

THE NEW WINAWER REPORT

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Pickett's Charge

Emmanuel Berg's recent book on the Winawer with 7 ♖g4 is, as mentioned in the last issue, an outstanding work, combining deep and searching analysis with an ambitiously broad scope comprising two complete Black repertoires—the Poisoned Pawn and 7 ... 0-0—in 304 pages.

A welcome aspect of this scope is that there is significant coverage of side lines, many of which, no matter how treacherous or threatening, would end up on the cutting room floor with a tighter page budget. In some cases such lines may become the main line of future theory: indeed Berg makes a strong case for one variation in this book (Chapters 11-13).

This issue considers a much-neglected White try: 11 h4!? instead of the almost invariable 11 f4 in the main line Poisoned Pawn. This is well covered by Berg, though he misses the history: the line is due to the London player and author Len M. Pickett and featured in a prominently publicised game that, however, appears in no modern database ...

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Poisoned Pawn main line: 11 h4!?

Pickett–Rivers

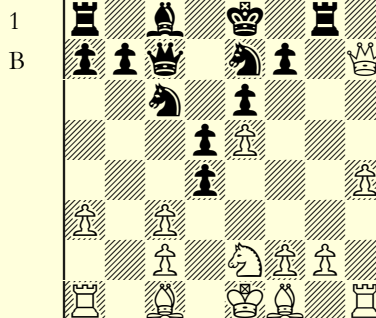
Kent-Surrey match, Eastbourne 1975

CHESS vol. 41, nos. 733-4, November 1975, pp. 56-57 (Pickett)

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♙b4 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♚e7 7 ♖g4 ♕c7 8 ♜xg7 ♜g8 9 ♜xh7 cxd4 10 ♚e2 ♘bc6

11 h4!?(1)

Pickett: 'A novelty, deviating from the standard 11 f4 and possibly an improvement. White leaves his f-pawn loose; I



consider this continuation more direct and dynamic.' Cf. A. Martin: 'Black also has to contend with Pickett's 11 h4! which I also think is very good for White although hardly played' *DFD-m p. 23*.

11 ... dxc3

After 11 ... ♖xe5 12 ♙f4 Pickett's analysis continues 12 ... ♗f5 13 ♖xf5 ♜xf5 14 cxd4 ♜cxd4 15 ♜xd4 ♜xd4 16 0-0-0 ?!. Black faces difficulties holding the h-pawn: ±. McDonald *ChessPublishing.com, September 2006* gives 12 ... ♖h8? 13 ♖xh8 ♖xh8 14 cxd4 '±±', an exaggeration but still ±. Better 12 ... ♖f6 13 ♙g5! ♖e5 14 ♙xe7 ♜xe7 15 cxd4±, though this is comfortably better for White.

12 ♖h3

Instead 12 f4, probably best (!? Berg *GMR-2 p. 66*) and usually played, has no independent significance. Other possibilities include 12 ♖d3, 12 ♙g5 and 12 ♙f4: cf. Berg *pp. 66-69, 77-79*.

The text formed part of Pickett's original idea. 'White's KR attacks and defends on the 3rd rank'.

12 ... d4?

'Wishing to avoid a material deficit, natural enough; but it allows White a strong centralisation of his queen', Pickett. This does not seem quite right: Black's difficulties arise because his centre is over-extended given his lack of development.

13 ♖e4 ♙d7?!

To avoid material loss without compensation, Black is forced into the unnatural 13 ... ♖d7/8, e.g. 14 ♖d3 ♖d5 15 ♖xd5 ♜xd5 16 f4 ♖g4±.

Not 13 ... ♖b6? 14 ♙g5±±.

14 ♜xd4 ♖xe5

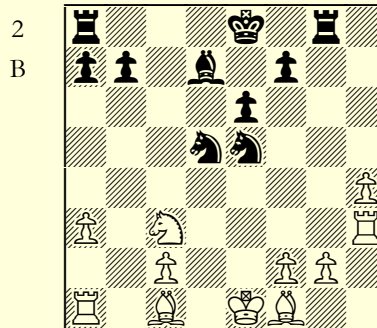
Exchanging on d4, so effective in the main line, loses immediately here: 14 ...

♜xd4 15 ♖xd4 ♜c6 16 ♖xc3±±.

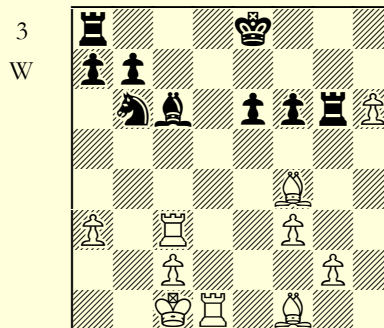
15 ♖xe5 ♜xe5

16 ♜b5 ♜d5

17 ♜xc3(2)



The triumph of Pickett's plan: with a safe pawn plus and queens off the board, White has a clear advantage. The continuation was 17 ... ♜xc3 18 ♖xc3 ♙c6 19 ♙g5 ♖g6 20 f3 f6 21 ♙f4 ♜d7 22 h5 ♖g7 23 h6 ♖g6 24 0-0-0 ♜b6(3)



25 ♙b5?

'?!' Pickett. A wholly unnecessary flourish that puts the win in jeopardy. The simple 25 ♖c5 ♜d5 26 ♙d2±± leaves White

in control.

25 ... ♖xb5
 Not 25 ... ♗d5? 26 ♜xc6±± or 26 ♜xd5±±.
 26 h7 ♖e7
 27 ♜c7+ ♗d7?

After the critical 27 ... ♗d6 28 ♗d6+ ♖f7 29 ♜xb7, Pickett gave 29 ... a6 30 c4 ♗a4 31 ♜d4 ♜h8 32 c5 ♗b5 33 a4 ♗c6 34 ♜c7 as leading to a White victory, but here 31 ... ♜h6 is much more resilient, e.g. 32 c5 ♗c6 33 ♜c7 e5 34 ♜g4 ♗xa4 35 ♜xa4 ♖e6 and Black survives to a probable draw.

28 ♗d6+
 Even simpler is 28 ♗e3.
 28 ... ♖f7
 29 ♗c5
 1-0
 * * *

This promising début failed to inspire many followers and the continuation has always been rare.

Examples:

a) **Vehre–Karasakalides, corr 1977** varied with 11 ... ♗d7, and after 12 ♜h3 ♖xe5 13 ♗f4 ♖e4 (13 ... ♜b8 14 ♗xe5=; 14 ♖d3±) 14 ♖xe4 fxe4 15 ♜g3± White stood somewhat better, the passed h-pawn gaining significance after queens are exchanged (½-½, 28).

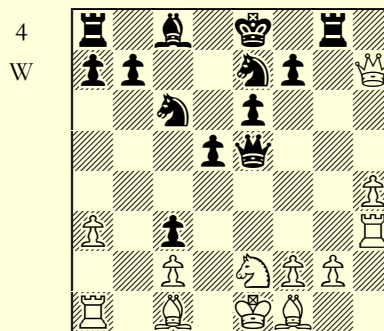
b) **Farah–Mellano, Mar del Plata Open 1993** continued (11 ... ♗d7 12 ♜h3) 12 ... dxc3 13 ♜xc3?! d4?! 14 ♗xd4 ♖e5+ 15 ♗e2 ♜h8 16 ♖d3 ♜xh4 17 f4= ½-½. Better 13 ... ♖xe5 as in **Tegzes–Rogowski, Balatonberény Open 1995**: 14 ♗f4 ♜h8 15 ♖d3?! (15 ♗xe5?) 15 ... ♖g7±/± with a strong centre against White's rather awkward development (0-1, 35).

But White can improve first with 13 ♗g5!, transposing into a favourable version of the ♗g5 line considered by Berg *pp.* 77-79, e.g. 12 ... ♖xe5 (12 ... 0-0-0? 13 f4±) 13 ♜f3 ♜g7 14 ♖h8+ ♜g8 15 ♖xe5 ♗xe5 16 ♜xc3±.

c) **A. P. Smith–Player, British Ch, Scarborough 1999** (after 11 ... ♗d7) continued 12 ♜b1 dxc3 13 ♜h3 d4? (13 ... ♖xe5 14 ♗f4 ♖h8∞/=) 14 ♖e4± 0-0-0? (better 14 ... ♗d5 to shore up c3) 15 ♗xd4± and 1-0, 29.

d) **Van der Hoorn–Sinclair, New Zealand Ch, Wanganui 1994** (after 11 ... ♗d7) saw the immediate 12 ♗g5!?, with success after 12 ... ♗xe5? 13 cxd4± (1-0, 37). Instead 12 ... ♖xe5 is essential but White again has an edge after 13 f4 ♖c7 14 ♖d3± (14 ♗f6? e5 15 fxe5 ♗f5±/± (but 1-0, 79) **Nikulin–Baragar, Winnipeg AB Classic 1998**).

All in all this evidence is quite promising. But there is a fly in the ointment, as pointed out by Berg *p.* 66: after 10 ... ♗bc6 11 h4 dxc3! 12 ♜h3 the time is right for the (never-played) 12 ... ♖xe5!(4).



Now 13 ♗f4 is no longer as effective, after 13 ... ♖h8! (13 ... ♖f5 14 ♖xj5

♠xf5 15 ♠xc3=) 14 ♠xh8 ♠xh8 when 15 ♠xc3?! is met by 15 ... ♠h4/♠ and 15 ♠xc3?? by 15 ... e5/♠. White is forced into 16 ♠g5 d4/♠: essentially the loss of time from ♠f4-g5 has cost White the one tempo required to complete the plan.

The immediate 13 ♠xc3? is weak because of 13 ... ♠h8 14 ♠d3 ♠xh4/♠. Berg gives 13 ♠f3 f6 14 ♠xc3 d4! 15 ♠d3 ♠d7/♠ ‘thanks to [Black’s] development advantage and better piece coordination’. White may not stand much worse after 16 c3 dxc3 17 f4 ♠f5 18 ♠xf5 ♠xf5 19 ♠b1, but no advantage can be claimed.

* * *

White may also fortify e5 first and then follow with ♠h3. This plan featured in the classic game **Ljubojević–Beliavsky, Thessaloniki Olympiad 1984** *Informator* 38/410 (Beliavsky), *UC pp.* 74-76 (game 26): 10 ... ♠bc6 11 f4 dxc3 12 h4 ♠d7 13 ♠h3?! (Berg advocates 13 b5) 0-0-0 (13 ... d4 14 ♠g3?! 0-0-0/♠ **Antoszkiewicz–Roemer, E. German thematic corr 1981** (0-1, 28); 14 ♠e4/♠) 14 ♠xc3?! (14 ♠d3; 14 ♠xc3) 14 ... ♠f5 15 ♠h5 (Beliavsky *UC* thought 15 ♠xf7?’ d4 16 ♠d3 ♠b8 risked the queen, but 17 g4 ♠d8 18 ♠xf8+ ♠xf8 19 gxf5∞/♠ is playable and the better chance; 15 ... ♠d8? 16 ♠b5= d4 17 ♠b3? ♠ce7? **Chos–Smolin, Ukraine Club Ch, Alushta 2011** (1-0, 43); 17 ... ♠xe5/♠) 15 ... d4 16 ♠d3 (if 16

♠b3, not Beliavsky’s planned 16 ... d3? 17 ♠xd3 ♠cd4 because of 18 ♠c3=, but rather the unhurried 16 ... ♠e8/♠) 16 ... ♠ce7 17 ♠b2? (the losing move; 17 ♠d2/♠, retaining control of e3, puts up much more fight) 17 ... ♠d5/♠ (‘? Beliavsky, but the immediate 17 ... ♠a5+! was even better) and White was massacred (0-1, 33).

* * *

So Pickett’s idea, though playable, appears to leave White no advantage in the main line. As with many side lines, though, the idea can be useful in the right circumstances. John Watson’s column *ChessPublishing.com, January 2014* analysed **Milliet–Pert, Hastings Masters 2013-14**, where 10 ... dxc3 11 f4 ♠d7 12 ♠d3 ♠a6!? led to an effortless draw. Watson remarks that ‘current theory doesn’t include any good line versus this order, let alone a refutation’.

But 10 ... dxc3 11 h4 ♠d7?! allows 12 ♠g5!, with advantage after 12 ... ♠xe5 (12 ... ♠bc6? 13 f4±; cf. Berg p. 67) 13 ♠xe7 ♠h8 14 ♠d6 ♠xe2+ 15 ♠xe2 ♠xh7 16 ♠e5±, while 11 ... ♠a6? allows 12 ♠h3 ♠xe5 13 ♠f3 ♠g7 14 ♠xg7 ♠xg7 15 ♠xc3± or again 12 ♠g5±.

Conclusion: With Berg’s 10 ... ♠bc6 11 h4 dxc3! 12 ♠h3 ♠xe5! Black has a fully satisfactory antidote to Pickett’s idea. With 12 f4 White transposes back to mainstream lines, while avoiding the awkward ... ♠a6 lines. ►

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GMR-2 BERG, Emanuel, *The French Defence 2* (Grandmaster Repertoire 15) (Quality Chess 2013) —see issue 13.

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