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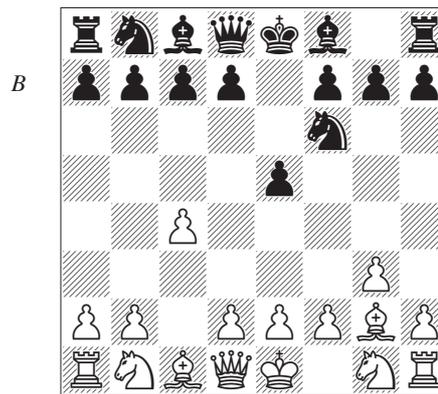
with direct attack; one feels that the strictures against moving pawns in front of one's king must have played some role in this reluctance.

## Affording Common Courtesy to a Horse

Another of the old saws which infiltrated my young chess consciousness was "develop knights before bishops". I believe Lasker was fond of this one; of course, he may never have meant it to be more than a general guideline, but it turned out to be a usable rule in the classical openings. For example, in double e-pawn openings, you're likely to make that  $\text{Nf3}$  move before  $\text{Bc4}$  or  $\text{Bb5}$ , and certainly  $\text{Bc3}$  tends to come before any false start by the queen's bishop. In the Queen's Gambit, moreover, we have both  $\text{Bc3}$  and  $\text{Nf3}$  before any bishop move in many lines (for example, in the Semi-Tarrasch, most Tarrasch QGDs, and almost all Slav Defences); and at least the queen's bishop is polite enough to wait for the b1-knight to get to c3 before dashing off to g5 in the orthodox Queen's Gambit Declined positions. Similarly, in the Queen's Gambit Accepted,  $\text{Nf3}$  and sometimes  $\text{Bc3}$  will generally precede  $\text{Bxc4}$ . Finally, in the classical English Opening variation,  $1\text{ c4 e5}$ , the sequence  $2\text{ Bc3 Nf6 3 Nf3 Bc6}$  was for years the most popular sequence, whereas the main line of the Symmetrical Variation was  $1\text{ c4 c5 2 Bc3 Bc6 3 Nf3}$  (or  $3\text{ g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 Nf3 Nf6}$ , etc.)  $3\text{... Nf6 4 g3 g6 5 Bg2 Bg7}$ .

These sorts of openings provided the training grounds for generations of players, and there arose the general feeling that the development of knights by principle preceded that of bishops. After all, we already know where the knights are going (f3 and c3, f6 and c6, right?), but the bishop has several options along its natural diagonal, so why tip your hand too early? But like so many rules, this one often fails in concrete situations. Modern chess is replete with bishop-before-knight developments, which simply take advantage of concrete positional considerations. Let's start with a couple in that same classical English Opening. After  $1\text{ c4 e5}$ , the innocent move  $2\text{ Bc3}$  can subject White to harassment by  $\text{... Bb4}$  (e.g., after  $2\text{... Nf6 3 g3 Bb4}$ ) or allow expansion in the centre (e.g.,

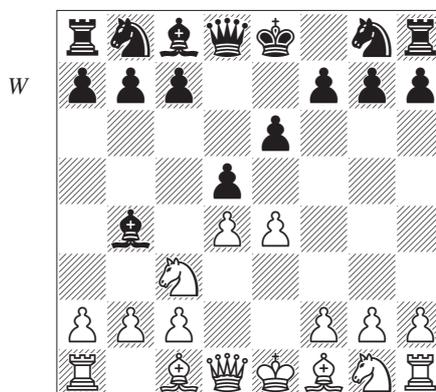
$2\text{... Nf6 3 g3 c6}$ , intending  $4\text{ Bg2 d5}$ , and the tempo win by  $\text{...d4}$  will justify Black's play in several lines). And the other knight development,  $2\text{ Nf3}$ , allows  $2\text{...e4}$ . Even  $2\text{ Bc3 Nf6 3 Nf3 Bc6 4 g3 Bb4}$  or  $4\text{ e3 Bb4}$  forces White to consider when and whether  $\text{... Bxc3}$  is going to be a threat. So a common modern alternative has been  $2\text{ g3}$ , e.g.,  $2\text{... Nf6 3 Bg2 (D)}$ .



A case of bishops before knights, simply so that Black must commit before he knows where White's knights are going to be. Play often goes  $3\text{...c6}$  ( $3\text{... Bc6}$ , following the 'knights before bishops' rule, is actually considered inferior due to  $4\text{ Nc3}$ , when  $4\text{... Bb4 5 Nbd5!}$  keeps a small, enduring advantage; again, I simply refer to the theory, rather than attributing this to any self-evident feature of the position)  $4\text{ d4 exd4 5 Bxd4 d5 6 Nf3}$ , and White would prefer to play  $\text{Bg5}$  or  $\text{cxd5}$  and 0-0 next, rather than commit his other knight to c3 and subject it to harassment from  $\text{...c5}$  and  $\text{...d4}$ .

This is a modest example, and  $2\text{ g3}$  is by no means 'superior' to  $2\text{ Bc3}$ ; it is just a valid alternative. But along the same lines, Black has recently (beginning in the early 1980s) turned his attention to  $2\text{ Bc3 Bb4!?$  (D).

By the time of this writing, there have been many hundreds of high-level games with this move, indicating that it has at least a certain credibility; but up to 1970, I can find only 4 such games, and by 1980, only 19 (and those by unknown players)! It's hard to believe that this doesn't to some extent reflect the ancient prejudice against bishops before knights. The repeated adoption of  $2\text{... Bb4}$  by players such as Kramnik and Shirov shows what a conceptual



shift has taken place. First, if White plays a move such as 3 g3 or 3 e3, Black can capture on c3 and compromise White's pawns, securing plenty of play. Of course, White can gain a tempo for the moment by 3 ♘d5; but it doesn't take much reflection to see that the knight on d5 will itself lose a tempo to ...c6, and in any case, it is a second move by the same piece in the opening and hardly the kind of development lead that inspires fear in the second player. In fact, after 3 ♘d5, Black has played 3...♗a5, 3...♗c5, 3...♗d6, and even 3...♗e7!?. This last move has intriguing modern aspects to it. Black voluntarily cedes the two bishops, because after ♗xe7 (a move White has actually foregone in several games), Black can easily expand in the centre by ...♗f6 (or ...f5 first), ...0-0, ...c6, and ...d5. I must admit that at the current time, White seems to be keeping a small advantage in this line, but arguably no more than in many of the main 1 c4 e5 variations. At any rate, there is no *a priori* reason to reject ideas such as 2...♗b4.

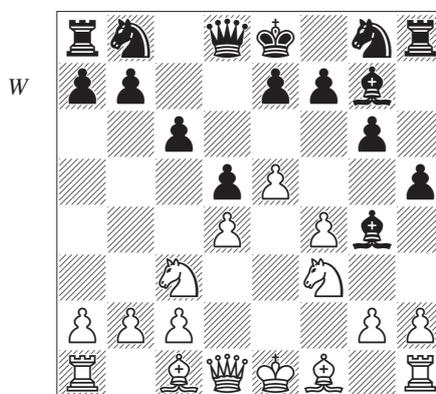
Let's consider some more examples. The reader is probably familiar with some major openings in which the bishop is developed first, for example, the French Defence, Winawer Variation: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 ♗b4 (D).

In this opening, Black very often continues to neglect the knights, a few examples being:

- a) 4 exd5 exd5 5 ♗f3 ♗g4.
- b) 4 e5 b6 5 a3 ♗f8 (or 5...♗xc3+ followed by a quick ...♗a6) 6 ♗f3 ♗a6.
- c) 4 e5 c5 5 a3 ♗xc3+ 6 bxc3 ♗c7 and now 7 ♗f3 b6 intending ...♗a6, or 7 ♗g4 f5 8 ♗h5+ g6 9 ♗d1 ♗d7, intending ...♗a4. In these two cases, Black has decided that resolving the

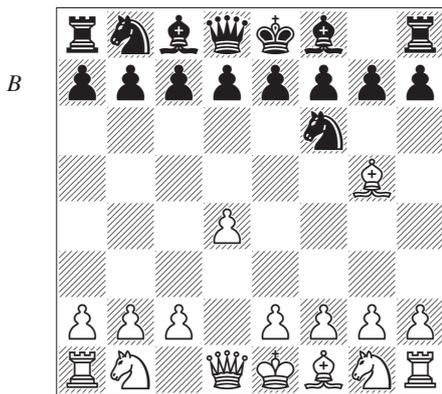
issue of his 'problem bishop' on c8 takes priority over developing his knights, which have decent prospects in such a position and need not be hurried to their destinations.

The Modern Defence, not surprisingly, offers us many examples of characteristically modern thinking. Here, too, the theme of 'bishops before knights' arises. After 1 e4 g6 2 d4 ♗g7 3 ♘c3, one example of this is Gurgendze's line 3...c6 4 f4 d5 5 e5 h5 6 ♗f3 (against other moves, Black will normally play ...♗g4 or ...♗f5) 6...♗g4 (D).



Black has achieved his primary goal, to get his c8-bishop out in front of the pawn-chain. He plays ...e6 next, and often, the further bishop move ...♗f8 (to prepare ...c5) will occur before the best posts for both knights are decided upon. Another example after 3 ♘c3 is 3...d6 4 f4 c6 5 ♗f3 ♗g4, and on his next move, having brought both bishops out before his knights, ...♗b6 will normally be preferred to any knight development.

Speaking of modern openings, how about 1 c4 e6 2 d4 b6, the English Defence? In many of the main lines, not only the c8-bishop but also the f8 one is developed before other pieces, e.g. 3 e4 ♘b7 4 ♖c3 ♙b4. And a truly modern opening is the Trompowsky Attack, all the rage and now well established as a solid system: 1 d4 ♗f6 2 ♙g5 (D).



Why commit the bishop so early, when it may be better-placed on f4 or b2, or even on its original square? Well for one thing, only by moving the bishop immediately to g5 does White force Black into making a committal decision with respect to his f6-knight. Clearly, if Black already had ...e6 in (e.g., 2 ♗f3 e6 3 ♙g5), the move ...h6 would be possible, putting the question to the bishop without allowing doubled pawns. Alternatively, ...♙e7 could be played. But with the precise Trompowsky order, moves such as 2...h6, 2...d6, 2...g6, and 2...d5 all allow ♙xf6, doubling Black's f-pawns, and 2...e6 allows White to trade his bishop for the centre by 3 e4 h6 4 ♙xf6, when

after 4...♙xf6 White can seek a more dynamic follow-up than 5 ♗f3. A natural alternative is 2...♗e4, when after 3 ♙h4 or 3 ♙f4, the knight on e4 will have to lose time to f3, with unclear consequences. (Here the almost too modern 3 h4!? is a whole other story, involving issues of the bishop-pair versus the open h-file and the cramping influence of White's g-pawn). The interesting thing, again, is how many years it took for this simple bishop-before-knight development to catch on. Similarly, there has been a lot of recent interest in the neglected opening 1 d4 d5 2 ♙g5. As in the Trompowsky, development of White's other bishop will often precede that of his knights, for example in the variations 2...g6 3 e3 ♙g7 4 c3 ♗d7 5 ♙d3 and 2...♗f6 3 ♙xf6 gxf6 4 c4 dxc4 5 e3 c5 6 ♙xc4.

In the chapters which follow, we will be addressing more rules and principles applying to specific pieces and formations. Traditional strictures against knights on the edge of the board, attacking the front of the pawn-chain, creating backward pawns on open files, ceding outposts, allowing doubled pawns, and the like, will be examined. Broader abstractions are even more vulnerable to criticism. The rule which states that 'a player with more space should avoid exchanges', for example, is so riddled with exceptions as to have lost its usefulness. I hope that this chapter has given a sense of the process by which the modern player has freed himself from the limitations of such rules, substituting a concrete and pragmatic assessment of the position at hand. This 'rule-independence' forms the basis for the discussion in succeeding chapters.