Breyer and the Last Throes

Edward Winter

The Hungarian master Gyula Breyer (1893-1921) is regularly quoted as saying/writing that after 1 e4 White's game is in the last throes, and C.N. 9 asked if this was apocryphal.



Gyula Breyer

C.N. 654 quoted from a review of *Modern Ideas in Chess*Richard Réti in the *BCM*, September 1923, page 338, written by P.W. Sergeant:

by

'On page 141 Breyer is quoted as saying that after 1 P-K4 "White's game is in its last throes". But this is scarcely hyper-modern, for H.E. Atkins made a similar joking remark to the present reviewer if his memory is not at fault, 25 years ago.'

We returned to the subject in C.N. 1549, citing D.J. Morgan on page 200 of the June 1954 BCM

'M.V. Anderson. We have looked further into the Breyer *dictum. Modern Ideas in Chess*

Réti, in his (English translation, London,

1923), makes a long quotation from, he says, a booklet by Dr Tartakower: "and above all (as Breyer preaches in one of his published treatises), 'After the first move 1 P-K4 White's game is in the last throes' ..." We wrote to Dr Tartakower and asked for particulars of the "published treatise". In a typically courteous reply he says: "I am astonished that Réti quotes me in speaking of Breyer, for it is precisely from Réti himself that I learnt all about his friend Breyer ... I do not know whether Breyer did publish a book ... Breyer's (or perhaps Réti's own) dictum was 'the initial position is a very difficult one to judge'."

Any conclusions from this we leave to you.'

As also pointed out in C.N. 1549, it is curious that when M.V. Anderson referred to this enquiry on page 8 of

'The truth may be traceable from another remark in Réti's book; on page 122, there is a diagram of a chess board with the pieces in position for the commencement of a game, entitled, "A complicated position".

Réti says there that Breyer "in an article some years ago" (In the original German editions of 1922 he has " vor einigen Jahren in

ungarischer Sprache ") i.e., some years prior to 1922 Breyer wrote an article in a Hungarian magazine "to prove 1 P-Q4 better than 1 P-K4".

But there were plenty of players as far back as Staunton's time that had the same view.

It can be concluded that Réti probably invented a dramatic statement from a mythical "treatise" just to dub it absurd, and it now goes round the world as the solemn belief of a man who probably never heard of it. Breyer died in 1921 before the first edition of Réti's book.'

In the 7 November 1959 *CHESS* (page 42) A. Eccles pointed out that Réti had referred to Tartakower and not Bogoljubow, and said that Réti's concluding quotation ' *Credo quia* absurdum ' does not mean 'which is absurd' but 'I believe this because it is impossible'.

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In his booklet "The Tree of Chess Knowledge" Dr. Tartakower describes the style of the "Hypermoderns." He has clearly Breyer in particular before his eyes.

This lucid sketch contains the following:-"Chess can also show its cubism. Its chief representatives, Alekhin, Bogoljubow, Brever and Réti, gained, especially in the year 1920, splendid successes in their contests with the tried big men of the old school like Rubinstein, Tarrasch, Maroczy and others, and thereby attracted the attention of the whole chess world to the most modern school. The tenets of the latter school had, till then, indicated a state of secession. They involved not only plans which had never disclosed themselves to us before: schemes which gave to the games an unhealthy stamp: moves which scoffed at any endeavour to obtain freer development of pieces, but also, finally, methods which seek salvation in their malignant and endless storing up of latent energy, and which in all earnestness were held up to us in the light of science. Through those methods the disclosure of secrets of hundreds of years' standing is promised to us. 'Not to build up but rather to obstruct a position' is the watchword there given out. The idols of the old school are smashed: the most favourite openings appear to be refuted; compromising the four Knights opening and above all (as Breyer preaches in one

BREYER

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of his published treatises) 'After the first move I P-K 4 White's game is in the last throes'

" Credo quia absurdum"

At the end of the year 1921, the chess world lost in Breyer not only a chess master of the first rank, but a pioneer, who by his profound investigations, destructive of old principles, effected reforms. A new Steinitz was all too soon snatched from us. Breyer had set out his views on theory in numerous treatises and analyses of games, which appeared in the Hungarian papers. In close detail he analysed the games for the world championship, between Capablanca and Lasker, I give the following as an example—

White: Lasker. Black: Capablanca.

Diagram XXIV,



mehr ließ sich aus der Stellung das anscheinend Unglaubliche nachweisen, daß in den letzten fünfzig Zügen keine Figur geschlagen worden sein und kein Bauer gezogen haben könne. Daher ist die Stellung nach den Schachregeln remis,

Der einzige Redakteur dieser Zeitung, die nur aus Originalbeiträgen bestand und in jeder Seite für den Leser schon einige Stunden Kopfzerbrechen bedeutete, war Julius Breyer. Und für diesen Mann, für dessen Scharfsinn die feinsten Finessen noch nicht fein genug sind, der die kompliziertesten Verhältnisse mit einem Blick durchschaut und dazu noch über eine unermüdliche geistige Arbeitskraft verfügt, für diesen Mann gibt es eine Kunst, ein Gebiet, in dem er nicht nur mit seinem Verstande arbeitet, sondern in das er seine ganze Persönlichkeit hineinlegt, das ist das Schach.

In seinem Büchlein "Am Baum der Schacherkenntnis" beschreibt Dr. Tartakower den Stil der "Hypermodernen". Dabei hat er deutlich in erster Reihe Breyers Spiel vor Augen, wie es auf den Außenstehenden, der in den modernen Schachideen noch nicht ganz zu Hause ist, wirkt. Die anschauliche Schilderung lautet:

"Doch hat auch das Schach seinen Kubismus aufzuweisen, dessen Hauptrepräsentanten Aljechin und Bogoljubow, Breyer und Réti insbesondere im Jahre 1920 großartige Kampferfolge vor altbewährten Größen (wie Rubinstein, Tarrasch, Maroczy und anderen) erzielten und hiedurch die Aufmerksamkeit der gesamten Schachwelt auf die jüngste Schule lenkten, deren Grundsätze bis dahin ein bloß sezessionistisches Dasein fristeten.

Pläne, die uns nie erreichten; Anlagen, die der ganzen Partie ein krankhaftes Gepräge geben; Züge, die jedem Streben nach freier Figurenentwicklung hohnsprechen; Methoden endlich, die in der tückisch-endlosen Aufspeicherung latenter Spannkräfte das Heil suchen, werden in allem Ernst wissenschaftlich durchleuchtet und es wird durch sie sogar die Lösung jahrhundertelanger Geheimnisse verheißen. Nicht das Ausbauen, sondern eher das Verbauen der Stellung wird als Siegesparole ausgegeben. Umgeworfen werden die angeblich entlarvten Götzen der alten Schule; die beliebtesten Eröffnungen erscheinen widerlegt; das Vierspringerspiel — kompromit-

tierend, und überhaupt (also predigt Breyer in einer von ihm veröffentlichten Abhandlung) dürfte schon nach dem 1. Zuge 1. e 2—e 4 die weiße Partie in den letzten Zügen liegen! Credo quia absurdum!"

(Während der Drucklegung dieses Buches ist Breyer, erst 28 Jahre alt, in Bratislava gestorben. In ihm verliert die Schachwelt nicht

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Die neuen Ideen im Schachspiel

1922)

by R. Réti (Vienna,

Strangely, nobody seems to have turned to Tartakower's 'booklet', *Am Baum der Schacherkenntnis* (Berlin, 1921), to check what he wrote. Page 16 has the passage quoted by Réti (and quoted with a few small changes). The Latin phrase is there; A. Eccles was clearly misled by the English edition's faulty use of quotation marks into thinking that it was Réti rather than Tartakower who had picked the expression.

Pläne, die uns nie erreichten; Anlagen, die der ganzen Partie ein krankhaftes Gepräge geben; Züge, die jedem Streben nach freier Figurenentwicklung hohnsprechen; Methoden endlich, die in der tückisch-endlosen Aufspeicherung latenter Spannkräfte das Heil suchen, werden in allem Ernst wissenschaftlich durchleuchtet und es wird durch sie sogar die Lösung jahrhundertelanger Geheimnisse verheißen. Nicht das Ausbauen, sondern eher das Verbauen der Stellung wird als die Siegesparole ausgegeben. Umgeworfen werden die angeblich entlarvten Götzen der alten Schule; die beliebtesten Eröffnungen erscheinen widerlegt: das Vierspringerspiel - kindisch, die Spanische - kraftlos, das Damengambit - kompromittierend, und überhaupt (also predigt der Großkophta Breyer in einer von ihm veröffentlichten Abhandlung) dürfte schon nach dem 1. Zuge: 1. e2-e4 die weiße Partie in den letzten Zügen liegen! Credo, quia absurdum! PEGG

Am Baum der Schacherkenntnis

by S. Tartakower

(Berlin, 1921), page 16

Below is an English translation of Tartakower's final paragraph:

'The apparently unmasked idols of the old school are overturned; the favourite openings appear to be refuted: the Four Knights' Game, childish; the Ruy López, ineffectual; the Queen's Gambit, compromising; and in any case (thus preaches the Grand Cophta Breyer in a treatise published by him) White would be in the last throes already after the first move! *Credo, quia absurdum!*

In his reference to Breyer, Tartakower used the word *Abhandlung*, 'treatise' either in the sense of article or book.

which may mean

treatise either in the sense of article of book.

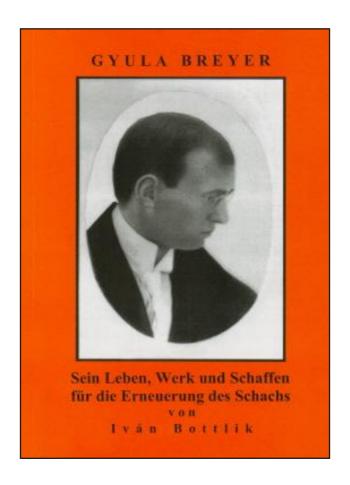
Our only other find was reported in C.N. 2497. Page 433 of the December 1911 *La Stratégie* quoted a remark by 'S. Barasz' (i.e. Z. Barász) from *Magyar*

Sakkujság :

'As far as I remember, it was Mieses who made the piquant remark that 1 e4 is a mistake which leads to the loss of the game.'

It is certainly surprising to see Mieses' name mentioned. Moreover, can it be a coincidence that Barász's remark appeared in annotations to a game from a tournament (Budapest, 1911) in which both Barász and Breyer were participants?

For further information on these matters see pages 118-119 and 144-151 of *Gyula Breyer Sein Leben, Werk und*Schaffen für die Erneuerung des
Schachs by Iván Bottlik (Unterhaching, 1999).



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