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Introduction

'Of low and unsightly stature, and of darkish hue, only those that can see beneath the surface will recognize in his shining eyes, developed forehead and amiable bearing, the extraordinary being. Of a perfectly harmless character, of a truly noble and liberal (taken in its classical sense) disposition, he possesses the chivalrous spirit which, being founded on moral consciousness, allows no infringement on one's dignity and self-respect, but in opposition to arrogant self-conceit, is in complete accordance with bashful modesty. This pure and beautiful personal integrity will, probably, through love of the noble game, not only be preserved, but even be brought to a still higher standard of perfection.'

One would assume that a saint or revered public figure was being celebrated here – surely anyone but a chess player! The author adds more context in these lines:

'It is not only extensive theoretical knowledge or deep analytic insight; not rapidly invented combinations which (...) seem to surpass the limits of human understanding; it is not the cool demeanor or graceful way of handling the pieces; nor is it the dignified or justifiably confident bearing: none of these qualities, considered in themselves, give an idea of the high merit of the newly risen master. It is his thoroughly noble personality, the result of the harmonious cooperation of these different qualities, which renders its possessor the champion of the royal game and sovereign master in its extensive dominions. It is in him that the chivalrous nature of the game has found its typical expression; and the more we admire the quiet nature of the game as opposed to the busy and interested activity of daily life, the more we find ourselves compelled to pay the just tribute of acknowledgment and admiration to its noble and youthful representative.'

It scarcely seems possible that a chess player inspired such open adoration – not just for his play, but even his personality. Surely a doting coach or countryman must have penned these words?

Actually, the noted German chess master Max Lange authored the lines in 1859, after Paul Morphy had obliterated his countryman and co-editor of the magazine *Schachzeitung der Berliner Schachgesellschaft*, the legendary attacking master Adolf Anderssen, in a match in Paris around Christmas in 1858. Following this lopsided triumph, it was universally conceded that Morphy was not only the strongest player in the world, but the strongest who ever lived.

At that moment Max Lange was no outlier in his estimation of Paul Morphy, the player or the man. Only 21 years old when he reached the chess summit –

still to this day the youngest player ever to do so – Morphy was met with astonishment, admiration, and even love wherever he traveled; in England, France, and of course his native United States. Players and dignitaries came from as far away as Russia to get a glimpse of the young hero, and pay their respects.

Alas, the 'still higher level of perfection' that Lange had hoped for was not to be – Morphy had already played his last serious chess game in 1858.

Paul Morphy vanished from the chess arena after only two years of serious play. But the admiration of the chess world did not diminish. If anything, the Morphy mystique only grew over time. Sixty years later Czech Grandmaster Richard Réti noted matter-of-factly, 'Morphy [is] the most famous of all chess masters. There is no doubt that in the eyes of the general public, he is the idol of chess.' These words were written during the heyday of Emanuel Lasker, José Raul Capablanca and Alexander Alekhine, to name a few.

How is it possible that a short, shy kid from the relative chess backwater of New Orleans inspired such rapturous praise from chess players around the globe, during his life time and continuing even today, when 'Morphy specialists' still study his life and games with undiminished enthusiasm?

Well, for starters he was strong – very strong. There is at least one Morphy feat which simply cannot be duplicated; he never suffered a documented setback! True, this is partly because his career was so short – but it remains a jaw-dropping legacy. Morphy battled the world's best masters in serious matches – including the strongest players from America, England, France and Germany – and not only beat, but destroyed them all. The equivalent today would be an unrated player winning his national championship, going straight into the Candidates Cycle, clobbering all comers including the World Champion, all the while never dropping more than two or three games in a match! Even in casual play, no player is known to have even approached a plus score against Morphy – with or without odds. Englishman Thomas Wilson Barnes was considered a real 'Morphy killer' for winning eight out of 27 offhand games against Paul, although some considered him lucky to have played Morphy 'fresh off the boat' from his transatlantic voyage.

Another key to Morphy's timeless appeal is his crystal-clear style. Paul Morphy was the first truly universal player the world had ever seen. Unlike his predecessors, he was equally deadly in the opening, middlegame and ending. His memory was prodigious, his board-sight elite – so much so that he could clearly mentally visualize eight boards simultaneously, making him easily the greatest blindfold player of his time. Finally, he was an unsurpassed practical player, with nerves of steel. Morphy never seemed to tire or succumb to pressure over the board. José Raul Capablanca, the third official World Champion, had this praise for Morphy's elegant, deceptively simple play:

'beginning with La Bourdonnais to the present, and including Lasker, we find that the greatest stylist has been Morphy.'

Those who witnessed Morphy at the chessboard came away thinking they had glimpsed the closest thing to chess perfection. Anderssen could not speak highly enough of Paul's accuracy, saying 'It is impossible to play chess better than Mr. Morphy'. Louis Paulsen remarked that Morphy had reduced chess to an exact science.

Even now some chess experts regard Paul Morphy as the strongest player of all time. Bobby Fischer remarked in the 1960s: 'Morphy, I think everyone agrees, was probably the greatest genius of them all.' While this case is difficult to make 160 years hence, it is no stretch to claim that he may well have been the *most gifted* player who ever lived. If what he accomplished in two years of serious play, could be extrapolated over twenty or thirty years, it is hard to even imagine the wonders he might have achieved.

How did a young, untested prodigy achieve all these accolades barely out of college, then suddenly retire at the height of his powers? The real story of the most enigmatic and brilliant chess champion of them all is indeed a mythic tale, 'stranger than fiction', as the saying goes.

CHAPTER 5

The American Chess Congress

Thirteen hundred miles away in New York, in a historical coincidence which almost seems ordained by fate, Daniel Willard Fiske, editor of the recently launched magazine *Chess Monthly*, had just proposed a National Chess Congress. Chess clubs and periodicals had proliferated around the US in preceding years. Inspired by the London 1851 tournament, a group of leading players spearheaded by Fiske decided that a national tournament would greatly enhance the stature of American chess.

On March 26, 1857, a committee was formed by the New York Chess Club to issue a formal proposal for the Congress. The members were Charles W. Mead, club president; Frederick Perrin, club secretary; William W. Montgomery, chess editor of Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Newspaper*; leading NY chess master James Thompson; and Fiske. A generous prize fund was raised by subscription. The tournament was set for early October, 1857, and a circular dated April 17, 1857, was widely distributed to chess clubs and well-known amateurs. Here we learn that Paul Morphy already had a considerable mystique among American chess players, as Daniel Fiske considered his attendance critical to the success of the tournament.

Fiske wrote letters to both Paul Morphy and Charles Maurian (the latter eventually published in the *New Orleans Times-Democrat* January 6,1895). Fiske asked Maurian to 'Beg Mr. Morphy to be (a member of the managing committee for the congress), as his name attached to the committee would aid us everywhere more than that of any other man in the Union...'. Early in July, Morphy declined, citing the death of his father seven months earlier. Fiske wrote Maurian again, urging him to press Morphy, as his attendance 'would increase our subscriptions, double the interest of the tournament and add largely to its respectability abroad. (...) No other person has it in his power to do so much good to American chess as he has...'

Morphy again wrote Fiske to decline in early September, just a month before the tournament, and a year since his father's fatal accident. Paul was evidently torn by grief, concerned for his widowed mother, and possibly feeling guilty over his chess ambitions and his parents' disapproval – although Sergeant takes the view that his father's death actually freed the way for Morphy to play.

With uncle Ernest absent, the New Orleans chess community, led by Maurian, used all the influence they could muster to change Paul's mind. Meanwhile Morphy's ardent supporter Judge Meek (also invited to play in the Congress) pleaded with Paul's mother, probably convincing her that constructive, distracting activity would be good for her grieving son. Finally

on September 19, 1857, Maurian sent a brief telegram to Fiske on Paul's behalf: 'Paul Morphy starts for N. York on Wednesday 23 – Chas Maurian.'

The New Orleans Times-Democrat reported that on September 23, 1857:

'at 5 o'clock in the afternoon Mr. Morphy took passage [via the Mississippi River] on board the steamer Benjamin Franklin bound for Cincinnati, and eight [eleven] days thereafter he landed in New York.' [By train].

This was the first long journey that Paul had ever taken. Avoiding ocean travel proved to be a good idea, since Paul was prone to seasickness. But why take a triangular route to New York via Cincinnati? One reason was probably the limited number of options. The first American railroad charter was issued in 1815; and the B&O railroad, which Paul likely rode from Ohio to New York, had only been built about twenty years earlier. Another possible motive is more intriguing: did Ernest Morphy meet Paul when he disembarked from the steamboat? Ernest was then living in Moscow, Ohio, about 25 miles from Cincinnati. To get there, the steamboat would have forked east onto the Ohio River, which feeds into the Mississippi roughly halfway between Memphis, Tennessee and Saint Louis, Missouri. Might they have visited for a day or two, perhaps even analyzing a few variations? At minimum it seems plausible that Ernest encouraged Paul to use this itinerary to reach New York. Whatever the case, the pride of New Orleans arrived in New York on October 4, 1857.

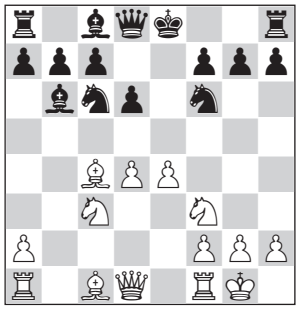
Next day he visited the New York Chess Club. This event was witnessed by Frederick Edge, a member of the organizing committee for the Congress. Edge later became Morphy's right-hand-man during his trip to Europe, and wrote the most important first-hand account of his exploits there. Edge writes that Frederick Perrin, the secretary of the NY Chess Club, was first to play Morphy, and '...presented about the same resistance as a mosquito to an avalanche. (...) Then who should enter the room but the warrior, [Charles] Stanley. (...) Loud cries were made for Stanley! Stanley! And Mr. Perrin resigned his seat to the newcomer, in deference to so general a request. Thus commenced (...) a series of contests, in which Mr. Stanley was indeed astonished. 'Mate' followed upon 'Mate,' until he arose from his chair in bewildered defeat.' Morphy had won all four of their casual games. As with many Morphy exploits, the significance of this result is hard to overstate. An untested youth, with minimal practice over the past seven years, fresh from an eleven-day voyage, summarily demolished the US Champion. The spectators were, of course, awe-struck. The best game was also a revelation in this sense: the seasoned veteran was theoretically undressed by the 'tournament virgin'.

Charles Henry Stanley (1819-1901) was a British Diplomat who emigrated to the US in 1843. In 1845 he played a long match against French-born master Eugene Rousseau in New Orleans, winning +15 -8 =8 to become the first US

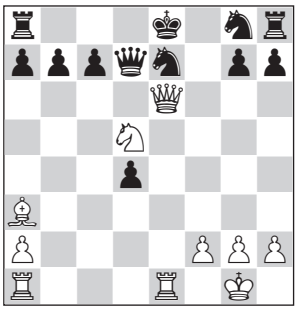
Champion. As already noted, 8-year old Paul attended that match with his uncle Ernest, who was Rousseau's second. The winner's purse was $1000, a tidy sum in those days (about $30,000 in today's money).

Paul Morphy
Charles Henry Stanley
New York 1857

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.b4 ♗xb4 5.c3 ♗a5 6.d4 exd4 7.0-0 d6 8.cxd4 ♗b6 9.♘c3!
Morphy's signature line, a strong novelty but not quite a TN. A more common attempt to maintain the tension was 9.h3 in Bledow-Von der Lasa, Berlin, 1837, and many had played 9.♗b2 since. This more nuanced move was introduced in Perigal-Popert, London, 1830, and repeated just a few times before this. In my opinion this fact refutes Steinitz' claim that Morphy 'never in his practice produced a single novelty'. By that strict a standard, few of Wilhelm's ideas would be 'new' either.
9...♘f6?

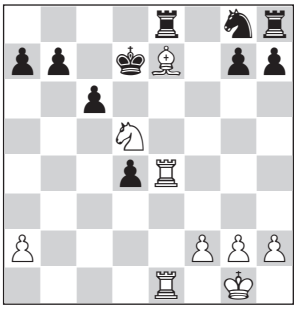


Woe to the unprepared, since this natural move is bad. 9...♗g4 10.♗b5! is the main line.
10.e5! dxe5 11.♗a3!
The raking Evans bishops spawn another brilliancy. Paul and Ernest must have sunk many hours of study into this position. The power of the thematic Evans sacrifice was already demonstrated in Perigal-Popert, which continued 11...♘a5 12.♖e1 ♘xc4 13.♕a4+ c6 14.♕xc4 ♗e6 15.♖xe5 ♕d7 16.♖xe6+ fxe6 17.♘e5 ♕c8 18.♖e1 ♘d5 19.♘xd5 cxd5 20.♕b5+ ♔d8 21.♘f7+ ♔c7 22.♗d6 mate.
11...♗xd4
A pretty alternative is 11...♘xd4 12.♘xd4 ♗xd4 13.♘b5 ♗xa1 14.♕xa1 winning, when position trumps material.
12.♕b3 ♗e6 13.♗xe6 fxe6 14.♕xe6+ ♘e7 15.♘xd4 exd4 16.♖fe1 ♘fg8 17.♘d5 ♕d7



18.♗xe7?
A stumble on Morphy's part; 18.♘xe7 wins routinely. On the plus side, the spectators now get a glimpse of Paul's endgame technique.
18...♕xe6 19.♖xe6 ♔d7 20.♖ae1

♖e8 21.♖6e4 c6



Morphy must still work to bring home the point, but proves equal to the task.

22.♖xd4 cxd5 23.♖xd5+ ♔c6 24.♖d6+ ♔c7 25.♖c1+ ♔b8 26.♗h4 ♘h6 27.♗g3 ♔a8 28.h3 ♘f5 29.♖d7 g6 30.♖cc7 ♘xg3 31.fxg3 ♖b8 32.♖xh7 ♖xh7 33.♖xh7 a5 34.h4 ♖g8 35.g4 b5 36.h5 a4 37.h6 b4 38.♖g7 ♖h8 39.h7 b3 40.♖g8+ ♔b7 41.♖xh8 b2 42.♖b8+ ♔xb8 43.h8♕+ 1-0

One onlooker who was less shocked than most was Judge Alexander Beaufort Meek. Morphy's friend and advocate had already predicted that Paul would triumph at the Congress. Ten years later the *Macon Telegraph* of May 2, 1867 would remark on their relationship, 'At once it was evident that the tenderest ties of honor and friendship existed between them. No father could watch with more tender anxiety, or glory with more exultant pride in the triumphs of a favored son, than this great man, in the victorious career of his protégé. And the youthful hero in turn, reverenced his noble friend as a father could not more have been reverenced.' Meek had become an important father figure for Paul during this key life juncture. A few months later (December 1857) Daniel's Fiske's *Chess Monthly* issued this report on Morphy's arrival:

'It was with the prestige acquired by his victories over Löwenthal, Rousseau, Ernest Morphy, Meek and McConnell that Paul Morphy arrived in New York on the fifth (sic) of October. (...) Notwithstanding his high reputation, there were many, who from his youth and the small number of his published games, manifested much incredulity concerning his Chess strength.

But on the evening of his arrival all doubts were removed in the minds of those who witnessed his passages-at-arms with Mr. Stanley and with Mr. Perrin at the rooms of the New York Chess Club, and the first prize was universally conceded to him, even before the entries for the Grand Tournament had been completed.'

What a mind-boggling first impression! He was simply *that good*, and no one who ever saw Morphy play failed to marvel at his greatness.

Daniel Willard Fiske (1831-1904)

During the ten-week duration of his first New York trip, Paul Morphy would make many friends. Wherever he traveled, his aura had a magnetic effect on others, especially chess players. The combination of other-worldly talent, genteel southern manners, and an utter lack of pretensions, cast a powerful

spell on people. In some ways Paul was a reluctant hero, fortunate to have so many allies pulling for him to succeed.

His most influential New York friend was Daniel Willard Fiske, the chief organizer of the First American Chess Congress. Born just six years before Morphy, Fiske launched *Chess Monthly*, one of the first American chess magazines, earlier that year in January 1857 when he was only 25 years of age. A learned renaissance man, he later became a prominent professor and scholar of Scandinavian languages at Cornell University. Two years later Fiske would publish *The First American Chess Congress*, New York 1857. This scholarly tome (running 563 pages) was much more than the definitive book of the tournament. Fiske was a researcher extraordinaire, and his chapters on chess history, particularly in America, are of lasting importance. He also devotes nearly 100 pages to the organizing and ceremonial aspects of the Congress, thereby making the first serious American chess tournament our most well-documented event, as well.

Fortunately for posterity, Fiske's interest in Paul Morphy went way beyond the professional. He would become a lifelong friend, corresponding not only with Morphy, but with many mutual acquaintances for years to come. Trained as a librarian, Fiske meticulously maintained his papers, donating them to Cornell University upon his death. A large chunk of the irreplaceable surviving correspondence by and about Morphy derives from D.W. Fiske.

Of more immediate importance, Fiske enlisted Morphy's help in annotating the tournament book, included a short biography of Paul in his section on American Chess, and even dedicated the book to Morphy.

Morphy had arrived just two days before the start of the tournament. The event was closely modeled on the London 1851 International Tournament, borrowing its knock-out format of five-game mini-matches, the first player to win three games advancing. Pairings were by lot; the organizers recognized the risk that strong players could meet early on, diluting the strength of later matches, but they could not agree on a better option. Chess clocks had not been invented yet; the first use of any strict time controls was not until the 1861 match between Anderssen and Ignatz Kolisch. This was of course a huge problem, since some players could and would try to wear down their opponents by sitting on lost positions for hours (probably while blowing cigar smoke in their opponent's faces). The rules of the congress allowed the organizers to intervene if a player thought for more than a half hour per move, but unfortunately this rule was not enforced.

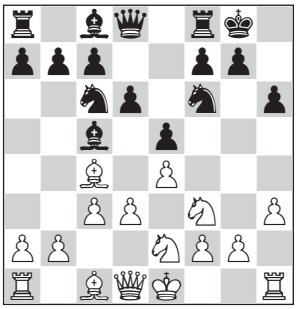
The original venue for the tournament was the New York Chess Club, but due to tremendous public interest the committee had to rent the larger Descombs' Room at 764 Broadway. Lots were drawn on October 6, 1858, and Morphy telegrammed his brother Edward:

'NY 6th Arrived last Sunday – playing begins today [Tuesday] – Am pitted against James Thompson.' The random pairings immediately came into play – Morphy had drawn one of the stronger players to start the event. Lawson writes,

'Thompson was a chess veteran who was well-known in Paris and London before he came to New York. He was a strong player and was accustomed to giving odds. (...) Play began at 1.40 pm, but Thompson resigned at 2.30 pm.' Frederick Edge would later write that Thompson was 'noted for the brilliance and daring of his attack, and noted for his pertinacity in playing the Evans' Gambit wherever he has a chance.' Not on this occasion, however.

James Thompson
Paul Morphy
First American Congress New York 1857 Round 1
Game 1

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.d3 ♘f6 5.♘c3 h6 6.♘e2 d6 7.c3 0-0 8.h3



The interesting maneuver ♘c3-e2-g3 was a favorite of Charles Stanley, which mirrors the (now) standard Ruy Lopez maneuver ♘d2-f1-g3, shifting forces to the kingside. The 'Pianissimo' was the main line of the Giuoco then; but this insipid variation would go underground for a century, reemerging only in recent years as a way to avoid computer traps in the modern era. Morphy nearly always sought to punish slow play in open games by opening lines, both because he thought it correct in principle, and because it suited his style. Here he finds the most direct route to seek the initiative against White's maneuvering, still relevant today.

8...♔h8 9.♘g3 ♘h7 10.♕c2

10...f5!? 11.exf5 d5 12.♗b3
12.♗b5 is better.
12...e4?! A vintage Morphy line-opening pawn sac, but here the idea is not quite sound, though Black's aggression induces a panic response. Instead, Black could achieve active equality with 12...♗xf5 13.♘xf5 ♖xf5 and on 14.d4 ♖xf3!.
13.dxe4 dxe4

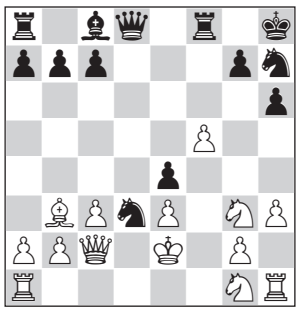
14.♘g1??

Little better than resigning. Fiske's tournament book disregards this blunder, while GM Geza Maroczy's bemoans that '(White's) last six moves in their totality form one continuous error, of which the 14th move is the crowning mistake.' In fact after 14.♕xe4! ♗xf5 15.♘xf5 ♖e8 16.♗e6 ♕f6 17.0-0 ♖xe6 18.♕c2 ♖f8 19.♘5d4! White returns the pawn with a comfortable edge.

14...♘e5

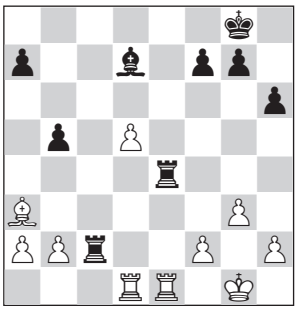
Yikes. The threat of ...♘d3 followed by taking on f2 is absolutely annihilating.

15.♗e3 ♘d3+ 16.♔e2 ♗xe3 17.fxe3



17...♕h4 18.♘xe4 ♕xe4 19.♕xd3 ♕xg2+ 20.♔d1 ♗xf5 21.♕e2 ♕xh1 0-1

Tournament rules allowed opponents to play multiple games per day if time permitted, so Game 2 soon commenced. This much tougher affair lasted nearly three hours. Showing the theoretical work he'd put in since the Löwenthal meeting, Morphy met 1.e4 c5 with the Open Sicilian 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 and soon won a pawn against Thompson's weak treatment (with an early ...h6?). Morphy uncharacteristically lost the thread and reached this ending:



position after 24.♖fe1

Maroczy criticizes Black's last move 23...b5(!), but after simply 24...♖xe1+ 25.♖xe1 a5! 26.♗d6 ♖xb2 27.a3 ♗h3 White faces a steep uphill climb just to hold. Thompson unluckily essayed one of the worst moves on the board,

24...f5?

Black's bishop is thereby denied the vital h3-square, and White was back on top after:

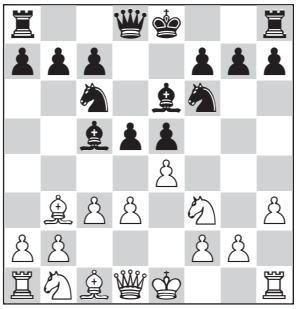
25.f3 ♖xe1+ 26.♖xe1 ♖d2 27.d6 a5 28.♗c5

With 29.♖e7 coming, Black can no longer afford his queenside counterplay and went down meekly (1-0, 48).

Morphy won the third game on October 8, following a rest day, in 46 moves, and advanced. The formula was reminiscent of Game 1 – meeting White's slightly slow play by sharpening the struggle.

James Thompson
Paul Morphy
First American Congress New York 1857 Round 1
Game 3

1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♗c4 ♗c5 4.c3 ♘f6 5.d3 d6 6.h3 ♗e6 7.♗b3 d5



Today it is a core principle of open games that if Black can safely achieve ...d5, he should equalize. Morphy did more than anyone to establish this idea. Since White has used two tempi for the non-developing moves h3 and ♗b3, Black believes the advance is justified.

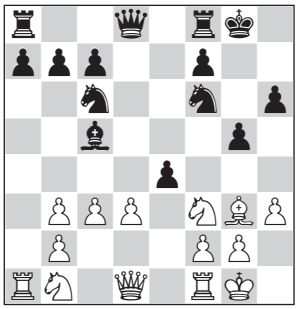
8.exd5

Bad is 8.♘xe5 ♘xe5 9.d4 ♘xe4 10.dxc5 ♘xc5; but 8.♘g5 and 8.♘d2 are both OK for White.

8...♗xd5 9.0-0 0-0 10.♗g5 ♗xb3 11.axb3 h6 12.♗h4 g5!

This move is often either very good, or very bad. Here the loosening of kingside squares is of no consequence and Morphy takes the initiative. In a note to Game 16 of the McDonnell-La Bourdonnais match, Morphy wrote: 'There are, undoubtedly, many cases, in which the [g] pawn can be thrown forward with advantage; the move, however, should be made at the proper stage of the game.'

13.♗g3 e4!



Opening the game highlights Black's greater activity.

14.♘e5!

Black is clearly better after 14.dxe4 ♘xe4! 15.♕xd8 ♖axd8 16.♗xc7 ♖d7. Now 17.♗h2? loses to 17...♘xf2!, so forced is 17.♗e5 when either 17...♘xf2 18.♗d4 or 17...a6 favor Black. A key to all this is White's ♘b1, still in the stable.

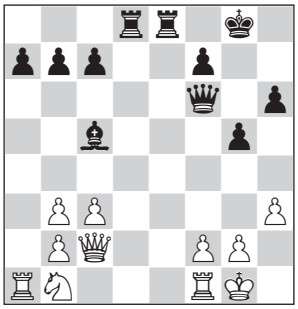
14...♘xe5 15.♗xe5 exd3

16.♗xf6?

The critical moment passed over by commentators. White rushes to remove the advanced passer, but in so doing the game slips away. Instead 16.♕f3! first maintains equality. After 16...♘d7 17.♗g3 ♕e7 18.♕xd3 ♘f6 19.♘d2/a3 White avoids the coming pitfalls.

16...♕xf6 17.♕xd3 ♖ad8 18.♕c2 ♖fe8

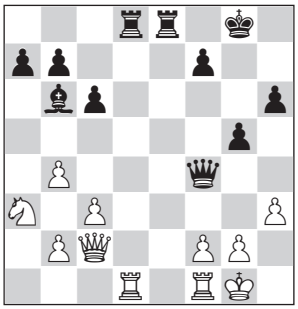
The most natural move and a strong one, but more incisive was 18...♕g6! when trading queens is fatal for White.



19.b4 ♗b6 20.♘a3

Thompson defends routinely, but not well enough. The last hidden resource was 20.c4! ♗d4 21.♘c3 with good holding chances.

20...♕f4! 21.♖ad1 c6



Black is simply much better. His killer bishop dominates White's lame knight, and all his men are more active. White can't contest with 22.♖fe1? ♖xe1+ 23.♖xe1 ♖d2 and is induced to blunder. Such games make it hard to fathom how some dispute that Morphy was ahead of his time positionally.

22.♖d3?! Maroczy suggests 22.b3 but 22...♗c7 23.g3 ♕f3 'and Black is winning' per Fritz.

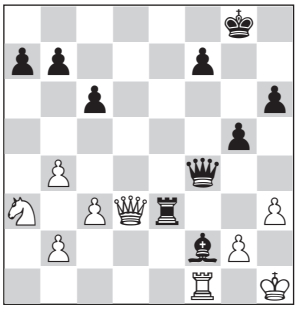
22...♗xf2+!

Black's strategic dominance results in a very 'modern' *petite combinaison*.

23.♔h1

23.♖xf2 ♖e1+ and mate.

23...♖xd3 24.♕xd3 ♖e3



25.♕d8+

25.♕c2 ♖xh3 is mate in three. White trades queens to escape this fate, but Morphy's technique is deadly:

25...♔g7 26.♕d4+ ♕xd4 27.cxd4 ♖e2 28.♘c4 ♖e1 29.♖xe1 ♗xe1 30.♘a5 ♗xb4 31.♘xb7 ♔f6 32.♘d8 c5 33.♘c6 ♔e6 34.dxc5 ♗xc5 35.g4 ♔d5 36.♘d8 f6 37.♔g2 a5 38.♔f3 a4 39.♔e2 ♗d4 40.♔d3 ♗xb2 41.♘f7 ♗e5 42.♔c2 ♔c4 43.♘d8 a3 44.♘b7 a2 45.♘a5+ ♔b4 46.♘b3 ♔a3 0-1

The games commenced each day at 11 am, but Morphy had knocked out James Thompson 3-0, and his second-round opponent was yet to be determined. Morphy spent the off days playing skittles with Thompson, Louis Paulsen and Hardman P. Montgomery. At this stage Morphy was no doubt eager to get all the experience he could, against the largest gathering of masters he had encountered. Likewise, the American chess public could not get enough of the 19-year-old wunderkind.

The following day, on Friday October 9, Louis Paulsen, also a young man of 24, stole some of Morphy's limelight. Born in Germany in 1833, he emigrated to the United States in 1854, following his older brother Ernst to Dubuque, Iowa, where he served as a bookkeeper for Ernst's wholesale tobacco business. Like Morphy, Paulsen was a virtual unknown, who had become a strong player by playing extensively against his master-strength brother Wilfried (their sister Amelie was also a strong player). Stylistically Louis Paulsen carried the torch of Howard Staunton; a strong positional and strategic thinker, who contributed immensely to the theory of the Sicilian Defense (lending his name to a key ...e6 variation which built on the ideas of Staunton and his French School predecessors). Paulsen would soon follow in Löwenthal's footsteps by moving back to Europe to establish himself as one of the world's leading players for the next few decades.

Paulsen and Paul Morphy shared a talent which had rarely been seen in chess annals: they were expert blindfold players. Louis Paulsen announced on October 9 that he would attempt to break the world record by playing four blindfold games simultaneously on the following day. This caused quite a sensation, since the previous modern record was Philidor's unheard-of three blindfold opponents, matched much later by French master Daniel Harrwitz. Paulsen was quite a gamer; even after losing all his off-hand games against Morphy the day before, he invited him to participate in the blindfold simul. Morphy agreed, on the condition that he also play blindfold.

A 'throng' of spectators paid $1 apiece on Friday to watch Paulsen take on William James Appleton ('W.J.A.') Fuller, the New England born chess editor of Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Newspaper*; New York Chess Master Dennis Julien, proprietor of the St. Denis Hotel, a 'popular chess resort'; C.H. Schultz, and Paul. Aside from Morphy only Julien would dent Paulsen for a draw, but the most memorable game was easily the following:

Louis Paulsen
Paul Morphy
New York Double Blindfold Simul, October 9, 1857

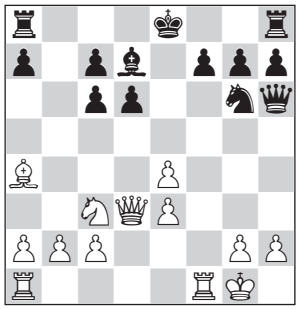
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.♘c3 ♗c5?!

Not a typical Morphy move; he would surely prefer White after the fork trick 4.♘xe5! ♘xe5 5.d4. Strange as it seems 3.♘c3 was a novelty at this time, and Morphy was out of book!

4.♗b5 d6 5.d4 exd4 6.♘xd4 ♗d7 7.♘xc6 bxc6 8.♗a4 ♕f6 9.0-0 ♘e7 10.♗e3?

This anti-positional lemon is in turn uncharacteristic of Paulsen. Isolated doubled pawns on an open file and a big fat e5-square for Black – what was he thinking?

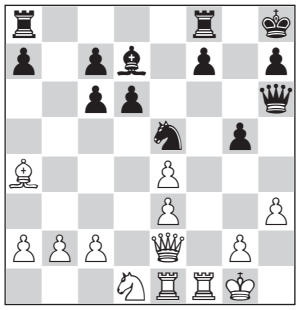
10...♗xe3 11.fxe3 ♕h6 12.♕d3 ♘g6



13.♖ae1 ♘e5 14.♕e2 0-0 15.h3

White must eventually commit his kingside pawns to counter ...♘g4, but Black now plays purposefully à la Anderssen, mobilizing on the kingside with a preponderance of force.

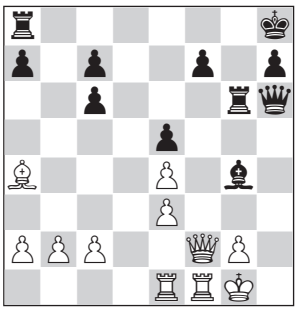
15...♔h8 16.♘d1 g5!



Quiet approaches are also good, but why not storm the fortress?

17.♘f2 ♖g8 18.♘d3 g4 19.♘xe5 dxe5 20.hxg4 ♗xg4 21.♕f2 ♖g6!

The winning move, preparing to double rooks while preventing 22.♕f6+.



22.♕xf7 ♗e6! 23.♕xc7 1-0

In for the penny, in for the pound, but White is lost anyway after 23.♕f3 ♗h3 24.♖f2 ♗xg2 or 24...♖ag8 25.♖ee2 ♕h4. Now Morphy announced mate in five: 23...♖xg2+! 24.♔xg2 ♖g8+ 25.♔f3 ♕h5+ 26.♔f2 ♕h2+ 27.♔f3 ♕g2 mate.

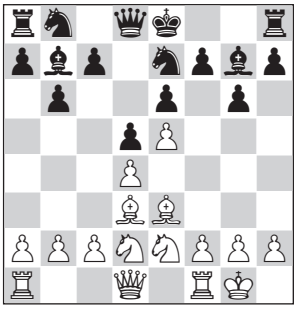
Morphy's mate announcement came at 10.30 pm after six hours of play. The spectators were dumbfounded by Paulsen's record-breaking feat; but Howard Staunton in the *Illustrated London News* of February 1, 1862 focused instead on Morphy's brilliance:

'In the faculty of imparting vitality to a position Mr. Morphy is hardly second to La Bourdonnais. It is very rare, indeed, to find a game of his which is not in some part enlivened by a stroke of vigor or a flash of inspiration. The advance of the pawn here [16...g5] operates a change in the aspect of affairs which is almost magical.'

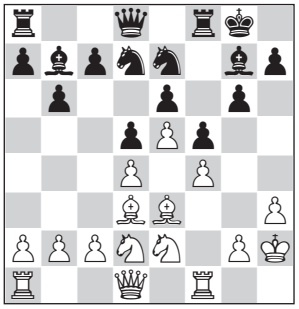
In the second round of the tournament Morphy was paired with his good friend, Judge A.B. Meek of Montgomery, Alabama. Due to the randomized pairings Morphy's second opponent was weaker and more familiar than the first. Fiske even mentions that Paulsen's sister Amelie beat Meek in an offhand game soon after this match, which probably bothered him more than losing to Paul.

Paul Morphy
A.B. Meek
First American Congress New York 1857 Round 2
Game 1

1.e4 e6 2.d4 g6 3.♗d3 ♗g7 4.♗e3 ♘e7 5.♘e2 b6 6.♘d2 ♗b7
Thanks to Staunton's influence all kinds of flank openings, including double fianchettoes and even the Hippopotamus (...♗b7, ...♗g7, ...♘d7, ...♘e7) were being tried then, with little or no theory. Given his knowledge of Paul, avoiding an open game was worth a try for the judge.
7.0-0 d5 8.e5



8...0-0
8...♘f5 or 8...♗a6 were worth considering.
9.f4 f5
Black plays 'à la Staunton' to close the kingside. The problem is that Black's queenside play is much more slow-developing than in the McDonnell-style 2.f4 Sicilians, where ...f5 was effective enough.
10.h3 ♘d7 11.♔h2
Bobby Fischer concurred with Fred Reinfeld and others that closed positions were Morphy's 'only weakness', but I'm not sure I agree. White's play is a model of efficiency, though Black is admittedly shooting blind.



11...c5 12.c3 c4
Locking the queenside is rarely advisable in these situations; Black's king is unlikely to survive long enough to witness a queenside pawn storm.
13.♗c2 a6 14.♘f3 h6?
The losing move, creating a fatal weakness on g6.
15.g4 ♔h7 16.♖g1 ♖g8 17.♕e1! ♘c6 18.♘h4!
An important maneuver to recognize here. White can pile irresistible

force on the g6-square, and a knight sacrifice there will decide sooner or later.

18...♕f8

Naïve, but even on 18...♘e7 19.♘xg6 ♘xg6 20.gxf5 exf5 21.♗xf5 ♘df8 22.♗c2 White crashes through.

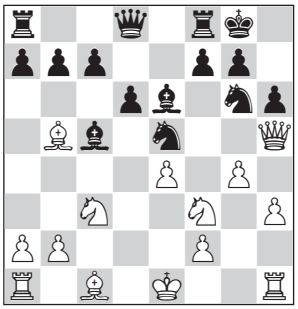
19.♘xg6! ♔xg6 20.gxf5+ ♔f7 21.fxe6+ ♔xe6 22.f5+ ♔e7 23.♕h4+ ♔e8 24.f6 ♗xf6 25.exf6 ♖xg1 26.♖xg1 ♘xf6 27.♗g6+ ♔d7 28.♗f5+ ♔e8 29.♗xh6 ♕h8 30.♖g7 ♘g8 1-0

In the third game, Meek decided to go down swinging, essaying the Scotch Gambit. Morphy, interested in accuracy as much as brilliancy, did not mind defending classical gambits. He and Anderssen enjoyed playing either side of open games, though both were more vulnerable when defending.

A.B. Meek
Paul Morphy

First American Congress New York 1857 Round 2 Game 3

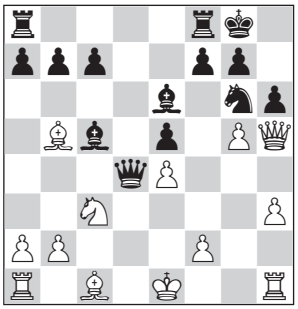
1.e4 e5 2.♘f3 ♘c6 3.d4 exd4 4.c3 dxc3 5.♘xc3 ♗c5 6.♗c4 d6 7.h3 ♗e6 8.♗b5 ♘ge7 9.♘g5 0-0 10.♕h5 h6 11.♘f3 ♘g6 12.g4 ♘ce5



13.♘xe5 dxe5

Instead of taking with the pawn, 13...♘xe5 is also good, with the cute idea of 14.♗e2 f5! 15.gxf5 ♗f7. Morphy handles this position very instructively. His concrete play may objectively not be the absolute strongest, but it is the most practical way to approach the position. Not only is Black better, but he puts to bed any White notions of attacking the kingside. Taking all the fun out of an opponent's position may rob his spirit as well.

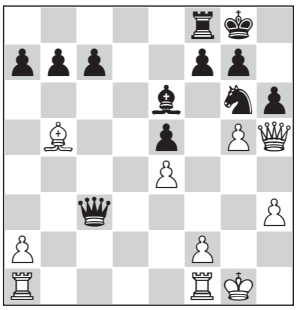
14.g5 ♕d4



15.♗e3 ♕b4 16.♗xc5 ♕xb2!? 17.0-0 ♕xc3 18.♗xf8?

Necessary was 18.♖fc1 first, shooing the queen off White's third rank; but Black is still in control.

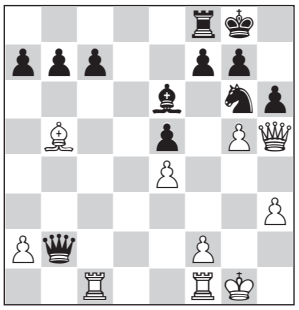
18...♖xf8



Not only is Black up material, but his ♘g6 is better than a white rook. Now 19.gxh6 ♘f4 is hopeless.

19.♖ac1 ♕b2

19...♕b4 would have been more accurate.



20.♗c4?

He should have played 20.♖b1.

20...♘f4 21.♕d1 ♘xh3+ 22.♔g2 ♘f4+ 23.♔h1 ♕b6 24.gxh6 ♗xc4 25.h7+ ♔xh7 26.♕g4 ♕h6+ 27.♔g1 ♗xf1 28.♖xf1 ♖d8 29.a4 ♖d6 30.f3 ♖g6 31.♔f2 0-1

The *Macon Telegraph* of May 9, 1867 ran a funny anecdote about the Morphy-Meek encounter:

'During the brief contests with Morphy, [Meek] made a playful threat that caused a good deal of amusement. He told the little hero, thus striding over them all so triumphantly, that if he didn't stop beating him so all the time, and, at least, once in a while give him some kind of a chance, he would pick him up, put him in his pocket and carry him off – a threat which, considering the immense disparity in their physical proportions seemed not at all impossible of execution.'

With Meek vanquished in a quick one-day session, Morphy waited nearly a week to receive his third-round pairing. Meanwhile on Saturday October 17 a fancy dinner was hosted at Denis Julian's St. Denis Hotel, with chess-themed entrees, such as 'Pommes de Terre a la McDonnell'. After many speeches, Colonel Mead toasted Morphy, who responded in a very upbeat manner:

'...For the first time in the annals of American Chess, a Congress is being held which bids fair to mark an era in the history of our noble game. Chess, hitherto viewed by our countrymen in the light of a mere amusement, assumes at last its appropriate place among the sciences which at once adorn and exalt the intellect...' Unfortunately, Morphy would soon begin expressing a much more negative view of chess playing.