

Steinitz Quotes

Edward Winter



Wilhelm/William Steinitz

From one of the greatest of all chess periodicals, Steinitz's
International Chess Magazine

(1885-1891), we present a selection of quotes.

February 1885, page 46:

'When I first met Anderssen in 1862, he spoke in the highest possible terms of Morphy. ... In 1866 I had another conversation with Anderssen about Morphy. The professor had much cooled down in his enthusiasm, and he did not seem to think that Morphy could always have beaten him for certain. My own impression is that Anderssen, who could not play a single game blindfold, was at first overawed by Morphy's wonderful *sans*

voir performances, and he overworked himself by calculations out of his real depth. But he subsequently found that he could hold his own against blindfold players like Blackburne, Paulsen, Suhle and Zukertort, by relying on his natural fine judgment, and then he began to doubt whether his fear was based on real grounds. The professor, at any rate, ridiculed the idea of Morphy's overwhelming superiority which some critics claimed to the extent of his being able to give the material odds of pawn and move to all his contemporaries.'

October 1885, page 301, regarding Bernhard Horwitz:

'Old Horwitz is gone ... His genius for end positions was unequalled by any chess master, and with the greatest facility he evolved and demonstrated profound ideas which most experts could only arrive at by laborious calculations. His loss is irreparable to the chess world at large, and personally I feel bereft of one of my dearest friends, who thoroughly sympathized with all my aims and opinions.'

February 1886, page 43:

'As stated in the *New York Tribune*, a few weeks ago, I remarked in answer to a question of my interviewer that I would rather die in America than live in England. At a recent banquet of the New York Chess Club I added that I would rather lose a match in America than win one in England. But after having carefully considered the subject in all its bearings, I have come to the conclusion that I neither mean to die yet nor to lose the match.'

May 1886, page 97 (Steinitz writing shortly after the end of his world championship match against Zukertort):

'In a personal interview with the editor of the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, Mr J.W. Miller who is the compiler of the American edition of *Cook's Synopsis*, we have ascertained in reply to our questions that not a single one of the openings adopted in the 20 games of the late contest for the championship of the world can be found in the books up to the eighth move. It will also be seen on examination that novelties were introduced, sometimes as early as on the fourth move ...'

May 1886, page 114:

'... It was Paul Morphy and his exploits that first induced me to enter chess life and to him I owe my career in the first instance.'

May 1886, pages 114-115:

'... Some remarks on correctness in general. It is a great quality in combination with others, but in itself it does not furnish any absolute proof of superiority, any more than the possession of any other single faculty, like knowledge, memory, etc. A man's vision may be clear, but he may be short-sighted, or he may turn his eyes in the wrong direction. A player may be exact in his combinations and calculations, but that does not necessarily include his having acquired sound strategical principles which often dispense with analysis altogether.'

June 1886, page 170 (tournaments v matches):

'... As is well known, I, in common with most connoisseurs, hold that general contests only furnish a very unreliable and much inferior test of strength in comparison to matches between two selected players.'

July 1886, page 203:

'... I have always shown fight ultimately, and I fought with my pen soundly and on principle, free from delusions and deceptions, just like on the chess board.'

July 1886, pages 204-205:

'But when it is so freely asserted that Morphy's style was all genius and inspiration *throughout* , while the play of modern masters is all book and study, I would take leave to answer frankly *that just the very reverse can be proved* in the only part of the game in which knowledge and study can be of much use and in which a test of the assertion can be applied, namely in the openings. For Morphy possessed the most profound book knowledge of any master of his time, and he never in his practice introduced a single novelty, whereas since his day the books have had to study the players.'

August 1886, page 236:

'If any further proof were needed of the unreliability of tournaments as a test, the ridiculous contrast between the scores of Bird and Burn in their late match, as compared with their tournament record in the last London contest, would be sufficient in itself. Here are two players who, about a fortnight before the tournament, made exactly even games out of about 19 or 20 played in their match, and yet in the tourney the one comes out at the top of the list in the general contest and ultimately only loses first honors in the tie, while the other is actually the very lowest in the score among 13 competitors. I have a high opinion of Mr Burn's genius, and I believe that his even score with Mr Bird was only due to his having been previously out of practice for many years. But there can be no doubt that Mr Bird was not in the proper place due to his skill, when he emanated at the tail end of the contest, which is a hard downfall from his position in last year's Hereford tournament where he tied for second and third prizes with Schallopp. But such is tournament fate. Anderssen once said to me: "To win a tournament, a competitor must in the first place play well, but he should also have a good amount of luck." I quite agree with that, but it naturally follows that there must be also ill-luck in tournaments, of which many instances could be cited, notably that of Winawer, who, after having tied for first and second prizes in Vienna, and just a few weeks before he came out chief victor in Nuremberg, did not win in London a single prize out of eight (to include the special one for the best score against the prize-holders). All this would tend to show that, at least, a single tournament, especially one consisting of one round only, cannot be regarded as a test.'

September 1886, page 275:

'... The *Telegram* of the 14th *ult.* freely admits that a match is a test of superiority between two players at least for the time being. Yet in one and the same breath the editor professes to believe that the contrast in the respective match and tournament scores between Bird and Burn might as well be turned as evidence against matches as a test. Now, as is well known, I am not very fond of Bird, while Burn is an intimate friend and former pupil of mine of whom I am very proud. But though I stated that in my opinion Burn, if in good practice, was the superior player, it surely is the barest justice to Bird's total record and reputation to say that his even score in the match represents a closer measure of his relative force than the gulf of 11 places which divided the two parties in the tournament ...'

November 1886, page 335:

'We all may learn from Morphy and Anderssen how to conduct a king's-side attack, and perhaps I myself may not have learnt enough. But if you want to learn how to avoid such an attack, how to keep the balance of position on the whole board, or how to expose the king

apparently and invite a complicated attack which cannot be sustained in the long run, you must go to the modern school for information.'

November 1886, page 335:

'When once my opinion was asked about the strength of a certain well-known English player who continually tried to blow himself up into a first-rate in a Sporting and Dramatic manner, I answered: "He evidently has an extraordinary good memory, for he always makes the same mistakes".'

November 1886, page 336:

' ... if there be anything debasing, degrading, mercenary, demoralizing, etc., in chess it is the promulgation of a so-called virtuous principle to the effect that wealthy amateurs for their own amusement and without paying the least consideration for their opponents' time and labor, may suck the brains of superior chess masters who are not as well off as themselves. Or when it is gravely preached that men of talent and genius, who happen to be born without a golden spoon in their mouth, should enter the public chess arena in a starving condition merely for the entertainment of thousands of rich people all over the world who only ought to pay their money to incapable critical chess pirates and their publishers. The highest and most exhausting mental labors which combines art and science should crouch before moneyed capital with an empty stomach and be content, like the Roman gladiators, to die with the words: "*Ave Caesar*
morituri te salutant"'

December 1886, page 371:

'It is not the least reproach to Morphy and Anderssen that they did not know what was discovered after their time, no more than to assert that Sir Isaac Newton, if he became alive now, would not be fit for a Professor of mathematics at a high-class school without some further study.'

January 1887, page 22 (part of Steinitz's justification of his Personal and General column):

'... to make it disagreeable for dishonest parties who are, I believe, even less numerous proportionately in the chess world than in other walks of life, but more crafty, cunning or "smart" as it is called. Chess must be established as a thoroughly straightforward and honest

game first of all before it can be made a real gentlemanly one, and unscrupulous trickery, deception and fraud must be "warned off the track". But it requires a strong arm to accomplish that, and war on dishonest chessists cannot be made with rose water ...'

February 1887, page 35:

'Herr Paulsen is one of the most original players that ever appeared in the chess arena ...'

January 1888, page 10:

'Mr Jas. D. Seguin, the chess editor of the *Times-Democrat*, is a local lawyer in New Orleans. This is an honorable calling if honorably pursued, and, for what I know, Mr Séguin may be as respectable a gentleman as his tailor and his profession could make of him. But, to judge from his chess journalistic performances, and from that alone, I ought to add in fairness, I conclude that he must belong to that class of lawyers who, owing to their habitual practice of blackening opponents and their attorneys, whilst whitewashing their own clients, become morally color-blind and lose all conception of right and wrong, like a scavenger loses his sense of smell. This pettifogging journalistic pawnbroker, whose connection with a band of literary highway robbers was fully exposed and castigated in our November issue, has now thrown off his mask, as I predicted he would, and has shown himself in his true character as one of the most insolent editorial desperadoes that has ever infested periodical chess literature.'

January 1888, page 14:

'... The enormous power of the press cannot easily be ignored in our rising pastime, and ... it must be counteracted vigorously when used for evil purposes.'

February 1888, page 44:

'According to the rules of any respectable journal which I fully agree with, the slightest error of fact, if it happens to be prejudicial to anyone, must be apologized for ...'

April 1888, page 82:

'... Like the Duke of Parma, I always hold "the sword in one hand and the olive branch in the other".'

April 1888, page 86 (Steinitz's description of himself):

'... The only true champion of the world for the last 22 years (I may say so for once) ...'

May 1888, page 142: death notice of Major William Martin (1807-1888). A weak rook player when Steinitz first met him in 1872, he became by the age of 66 '... one of the strongest amateurs in England' after taking 'for a few months regular instruction from me'. Steinitz also wrote that Major Martin was:

'... one of the most amiable, honorable and straightforward gentlemen I ever met, and one who ought to be commemorated as an example of pluck and perseverance at an old age in the study of our game.'

July 1888, page 195 (Steinitz's obituary of Zukertort):

'He had an extraordinary book-knowledge, and when he came across some novelty in friendly analytical trials with strong players he would retain it for years and then apply it in a match or tournament. But though he had a remarkable faculty of assimilating and perhaps correcting other people's ideas, we feel sure that he was very deficient in originality. We noticed this defect especially in his analysis as well as in his attempted practical application of the principles of "the modern school".'

October 1888, page 304, regarding Alexander Sellman (1856-1888):

'... Poor Sellman ... had to seek his daily bread in a cigar factory and was driven into insanity by the threats of fellow workmen with whose anarchistic views he frankly expressed his disagreement.'

November 1888, page 335, also concerning Sellman:

'...This very gifted player who was one of the most remarkable figures among the prominent chessists during the last ten years. ... By his own study and without any practice with great masters he acquired a degree of strength that made him a dangerous opponent for the best masters of our time.'

May 1889, page 140:

' ... Though I fight with might and main against the inky ruffianism of the chess press impostors, I entertain a genuine charitable feeling for the failings of real chess masters, and some allowance ought to be made for the excitement of a mental contest which entails the hardest kind of brain exertion with little prospect of proportionate reward.'

July 1889, page 223:

'We do not approve of handicaps in which material odds are given.'

January 1890, page 10:

' ... I reiterate that "the principles" and "the modern school", as far as their development is demonstrated in my book, belong to me and nobody else. It has gone with the modern school like with other discoveries. It was ridiculed and pooh-poohed for a long time, and since it came to be recognized, investors try to make more profit out of it than the inventor.'

July 1890, page 208 (during a controversy with Mason):

' ... I am no egotist or individualist, and I never, in the whole course of my life, could have sympathized in the least with the J.Y.D. school of philosophy to which you professedly belonged for some years at least. If I could go to any extremes in my ideas about the principles to be adopted in the "Gambit of Life", I might lean toward communism or socialism, but certainly not toward selfishness. Or in other words, small as chess matters are in comparison to other objects in life, I have always believed, and still do believe, in spite of your sneer about "the interest of chess all over the world", that what is for the common good of our game is sure to revert to me enough benefit to satisfy my own wants and wishes. Therefore I do not raise any artificial or humbugging press noise about matches that

are not likely, and sometimes not even intended to be played, but when a genuine contest "on reasonable terms" is offered to me in a manner that means business, I accept it promptly and do my best to bring it about.'

March 1891, page 82 (in reply to a statement by Tarrasch):

'Unlike some shallow critics who have given me credit for book knowledge or practically credited others with my own new ideas, the Doctor lays most stress on the originality of my play, and I may only take this opportunity to affirm that only just now, while writing my own book, I am going through the openings systematically for the first time in my life.'

December 1891, page 359:

'... I beg to state that I shall most probably adhere to my intention of retiring from active play altogether, but I do not wish to stand pledged either way.'

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