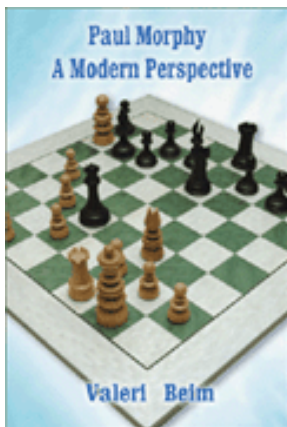




C O L U M N I S T S

New Stories about Old Chess Players

Jeremy P. Spinrad



Augustus Mongrédien

Historical memory can be strange at times. Some strong players are remembered, while others equally strong from the same period are forgotten. Sometimes a player's chess reputation obscures his reputation in other fields, while others are remembered vividly in their outside field of endeavor, but their chess is almost forgotten. As for second-rank players, it is often an accident of fate whether we remember them or not; it may depend on their name surviving in an opening variation, or a famous game, or if a particularly colorful story (which does not have to be true) is associated with them.

Mongrédien is an interesting example of a rare phenomenon. He was quite famous outside of the chess world for a time, and was only a player of the second rank, but he is remembered in the chess world while being otherwise almost completely forgotten. The only similar case I can recall is that of Judge Meek. One reason both these non-masters are remembered in chess is that they each played a role in the career of Paul Morphy, and there is a continued interest in Morphy above all other chess players of the 19th century. Meek, a much weaker player than Mongrédien, will be discussed in another article, but I would also like to bring attention to Mongrédien's interesting life story.

The Oxford Companion to Chess gives a short summary of Mongrédien that shows how he is generally viewed by chess historians. The actual entry is for the Mongrédien Variation (1.e4 g6 2.d4 Bg7 3.Nf3 b6) "played twice in the London 1862 tournament by Augustus Mongrédien (1807-88), the London-born son of a refugee from the French revolution. Mongrédien (his descendants dropped the accent) was president of both London and Liverpool chess clubs at the same time, a measure of his popularity."

I think the summary above is accurate as far as it goes, but it might be quite surprising to learn that Mongrédien was a very controversial figure in one of the crucial debates of the 19th century, yet most chess players are not aware of his claim to political fame, because it came long after his time as a chess player.

I note that a descendant, Philippe Mongrédien, adds on a genealogy web-site that Augustus' mother, Adrien Mongrédien, emigrated to London in 1802 because she was a royalist, while the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* mentions his father fleeing to England after Bonaparte's coup in 1798. The *Oxford Biography* also says that Mongrédien was president of the London Chess Club by 1839, and held that position for more than 30 years.

As to his general character, it calls Mongrédien an energetic and versatile man, a considerable linguist, a good musician, a great conversationalist, and somewhat of a *bon vivant*. A book called *Study and Stimulants* says that Mongrédien, at age 76, reports that he has smoked moderately all his life “and, for the last fifty years, has never, except in rare and short instances of illness, retired to bed without one tumbler of whiskey-toddy.”

Mongrédien must always have had some interest in politics, since he joined a reformist group called the National Political Union in 1831, and is listed as a member of the associated Radical Club in 1838. It is noteworthy for this son of a royalist that the Radical Club was violently opposed to hereditary titles, including the monarchy. Outside of these associations, the first references I can find for Mongrédien (with one exception, an announcement of the birth of his son, who later became a chess player himself, in 1844) are as a chess player. He was quite active as a player in the mid 1840s, playing a match against Williams in 1844 (the score of this match is unknown), and matches against Bledow (4-7-1), Mayet (3-3-1), Hanneken (3-1-2) and Staunton (0-2-3, with the odds sometimes given as P+2) in 1845. Keene and Coles' book on Staunton give Hanstein instead of Hanneken as his opponent, but I believe this to be an error. Stanley printed a number of games by Mongrédien, in his column in *Spirit of the Times*, and tried to arrange a match between New York and Liverpool, where Mongrédien was club president.

In 1847 and 1848, the *London Times* carried a number of advertisements from Mongrédien for a steam boat which sails between Liverpool and the Mediterranean. This business was a failure, and Mongrédien was forced into bankruptcy. Bankruptcy hearings are noted in the *London Times* in late 1849. To chess players, the most interesting detail of the bankruptcy proceedings is that one of the opponents of Mongrédien in a law case covered in the paper on Dec. 12, 1849, was a Mr. Perigal. I assume that this is the well-known chess player George Perigal. I do not know whether the case ever affected their relationship over the chessboard, but both men continued to be officers of the London Chess Club.

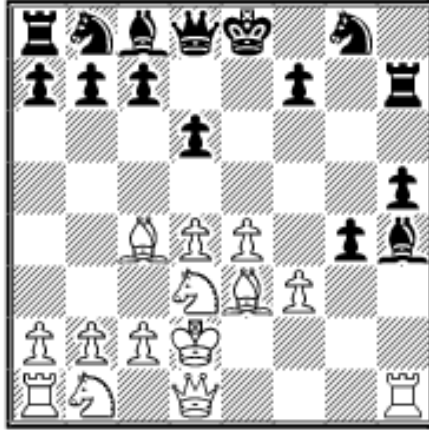
Mongrédien is next seen as the president of the London Chess Club. It is easy to find Mongrédien games from the 1850s. *The Chess Player* and *Chess Player's Chronicle* carry many such games with a variety of opponents. The following game appears in the *Spirit of the Times*, Sept 27, 1851. The game, in which Mongrédien is defeated by Jaenisch at the London Chess Club, is taken from *Bell's Life* of Aug 31, 1851. The game has been reprinted a number of times; my main reason for including it here is the amusing final comment. I believe that in the comment on move 28, Walker makes fun of Staunton's excuses for poor play in the London 1851 tournament, and that the final comment is directed at Staunton's literary style.

Jaenisch-Mongrédien

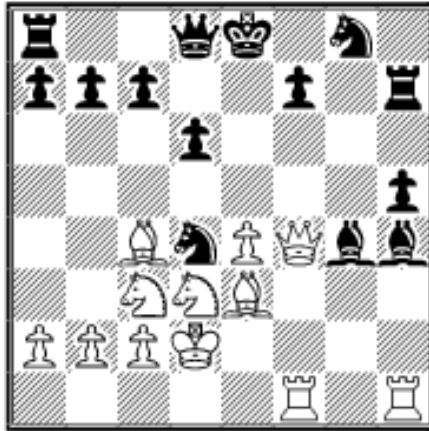
London Chess Club, 1851

Notes from *Spirit of the Times*; notes in italics courtesy of Fritz8

1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 g5 4.h4 g4 5.Ne5 h5 6.Bc4 Rh7 — We prefer Nh6.
7.d4 d6 8.Nd3 f3 9.gxf3 Be7 10.Be3 Bxh4+ 11.Kd2

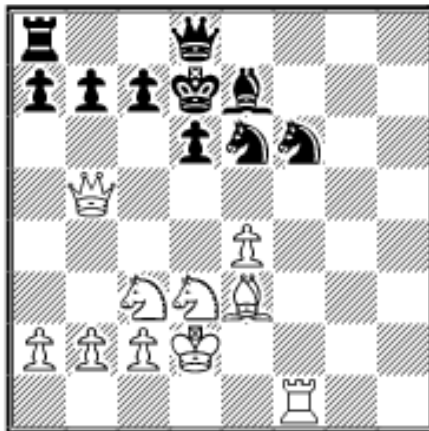


11...gxf3 — *Better either 11...Nc6 or 11...g3. 12.Qxf3 Bg4 13.Qf4 Nc6 14.Nc3 Nxd4* — Ingenious: Because if Bxd4, Mongrédien pins queen; but nevertheless Jaenisch is not likely to fall into the trap, and gains valuable time. **15.Raf1**



Has a won game from this position. (*Perhaps, but against the best defense, 15...Bf6! 16.Nd5 Ne2!, White has to find an ingenious way to prove it: 17.Qxg4! hxg4 18.Rxh7 Ng3 19.Rf4+-.*) **15...Be7?! 16.Bxf7+ Kd7 17.Bxh5** — Mark the hand of a master in this. (*A bit more masterful perhaps was 17.e5! Ne6 18.Bxe6+ Bxe6 19.Qe4 Rg7 20.Nf4 Bg4 21.Nxh5 Bxh5 22.Qf5+ Kc6 23.Rxh5+-.*) **17...Bxh5 18.Rxh5 Rxh5 19.Qg4+ Ne6 20.Qxh5**

Nf6 21.Qb5+



21...c6?? — *Much better was 21...Kc8 with an inferior but not immediately lost position. 22.Qxb7+ Nc7 23.e5* — Well followed up. **23...Ng4 24.e6+ Kxe6 25.Qxc6 Nxe3 26.Kxe3** — Overlooks that he can force mate in two moves; but yet neither pleaded headache nor heartache. **26...Bg5+ 27.Nf4+ Kf7 28.Kd3 Bf6 29.Ne4 Ne8 30.Qd5+ Kg7 31.Ne6+** and Jaenisch wins. Had certain of our poetical contemporaries recorded this game, Jaenisch would doubtless go down to

posterity as “the great conqueror of Mongrédien, and chief of – the ivory handled umbrella.” The mate would also have been described as given in the “cloud compelling style.”

In matches around this time, Mongrédien lost 9-6 to Medley in 1850, and 4-0-1 to Williams in 1851. The book *Uncrowned Champions* gives scores of the informal games played by Kieseritzky at the time of the great London 1851

tournament; Kieseritzky won the majority against Buckle, Mayet, Szen, Loewenthal, Bird, and Anderssen, tied Jaenisch 1-1-1, and had a losing score (1-2) only against Mongrédien.

Later scores of Mongrédien are not very impressive. We must remember that Mongrédien, born in 1807, was neither a young man nor a chess professional when he lost matches against Morphy (7-0-1 in 1859), Harrwitz (7-0-1 in 1860), Steinitz (7-0 in 1863), and finished near the bottom of the strong London 1862 tournament.

In the chess world, Mongrédien had a reputation as a particularly pleasant opponent. Kennedy calls him a prince, Morphy was very friendly with Mongrédien, and he is listed as a contributor to both chess and charitable causes. As a side note, Mongrédien was one of the first proponents of chess played with randomized starting positions (see, for example, *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, January 1876), and some of these old games have been preserved.

Outside of the chess world, my first reference to Mongrédien in London comes from the *London Times* of January 19, 1850. He is called a corn-factor (an agent for the sale of grain), and writes a report titled *Report on Corn Consumption of Indian Corn in Ireland in 1849*. Although it is hard to imagine a less interesting title, the report dealt with an important issue. It had been illegal to import corn into England or Ireland, but the great potato famine led to a loosening of this law. Supporters of Free Trade felt that this was a major step in easing the famine, and used it as an argument for further reduction of tariffs in general. The corn laws were a subject of lively debate in parliament and the press for many years.

Around 1870, Mongrédien published *Trees and Shrubs for English Plantations*. This may have also had an alternate title, since a book about trees and shrubs by Mongrédien is advertised as *The Planter's Guide* in the *London Times* of Oct. 28, 1870. There is a perplexing advertisement in the *Times* of May 21, June 21, and July 15, 1878 with the listing "Frank Allerton: an Autobiography. By Augustus Mongrédien. 3 vols."

At an age when most people think about slowing down, Mongrédien suddenly became extremely active. He became an ardent activist for free trade, writing controversial pamphlets on the subject. The first was called *Free Trade and the English Economy*, which appeared around 1879. It was recommended by popular politician John Bright, and sold tens of thousands of copies. As a side note, another prominent chess player and officer of the London Chess Club, George Medley, also wrote pamphlets in support of free trade, which makes me wonder if some of the famous disputes between chess clubs of the time period might have been tied to political affiliations as well as to personality differences.

Mongrédien's most controversial book, *The Western Farmer of America*,

came out in 1880. The book claimed that protective tariffs ostensibly imposed to help the United States farm economy actually had a negative overall impact on the farmers themselves, as well as on the entire trade system. Some of the responses to the book deal with serious technical objections, but other reactions were quite heated. The *Christian Union* of June 30, 1880 says that “The pamphlet is written in order to secure a larger sale of English manufactures in the United States.” The *International Review* of December, 1880, calls it an extraordinary example of insular thought. The *North American Review* of November, 1882, writes of the essay, “Our farmers are the object of the deepest solicitude and sympathy on the part of the Cobden Club [JS: a free trade organization which distributed Mongrédien’s work]. It is distance (colored by self-interest) lends enchantment to the view.” It is called an incendiary pamphlet in *The Literary World* of July 16, 1881.

A particularly colorful attack on the book appears in the *Rolla New Era* of November 23, 1889. It begins with:

If I did Steal Eggs, I Didn’t Suck ‘Em

Such was the plea set up in extenuation of his offense offered up by a robber of hens’ nests when caught in the theft. Very analogous is the argument used by Mr. Augustus Mongrédien, the great high priest and expounder of British Free-Trade, when charged ...

Why did this book attract so much attention? It was not just what was written, but how it was distributed. The Cobden Club decided to attempt to persuade farmers of the benefits of free trade by distributing copies for free in the western United States. The tactic did not work. Recalling the hard lesson learned, the leader of the Cobden Club tells the *Tribune* on Sept. 27, 1891, “One of the things that persuaded us that it was unwise to discuss the question of free trade in America was the reception given to Augustus Mongrédien’s *The Western Farmers of America*. The book was simply torn to pieces.” The issue still rankled Westerners years later; the *Castle Rock (Colorado) Journal* of September 7, 1892 recalls when the Cobden Club “hired one Professor Mongrédien to write up the side of Free Trade, and his books were scattered free by the 100,000 through the West.”

Mongrédien, though in his seventies, continued to publish at a rapid pace. *The History of the Free Trade Movement* appeared in 1881. It again was distributed free in the United States, and even translated into Japanese and sold at a low price there; Mongrédien is called a very controversial writer in the *Literary World* of July 16, 1881. Other books on economics include *Pleas for Protectionism Examined*, *Wealth-Creation*, *Free Trade and English Commerce*, and *Trade Depression, Recent and Past*. *Overland Monthly* and *Out West Magazine* of July, 1883, calls Mongrédien “one of the few men practically engaged in commercial matters who have ever taken up the study of economics” as part of a very favorable review of his work. The *Atlantic* of July, 1883 says that the short works published by Mongrédien are planned as part of a larger single work. Mongrédien also branched out into other areas of

politics; an 1883 pamphlet on privatizing the Suez Canal was supported by Lord Granville, but opposed by Gladstone. *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* notes his support for a United Europe. The Liberal government awarded Mongrédien a literary pension of 100 pounds per year in 1886; he was a sufficiently controversial figure that the pension provoked parliamentary opposition, as reported in the *London Times* of Aug 30, 1887.

Thus, he is remembered in his obituaries not as a chess player, but as a political writer. The *Brooklyn Eagle* of April 5, 1888 announces that “Mr. Mongrédien, the eminent writer on free trade, is dead,” while *Current Literature* of December 1888 remembers Mongrédien as “an able member of the Cobden Club and a strong, clear writer on free-trade and political economy.”

For some reason, even though free trade versus protection remains an issue in current politics, the heated economic debates of the past seem uninteresting to us. We Americans may have learned that William Jennings Bryan said, “You shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold,” but the accompanying rallying cry of “16-1!” (the proposed silver vs. gold ratio in coinage, as opposed to the existing 15-1 ratio) seems far too trivial to interest us. Thus, Mongrédien’s appeals for free trade are forgotten, while some of his chess games remain classics. Mongrédien also lives on in another field, which has only been mentioned briefly up to this point.

Mongrédien’s book *Trees and Shrubs for English Plantations* was not simply the jottings of an aristocratic dilettante, but a part of a serious interest in commercial botany. He purchased a 300-acre estate in 1862, as well as an experimental farm in the 1870s. Mongrédien employed some of the leading botanists of his time period as directors of a company, but it was an expensive failure. Mongrédien’s first attempt at commercial gardening was quite important. Although not the enormous success he hoped for, his advocacy created a boom in a plant which still has some advocates today.

Mongrédien decided to create a lawn that did not require mowing. The *Horticulturist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste* of June, 1859, and August, 1859 likes Mongrédien’s idea; this quote is from *Gardener’s Chronicle* of January 19, 1860:

New Substitute for Lawn Grass

Spargula Pilifera — To Mr. Mongrédien belongs the merit of having first pointed out that Spargula Pilifera was capable of forming an excellent substitute for grass in the formation of lawns. A piece of ground planted here four years ago with this pretty little moss like Alpine, is now, and has been for these three years, closely covered with a carpet of the richest green — soft and elastic to tread, and forming a turf equal to that of the finest grass, for which, at first sight, it might easily be mistaken. Over grass, it however, possesses many advantages; in the first place, it requires no mowing, and it is reported to withstand the effects of a long-continued drought better than any

grass, remaining comparatively green when the latter has been burnt up.

The article continues at length, concluding that it seems extremely promising but needs to be tried out on a larger scale. A search for *Spergula pilifera* on the web gives thousands of hits; the plant is also called Lawn Pearlwort and according to some web-sites Irish Moss. Gardening is as unknown and terrifying field to me as chess is for many other people, but the plant seems to still have commercial appeal and according to one web-site is “generally known in consequence of its failure some years since as a substitute for lawn grass.” Not mowing lawns sounds like a wonderful boon to mankind. I have to wonder whether this plant is being suppressed by high tariffs imposed by sinister grass farmers, and whether someday we will live in Mongrédien’s utopia, where there are no tariffs and grass never needs to be cut.

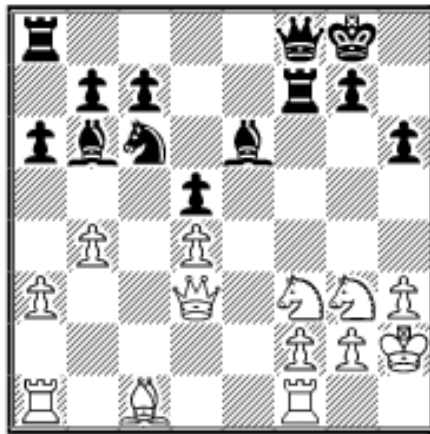
When I called Mongrédien a second-rank player earlier, I did not mean to imply that he was weak. He was not on the championship level, and was handily defeated in matches with top players, but the 1859 *Chess Player’s Chronicle* still lists him as one of the twelve top players in London, although he was past his peak as a player by that time. Kennedy included Mongrédien in his list of prospective players for the London 1851 tournament; I presume this became impossible when the London Club fell out with Staunton, and organized a separate tournament. Fiske includes Mongrédien in a list of major British players in the years 1825-1850. An article on chess in the *Atlantic* magazine of June 1860 includes Mongrédien as a leading “heroic” player, i.e. a player with a very sharp, attacking style. I think that these may overstate Mongrédien’s ability somewhat, probably because of his prominence as head of the London chess club, but Mongrédien certainly was not a weak player, and could produce some interesting games.

Some of Mongrédien’s losses against top players, such as Morphy and Steinitz, are well-known games. I give a small sample of wins by Mongrédien below. I start with a convincing win by Mongrédien over Elijah Williams. This in 1844, which in my opinion was roughly when Mongrédien was playing his best chess.

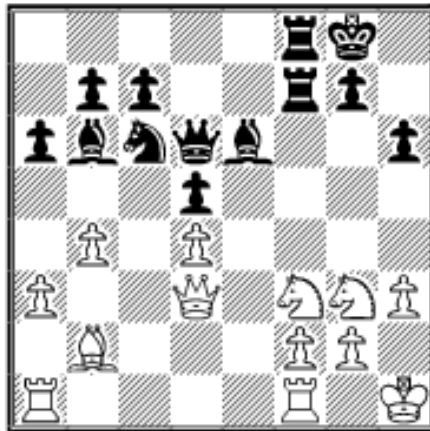
Williams-Mongrédien

From *History of the Bristol Chess Club*, pg. 44

1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 Bc5 3.Nf3 d6 4.c3 Nf6 5.d4 exd4 6.cxd4 Bb6 7.Nc3 0-0 8.h3 h6 9.0-0 Nxe4 10.Bxf7+ Rxf7 11.Nxe4 d5 12.Ng3 Nc6 13.a3 Qf8 — Threatening 14...Bxh3. 14.Kh2 Be6 15.b4 a6 16.Qd3



16...Qd6 — Worth considering was the exchange sac **16...Rxf3!? 17.Qxf3 Qxf3 18.gxf3 Nxd4 19.Kg2 Nb3 20.Rb1 Nxc1 21.Rbxc1. 17.Kh1 Raf8 18.Bb2**



18...Bxh3! 19.Ne5 Rxf2 — Strongest was **19...Bxg2+ 20.Kxg2 Nxe5—+,** but the text still wins. **20.Rxf2 Rxf2 21.gxh3 Rxb2 22.Nf5 Qe6 23.Rg1 Nxe5 24.Nxh6+ Kf8 25.dxe5 Qxe5 26.Rg2 Qe1+ 0-1**

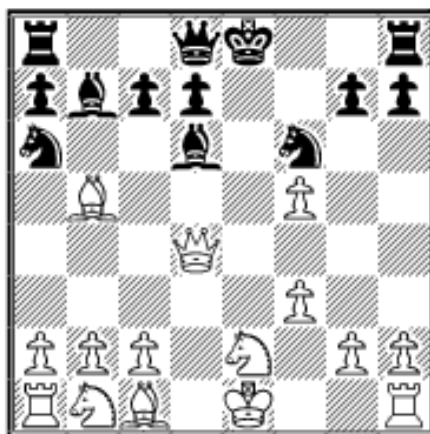
We conclude with two wins against Anderssen. The first game was played in London in 1851. In general, Anderssen had a much lower score in informal games than in serious matches and tournaments. In this game, Anderssen plays some

bizarre opening moves, which he would never play in more serious games. Still, he achieves the sort of wild position that he excels in, and Mongrédien plays well in securing the victory.

Mongrédien-Anderssen

From *The Chess Games of Adolph Anderssen* (Pickard), game 309

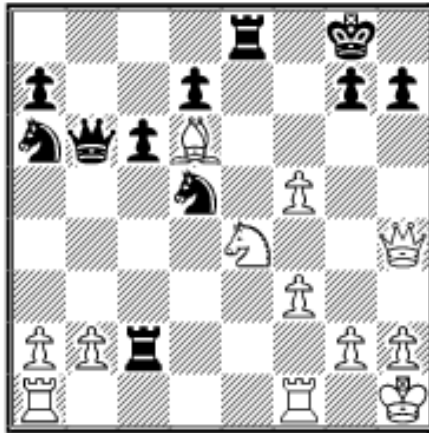
1.e4 e5 2.Bc4 b5 3.Bxb5 f5 4.d4 exd4 5.Qxd4 Nf6 6.exf5 Bb7 7.f3 Bd6 8.Ne2 Na6



A rather odd-looking position. Because of Black's liberality with pawns, White may have a theoretically won game, but winning it against Anderssen is no foregone conclusion. **9.Qe3+ Kf7 10.Qb3+ Bd5 11.Bc4 c6 12.Bxd5+ Nxd5 13.0-0 Re8 14.Qc4 Qb6+ 15.Kh1 Re5**



16.Bf4 — Good, but stronger perhaps was 16.Nbc3 Rxf5 17.Nxd5 cxd5 18.Qg4 g6 19.Nd4 Rh5 20.Qxd7+. **16...Rxe2**
17.Bxd6 Rae8 **18.Nc3** Rxc2 **19.Qh4** Kg8
20.Ne4



20...Ne3? — Allowing a winning attack. Relatively best was 20...Qxb2 21.Rae1 Re2. Mongrédien now concludes energetically. **21.Qh5!** Qd8 **22.Ng5** h6
23.Qf7+ — Good, but missing a forced mate by 23.f6! Nf5 (if 23...hxg5 24.f7#, or 23.gxf6 24.Qg6+ etc.) 24.f7+ Kh8 25.fxe8Q+ etc. Still, the outcome is hardly in doubt. **23...Kh8** **24.f6** Nf5 **25.fxg7+** Nxg7 **26.Qb3** Qxg5 **27.Qxc2** Nf5 **28.f4** Qh5 **29.Be5+** Kh7 **30.a3** 1-0

The second game is very wild. There are definitely mistakes, but Anderssen certainly initiated a creative attack. Mongrédien responds well, marching his king boldly into a dangerous-looking position. It is worth playing over, and you will see that Mongrédien could be quite resourceful. The game was played in Manchester in 1857.

Mongrédien-Anderssen

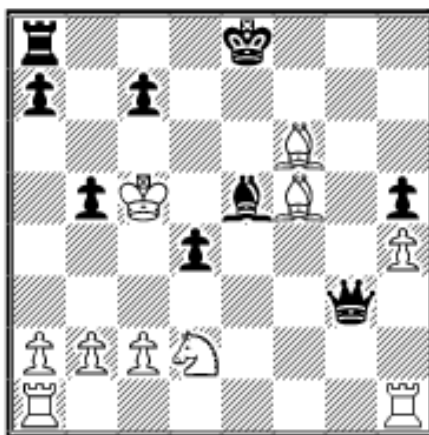
From *The Chess Games of Adolph Anderssen*, game 413

1.e4 e5 **2.f4** exf4 **3.Nf3** g5 **4.h4** g4 **5.Ne5** Nf6 **6.Nxg4** Nxe4 **7.Qf3** d5 **8.d3** h5
9.dxe4 Bxg4 **10.Qxf4** Bd6 **11.Qe3** d4 **12.Qf2** Nd7 **13.Bc4** Ne5 **14.Bg5** Qd7
15.Nd2 f6 **16.Qxf6??**

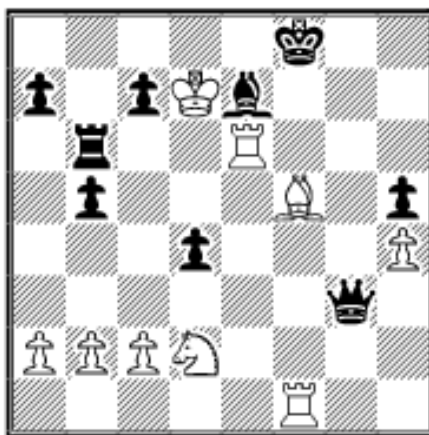


16...Nd3+? — Why White did not play 16.Bxf6, and why Black did not play the immediately winning 16...Rf8!, are among life's mysteries. **17.Bxd3** Bg3+
18.Kf1 Rf8 **19.e5** Rxf6+ **20.Bxf6** Qf7 — Better 20...Bf4, Bf5, or Qe6. Now with 21.Kg1 Mongrédien might have had a tenable game, but ... **21.Bc4?** Qg6 **22.Bd3** Bf5 **23.Ke2** Bxe5 — Good, although 23...Qg4+ 24.Nf3 Bxe5 would have been devastating, viz. 25.Bxe5 Qxg2+ etc. **24.Bxf5** Qxg2+ — Better perhaps

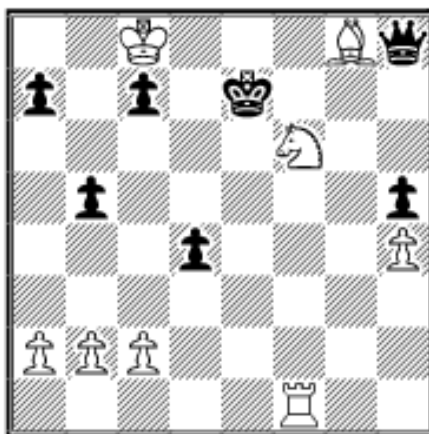
24...Qxf5 25.Bg5 Qxc2. **25.Kd3 Qg3+ 26.Kc4 b5+ 27.Kc5**



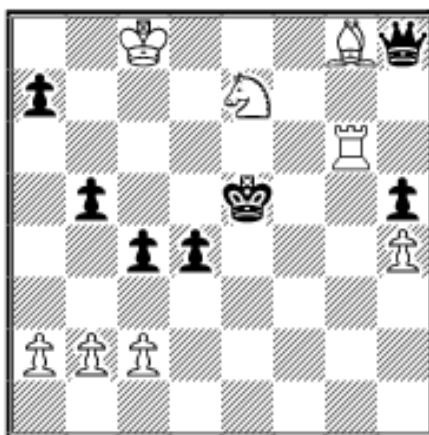
White's king wanders far into enemy territory, but what choice does he have? **27...Bxf6 28.Rae1+ Kf8?! — Missing 28...Be7+! 29.Kd5 Rd8+ 30.Ke4 Bb4—+. 29.Re6 Be7+ 30.Kc6 Rb8 31.Rf1 Rb6+ 32.Kd7**



32...Bf6? — Missing a chance to consolidate by **32...Rd6+!** **33.Kc8 Qxh4 34.Kxc7 Rxe6 35.Bxe6 Bf6—+. Fritz8** considers White to have a slight advantage now. **33.Ne4 Qg7+?** — Better **33...Qg2. 34.Kc8 Qh8 35.Nxf6 Rxe6 36.Bxe6 Ke7+ 37.Bg8**



37...c5? — Better **37...Kd6. 38.Nd5+?! — Better 38.Kc7!, e.g. 38...Qg7 39.Nd5+ Ke8+ 40.Bf7+ Kf8 41.Kd7 c4 42.Ne7** and Black is forced into **42...Qxf7 etc. 38...Kd6 39.Rf6+ Ke5 40.Rg6 c4 41.Ne7**



41...d3?? — The final mistake. Black still had chances after **41...Ke4** or **Kf4. 42.Re6+!** — Giving Black a choice between **42...Kf4 43.Ng6+** losing the queen, or **42...Kd4 43.c3+ Kc5 44.Rc6#**. Hence: **1-0**



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