I am sure I could do better.

"I expect to make Brooklyn my home," Worrall concluded, "as it has been for many years. I will visit friends for a time at College Point, and do not know when I will take up chess again." Chess did not have to wait too long for her return. She was back by the end of 1898 when she played in a four-board blindfold simultaneous exhibition given by Hodges at the Brooklyn Chess Club on November 13 (+ 2 – 1 = 1). On December 3, in consultation with Walter Frère, she took a board in Pillsbury's twenty-seven-board simultaneous exhibition at the Brooklyn Chess Club (with two boards playing checkers). Pillsbury's overall score was + 20 – 5 = 2 with Worrall/Frère duo being among those defeated. Two weeks later, on December 17, 1898, when Dawid Janowsky visited the club, Worrall and Frère made a better show. The *Eagle* of December 18 recorded the following unusual fact:

An interesting feature of the last night's play was that Mrs. Worrall, in response to the committee's request for players to contribute additional chess pieces for the evening's performance, brought a set of chess men and a board that had a history of their own. Mrs. Worrall, who hails from England, during her residence there met, among many other redoubtable opponents, the American genius, Paul Morphy, who then played her two games at the odds of a rook on that very same board and with the identical pieces which figured in the exhibition yesterday. Mrs. Worrall lost and drew the other of the games, and, needless to state, she is very proud of her possession. Last night she looked to it for the inspiration necessary to properly conduct the defence against the

ingenious Frenchman.

It worked. In the end Janowsky scored + 17 – 5, but among those who scored against him were Worrall and Frère.



Harriet Worrall  
*Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 4, 1897

In January and February 1899, Worrall worked together with S. E. Haskell to organize another ladies' chess congress, this time in the United States. Unfortunately, nothing came of the collaboration. On April 27, again assisted by Frère, Worrall met Steinitz over the board during a sixteen-board simultaneous exhibition at the Brooklyn Chess Club (+14 – 2 = 0). Worrall, with her frequent partner Frère, administered to Steinitz a quick defeat with a shrewd knight sacrifice meant to open all roads toward the ex-champion's uncastled king:

#### **Steinitz, William – Worrall & Walter Frere**

Fifteen-board simultaneous, Brooklyn CC, 27.04.1899  
King's Gambit [C30]

**1.e4 e5 2.f4 Bc5 3.Nf3 d6 4.Bc4 Nc6 5.c3 Bg4 6.d3 Nf6 7.Qe2 Bb6 8.f5 a6**

8...d5! was an excellent way forward.

**9.Bb3 h6 10.h3**



[FEN "r2qk2r/1pp2pp1/pbnp1n1p/4pP2/4P1b1/1BPP1N1P/PP2Q1P1/RNB1K2R b KQkq - 0 10"]

**10...Bxf3**

Interesting would have also been 10...Nh5!? 11.hxg4 Ng3 12.Bg5 Qd7 (12... Nxe2 13.Bxd8 Nf4 14.Bh4 Nxd3+ 15.Kd1+-) 13.Qd2 Nxe1 14.Bh4 g5 15.fxg6 fxg6 16.g5 with complicated play for both sides.

**11.Qxf3 Nh7 12.Qg4 Qf6 13.Nd2 0–0–0 14.Nf3**

14.Nc4!? Ba7 15.Ne3 Ne7 16.Bd2 c6 17.0–0–0 d5 was a good alternative for White.

14...Na5 15.Bc2



[FEN "2kr3r/1pp2ppn/pb1p1q1p/n3pP2/4P1Q1/2PP1N1P/PPB3P1/R1B1K2R b KQ - 0 15"]

15...d5! 16.d4?!

Considering the uncastled position of his king, this is risky play by Steinitz. Highly tactical play could have followed after 16.exd5!? Rxd5 17.Bd2 Rhd8 18.c4 R5d7 19.c5! e4 (19...Bxc5?! 20.Bxa5 e4 21.Bc3 Bb4 22.Bxb4 Qxb2 23.0-0 Nf6 24.Qh4 exf3 25.Qc4 fxg2 26.Rfe1 with unclear play, but it's clear Black has enough pawns for the missing bishop. ) 20.Bc3 exf3!? (20...Qe7 21.0-0-0! exf3 22.cxb6 Qe3+ 23.Kb1 Qxb6 24.Qxf3=) 21.Bxf6 Nxf6 22.Qxg7 fxg2 23.Qxg2 Re8+ 24.Kf1 Bxc5 and the exposed position of the white king offers Black good prospects even if the situation looks under control for White for the moment.

16...Nc6 17.exd5



[FEN "2kr3r/1pp2ppn/pbn2q1p/3PpP2/3P2Q1/2P2N1P/PPB3P1/R1B1K2R b KQ - 0 17"]

17...exd4!

A great conception which must have surprised Steinitz.

18.dxc6

18.c4 was not good enough because of 18...Nb4 19.Kd1 d3 20.Ba4-/+. .

18...dxc3

18...Rhe8+! 19.Kf1 Qxc6 20.f6+ Kb8 21.fxg7 Nf6 22.Qh4 dxc3 23.b3 Ne4+— looked much stronger.

19.Qb4

If 19.cxb7+, then 19...Kb8 20.b3 Qe7+ 21.Kf1 Qc5 22.Qh4 Rhe8 with great activity for Black.

19...Qxc6— 20.bxc3

20.b3 could have been met by the powerful 20...Rd4!? 21.Nxd4 Qxg2 22.Rf1



Re8+ 23.Ne6 Qxc2 24.Qc4 Qg2 25.Qg4 Qh2 26.Qe2 Qxh3 27.Rf3 Qh1+ 28.  
Rf1 Qd5 29.Qc4 fxe6 30.Qxd5 exd5+ 31.Kd1 Nf6 32.Kc2 Bd4—+.

## 20...Rhe8+ 21.Kf1 a5!

Now Black's attack on dark squares (c3 or g1–a7 diagonal) is decisive.

## 22.Qb3 Qc5 0–1

If 23.Nd4, then 23...Rxd4! 24.cxd4 Qxd4 and it's all over.

Source: *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, April 28, 1899.

Beginning with 1900, chess news related to Harriet Worrall becomes scarce. According to the *New York Sun* of February 21, 1910, two days earlier she brought her much treasured Morphy-touched chess board again (although unsuccessfully this time) to a simultaneous exhibition of twenty boards given by Hodges (+18 – 1 = 1). On March 11 and 12 of that year Worrall was a witness for the proceedings of the twelfth cable match between the United States and Great Britain at the Brooklyn Chess Club. A close friend of both George Newnes and J. H. Blackburne, as reported by the *Eagle* of March 13, 1910, she sent them cables of congratulation for administering the most severe defeat upon the Americans (6½ – 3½).

On Saturday, March 26, 1910, according to the *Eagle* of March 27, Worrall was one of the five women among the twenty-eight players, members of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science, who faced the young José Raúl Capablanca in simultaneous exhibition of lighting play at Academy of Music (+27 = 1). She lost a Sicilian Defense on Board Twenty-two.

It is reasonable to assume that such appearances dwindled in the next decade. On Saturday, October 11, 1920, the seventy-four-year old Worrall appeared in a twenty-four-board simultaneous by Frank K. Perkins at the Brooklyn Chess Club (+19 – 2 = 3). "Mrs. Worrall is one of the few living chess players who actually played with Paul Morphy," wrote the *Eagle* of October 13. "Although her game with Lt. Perkins was scored against her when she had to leave, owing to the lateness of the hour, and because her pawn position was slightly inferior, Mrs. Worrall played remarkable good chess for one of her years, offering to sacrifice her Queen at one stage of the proceedings." In the mid of the same month, she paid a visit to the Brooklyn Institute Chess Club. Hermann Helms placed the following note about it in the October 20 edition of the newspaper:

Mrs. Worrall, who cherishes the recollection of playing with Paul Morphy while that famous player was in New York, is over 80 years of age and, although her health has not been the best of late years, she was in excellent spirits and regaled those she met at the Institute with an interesting recital of some of her experiences. For a number of years, Mrs. Worrall has resided at Ballston Spa, N.Y., but is now visiting friends in College Point, L. I.

One suspects the College Point friends she was visiting included Arthur Cole, or at least his family, if he no longer lived. Certainly Worrall had much to be thankful for, in terms of their help, which allowed her the many rewarding years she lived after her foiled suicide attempt.

Harriet Worrall died of natural causes in New York at ninety-two, on November 23, 1928. Despite coming very close in a moment of desperation to ending her life four days before Christmas 1890, nearly forty years earlier, by the time of her death she had outlived not only her husband, Morphy and Mackenzie, but also Steinitz, Delmar, Pillsbury, and a host of lesser players, all individuals she met over the board on numerous occasions. An unusual yet accomplished presence in a man's world, Harriet Worrall was a pioneer of chess for women in the United States.

1. Harriet Worrall's dates of birth and death are based on her entry in Jeremy Gaige's [Chess Personalia](#).
2. Worrall's husband, Thomas Herbert Worrall, an interesting figure in himself, had good results in 1850s against some top players. The following fragment comes from Johann Löwenthal's column in *The Era* of June 20, 1858 [citing from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*]: "Staunton, Worrall, and Morphy – There is an impression upon the minds of the Chess community that the cross play of the three gentlemen named has resulted unfavourably to the latter, as between him and Mr. Staunton. Such an impression is an erroneous one, as the facts do not warrant it. We have the information from a reliable source, that Mr. Worrall played forty-five games in all with Mr. Staunton. Of which he lost twenty-three and won twenty-two. Embraced in these games was a short match, *for a consideration*, at the odds of the Knight, which match Mr. Worrall won; Mr. Morphy played fifteen games with Mr. Worrall, winning eight and losing seven, none drawn. When we consider the natural advancement in strength of Mr. Worrall's game, which must have taken place during so long a siege against so fine a player as Mr. Staunton, if any reliance at all can be placed upon cross play, Mr. Morphy shows the fairest record."
2. The descriptive account of Harriet Worrall's suicide attempt is based on an account published in *The World* of December 23, 1890. The account until now was difficult to locate, as the article consistently misspelled Worrall's name as "Worrell."
3. Worrall's words prior to her departure to England on May 16, 1897, come from interview excerpts published in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of May 17, 1897.
4. The quote from Worrall's letter to the *Eagle* regarding the voyage across the Atlantic were reproduced first in the June 17, 1897, edition of the newspaper.
5. For a closer look at the First Ladies' International Chess Tournament, see Tim Harding's *Kibitzer* columns here at [ChessCafe.com](#) ([Part I](#) and [Part II](#)).
6. An excellent photograph of Worrall among the participants in the First Ladies' International Chess Tournament is available at [Cleveland Public Library Digital Gallery](#); another photograph of Worrall appeared in the *American Chess Magazine* of June 1897 (Vol. I, No 1, page 16) and a supplementary line-drawing to the ones offered in the text appeared in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* of May 17, 1897.
7. Harriet Worrall's reported games at odds against Paul Morphy were often described inconsistently throughout the years: for instance, the *New York Daily Tribune* of February 21, 1910 wrote the following regarding the above-mentioned Worrall presence in a simultaneous against Hodges: "A Relic of Morphy - Woman Plays on Board Used by Chess Marvel – Comparatively few chess boards are now in existence on which Paul Morphy, the remarkable Southern chess player, is known to have played. One of these, the property of Mrs. Harriet Worrall of Brooklyn, and on which *she defeated the champion in a game at odds of a rook* [our emphasis], figured in the simultaneous exhibition given by Albert B. Hodges in the art room of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences in the Academy of Music on Saturday night [...]". When reported Janowsky's exhibition at the Brooklyn Chess Club on December 17, 1899, the *Eagle* of December 18 noted that Worrall played two rook odds games against Morphy, scoring  $-1 = 1$  [see main text]; the same was reported by the *American Chess Magazine* of January 1899 (Vol. II, No. 7, page 325).

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