

# Morphy's Games/Memoir

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## A MEMOIR

THE presentation to the Chess public of more than one hundred and fifty games contested by Paul Morphy, against the best players of Europe and America, would scarcely be complete, unless accompanied by a Memoir, however brief, of the young genius who has so suddenly risen up in our midst, and fairly fought his way through a host of formidable competitors to the Chess throne. If, in the composition of that *Memoir*, we were to confine ourselves simply to the Chess life of Paul Morphy, the record might be a very brief one—almost as brief as the celebrated "*Veni, vidi, vici*" of the Roman conqueror, and much to the same effect. We might write, Paul Morphy is in his 22d year, has played Chess from his childhood, and has beaten all who have ventured "to enter the lists with him." and then we might resign our pen. But in every life there is more than one element, however much that one may prevail over the rest. The web of each human existence may be compared to a woven fabric, in which one material predominates in weft and warp, but blended threads of many hues wind in and out, checkering the prevailing uniform tint, and giving variety to the general aspect. Curiosity is a constant element in the action of the human mind. The public scrutinizes a man brought prominently before them, as a dealer or buyer does the manufactured goods. When any individual becomes great in any department of life, those who walk in the same path want to know something more of him than relates to their common pursuit—that they are generally already aware of—that it is which has called their attention to him, and stimulated their curiosity. "What they require, is something beyond that. They ask to be told of the general, as well as the special, man. They inquire what race he has sprung from ; what his home has been ; how he has been educated ; what he is outside the arena in which he has become great. They seek for the signs of *character* in the sense in which it has been defined by a countryman of Paul Morphy's—Emerson, who tells us character is that subtle force which impresses us with the idea of what a man is capable of, rather than leads us to think of what he has done. The outer life with which the biographer deals, is made out of actions. The superstructure of inference must bear its due proportion to the basis of facts which, in our case, is but a narrow one. Paul Morphy is yet too young to have played his part on the great stage of life. He has yet to make his mark in the world of men, on the map of which the Chess world is but a speck—a dot of an intellectual island, amid oceans and continents. If he were to die to-morrow, he would be handed down to posterity in company with the greatest of the Chess-masters of the past. If he live out the " three-score years and ten," the qualities which have thus early made him great in Chess, may signalize his name in one or more of the many fields on which the battle of life has to be fought.

In person, the subject of our Memoir is short and slight, with an elegant and dignified, though unpretending bearing. He has black hair, dark brilliant eyes, small delicate features, and a firmly set jaw ; the latter lending an aspect of determination to the whole countenance. Over the Chess-board he is cool, collected, and concentrated ; and so easily are his greatest and most prolonged efforts made, that he seldom or ever exhibits traces of fatigue. In his intercourse with the world he is courteous and unassuming, and exhibits a tact surprising in one so young, and that appreciation of motive which generally marks those who are great in any walk of life.

Of Paul Morphy, except as a Chess player, we know but little. He comes, on the father's side, of a Spanish family, long settled in Louisiana. The name Morphy, certainly, does not sound like a Spanish patronymic ; it rather reminds an Englishman of a name not at all unusual in the sister Isle ; and we

should not be surprised if some enthusiastic Irish Chess player were to broach the theory that Paul Morphy is descended from men who lived on Irish soil. This, of course, is mere speculation, but it is a fact that many Irishmen have emblazoned their names on the page of continental history, risen to high rank in the military service of Spain, and founded powerful families. However. Paul Morphy's father was of reputed Spanish descent ; and, of his mother's family, there is no question. They were French, and had been long resident in one of the West India islands.

Morphy's father, during the latter years of his life, held the office of Supreme Judge of the State of Louisiana. Paul was born in the city of New Orleans, on the 22d of June, 1837 ; so that he is now in his 23d year. We have not any information which would lead us to believe that in his earlier years he was different from other children ; except that, when exceedingly young, he played at Chess. His father was a Chess player of considerable power ; and his uncle, Mr. Ernest Morphy, was generally considered the Chess King of New Orleans.

In a recently published Memoir, we are told that, in 1847, when the boy had completed his first decade, the father taught him the moves, and his uncle gave him a lesson in the art of the game.

Paul was an apt pupil. In a few months he was able to contest a game with either of his relatives, and soon entered the lists against the stoutest opponents he could meet. In 1849, 1850, and 1851, Mr. Morphy achieved a series of triumphs over the strongest players of the Union ; among whom were Ernest Morphy, Stanley, and Rousseau. It is said that out of over fifty parties fought during these years with Mr. Eugene Kousseau, his young antagonist won fully nine-tenths.

We are told that even at that time the boy gave evidence of genius and originality. He did not rest upon precedent, nor pay any great regard to established forms of opening, but used to get rid of his pawns as quickly as possible, regarding them as incumbrances, which prevented the free action of his pieces. A very short experience, combined with his rapid insight into the principles of the game, soon corrected that habit, without impairing the boldness and decision from which it sprung. At thirteen he must have been a good player. When about that age, he was victorious in one or two games with the Editor of this work, who was then paying a short visit to New Orleans ; and though he was at the time depressed in mind, and suffering in body, and was also prostrated by the climate, yet the achievement argues a degree of skill which it is wonderful a child could have attained to. This circumstance was not known in Europe, where the name of Paul Morphy had not been heard till a short time before the assembling of the American Chess Congress, which met on the 5th of October, 1857, when, as if to shadow forth his coming greatness, the fact was stated in a London newspaper. Paul Morphy's boyhood was profitably employed. He had the incalculable advantage of a systematic education. He was sent at an early age to the Jefferson Academy, in his native city, where he received an elementary education befitting the son of a gentleman ; and, in 1850, he proceeded to a college near Mobile, in Alabama, where he distinguished himself in several departments of study. In 1854, he graduated at this college, but remained another year, during which time we are told that mathematics and law almost entirely engrossed his attention. At length, having chosen the profession of a barrister, he concentrated his vast mental powers upon a branch of study necessary for the pursuit of that object.

We need scarcely enter into the details of the American Congress, with which our readers are already familiar, but connected as that event is with the chess fame of our hero, we may mark some of its great results. The power of American Chess players had been but lightly regarded in the old world. Those who were considered the best, were estimated as inferior in force to the first rank of Europeans, and if any one had predicted a Chess champion from America, he would have been laughed to scorn. The Congress, however, showed that the traditional names were not the names of power—that the unknown wore superior to the known—that there was unsuspected latent chess talent in the mind of young America. The gray-beards were fairly pushed from their pedestals. Youth and genius proved far more than a match

for age and experience. All went down almost without a struggle before the conqueror from New Orleans, and second in the contest stood Paulson, of Iowa, till then never heard of beyond his own locality, and who was only a few years older than Paul Morphy.

The triumph of the young master did not produce any feeling of jealousy. His superiority was so evident that all idea of rivalry was at once felt to be absurd. It was not merely that he beat those to whom he was exposed, but that he beat them so decisively that they never had a chance of turning the tide of conquest. Whoever sat on the other side of the board, the result was from the first certain, and the proportion of games he won over those he lost was enormous. Out of about one hundred, with the strongest players of the States, only three went against him. The Americans were in ecstasies at the brilliancy of the star which had arisen in their midst. They at once placed the victor of their tournament on the same eminence as the greatest of the great masters. The American Chess players regarded him as invincible. They challenged the world to produce his equal, and backed their defiance by money worthy in amount to accompany the transfer of the Chess Crown.

It was clearly time for Europe to revise its notions of American chess play: but Europe did this rather slowly. The old world clung to its traditional prestige, and in most quarters the idea of the sceptre being wrested from its veterans by so young a hand was freely ridiculed. That Paul Morphy was a good player there was no attempt to deny. The published games which found their way across the Atlantic forbade the committal of any absurdity of that kind, but that he was the peer of Deschappelles or Labourdonnais or Philidor none could be found to admit. That his triumph had been a *facile* one was granted, but then he had only been pitted against second-rate men—and it was easy to manœuvre dashingly in the presence of a weak enemy. Besides, some of the analysts said his combinations were not sound, and Paul Morphy would find himself in a very different position when brought in contrast with the great lights of another hemisphere. The enthusiasm of the Americans was natural, characteristic, and excusable, but it was simply enthusiasm which would have to be corrected by fact. A great voice answered to the American defiance, that if Mr. Morphy would make the voyage to England he would find worthy antagonists to lift his glove and enter the lists against him. Before long it was stated that Mr. Staunton would defend the Chess reputation of white-cliffed Albion against the young champion of the West.

The great contest which was to decide the question of supremacy between the Old World and the New. it was settled should take place in England. That was only fitting. It was proper that the young and aspiring should go to the old and established. The age of chivalry had not yet passed. Chess had its Knight-errants, and Paul Morphy decided to leave his transatlantic home to make the voyage to Europe, to meet his new antagonists upon the checkered field on which, in the great Continent of the West, he could find no compeer. The time was propitious. The Birmingham Meeting would take place shortly after his arrival—the prospect exhibited an opportunity of contest with players of great fame, but above all he looked forward to a struggle with the representative of English Chess, whose name was known and whose reputation was established wherever the votaries of Caïssa dwelt.

Paul Morphy arrived in London in June, 1858, and his reception was, as it ought to have been, of the most cordial character. At the great Clubs, the St. George's and the London, he met with that courteous hospitality which English gentlemen know so well how to render ; but, for a while, an impression obtained that he would not repeat in Europe his American triumphs. The fatigue of the voyage had, no doubt, told upon him. The strangeness of the new stage on which he was called to play so prominent a part, no doubt produced an unfavorable effect, and his first games did not alter the pre-judgment of English Chess players, that within the four seas of Britain he would find something more than his match. That delusion, however, was soon dispelled. With whomsoever he played, it was found he came off victorious ; and a formal match was soon arranged, the result of which showed that the Americans had not overrated their young champion. The arrangements for the contest with Mr. Staunton progressed but

slowly ; but, pending their completion, the Editor put forward a challenge, and the stakes were immediately supplied. The result was, that Paul Morphy added another laurel to his wreath. At the conclusion, the score stood thus:—Morphy, 9 ; Löwenthal, 3 ; Drawn. 2.

It was a saying of Napoleon's, "that he is the best general who in war makes the fewest mistakes;" and Paul Morphy's play is even more remarkable for its correctness than for its power and brilliancy. It is as careful as it is profound. Into his blindfold play an error scarcely ever creeps. During the excitement of this match, the placidity and courtesy of Mr. Morphy excited as much admiration as his skill. The utmost good feeling prevailed between the combatants and their friends throughout.

This decisive victory conclusively settled Paul Morphy's position in the highest order of Chess players, and justified "Alter" in accepting the odds of pawn and move from the youthful victor. The results of this combat were still more marked. .Seven games in all were played, of which " Alter " did not score a single game. Paul Morphy won five, and two were drawn.

At the Birmingham Tournament Mr. Morphy did not play, but he displayed his extraordinary proficiency in blindfold play, conducting eight games against strong players simultaneously, without sight of the boards. We have already observed that remarkable correctness is a characteristic of Paul Morphy's play. These blindfold games indicate the same absence of errors already referred to.

While upon the subject of blindfold play, we may remark that Paul Morphy's opinion of it is similar to that entertained by Labourdonnais and other great masters. He regards it as a *tour de force*, the requisites for which are the habit of playing Chess, memory, and imagination. To these essentials we should add the faculty of abstraction, and the power of picturing on the retina a representation of the Chess-board and the pieces, as their position alters at every successive move. This last qualification is the one which will be found the least frequent among men. The power of photographing a picture on the mind, not in vague, dim, shadowy outline, but in all its minute details, is extremely uncommon; and where it exists, goes far to make up what is called genius.

After the Birmingham Tournament, Paul Morphy had only one object to keep him in England. That one was to play Mr. Staunton. The Chess public are already aware of the circumstances which prevented that match from taking place. The facts are shortly these :— When Paul Morphy arrived in this country, the money for the stakes of the English champion was subscribed by various members of the English Chess circle. It only remained to name a day and arrange the preliminaries. From time to time, the fixing of the period was put off. Mr. Staunton alleged that urgent literary occupations kept him from practising, and he was unable to give up the time necessary for the match. At the Birmingham meeting, however, a promise was given to name the day immediately, but matters remained *in statu quo*, till Paul Morphy had departed for France; and then Mr. Staunton, for the same reasons by which he had accounted for the delay, declined to play at all. On this, there arose a controversy, in which some bitterness was exhibited, and into which we do not intend to enter.

At the conclusion of the Birmingham meeting, Mr. Morphy went to Paris, and among our Gallic neighbors added to the laurels he had won in England. His arrival caused great excitement in the *Café de la Régence*. The *habitués* of the place, and the Chess players of Paris, hung over the board on which he played with most profound attention, and his blindfold play excited the greatest admiration. A match was at once arranged between him and Herr Hamvitz; the winner of the first seven games to be the victor. This match, however, was not played out, though it went far enough to place the result beyond doubt. Victory *waited* for the American. Eight games were played, of which Paul Morphy scored five; Herr Harrwitz two, and one was drawn. At that point Herr Harrwitz was compelled, by illness, to resign.

Only two European players were left, who could be expected to measure themselves against the young American: Von Heydebrand und der Lasa, the accomplished Chess writer, and Anderssen, the victor in the great International Tournament of 1851. The former was unfortunately called away by his diplomatic duties to a remote quarter of the globe ; but the latter consented to emerge from his studious retirement in the College of Breslau, where he fills the post of Professor of Mathematics, to visit Paris, and meet the Knight who kept the list against all comers. The arrangements for the match were simple, and they were made with the utmost facility. Seven games were to be won by either combatant. The two masters sat down to (he struggle. At the conclusion the score stood thus:—Morphy, 7; Anderssen, 2; Drawn, 2.

Having thus encountered and defeated every living player of celebrity, with the solitary exception of one with whom he could not obtain a meeting, Mr. Morphy felt that his mission in Europe had been fulfilled, as far as it was possible. His thoughts turned homewards, and he shortly made arrangements to cross the Atlantic. His departure from Paris was the occasion of much regret to his continental friends. This brief second visit to London was a source of equal pleasure to the Chess players of Great Britain. His subsequent movements are thus described in a sketch of his life, which accompanied a steel-plate portrait, published in connection with the *Illustrated News of the World*:— "From this moment the progress of Mr. Morphy was through a series of ovations, in which Chess became a mere accessory to personal, but well-deserved compliments. The St. George's and the London Chess Clubs each invited him to a public banquet ; and all parties of Chess players (for Chess players, like politicians, are split into sections) laid aside their differences, and united to do him honor. Those parties were attended by many of the aristocracy of rank and talent ; and his countrymen will not fail to recognize the cosmopolitan spirit in which their hero was received. To Mr. Morphy these entertainments must have been very gratifying ; but, with a degree of good taste that demands notice, he declined numerous other invitations of the same kind. During his second brief sojourn in London, his time was occupied with Mr. Lowenthal, in the preparation of an important literary work,<sup>[1]</sup> and occasional private visits to the Clubs." Many and strong were the inducements to return to the United States. His fellow-countrymen had raised him a magnificent honorary testimonial, and were preparing to welcome his reappearance in a manner which indicated an exalted sense of his character. Reasons, we believe, still more cogent, pressed him to leave Europe. Mr. Morphy, as we have shown, does not look upon Chess as an employment, but an amusement ; and he is desirous of applying his intellectual powers to the profession he has adopted. Let us hope that in such a sphere he may become as widely known and as generally esteemed as he is in what passes under the description of" the world of Chess." His success in that sphere is without parallel. It is little more than twelve months since he embarked at New York for England. Never was a reputation so soon and solidly erected. He came among us with a local, and returns with a universal fame. His movements in America were recorded in fugitive paragraphs ; his marvellous exploits in Europe will become matter of history. If to the renown he has achieved as a Chess player, he can add the future reputation of a great lawyer, he will supply one of the most curious and suggestive illustrations of the exceptional versatility of genius that humanity has produced. We have faith that a career of more than national usefulness is open to Paul Morphy.

The Americans are it is scarcely necessary to say, exceedingly proud of their representative in the world of Chess ; and, since his return, his merits have been worthily recognized. On the 25th of May, 1859, a vast assembly met in the chapel of the New York University, to present him with a testimonial, consisting of a magnificent set of gold and silver Chess-men, and a board of rosewood, inlaid with pearl ; and, since then, he has been entertained at a grand banquet at Boston, Massachusetts. Other honors have been showered upon him.

Who is to be Paul Morphy's next opponent we do not know ; but we may quote the opinion of M. St. Amant, once the opponent of Mr. Staunton. That distinguished player is reported to have said that Paul Morphy "must, in future, give odds to every opponent, or play single-handed against several in consultation."

The precise character of Mr. Morphy's play will be better gathered from the games and analysis, than from any description we can give here. We may note, however, that its general features are carefulness, exactitude, concentration, invention, mid power of combination. The game of Chess may be divided into three parts : the opening, in which a position is striven for ; the mid-game, in which the position is used; and the end-game, in which the results are obtained. The openings depend upon knowledge ; and here Paul Morphy, with a quickness and accuracy of perception which looks almost like instinct, seizes on and employs the best methods developed by the latest analysts. In the turmoil of the mid-game, his great natural powers in attack and defence are displayed ; and the end-game he plays with all the calm mathematical precision of a veteran. He has, in course of a few years, attained a position among the greatest masters. Posterity will admire his genius; and we hope that the labors of his Editor will not be lightly appreciated.

## Notes

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1. The work referred to is the present volume.
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