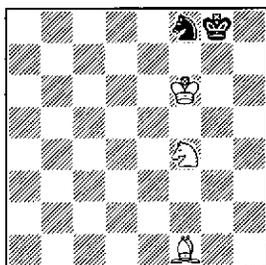
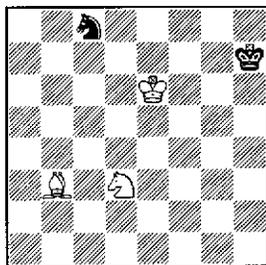


Some studies by Friedrich Amelung

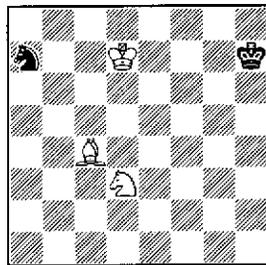
A name that frequently crops up in the literature of chess is that of Friedrich Amelung (1842-1909). He is perhaps best known for his 8-man setting of the “*en passant* key” two-move problem task, published in *Düna Zeitung* in 1897 and still unsurpassed after more than a century: set White Kf5, Rh8, Pf6/e5/h5 (5), Black Kh6, Ph7/g5 (3), and White to play can mate in two by h5xg6 e.p. since Black’s last move must have been Pg7-g5 (not Pg6-g5 because White would have been in check with Black to play, and not Kg7-h6 because Black would have been in check from White’s Pf6 and there is nowhere the pawn could have come from to give that check). But in truth he was an all-rounder: player, composer, analyst, journalist, editor, and publisher. I am not aware of any master tournaments in which he competed (he lived in Riga and may have been inconveniently far from the main centres of tournament activity), but the BIG99 database that came with ChessBase 7.0 contained a couple of wild games he played against Anderssen in Berlin in 1862 (one lost, one won), and the Russian encyclopaedia *Shakhmaty* (1990) reports matches played in 1877 against Ashurin (won 4-3 with two draws) and Schiffers (lost 6:2 with four draws).



1 - win

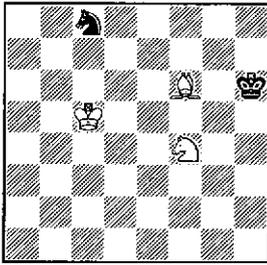


1a - after 5 Ke6

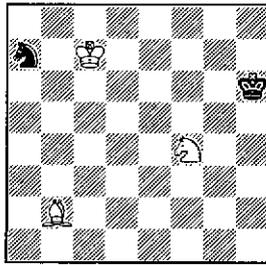


1b - after 8 Bc4

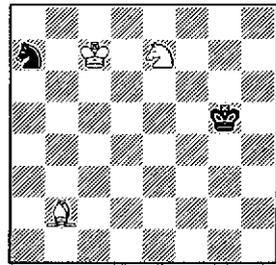
Amelung seems to have come to study composition relatively late, starting with four positions in *Nordische Rundschau* in 1884. Right from the start, he appears to have produced studies of two quite different kinds: analytic examinations of positions in pawnless endings such as B+N v N and R v N, and piquant tactical manoeuvres in positions more akin to problems than to conventional endings. 1 is an example of the former. White separates the defenders by 1 Bc4+ Kh7 (1...Kh8 is no better) 2 Kf7, and after 2...Nd7 he rounds up the knight by 3 Nd3 Nb6 4 Bb3 Nc8 5 Ke6 (see 1a). The rest is routine. The given line is 5...Nb6 6 Kd6 Nc8+ 7 Kd7 Na7 8 Bc4 etc (see 1b); Black can hold out a couple of moves longer by playing 5...Na7, but this merely alters the details of the mopping up. White’s first four moves are necessary to win, and 5 Ke6 is a move which would be thought necessary by anyone other than a computer (a win remains possible after 5 Kf6 but it takes vastly longer). Amelung was not the first to explore this ending, the pioneer apparently being an elegant example published by Kling and Horwitz in *The Chess Player* in 1852, but it was a simple and incisive piece of work.



2 - win



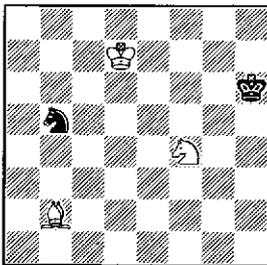
2a - after 4 Bb2



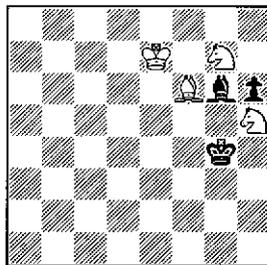
2b - after 9 Kc7

2 is perhaps the most interesting of a series of positions which Amelung published in *Deutsche Schachzeitung* in 1895 and 1896. The natural start is 1 Kc6 Na7+ (temporizing by 1...Kh7 doesn't help) 2 Kb6 Nc8+ 3 Kc7 Na7, and now 4 Bb2! seals off the exit at a3 and allows White to view the prospect of ...Nb5 with equanimity (see 2a). Black's natural move now might seem to be 4...Kg5, but it allows 5 Ne6+ followed by 6 Nd4 covering b5, and the Black knight is dead. However, 4...Nb5+ seems strong despite the loss of a3, because after 5 Kc6 (to attack the knight and hold c7/d6) Na7+ the reply 6 Kc7 will repeat the position, and 6 Kb7 appears no better. Yes, but White has 6 Kd7! giving 2a with the king on d7 instead of c7. Now 6...Nb5 is not check, and White has time for 7 Nd5 threatening 8 Ne7 and 9 Nc8. Black has nothing better than 7...Kg5 (if 7...Na7 then 8 Nc7 and 9 Bd4), and after 8 Ne7 (still threatening 9 Nc8) Na7 9 Kc7 Black is helpless (see 2b); his knight is restricted to a7 and b5, and will be rounded up in a move or two.

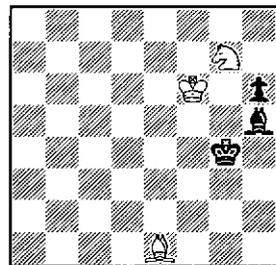
There is one further point: after 4...Nb5+, why not 5 Kd7 straight away (see 2c)? Because now Black *can* play 5...Kg5! After 6 Ne6+ Kf5 the move Nd4 is no longer playable, Black's knight being already at b5, and Black can just wriggle out of trouble.



2c - after 4...Nb5+ 5 Kd7



3 - win

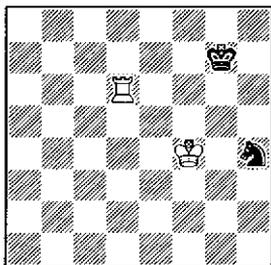


3a - after 4 Be1

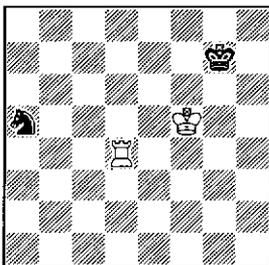
3, from 1899, is simpler. The knight on h5 is doomed, but after 1 Bd4 Bxb5 2 Kf6 the Black bishop has no moves and 2...Kh4 is forced. There follows 3 Bf2+ Kg4 4 Be1! and Black must commit suicide (see 3a).

And why not the apparently equivalent move 1 Bc3? Because after 1...Bxh5 2 Kf6 Kh4 3 Be1+ Kg4 we have 3a with White to move, and he has no waiting move; 4 Bf2 allows the counterattack 4...Kf3, and Black will escape.

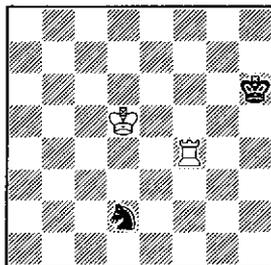
Amelung's best-known pawnless analyses were those of rook against knight. Murray's *A History of Chess* gives five examples of this ending from the days of Arabic chess, but this did not appear until 1913 and the basic reference work available to Amelung will have been Berger's *Theorie und Praxis der Endspiele* of 1890. I have convenient access only to the 1922 edition of this and it is possible that the 1890 edition contained material which was subsequently superseded, but the 1922 edition has only a few positions: the "Al-Adli" position from Arabic days (White Kc6, Rh8, Black Ka7, Nb7, Black to move but White wins), to which Berger devotes six pages, and some positions by Amelung himself. That to which Berger gives most prominence is 4, which Harold van der Heijden's "Endgame study database 2000" gives as having originally appeared in the *St Petersburg Zeitung* in 1897.



4 - win

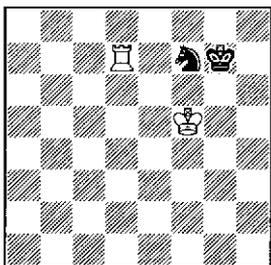


4a - after 4...Na5

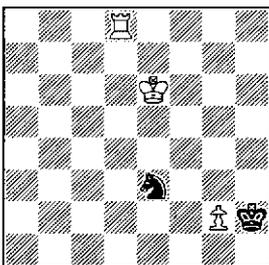


4b - after 8 Rf4

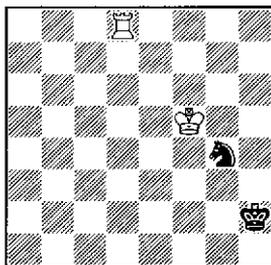
Amelung's solution is 1 Kg5 Nf3+ 2 Kg4 Ne5+ 3 Kf5 Nc4 4 Rd4 Na5 (see 4a) 5 Ke6 Nb3 6 Rg4+ Kh6 7 Kd5 Nd2 8 Rf4 (see 4b) Kg5 9 Rf2 Nb3 10 Rb2 Nc1 11 Kc4. In all essentials, this is impeccable. The computer reports that 5 Rd7+ would win the knight two moves sooner (5...Kf8 6 Rc7, 5...Kh6 6 Kf6) and that 8...Nbl would preserve its miserable existence for two moves longer, but a human analyst does not spend time counting moves once the result has become clear.



5 - Black to play loses



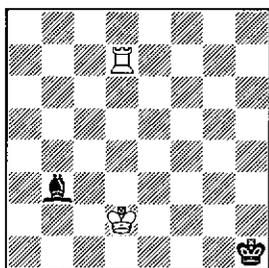
6 - win



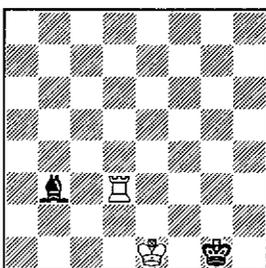
6a - after 2 Kf5

If Black plays the inferior move 3...Nf7 in 4, White pins the knight by 4 Rd7 (see 5) with a quick win. The same position arises in 6, which was published in the *St Petersburg Herold* in the same year. The pawn on g2 is doomed, but the way to concede it is 1 g4. Now 1...Nxg4 separates the knight from its king, and Kf5 (see 6a)

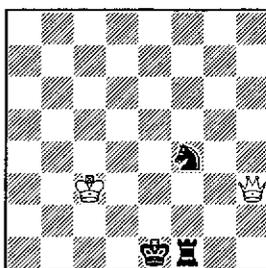
takes advantage. If **2...Nf2** then **3 Kf4 Kg2** (or **3...Nh3+ 4 Kg4 Kg2 5 Rd2+ Nf2+ 6 Kf4**) **4 Rd2** and we have **5** reflected top to bottom, while if **2...Ne3+** then **3 Kf4 Ng2+ 4 Kf3** and we have a version of the Al-Adli position. As cited in "Endgame study database 2000", the main line is given as **2...Nf2**, the Al-Adli position presumably being regarded as a known loss. Mandler called **5** "the Amelung position" and regarded it as an important position in this ending. If White can reach this position located as it is here, he wins; if it is one file down or to the left, Black can draw.



7 - win

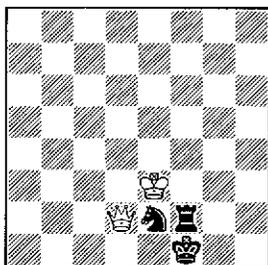


7a - after 3 Rd3

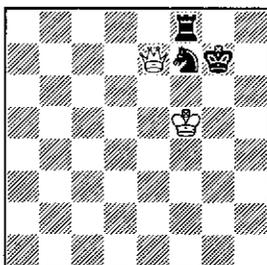


8 - win

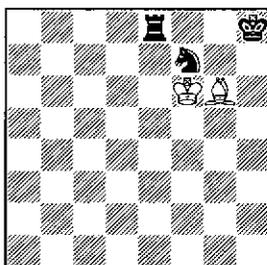
Rook against bishop offers less scope for subtlety, but **7** (*Düna Zeitung* 1902) sets White some problems. Penning in the Black king by **1 Rg7** fails (given is **1...Kh2 2 Ke3 Bd5 3 Kf2 Kh3** and he is safely away from the bad corner), so the White king must try coming to the e-file, and the slightly surprising **1 Ke1** is the only move that works; the second and third ranks must be left free for the rook. Black naturally plays **1...Kg2**, and there follows **2 Rd2+ Kg1 3 Rd3** (see 7a). The bishop must run to safety, after which **4 Rg3+ Kh2 5 Kf2** gives a book win; Amelung plays a specimen line through to capture.



8a - after 4 Kd3

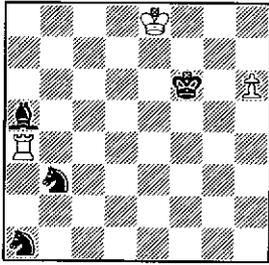


9 - win

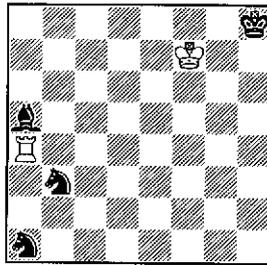


9a - after 4 Kf6

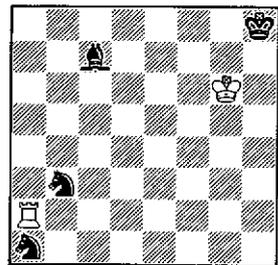
Queen against rook and knight was another ending to attract Amelung's attention. **8** (*Rigaer Tageblatt* 1901) and **9** (*Deutsches Wochenschach* 1908) each require two non-checking moves. In **8**, **1 Qe3+ Ne2+ 2 Kd3 Rf2 3 Qd2+ Kf1 4 Ke3** (see 8a) and even **4...Rh2** fails (**5 Qd1+** etc); in **9**, **1 Qf6+** (**1 Ke6 Kg8**) **Kg8/Kh7 2 Qg6+ Kh8 3 Ke6!** (if **3 Kf6** straight away then **3...Ng5+**) **Re8+ 4 Kf6** (see 9a) and mate in a few.



10 - win

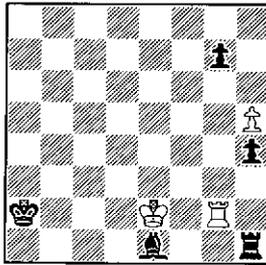


10a - after 3 Kf7

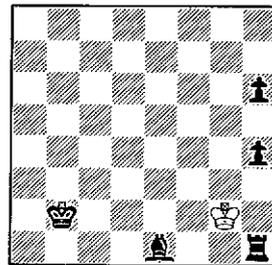


10b - after 5 Kg6

10 (*Rigaer Tageblatt* 1894) introduces Amelung's more "problemistic" studies. Play starts **1 h7 Kg7 2 h8Q+ Kxh8**, and **3 Kf7** threatens mate (see 10a). The only reply is **3...Bd8**, but now comes **4 Ra2 Bc7 5 Kg6!** (see 10b) **Ba5/Na5 6 Re2** and this time there is no defence.

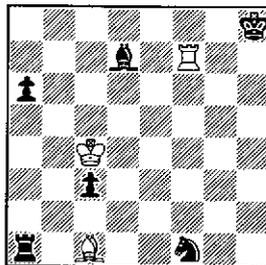


11 - draw

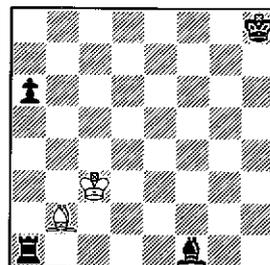


11a - after 4 Kg2

11 (*Düna Zeitung* 1896) was selected by Firth as one of his "Chesnuts" (see March last year). **1 h6! gxh6** converts the Black g-pawn into an h-pawn, and now **2 Kf3+ Kb1 3 Rb2+! Kxb2 4 Kg2** leaves the Black rook helpless (see 11a).

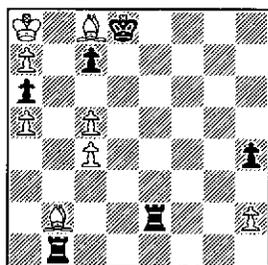


12 - draw

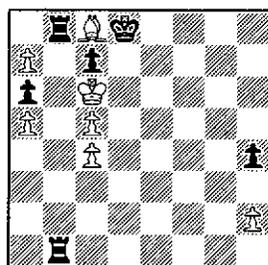


12a - after 3 Bb2

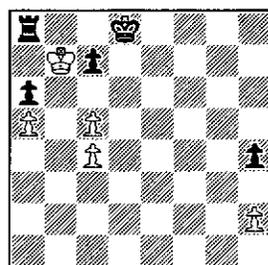
12 (*Rigasche Rundschau* 1898) provides an amusing counterpart. The play is frankly crude, **1 Rxf1 Bb5+ 2 Kxc3 Bxf1 3 Bb2**, but the resulting position is piquant (see 12a). Wherever the rook goes, White can pick it up by a discovered check.



13 - win

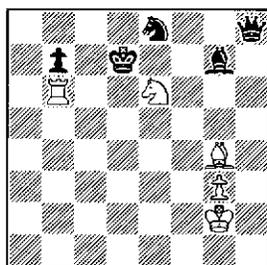


13a - after 2...Rb8

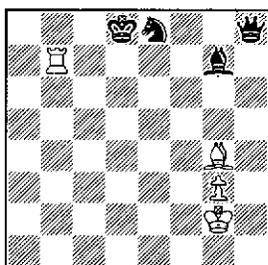


13b - after 6 Kb7

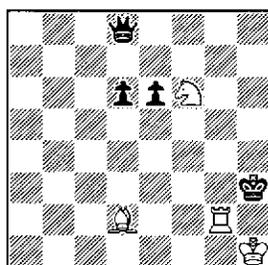
13 (*Düna Zeitung* 1903) is made of heavier metal. 1 Kb7 threatens 2 a8Q, and 1...Rxb2+ sets no real problems (true, after 2 Kc6 Kxc8 3 a8Q+ Rb8 4 Qxa6+ Kd8 White only has Q+2P against 2R, but 5 Qa7 Rc8 6 Qb7 extricates the queen, the a-pawn will be a continuing threat, and if Black tries 6...Rxh2 White has 7 Qb3 and the loose rook will soon fall). More promising is 1...Rexb2+ 2 Kc6 Rb8 (see 13a), when the pawn is stopped. Or is it? 3 Bb7! threatens 4 axb8Q, and if 3...R1xb7 then 4 a8Q!! Rxa8 5 Kxb7 and again a Black rook is dominated (see 13b); Black can only play 6...Rc8, and 7 c6 h3 8 c5 puts him in zugzwang. The win after 3...R8xb7 4 a8Q Rb8 5 Qxa6 is not quite clear to me, because again White has only Q+2P against 2R and the position is less favourable to him than that in the line 1...Rxb2+, but I am sure the setting can be adjusted if necessary.



14 - draw



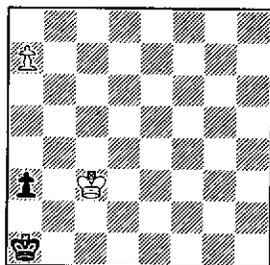
14a - after 1...Kxd8 2 Rxb7



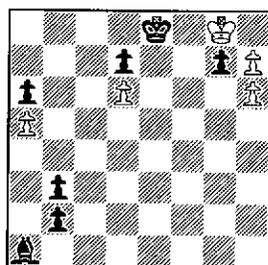
15 - win

Play in the curious 14 (*St Petersburg Zeitung* 1903) starts 1 Nd8+, and if 1...Kxd8 then 2 Rxb7 (see 14a) and Black must concede his queen (2...N-- 3 Rb8+, 2...B-- 3 Rd7+ Kc8 4 Rh7+). But Black can temporize with 1...Ke7, and now 2 Rxb7+ Kxd8 gives 14a with White to play; is he too not in zugzwang? If he tries 3 Ra7 Black can play 3...Nc8, because the eighth-rank skewer is no longer available. But there is a way out: 3 Kg1!! True, this gives Black a check, 3...Bd5+, but after 4 Kg2 the bishop must return to g7 to stop 5 Rd7+ and 6 Rh7+, and 4...Bg7 5 Kg1 gives a draw by repetition.

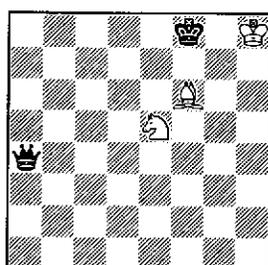
With this in mind, 15 (*Rigaer Tageblatt* 1907) perhaps needs only the one diagram: 1 Nd5 (threat 2 Nf4+ and 3 Be1 mate) exd5 (1...e5 is no better) 2 Be1! and again the queen is lost.



16 - White to move



17 - draw



18 - BTM, White draws

Tim Krabbé, in *Chess Curiosities*, quotes **16** from an 1893 game Amelung-Erlin, where White mischievously played **1 a8R** (mate in three) instead of the natural **1 a8Q** (mate in four only). **17** (*Düna Zeitung* 1905) pioneered the idea of a non-capturing rook promotion to force a draw (it had been achieved by a capture back in the 1840s). The solution is **1 h8R! b1Q/B** (else mate by **2 Kxg7**) **2 h7** self-stalemating, and of course **1 h8Q** denies White this resource. The play after **2...Q/Bxh7+ 3 Rxh7** is a little unclear (Amelung gives **3...Be5 4 Rh3 b2 5 Rb3 Bxd6 6 Rxb2 g5 7 Rb6 Ke7 8 Rxa6 g4 9 Rb6 Bc7 10 Rg6**), but I think the draw is always there.

Of course, not all Amelung's compositions were of this standard. He was a journalist and publicist as well as a composer and analyst (he published the *Baltische Schachblätter* for thirteen years, 1889-1902, and wrote several columns elsewhere), and a journalist with a column to fill cannot be blamed for composing a potboiler if nothing else is to hand. I haven't seen the original sources and do not know what text may have accompanied his analyses of pawnless endings, but on the evidence of "Endgame study database 2000" these were rarely deep; he normally gave positions where Black was within half a dozen moves of defeat, and the computer has identified one or two faulty verdicts (though Lewis Stiller reports in *Games of No Chance* that he correctly judged the general result in respect of **K+R+B v K+2N**).

However, he was rarely less than competent, and his best was very good indeed. Let us finish with the sparkling **18**, which will surely have delighted the readers of the *Düna Zeitung* when it first appeared. White threatens **2 Bg7+** setting up the Karstedt draw (**Bg7/Ne5** defending **K** against **K+Q**), and only **1...Qa7** prevents this. Is White now in zugzwang? No, **2 Be7+!!** Either capture allows a fork, and if **2...Ke8** then **3 Bf6** reinstating the threat of **Bg7**; Black has only **3...Kf8**, and **4 Be7+** gives a draw by repetition. The chess-loving readers of *Düna Zeitung*, *Rigaer Tageblatt*, and the like were indeed fortunate to have had the benefit of his labours.

And what was the *Düna Zeitung*, a journal described as "elusive" by Lewis Stiller? He couldn't find it in America and had to apply to the National Library of Latvia, and I know of no copy in Britain. But Bernd Graefrath tells me that "Düna" is the German name for the river through Riga (this is the Western Dvina in Russia, and the Daugava in Latvia), and I assume it to have been something like the *Illustrated London News*.

As always, my thanks to Harold van der Heijden's invaluable "Endgame study database 2000" and to the library of the British Chess Problem Society. - JDB