

Contents

Preface	7
Chapter 1	The first encounter10
Chapter 2	The pseudo-classical style19
Chapter 3	The insult27
	First game: Tarrasch-Nimzowitsch, Nuremberg 1904 28
Chapter 4	Tarrasch's rise to the top 36
Chapter 5	Three Hundred Chess Games..... 44
Chapter 6	A man of enormous ego.....59
Chapter 7	Don Quixote at the chessboard76
	Second game: Tarrasch-Nimzowitsch, Hamburg 1910 83
Chapter 8	Deep strategy 89
	Third game: Nimzowitsch-Tarrasch, San Sebastian 1911 91
Chapter 9	Dogmatism..... 100
	Fourth game: Tarrasch-Nimzowitsch, San Sebastian 1912. ... 101
Chapter 10	Hideous moves113
	Fifth game: Nimzowitsch-Tarrasch, San Sebastian 1912 113
Chapter 11	The modern chess game..... 126
Chapter 12	Modern and unmodern chess..... 136
Chapter 13	The theoretician 146
Chapter 14	Variations!.....161
Chapter 15	Words and moves 172
Chapter 16	Rules and exceptions 183
Chapter 17	The new System.....191
Chapter 18	St Petersburg 1914 201
	Sixth game: Nimzowitsch-Tarrasch, St Petersburg 1914 213
Chapter 19	The Great War 221
	Seventh game: Tarrasch-Nimzowitsch, Göteborg 1920 229

Chapter 20	Zugzwang	231
	Eighth game: Nimzowitsch-Tarrasch, Carlsbad 1923	237
Chapter 21	The revaluation of all chess values	241
Chapter 22	Nimzowitsch's rise to the top.	254
	Ninth game: Nimzowitsch-Tarrasch, Baden-Baden 1925 . . .	258
	Tenth game: Nimzowitsch-Tarrasch, Breslau 1925	261
Chapter 23	My System	264
Chapter 24	Battle for the World Championship	290
	Eleventh game: Nimzowitsch-Tarrasch, Semmering 1926 . .	291
	Twelfth game: Nimzowitsch-Tarrasch, Bad Kissingen 1928 . .	303
Chapter 25	Chess Praxis	307
Chapter 26	Carlsbad 1929	320
Chapter 27	Endgame	335
Chapter 28	The philosopher and the housewife	347
Chapter 29	Artist of variations	364
	Acknowledgements	385
	Index of names	387
	Explanation of symbols.	390
	Bibliography	391

Preface

I do not limit myself to the game at hand, but search for the stable point in the flight of the appearances, most often I abstract from the specific case towards the general, and I set up a number of principles and doctrines, whose knowledge will improve the level of play enormously.

Siegbert Tarrasch, Preface *Die Moderne Schachpartie* (1912)

But in the quiet lived and searched someone who loved the truth in chess and, in a tough fight, endeavoured to discern its everlasting laws. And that person – was me. And what I was lucky enough to find were strictly formulated laws of chess strategy expanded into a harmonious whole.

Aron Nimzowitsch, *Wiener Schachzeitung* (1913)

Bent over his board, the chess player wrestles with his position. He has accumulated a lot of knowledge in his life: concrete knowledge, understanding, skills, intuition. All this he deploys while feverishly thinking about his next move. That knowledge could be represented as a spectrum, running from very concrete to very general. Or, perhaps even better, in the form of a pyramid, with the highest truths at the top and the concrete moves at the bottom. In which case it would be very nice if those moves followed logically from the truths at the top of the pyramid.

The protagonists of this book, Siegbert Tarrasch (1862-1934) and Aron Nimzowitsch (1886-1935), looked at chess in this pyramidal form and were in search of the truths at the top, of ‘the stable point in the flight of the appearances’, or, formulated no less ambitiously, ‘the everlasting laws of the truth in chess’. Their different ideas on the subject were the prelude to perhaps the fiercest and most compelling theoretical battle in chess history.

Tarrasch was the older of the two and he was already considered the leading theorist when Nimzowitsch made his entrance into the chess world. From the very first moment, Nimzowitsch was at odds with Tarrasch and was determined to knock him off the throne as the greatest chess thinker. Consequently, their personal relations became rather grim.

Both were among the world’s best throughout their chess careers and were even close to the world title at some point – Tarrasch just a little closer than Nimzowitsch. Their duel took place not only in words but also at the board, although by the time Nimzowitsch joined the world elite, Tarrasch had already entered the second half of his career. Yet, partly due to this intellectual

animosity, their encounters at the board were also highly fraught. Between 1904 and 1928, they faced each other in twelve games. Almost all of these were great battles, and they run like a common thread throughout this book.

Tarrasch was an outspoken and confident individual and, to put it mildly, a tad arrogant. He was for some time the obvious candidate to succeed William Steinitz as the World Champion, but Emanuel Lasker beat him to the punch in 1894. Tarrasch maintained for quite some time that he was the actual number one, but in their 1908 World Championship Match, he went down with convincing figures. He wore the honorary title *Praeceptor Germaniae* (teacher of Germany) with pride and he also had no objection if people replaced *Germaniae* with *mundi*. Tarrasch was a doctor and also kept a practice; he was one of the few top players of the time who were not full-time professionals. He was married twice and had five children from his first marriage.

He was, in short, a man of the world, and this placed him in stark contrast to his great opponent. Nimzowitsch had soon given up his studies and was a chess player before anything else. We don't know if he had any love life, and he lived in a rented room for much of his adult life. From descriptions, he emerges as a tad eccentric, rather neurotic, but also very provocative, vain and touchy. The tormented artist.

Whereas one could very well describe Tarrasch as a solid teacher, the image of Nimzowitsch as a philosopher, or even a prophet, comes to mind. He is perhaps the only chess writer in history with a following, enticed by the perspective of profound strategy.

During the period in which this book is set, the chess world was in full development and the level of play was rising considerably, especially if we include the first half of Tarrasch's career, when Nimzowitsch had not yet appeared on the scene. The controversy between the two became public just before World War I, but actually started when they met for the first time in 1904. After the war, their struggle continued in full force, and new players joined the debate. Nimzowitsch's main work, *My System*, appeared in 1927, and works by more or less kindred spirits (including Richard Réti and Savielly Tartakower) appeared in the same period. Together, they have gone down in history as the hypermoderns, after the title of Tartakower's book *Die Hypermoderne Schachpartie*. In other areas of intellectual activity, the interbellum is often described as a feverish, turbulent period full of experimental and revolutionary movements. The hypermoderns fit nicely into this picture and will be discussed at length in this book.

But a more important secondary role in this story, regarding our overarching theme, is taken by a somewhat lesser-known chess player: Semyon

Alapin. He did not play as strongly as our protagonists, but wrote a lot about chess, especially on opening theory.

When Nimzowitsch launched his attack on Tarrasch in the *Wiener Schachzeitung* in 1913, Alapin came up with a response criticizing both of them. In his view, and this is the third position that will be examined in this book, Tarrasch and Nimzowitsch had far too high expectations of their general principles. The truth was rather to be found in concrete variations. Nimzowitsch reacted indignantly, writing that, of course, Alapin's variations could not threaten his philosophy. A 'Variantenkünstler', he condescendingly called him, a word that does not translate so well in English. An artist of variations, but an artist in the sense of, say, a conjurer. Nimzowitsch also had a derogatory qualification for Tarrasch, likening his work to the 'advice of an experienced housewife'. This gives us three positions: the housewife, the philosopher and the Variantenkünstler.

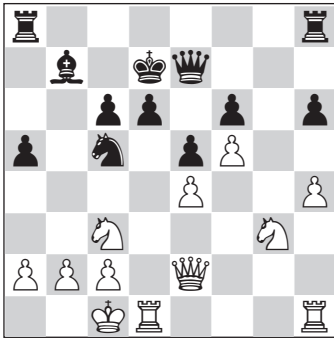
Even today, in many modern books on chess theory and on how to become a better chess player, these three positions can be found in all sorts of variations. Therefore, the discussion between Tarrasch, Nimzowitsch and Alapin has lost none of its topicality.

I am an emancipated husband, my wife brings in the lion's share of the income and I write chess books and do most of the housework. So 'advice from an experienced housewife' certainly does not sound like a disqualification to me, and that would plead for Tarrasch. But I am also a philosophy graduate, so Nimzowitsch's desire for an almost Platonic system, where moves flow naturally from eternal universal truths, does not leave me untouched either. However, the best chess player of the moment could well be described as a Variantenkünstler, who needs no words at all.

So as far as different perspectives on the search for truth in chess are concerned, I'll keep my cards close to my chest for now. But beyond that philosophy of science perspective, I would like to tell the story of the clash between these two extraordinary characters – or even three, if we include Alapin, who was by no means an easy gentleman either. A clash that took place in a turbulent period in (chess) history and also gives a nice view on it.

CHAPTER 1

The first encounter



White to move

In his memoirs of Nimzowitsch, Mieses tells us that the same joke was circulating about Nimzowitsch as it had been a quarter of a century earlier about Curt von Bardeleben: ‘He studies chess and plays law.’ Perhaps it was also philosophy. But that has since become irrelevant. Nimzowitsch’s study venue was not the university auditorium but the chess salon of the *Kaffee Kaiserhof* in Berlin.

Jacques Hannak¹

Born on 7 November 1886 to a prosperous Jewish merchant family in Riga, Nimzowitsch learned chess at the age of eight from his father, who was himself a very decent player. Naturally, Aron was expected to pursue a social career after high school, and he also studied at several universities. To his father’s dismay, however, it became clear fairly soon that Nimzowitsch wanted to live only for chess. At the time, chess was not seen as an honourable profession, and even the very strongest barely managed to make ends meet. Of that conflict between father and son we do not know first-hand, but Alexander Koblenz, best known as the trainer of the later World Champion Mikhail Tal, brought it up sideways in response to a question about the beginning of his own career.² Koblenz also wanted to devote himself entirely to chess, but, of course, his father was against it: ‘He told me about the experiences of his timber-trade acquaintance Isaiah Nimzowitsch, who he had met at the Riga exchange. His son Aron used to sit for days on end in the exchange café, playing amateurs for stakes. Isaiah

1 In a biography of Nimzowitsch accompanying a reissue (1958) of *Mein System*.

2 In a conversation with Genna Sosonko, *The Essential Sosonko*, p. 129.

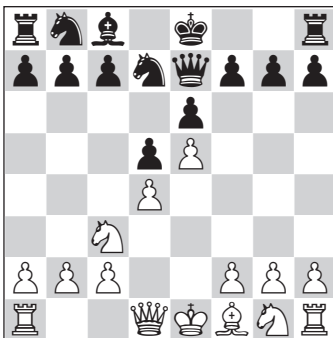
sent his son to Zurich University, but he abandoned his studies and became a chess professional. My father heard how colleagues, trying to wound the old man Nimzowitsch, would say: “How was it, Mr Nimzowitsch, that in your respectable family there appeared such a tramp?” Incidentally, Koblenz’s father was just as unsuccessful as Nimzowitsch’s father in setting his son on the right path.

At the age of 17, which was particularly young at the time, Nimzowitsch made his debut in serious tournament chess. That was at the 14th Congress of the German Chess Federation in Coburg in 1904, and it was there that he first met Tarrasch. Nimzowitsch played in the second group, the so-called Hauptturnier. In it, you could qualify for the highest group, the Meisterturnier. Tarrasch, then at the height of his powers, had already won several such Master tournaments in his career. This time he did not participate, but apparently he was an occasional guest.

Many years later, Nimzowitsch described his first meeting with Tarrasch in *How I Became a Grandmaster* (1929).³ In a joint analysis of a game by Nimzowitsch against Wilhelm Hilse, Tarrasch made some critical remarks. These brought to the surface a theme Nimzowitsch had struggled with before. On that, he wrote the following:

Allow me at this point to relate a little chess psychological episode, which played an immense role in the history of my development. In one of my earlier games a position had arisen characterized by a pawn chain. Let us suppose that the following moves were played:

1.e4 e6 2.d4 d5 3.♘c3 ♟f6 4.♙g5 ♘e7 5.e5 ♞fd7 6.♙xe7 ♚xe7



³ That booklet was in Russian; I have used several translations here, including from Keene’s and Skjoldager/Nielsen’s books – see the bibliography.



Siegbert Tarrasch



Aron Nimzowitsch

In this approximate position, I was wondering: 'I could play 7.♘f3 or I could play 7.f4.' It struck me that this painful question could only be answered in its essence if somebody discovered the general laws and principles for the exploitation of the pawn chain. In other words, in a purely intuitive sense, it dawned on me that there existed strategic elements and that they were, so to speak, seeking their ideologue and 'lawgiver'. That I myself could emerge as such an ideologue was a thought that did not even enter my head. Altogether at the time, this episode did not seem to be of significance and I did not give it much attention. But in 1904, when I had completely forgotten this slight and quite innocuous story, the following happened to me.

The Plato of chess

Before we move on to that 'following', i.e. Tarrasch's comments on Nimzowitsch's game against Hilse, it is nice to dwell for a moment on Nimzowitsch's reflections from his younger years because they so nicely reflect the core of his entire later work.

At the time, people had very little experience with the main lines of the French Defence. Nimzowitsch leaves it open whether his thoughts were inspired by exactly the above position or a somewhat similar one, but whatever the case: regarding this position, in the course of history, it was found out that 7.f4 is indeed preferable to 7.♘f3. But how did people find out? By empirical means, by trial and error, by analysis and practice, or by discovering 'general laws and principles', as Nimzowitsch wants?

These questions tie in with a core theme in philosophy that has been recurring in all kinds of guises since Plato: the relationship between the general and the particular, between idealism and empiricism, and perhaps also between philosophy and science, to sum it up somewhat crudely.

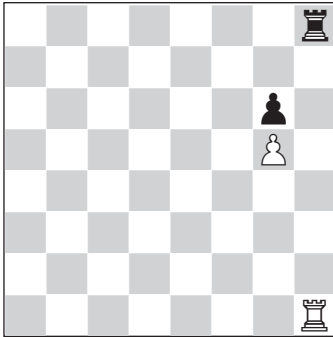
Moreover, with his idealism – the theory that visible reality consists of imperfect reflections of ideas of a higher order – Plato immediately took a position at one extreme. As the above quote shows, Nimzowitsch took a position at the same extreme in his quest to become the ideologue or legislator of chess. This was an ambitious aspiration.

For example, looking at the above position, both 7.♘f3 and 7.f4 seem very reasonable at first glance. The advantage of 7.f4 is that this move gives e5 extra support, and that can be useful after an exchange of the black c-pawn against the white d-pawn. But 7.♘f3 develops faster and leaves no weaknesses. Can rules or laws regarding pawn chains facilitate the choice here or can only analysis and tournament practice determine the difference?

After his introduction with the French example, Nimzowitsch comes to talk about that first meeting with Tarrasch. I give that piece in its entirety because it marks the beginning of the lifelong controversy between the two. It also

depicts very nicely what the crux of that controversy was, and the outcome – at least in Nimzowitsch’s eyes!

With a certain chess master (whose name will be disclosed later) I was analysing my game against Hilse (Coburg 1904). During the analysis I had to admit that my rook manoeuvres from the d-file to the h-file and back were not at all founded in any strategic necessity. On the extreme right flank the position was this:

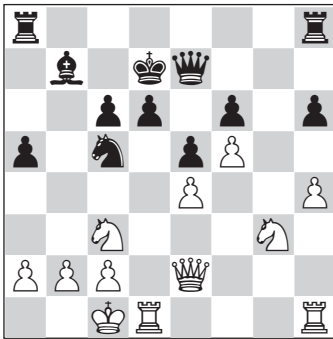


‘You should have played ♖h1-h6,’ the master proclaimed in a portentous tone. ‘But why,’ I asked, still not giving in, ‘I mean the move I played in the game, ♗h1-d1, was not bad either.’ On this modest assertion of mine, I got the following reply, in a tone which permitted no argument: ‘Yes, you should have played ♗h6, because that’s the way you play in cases like this!’ I distinctly remember how these words produced a tremendous effect on me. Suddenly I remembered the abovementioned episode with another element – the pawn chain – and I now made a definitive decision: ‘There are laws and rules for the exploitation of both the pawn chain and the file, and one way or another I must find them.’

An amusing incident it is, that the master who – quite by chance and involuntarily – gave the decisive impulse to my eventual revolutionizing of chess strategy and the overthrow of the pseudo-classical style, was none other than Tarrasch himself, i.e. the very leader of that fashion which was doomed to disappear from the scene on account of my discoveries; in other words, with his own weighty proclamation Tarrasch actually dug his own grave!

If we look at the actual game, we notice that Nimzowitsch moved the construction on the kingside one file – I cannot quite think why. He wrote that down twenty-five years later; perhaps it was no longer clear in his mind what had actually happened.

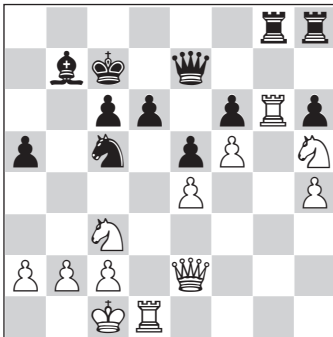
Here is the position about which Tarrasch claimed that the plan with ♖g6 was the only correct one.



Aron Nimzowitsch – Wilhelm Hilse

Coburg 1904 (9)

So: 23. ♖hg1 followed by ♜h5 (or in reverse order) with the intention of ♖g6. Black can defend in various ways, but White stands superbly in all cases, for example after 23... ♜c7 24. ♜h5 ♜h7 25. ♖g6. It makes no sense for Black to try challenging the open g-file. After 23... ♜ag8 24. ♜h5 ♜c7 there follows 25. ♖g6!

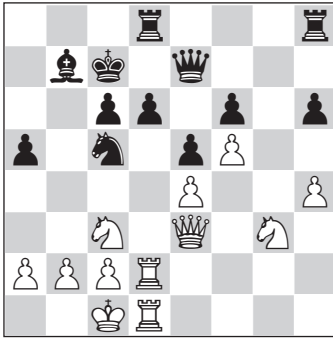


analysis diagram

White is going to double rooks on the g-file, and capturing on g6 is of course out of the question because of the gigantic passed pawn that would be created.

The plan indicated by Tarrasch was indeed the best, but White was in a great position anyway. In such a situation, a player often has several good continuations to choose from. Apart from the weak square on g6, Black's king is his big worry. It is very unsafe and has nowhere to hide, so as long as the queens stay on the board, this gives White a big advantage.

Nimzowitsch therefore decided to double his rooks on the d-file. Not a bad idea either, and after 23. ♖h2 ♜ag8 24. ♜e3 ♜c7 25. ♖hd2 ♜d8 White had a nice advantage:



After quite a few adventures, Nimzowitsch eventually managed to decide this game in his favour.

For Nimzowitsch, this game and the resulting memory of the French issue (7.♘f3 or 7.f4 ?) marked the start of a search for the rules and laws on pawn chains and open files. But, remarkably, although he was so impressed by Tarrasch's self-confidence ('that's the way you play in cases like this!'), Nimzowitsch did not ask Tarrasch about those laws and rules. Of course, it could also be that the conversation was a bit more extensive than depicted here by Nimzowitsch and that he did explicitly ask for an explanation. To which Tarrasch might have replied something like: 'Why, why? Surely that goes without saying; look here, ♖g6!'

That it's nice to control an open file with your rooks, to invade the seventh or sixth rank with those rooks, that g6 is a weak square (just like h5) and that the pawns on h6 and f6 can become weak: all these things were already commonplace for the stronger players at the time, and certainly Tarrasch would have been able to put it into words without difficulty. But for Nimzowitsch, Tarrasch's assertion that 'that's the way to play in this kind of position' was apparently a sign of incapacity. Laws and rules, a more profound chess strategy, were asked for, and he, Nimzowitsch, was the right person to find and explain them.

With his self-assurance and his pomposity, Tarrasch was digging his own grave, Nimzowitsch said. Because by doing so, he initiated the search for a new chess strategy that would eventually spell the end for Tarrasch's 'pseudo-classical' theory.

Nimzowitsch's account of this event is rather succinct and leaves open several questions. Were he and Hilse analysing their game together and was Tarrasch joining them the whole time? Or did he stop by and then make his pedantic remarks – 'Young man, why on earth didn't you play your rook to g6?' Probably the atmosphere was still good at this first encounter, because it soon had a sequel.

Almost absolute correctness

One year later, in a match against the upcoming talent Karl Walbrodt, Tarrasch was again very successful. The match was played for seven wins and Tarrasch achieved them in eight games (with one draw). Walbrodt was not among the very best, but he certainly could play a decent game. A year later, at the top tournament in Hastings, he managed to finish in the middle of the table. About his match against Chigorin, Tarrasch complained that time trouble had regularly affected him (and his opponent) – despite the, from today's perspective, luxurious rate of play of 15 moves per hour. Therefore, in this match with Walbrodt, they played according to the following, rather peculiar, schedule:

The games shall initially be played without clocks. However, if the committee finds that the time taken is too long, it may order that from then on the game shall be played under the control of clocks with a time limit of 1 hour for every 12 moves [...]. Exceeding the time limit shall not immediately result in the loss of the game, but shall entitle the committee to determine that the defaulting player shall make each move that he still lacks for 12 (or 24 or 36) moves in a time limit of 5 minutes. Only the exceeding of this time limit shall result in the loss of the game.

If you are one of those who are regularly struggling with the clock, please read this over again. Even if you have exceeded all the limits, as a final 'punishment' you will still get an increment of 5 minutes per (not yet completed) move. Tarrasch noted with satisfaction that this set-up made for a smooth match. Indeed, he was able to play with such concentration as never before – and also as never afterwards, for that matter: this dream tempo for deep-sea divers did not get any follow-up after this match.

The result was – I must state this so as not to be unjust as a biographer – a degree of correctness that has never been achieved in any series of games that I know of. Apart from the first game, where I deliberately made an incorrect move in order to avoid a draw [...], in the eight games totalling more than 300 moves I not only made no mistakes, but at most overlooked the strongest move three times [...]. Apart from these few exceptions, however, I found the strongest move every time. It was only by playing like this that Walbrodt could be beaten; against my almost absolute correctness he couldn't compete.

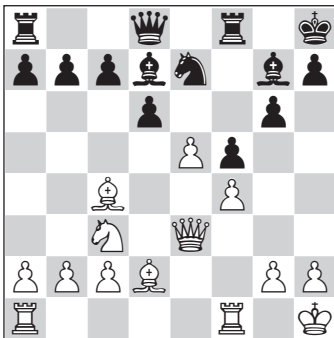
Tarrasch at his best! Of course, the reader will understand that he would rather not boast like this but, as a truthful (auto-)biographer, he has to mention this remarkable fact: in more than 300 moves, he missed the very best move only three times! Nowadays, this would make one more than a little suspicious, but we can be sure that Tarrasch did it on his own.

The previous excerpts already give a good idea of Tarrasch's writing style. But besides a collection of beautiful games and his personal story, Tarrasch wanted to offer the reader more, namely 'a textbook of the game of chess, but without system and methodical arrangement', as he writes in the preface to the second edition (1909). Incidentally, 'without system' was not meant to vex Nimzowitsch; the latter had not written anything at that time and the world had not yet become acquainted with his system. Of the younger generation, Tarrasch writes, there will be few who have not studied his book with profit. He knew that at least from Rubinstein and... Nimzowitsch! (The latter must have told him this before he had decided to declare Tarrasch his arch-enemy.) With due pride, Tarrasch further reports that he had recently learned, to his great surprise, that he had long been adorned with the honorary name 'Praeceptor Germaniae'.



What exactly makes *Three Hundred Chess Games* so instructive? The following few excerpts will give you an idea of that, although it is difficult to choose from the wealth of what Tarrasch has to offer as a teacher.

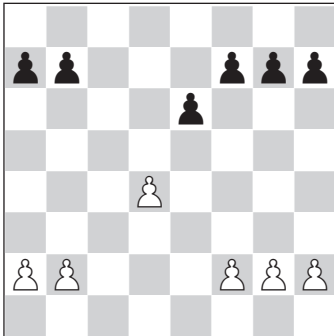
Tarrasch regarded Steinitz's analyses and ideas highly but was strongly opposed to some of his idiosyncrasies. Consequently, Tarrasch is often presented in history books as someone who straightened out Steinitz's sharp edges. Steinitz comes up occasionally in *Three Hundred Chess Games*. In the following excerpt, the tension between Tarrasch and Steinitz is clearly felt at several moments.



Siegbert Tarrasch – Arnold Schottländer

Hamburg 1885 (16)

About White's last move **15.e5**, Tarrasch writes: 'At that time, the dogma of the isolated pawn was not yet known.' This is a stab in the direction of Steinitz, who would establish that dogma a little later. A year after this game, the first World Championship Match took place between Steinitz and Zukertort, and the well-known Isolated Queen's Pawn structure featured in a number of games in that match.



Steinitz was very adamant that this structure was favourable to him (playing Black). When Zukertort died a few years later (in 1888), Steinitz, somewhat typically, used his In Memoriam to explain once again that Zukertort had understood very little of modern chess. This was evident from the fact that Zukertort insisted on playing the above structure with White.

However, regarding this IQP issue, Tarrasch sided with Zukertort. An important point in Tarrasch's view was that deficiencies in the pawn structure could be compensated with active piece play. Steinitz, on the other hand, was often content with a constrained position as long as he had the better pawn structure (or an extra pawn). This is also evident from his recommendation on the next move.

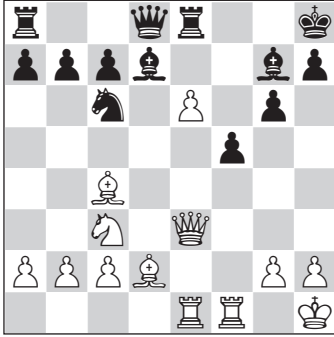
By the way, it should be noted that the isolated e-pawn White gets in this game is also a passed pawn, which, of course, creates a slightly different situation compared to the standard IQP structure.

15...dxe5

'Steinitz recommends 15...♘c8 instead, a very characteristic move for his style', writes Tarrasch. Steinitz had annotated this game in his *International Chess Magazine*. And indeed, such backward moves were very typical of him. But the move played by Schottländer was stronger, although the tactical justification was hard to see.

16.fxе5 ♙c6

Here, Black could have played 16...♘c6. This looks bad at first glance because White's passed pawn steams up very powerfully. However, after 17.e6 ♖e8 18.♞ae1 we get the following position:

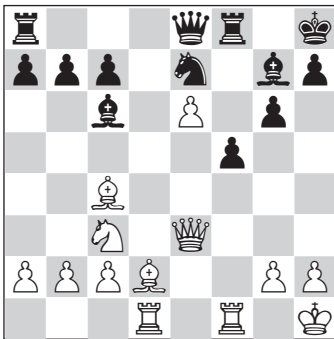


analysis diagram

Black can eliminate the passed pawn with 18...♙xe6!, as after 19.♙xe6 ♘d4 he surprisingly wins his piece back without any problems.

This line (starting with 16...♘c6) is rather advanced tactics. Today's very best players would probably spot it, but in 1885 that was almost unthinkable.

17.♞ad1 ♖e8 18.e6?



'The passed pawn will secure victory', writes Tarrasch, and that is what eventually happened. Here, however, he (and his opponent) overlooked a tactical shot that should surely have been within his grasp: 18...♙xg2+! 19.♙xg2 ♞c6+ followed by 20...♞xc4 and Black has a healthy extra pawn.

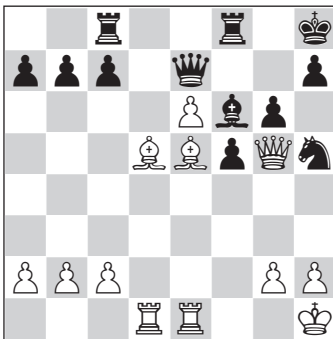
Those who already had some doubts about Tarrasch's aforementioned claim about that series of more than 300 moves in which he overlooked the very strongest move only three times, may feel strengthened by this incident. If Tarrasch overlooked this 18...♙xg2+! shot during the game, and also later in his analysis, he may also have missed a small detail here and there during the series.

But nonetheless, we should not judge Tarrasch's apparent conceit too harshly. If, at some point, you are the strongest chess player in a history of continuous progress, it's quite reasonable to wonder how close you are to perfection. And it is not very strange to think that you might already be rather close to perfection, because it is difficult to see beyond your own horizon. Tarrasch wasn't the only one struggling with this question either. Several other players who were the strongest at some point in history have thought they were close to playing perfect chess. A well-known example is Capablanca, who saw the game's death-by-draw approaching.

Thanks to the engines, we now know that chess players in history have always been far from perfection, but it is doubtful whether we could have found out how big the gap was without the engine.

Back to the game. After this missed opportunity, White did indeed win thanks to his passed pawn, and in the process even managed to deploy a rare cross-pin.

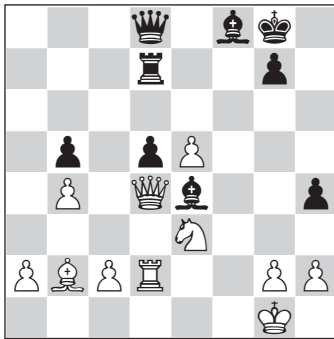
18...♗g8? 19.♖g3 ♖e7 20.♙f4 ♜ac8 21.♞fe1 ♝f6 22.♝d5 ♘xd5 23.♙xd5 ♜h5 24.♖g5 ♙f6 25.♙e5



25...c6 26.♙b3 ♞fe8? 27.♞d7 ♖f8 28.♞f7 ♖xf7 29.exf7 ♜xe5 1-0

Before the endgame, the gods have placed the middlegame

Another difference of opinion with Steinitz gave Tarrasch the inspiration for one of his most famous aphorisms, concerning an issue that has lost none of its topicality today: how to deal with an advancing (rook) pawn? In *The Modern Chess Instructor*, Steinitz had given some extremely cautious rules for dealing with pawns. One was the advice that 'at the utmost a pawn may be sometimes advanced to the fifth (fourth) rank when he can be well supported on each side by so-called chains of pawns that cannot be broken up, but it is rarely good play to advance a pawn to the sixth (third) rank.' No one believes this anymore. Tarrasch was the first to question this dogma of Steinitz.



Siegbert Tarrasch – Johannes Metger

Nuremberg 1888 (1)

Black has sacrificed two pawns already, for which he has no real compensation; only some small attacking chances. But he still has a small trump in his h-pawn.

In this type of position Steinitz recommends not to prevent the advance of the rook-pawn with h2-h3, because this would leave the g3-square weak, but instead to just let the pawn get to h3 and then move the g-pawn. [...] After the course of this game, as well as from my other experiences, I cannot agree with Steinitz's point of view. Indeed, the advanced pawn will be weak in the endgame, but before the endgame, the gods have placed the middlegame, and there the pawn forms a lasting threat to the defender, since it supports mating attacks very effectively.

The game continued **29.a3 h3 30.g3** and though White didn't have too much trouble bringing the point home in the remainder of the game, Tarrasch's judgement is to the point. Though not necessary, safer would have been 29.h3, preventing the further advance of the h-pawn.

Nowadays we know that even in the endgame, such a far-advanced pawn on h3 (or on a3, a6 or h6) is not always weak but can often be a big asset – if such a pawn ever becomes a passed pawn, it is already very close to promotion.

The above extract brings to mind an earlier anecdote by Zukertort in his magazine *The Chess-Monthly*. That one was about Steinitz's favourite opening, the gambit named after him in which he quickly brought his king into play (1.e4 e5 2.♘c3 ♘c6 3.f4 exf4 4.d4 ♙h4+ 5.♚e2). In the London 1883 tournament, which was gloriously won by Zukertort, Steinitz went down hard with his gambit a couple of times. At the time, Zukertort was practically at war with Steinitz, and he wrote with *Schadenfreude* about the latter's favourite opening:

The inefficacy of this Opening has been sufficiently demonstrated over and over again; but it received its severest blow in the late London Tournament, when Mr. Steinitz disowned the long-cherished offspring of his fancy, and had to cast it adrift for the rest of the contest and content himself with such prosaic Openings as the Ruy Lopez, &c.,

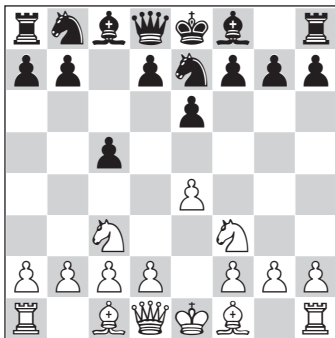
&c. Theoretically the advantages of the Steinitz Gambit are plausible enough: the King is in the middle of the board, and 'White ought to obtain some advantage' if it comes to an end-game. But the misfortune is, that it frequently comes to an early end-game. This reminds us of an incident which occurred some years ago at Mr. Gastineau's. Blackburne, Zukertort, and we forget who else, played a game in consultation against MacDonnell, Löwenthal, and a distinguished end-game player. The latter observed that he, not being wanted during the opening and middle of the game, would reserve his advice for the ending, and wished to be called at that stage, whilst he would stroll about in the meantime. But unfortunately his service was not required, as his allies were mated in the middle of the game.

Normal chess

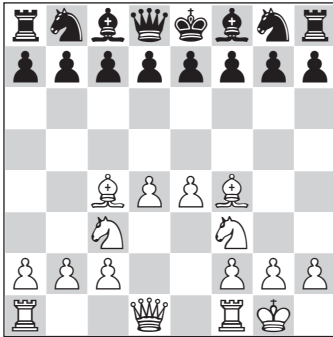
Tarrasch had clear views on how the opening should be played. The chess literature at the time was largely concerned with openings, and almost all major controversies in chess history were about how the opening should be played. We shall see later that this was also true of the polemics between Tarrasch and Nimzowitsch.

Siegbert Tarrasch – Louis Paulsen Nuremberg 1888 (5)

1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.♗c3 ♘e7



Tarrasch's views on the correct approach to the opening cannot be illustrated more beautifully than with this snappy comment: 'As already mentioned, I far prefer the powerful normal move ♘f6 to the sickly creeping move ♘e7.' Many openings have a classical main line, and this usually reflects Tarrasch's views. Powerful and healthy normal chess, you might say, although this description has somewhat suspicious connotations these days. The golden rules of the opening children still learn today express the classical ideal: 'do something' in the centre (or even try to gain the upper hand there); bring all your pieces into play as quickly as possible; move your king into safety. This leads to roughly the following ideal set-up:



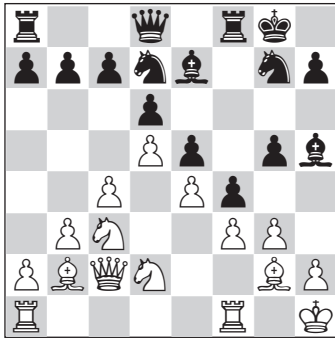
The picture can be completed by bringing the heavy pieces into play, for example by ♔e2, ♖ad1 and ♗fe1.

Typical classical ideals include developing the knights to squares c3 and f3 (c6 and f6) and giving the bishops free space. Another ideal is speed: bringing each piece into play preferably using only one move. Paulsen's 3...♘e7 flies in the face of all these ideals. For instance, it doesn't actually do anything for development. If you start counting tempi, and this was a favourite method of Tarrasch, you see that after this move, Black still needs two tempi to bring the f8-bishop and the e7-knight into play. With the classical ...♘f6 and ...♘e7, that could have been done one move faster. Earlier, we saw that Nimzowitsch mocked Tarrasch's tempi-counting during their first game. Still, this method does offer a useful perspective on the speed of development in the opening. Looking at the Sicilian, for example, there are big differences between the main lines in terms of Black's speed of development. The Najdorf develops very slowly with Black also starting on the queenside instead of, classically, developing the kingside first. In contrast, the Dragon shows a rather fast, almost classical, way of developing. Like the Najdorf, the Sicilians with 2...e6 are modern openings with slow development schemes that deal with the queenside first. The Sicilian after 1.e4 c5 2.♘f3 e6 3.d4 cxd4 4.♘xd4 a6 is nowadays usually called the Kan Variation, but also sometimes the Paulsen Variation. The latter name is actually more correct, because the Black player from the above game was much earlier with it (and his brother Wilfried also liked to play it).

Counting tempi from the start makes a player aware of the speed of development in a given opening. But during the game, it is more common to count in the other direction, namely how many more tempi are needed to finish development or to bring the king into safety by castling. This method of tempi-counting gave Tarrasch's theory an aura of science; it is nice if things can not only be named but also quantified. Quantifying was also done before Tarrasch, for instance when determining the relative value of pieces, using the pawn as a starting point.

CHAPTER 22

Nimzowitsch's rise to the top



White to move

He is, by the way, contrary to various assertions and in contrast to the well-known chess writer Nimzowitsch, the most amiable and nicest person imaginable, but should not exaggerate in this respect. Occasionally knocking over the pieces instead of resigning the game, apparently only to increase the enjoyment of the winning partner, is perhaps not necessary.

Editorial comment in the *Wiener Schachzeitung* on the chess player Nimzowitsch in the Baden-Baden tournament 1925

How deeply affected Nimzowitsch was by Réti's emergence as the new leader of modern chess is clear from an article he wrote in the first issue of the *Wiener Schachzeitung* of 1925. In that piece, titled *Partien die ein Gesicht haben* ('Games with character'), he again lashed out harshly at Réti.

Nimzowitsch begins with a lengthy philosophical reflection on what makes good literature. To summarise briefly, a good novel, he says, must have an idea (an 'assertion'), and that idea must be worked out ('impregnated') in a personally lived-through way. The same applies to chess games. The real artists among chess masters are those who, in their games, manage to implement their own ideas in their own completely unique way.

This is true of Lasker, for instance:

Lasker is an admirer and confessor of healthy strength. It is a pleasure to replay the games in which this truly profound master manages to realise the surplus of an exchange under difficult conditions. Why was this so enjoyable? Well, because it brings out the very best in Lasker.

It is essential that these are your own ideas, not borrowed (or even stolen) ones. This is the case with Réti:

In contrast to this, we experience in Réti the strange spectacle that his games, despite their apparently original layout, nevertheless appear stilted and somewhat tedious. The basic idea of Reti's strategy is to be seen in the restraint of the central pawns. At the same time, however, he by no means refrains from observing the central squares. On the contrary, the centre is sharply fixed, e.g. by bishops, and its successful advance is always prevented. In short, instead of a material centre, a control of the centre is aimed for. A lively idea, an idea rich in possibilities for further development, but it is a pity that this idea is thoroughly borrowed.

Because, continues Nimzowitsch, referring to his previous articles and games: that is my idea, I am the inventor. This fact 'also forms the explanation for why Reti's "re-perception" must appear inauthentic. For the prerequisite of personal experience, which was established as a necessity in this sense at the beginning of this article, is thus missing.'

To summarize, Réti is not an artist but an imitator.

Incidentally, Bogoljubow also has to suffer in this article. It is not clear whether he had also somehow incited Nimzowitsch's wrath, but he was dismissed as a 'variations player':

People who tend to prepare 15- to 20-move variations months before the start of the contest, with the rather philanthropic idea of coming up with the 'surprising punch line' for the unsuspecting opponent in the 14th or 19th move. Bogoljubov is an apt example of this. Bogoljubov does not 'assert', because a specific variation is not an assertion in the artistic sense! And quite rightly, if we examine his play, we see that it is never and nowhere impregnated with a particular Bogoljubovian conception, only with the exception of the cases where he, leaving aside all the German thoroughness he married into, feels infinitely at ease and liberated in the wild Cossack ride ... Verdict: The 'variations player' can be described as untalented in a higher sense!³⁵



Efim Bogoljubow

35 Bogoljubow had stayed in Germany after the Mannheim tournament and married a German woman.

In 1920, the 'in a higher sense ungifted' Bogoljubow had won a minor match against Nimzowitsch 3-1. Could something have occurred there? In any case, Bogoljubow was not really involved in the theoretical battle surrounding (hyper-)modern chess. It is questionable whether he wanted to place himself in that school, though Réti more or less did so in his *Modern Ideas in Chess*. Perhaps that was what prompted Nimzowitsch to this harsh verdict.

It will not come as a surprise that the player who ideally fits the picture of the player/artist is Nimzowitsch himself. He therefore concludes his article with three games 'which reflect personal experience and personal opinion. The games [...] form – each on its own – a chess-artistic programme'. Among them was the immortal zugzwang game, which Nimzowitsch was able to present here for the first time to a wider audience. The first game he showed was a victory over Alfred Brinckmann from their match in early 1923. In his characterization of – and praise for – this game, Nimzowitsch once again summarizes the main points of his article:

This game is a personally coloured performance from A to Z. Both requirements – assertion and impregnation – are brilliantly demonstrated here. [...] The fact that Brinckmann contributed passively against his will to the work of art which this game represents (i.e. by omitting the strongest moves) in no way weakens the effect which emanates from this work of art. It is not a succession of the strongest moves that makes the game a work of art (the outdated view!), not even a brilliant combination (Mieses' view), but rather only the 'assertion' and 'impregnation'!

In terms of self-aggrandisement, Nimzowitsch has no equal in chess history, and this piece is a highlight. Most readers will pass this over with a smile, but his attack on Réti and Bogoljubow does leave an unpleasant impression. Twenty years earlier, the same style of Tarrasch – praise for one's own achievements, disdain for the lesser gods – would have been reason for the editor-in-chief, Marco, to show Tarrasch the door. Marco, however, had died a few years earlier and the editorship had changed hands after the war.

Yet, a few months later, a somewhat cryptic editorial piece seems to refer back to this article. In the final report of the Baden-Baden top tournament, we read the following:

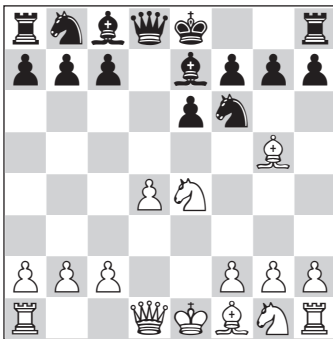
Nimzowitsch, the ninth prize-winner, is, as he himself claims, not in great shape. Nevertheless, he played some excellent games (against Rabinowitsch, Mieses, Roselli). He is, by the way, contrary to various assertions and in contrast to the well-known chess writer Nimzowitsch, the most amiable and nicest person imaginable, but should not exaggerate in this respect. Occasionally knocking over the pieces instead of resigning the game, apparently only to increase the enjoyment of the winning partner, is perhaps not necessary.

Unfortunately, the report does not tell against which opponent Nimzowitsch was so 'amiable' to knock over the pieces, instead of resigning.

The ninth game

So, in Baden-Baden Nimzowitsch was not yet in good form (11 out of 20). Alekhine was the glorious winner: with 16 points, he finished one and a half points above veteran Rubinstein. Tarrasch, who was also the tournament director, finished in the bottom half with 7½ points. His game with Nimzowitsch was a relatively short draw in which the balance was not really broken, but it was nevertheless a peculiar game. If you don't know who had White and who had Black, it is hard to guess; in no way can this game be placed in the 'classical versus hypermodern' framework. This fits nicely with the picture Tartakower painted of Tarrasch in *The Hypermodern Game of Chess*. In a chapter titled Dr. Tarrasch and Geza Maroczy as Hypermoderns, Tartakower tries to include both classical masters in the hypermodern camp.

Tartakower does so by using the game he played with Black against Tarrasch in the top tournament of Mährisch-Ostrau in 1923. After **1.d4 e6 2.e4 d5 3.♘c3 ♘f6 4.♙g5 dxe4 5.♘xe4 ♙e7**



Tarrasch came up with the novelty **6.♘c3(!)**.

Those exclamation marks in brackets are from Tartakower, and he commented:

Similia similibus! Dr Tarrasch now tries to counter Black's after all unscientific 4th move with even greater 'unscientificity'! He looks at the position with the unbiased eyes of modern times and recognises that the exchange 6.♘xf6+ would give the opponent a 'dynamic tempo of development'. However, he also rejects the right turn 6.♘g3, as he wants to actively participate with all available forces in the piece fight in the centre (point d5!) which is about to break out. Based on all these considerations, he breaks with the rules and makes the bizarre-looking text move.

And yet: – How much self-conquest it takes for Dr Tarrasch, who used to offer libations only to the deities of arithmetic tempo winning and straightforward

developmental power, to now break new ground and provide the younger generation with a fine example of the ‘madness method’ (instead of the earlier ‘method madness’).
[...]

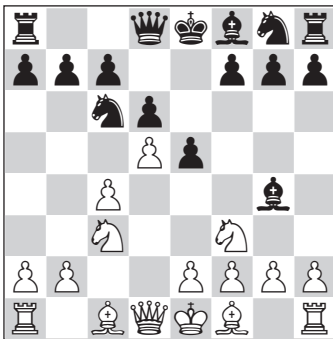
New truths ... New perspectives ... Dr Tarrasch, who in his glorious past suffered many a defeat due to his dogmatic adherence to the views he had been inculcated with, can now proudly proclaim: **‘I am relearning!’**

For those not yet familiar with Tartakower’s writing style, this piece provides a typical sample.

Whether Tarrasch was happy with this ‘praise’ is the question; perhaps he could laugh about it. The game ended in a draw after Tarrasch had obtained a very nice position. However, this was not due to that hypermodern novelty, because Tartakower can argue all he wants: taking on f6 with the bishop or the knight, in the old-fashioned classical Tarrasch style, was considerably stronger than 6.♖c3.

Aron Nimzowitsch – Siegbert Tarrasch Baden-Baden 1925 (2)

1.c4 e5 2.♖f3 ♘c6 3.d4 d6 4.♗c3 ♙g4 5.d5

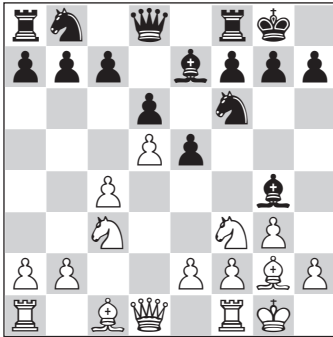


5...♗b8!?

A modern retreat, 5...♗ce7 is the other option.

This transition (5.d5) to a (King’s) Indian structure is reminiscent of the similar transition from the Ruy Lopez. In the discussion between Tarrasch and Nimzowitsch about *Die Moderne Schachpartie*, we already saw that Tarrasch considered this transition to be favourable for Black because he could start play on the kingside with ...f5. Nimzowitsch opposed this categorical judgment on that occasion.

6.g3 ♗f6 7.♙g2 ♙e7 8.0-0 0-0

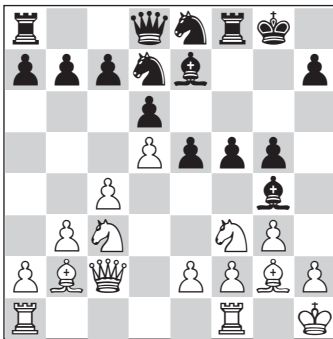


Here, 9.e4 is an obvious option, to continue with the standard plan from the King's Indian main lines: playing on the queenside with a3, b4 and c5.

9. ♔h1!?

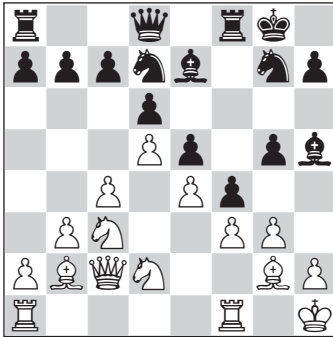
A mysterious move, the type Nimzowitsch was so fond of. And, of course, a provocation to Tarrasch. The only explanation I can think of is a continuation with ♖g1, perhaps with the idea of f3 + e4 and possibly later ♗g2-h3. Moments later, however, the knight moves to d2 and the white king returns to its initial square a little after that.

9... ♞e8 10. ♚c2 f5 11. b3 ♞d7 12. ♗b2 g5!?



White has been playing a bit slowly so far. Not much is happening on the queenside, so Black initiates his play on the kingside with this ambitious move. According to Tarrasch's own definition, it qualifies as a harakiri move, but, probably and rightly, he was not concerned with that. In the later game stages of the King's Indian, it happens quite often that the Black player regrets his expansions on the kingside, but in this game, that scenario remains under the surface.

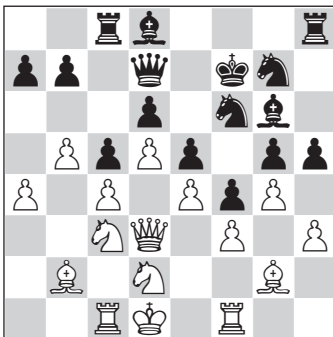
13. ♞d2 ♞g7 14. e4 f4 15. f3 ♗h5



16.g4?!

A remarkable decision. After this move, only Black has play on the kingside (with ...h7-h5). Moreover, the bishop on g2 becomes a sad piece now that it can no longer be brought into play via h3. That same move, 16.♙h3, would have been a fine option here. In the next phase, Black has the better chances, although it seems that Tarrasch did not want to take it to the extreme.

16...♙g6 17.♖g1 h5 18.h3 ♜f7 19.♜f2 ♝h8 20.♗e2 c6 21.b4 ♞f6 22.♞d3 ♜c8 23.♝ac1 ♞b6 24.a3 c5 25.b5 ♞c7 26.a4 ♞d7 27.♗d1 ♙d8



Now, the queenside is also largely fixed. White can best proceed with 28.♞b3 to prevent 28...♙a5. Black still has some possibilities on the kingside via the h-file, possibly combined with a piece sacrifice on g4, but here, on Tarrasch's suggestion, the peace treaty was signed. All the pieces are still on the board!

Immediately after Baden-Baden, the top tournament in Marienbad took place. This brought Nimzowitsch his first major tournament victory: with 11 out of 15, he shared first prize with Rubinstein. Capablanca, Lasker and Alekhine did not play – the first two played relatively few tournaments in their careers

anyway – but otherwise, it was a strong field of participants. Nimzowitsch belonged to the absolute world top as of now.

The tenth game

The tournament calendar was well filled in these years, and another month later the next event was scheduled: the biennial congress of the German Chess Federation. This time it was again held in Breslau, Tarrasch's hometown. His results gradually declined as the years passed, and here he even finished in the rear with 3½ out of 11. Nimzowitsch did not do badly with 7½ points and second place, but that was two points behind Bogoljubow, who won the tournament brilliantly. Like Nimzowitsch, Bogoljubow had joined the elite by now. Later that year, he won the top tournament in Moscow with 15½ out of 20, a great achievement as he stayed ahead of Lasker and Capablanca. Incidentally, he would soon break with the Soviet Chess Federation and spend the rest of his life playing for Germany. A few years earlier, Alekhine had also decided that his future was not in the Soviet Union. That Moscow tournament, by the way, made it clear that a strong chess community was developing in the Soviet Union, supported by the new regime.

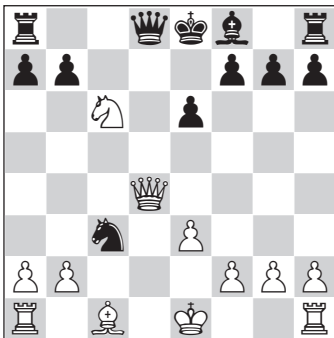
This time, the game between Nimzowitsch and Tarrasch was one-way traffic. A few weak moves after an innocent opening put Tarrasch in a very passive position. While Nimzowitsch patiently improved his position, Tarrasch could not muster that patience. With a misguided attempt at active play, he threw himself into the knife.

Aron Nimzowitsch – Siegbert Tarrasch Breslau 1925 (9)

1. ♘f3 ♘f6 2. c4 c5 3. ♘c3 d5 4. cxd5 ♘xd5 5. d4 cxd4 6. ♚xd4 e6 7. e3

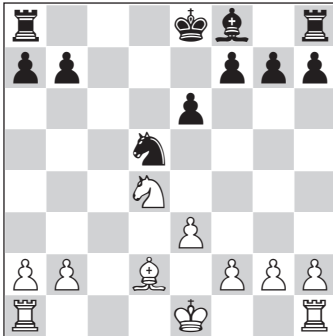
A very tame move. With 7.e4, White may hope for an advantage.

7... ♘c6 8. ♘b5 ♘d7 9. ♘xc6 ♘xc6 10. ♘e5 ♘xc3 11. ♘xc6



A diagram for aesthetic reasons: the engine here recommends the rather inhuman 11...♔d5!?, a beautiful move from a perspective of symmetry. The position is not completely symmetrical because of the different bishops; as a result, g2 is under attack and g7 is not. Therefore, on 12.♔xc3? Black can take on g2 in between. If White exchanges on d5 instead, then after 12.♔xd5 ♖xd5 13.♗d4 Black has, in a peculiar way, won a tempo by not taking on d4 as he did in the game.

11...♔xd5 12.♗xd4 ♖d5 13.♗d2

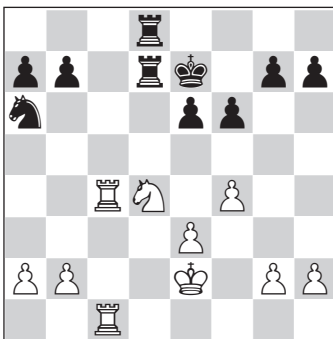


‘Despite its apparent harmlessness, the position depicted here is full of poison,’ says Nimzowitsch. Strangely, Tarrasch chooses to exchange his slightly better bishop for White’s bishop, also losing time in the process. As a result, things indeed become a little dangerous for Black.

13...♗c5 14.♗b3 ♗b4 15.♖c1 ♖d8 16.♗xb4 ♗xb4 17.♕e2 ♕e7 18.♖c4 ♖a6

The problems start to become more concrete. The knight on a6 is very passive, and it doesn’t manage to become active again in the rest of the game.

19.♖hc1 ♖d7 20.f4 ♖hd8 21.♗d4 f6



Nimzowitsch, in his role as a teacher, wrote: 'Black intends e6-e5. Is that a threat? If not, the student should find a reasonable waiting move for White!'

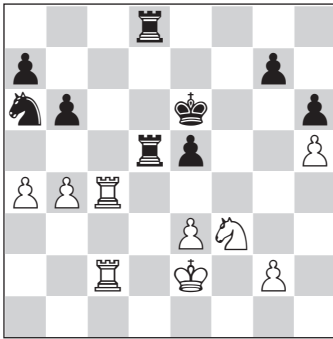
Indeed, this advance of the e-pawn is not a threat but rather a decisive weakening. Black is very passive and has no choice but to try to stay put.

22.a4 e5?

Again, Nimzowitsch:

Striking out is psychologically explainable in squeezed positions, even if it is not always objectively justified to the same extent. This is also the case here. However, Black is in a bad position in any case.

23.fxe5 fxe5 24.♘f3 ♖e6 25.b4 b6 26.♞1c2 h6 27.h4 ♜d6 28.h5 ♞d5



29.♞g4!

Playing against multiple weaknesses (e5, g7, ♘a6), a favourite strategy of Nimzowitsch. Black can no longer defend everything; on 29...♙f7, for example, there is 30.e4 and the e-pawn is lost.

29...♞5d7 30.♞c6+ ♜d6 31.♞g6+ ♖e7 32.♞xg7+ ♙f8 33.♞xd6 ♞xd6 34.♞xa7 ♘xb4 35.♘xe5 ♞e6 36.♘g6+ ♙g8 37.♘e7+ ♙f8 38.♘f5 ♘d5 39.g4 ♘f4+ 40.♙f3 ♘d3 41.♞a8+ ♙f7 42.♞h8 ♘c5 43.♞h7+ ♙g8 44.♞xh6 ♞xh6 45.♘xh6+ ♙f8 46.♘f5 ♘xa4 47.h6 ♙g8 48.g5 ♙h7 49.♙g4 ♘c5 50.♙h5 ♘e6 51.g6+ ♙g8 52.h7+ ♙h8 53.♙h6 1-0

Nimzowitsch's instructive comments on this game come from *My System*, the long-awaited book that was finally about to be published.