November 28, 1938

(G3;A) S: Salo Flohr E: De Groot T = 10 minutes

It's been a Queen Gambit Accepted or Caro-Kann. KB6 is weak, but Q5 is a strong point; the Pawn on Q4 is isolated and, as such, weak. White's chances are in the attack, Black's in the endgame. 1.NxN or perhaps 1.BxN/5 come into consideration.

1.BxN/5 looks good. Let's calculate it: Does it give a decisive advantage? No other move would win immediately in any case. One has first to see if there is anything decisive in the position.

1.BxN/5 and now only 1...PxB is possible, and then one plays for instance: 2.Q-B3 or 2.R-K1. No direct decision.

Maybe first neutralize the Bishop at QB6?

1.NxB, then 1...PxN. Then for instance proceed positionally with 2.N-R4. Also possible is 1.NxB; 2.BxN/5 and 3.Q-B3. 1.NxB is a good move in any case; if there is nothing decisive, then one should hold on to a small advantage. The pair of Bishops and the weak Pawns for Black. But wait, can't you win the exhange? Yes:

1.NxB, PxN — forced, 1...RxN doesn't hold — 2.BxN/5, BPxB; 3.BxN and 4.N-Q7 (sic).[1)]

Yes,

1.NxB looks good; I play that.

1) Subject G3 discovered his error later but probably hoped that it would slip by the experimenter!

Salo Flohr — record of his thinking

Adriaan de Groot’s experiment, Position A | 28 November 1938 | 10 minutes | G3; A

The position arose from a Queen’s Gambit Accepted or a Caro-Kann Defence. The knight on f6 is weak, but the d5-square is strong; the pawn on d4 is isolated and therefore weak. White’s chances lie in an attack, Black’s in the endgame. 1.Nxd5 or perhaps 1.Bxd5 comes into consideration.

1.Bxd5 looks good. Let’s calculate it. Does it give a decisive advantage? No other move would win immediately anyway. First we must find out whether there is anything decisive in the position.

After 1.Bxd5, only 1...exd5 is possible, and then White can play, for instance, 2.Qf3 or 2.Re1. That does not bring matters to an immediate conclusion.

Shouldn’t we first neutralize the bishop on c6?

1.Nxc6 and then 1...bxc6. One could then, for example, continue positionally with 2.Na4. Also possible is 1.Nxc6, followed by 2.Bxd5 and 3.Qf3. In any case 1.Nxc6 is a good move; if there is nothing decisive, one should preserve a small advantage. The bishop pair and Black’s weak pawns. But wait, can’t White win the exchange? Yes:

1.Nxc6 bxc6 — forced, since 1...Rxc6 does not work — 2.Bxd5 exd5 3.Bxf6 and 4.Nd7? (sic).[1]

Yes, 1.Nxc6 looks good. That is what I’ll play.

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[1] Note to the original protocol: “Subject G3 discovered his error later but probably hoped that it would slip by the experimenter!”

Source: English archival typescript of de Groot’s experiment (28 November 1938).