

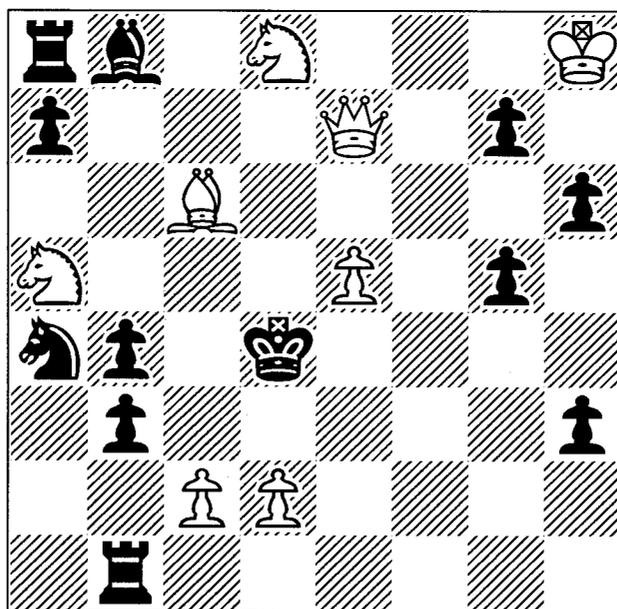
An outline of
THE THEORY OF CHESS PROBLEMS

by

Josef Pospíšil

(from *České úlohy šachové*, 1887)

translated and edited by John Beasley, with a selection of problems



White to play and force mate in at most three moves, against any defence

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Translator's introduction. Although the exposition of Bohemian chess problem theory in Josef Pospíšil's book *České úlohy šachové* has long been recognized as one of the most important texts in chess problem history, there appears until now to have been no readily available version of it in English. This has been a serious gap in the problem literature of our language, and I hope the making of this translation will fill it. I have accompanied it by a selection of problems from the book, kindly chosen for me by Vladimír Kos, and by a brief essay of my own which looks back after the passage of a hundred years.

I am grateful to the library of the British Chess Problem Society for access to a copy of *České úlohy šachové*, and to Jiří Jelínek for highlighting the differences between the Czech of 1887 and that of the present day. Jiří has gone so far in his support as to send me a transcription of the entire text into modern Czech, which has proved invaluable in elucidating some obscure passages. Literary fashion has changed both in Bohemia and in England and I have simplified or eliminated some passages which seem unduly laboured or repetitive to a modern reader, but I believe that everything which matters has been fully and faithfully reproduced.

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Foreword by Antonín Kvíčala

Translator's note. This foreword was written by Kvíčala, himself both a player and a problem composer, on behalf of the Bohemian Chess Association in Praha (Prague) of which he was chairman.

Chess problems represent the pinnacle of chess art. And even though the problem is the branch of chess that has developed the most recently, it has flowered in a relatively short time in a way which few would have suspected.

Bohemian composers have not been backward in this development. On the contrary, as has been shown by the developments of the last 25 and more particularly of the last 10 years, they are universally recognized as deserving a large part of the credit. The Bohemian school, whose principles flow from the eternal and inexhaustible sources of beauty and harmony, is now known the world over; and not only to specialists, but also to the general enthusiast to whom the solution or study of chess puzzles is providing a pastime ever more enjoyable and fulfilling. And this fame is continuously increasing, due to the numerous chess publications which everywhere pay gracious and unaffected homage to "the Bohemian problem school".

However, even the compositions of lasting value which this school has produced so abundantly have been scattered until now in newspapers and in foreign publications, and we have lacked a collected work in which at least a representative sample of its fruits could be displayed. Accordingly, the Bohemian Chess Association in Praha, which is our chief national representative body for chess, has taken upon itself the duty of presenting the results of these 25 years of successful development in the form of a collection of works each of which is both original and meritorious.

This project, originally taken up within a very narrow circle, has come to fruition in the face of more than one obstacle, and we believe it fully satisfies the resolution passed by the general meeting of our association in January of this year.

This collection has been the responsibility of our leading composers, Jan Dobruský, Jan Kotrč, and Josef Pospíšil. They have received enthusiastic support from František Moučka, who with Jan Karel has undertaken the technical and administrative burden. An introduction of permanent value, laying down the special principles of the Bohemian school, has been contributed by Josef Pospíšil. And for the fact that this collection worthily represents our best chess endeavours, which hitherto have been far better known abroad than at home, the principal credit is due to the composers whose names appear above the individual diagrams.

We add that most of the problems here collected appeared during the period 1868-1887 in our literary journals which contain chess columns, in particular *Světlozor*, *Humoristické listy*, *Paleček*, *Zlatá Praha*, and *Švandův dudák*, and in the sadly short-lived specialist magazine *Šach-mat*.

And may this co-operative work serve to honour and enrich the name of Bohemia in this international tournament ground of intellectual endeavour!

Praha (Prague), December 1887.

THE THEORY OF CHESS PROBLEMS

Introduction

Chess provides an almost inexhaustible flow of marvellous combinations. These combinations have a magical impact on players encountering the game for the first time, and this attraction increases as their knowledge of the game increases.

Every game of chess is made up from such combinations, sometimes simple and obvious, sometimes deeply profound. Combinations also form the basis of chess problems. Certain positions from games, whose resolution required particularly attractive play, went round the world and became the common property of all chess players; and being thus broadcast, they awoke the natural desire to construct further positions, not this time dependent on the accidents of actual combat, whose resolution required surprising manoeuvres which were left for the solver to discover. This we meet the origin of the chess problem.

Of course, the objective of practical play is to win the game. Combinations may form the basis of play, but they are not an end in themselves. Problems, having originated from play, at first presented winning manoeuvres such as occur in games, and in this respect they had a certain didactic value. But for many centuries problems were only the Cinderella of the game, and the vast majority of enthusiasts concentrated on the practical game.

However, the ideas that the practical game could provide for embodiment in problems were eventually found to be too monotonous, too limited, and it became recognized that the seeking out of interesting combinations from the inexhaustible well of chess was an activity no whit less enjoyable than playing an actual game. So the problem entered a new and quite different epoch, one that has led to rapid development and expansion. Now the aim of a problem was not to show something likely to be useful in practical play, but simply and solely to display an *interesting combination in a beautiful form*.

In older problems, the germ of the idea was buried in a mass of commonplace and irrelevant moves, often disfigured by conditions foreign to true chess; the idea was offered in settings which were pedantically game-like; all these distracted attention from the manoeuvre which was the true purpose of the problem. In place of this, the new epoch demanded only the most beautiful mating sequences in from two to five moves, and, in sharp contrast to a normal game, no account was taken of the initial equilibrium of the forces. In this form, the modern problem shows us all the most sophisticated manoeuvres of chess. Here, the combinations of practical play are idealized, they become not only the basis of the problem but its sole aim; therefore it is natural to try and present them cleansed from all irrelevant and disturbing influences, in a word to present them refined into perfect form. Works which retain their practical aims, which demonstrate combinations of practical interest without regard to refinement of form, are now distinguished from true problems, and they belong wholly to the theory of the practical game.

Although the problem has thus become divorced from the practical game, it remains of course a true *chess creation*. However, by its idealization of combinations, it becomes, to look on it yet another way, a *work of art*. The concept of beauty occurs in all artistic work, be it a painting, a piece of music, or a literary composition; each of these fields is governed by certain aesthetic laws, which have gradually evolved during many years of practice and experience. So it is with the problem. As experts have penetrated more deeply into the secrets of the game, certain aesthetic rules peculiar to chess have emerged, and these show the direction in which the artistic refinement of combinations should proceed. By this means, the form of problems has gradually achieved a wholly unexpected level of perfection, entitling us to use the proud term *problem art*.

But here let us leave comparisons with other art forms, for we must not forget that the subject of a chess problem is merely a game; it has no true basis in nature, and does not give any direct benefit to mankind. However, only an expert can judge whether the title "art" is justified, and in our case this judge is the chess world, which has already firmly accepted it.

And we must not forget that a problem has yet another side. It is a *puzzle*; its solution is something initially unknown, that the solver has to find. The combinations in a problem are concealed; the solver realises their validity only when he has himself discovered them.

So we see that a problem has three aspects: a *chess creation*, a *work of art*, and a *puzzle*. Our exposition of its theory will take account of all three characteristics.

1. The problem as a chess creation

A. Content

The contents of a chess problem are its combinations; but the number of possible chess combinations is so large, and their forms so diverse, that to describe them in a few words is quite impossible. The theme of a problem rests sometimes in a single surprising move, sometimes in a beautiful mate, sometimes in an interesting line of play spanning several moves, but most often in a harmonious blending of individual moves and final result.

But if a complete and comprehensive analysis is out of the question, we can at least highlight the most common *fundamental elements* from which problem combinations are constructed.

One simple element is the *decoying of a man away from a crucial square*. Such a man has an important defensive role in its original position, and only after it has moved away can the solution proceed. This simple motif is encountered very frequently, and plays a more or less important part in the majority of problems. The converse motif also occurs, where a man is *lured to a crucial square*.

Another common motif is the *freeing of a square* so that another man can occupy it. Again, we also have the converse manoeuvre, the *blocking of a square* in order to deny it to some other man. This is particularly common in the creation of a mating position.

Yet another simple motive is *line clearance*, the removal of a man from a line so that another man can travel along it. Here again we also find the converse motif, the *limitation of the field of action* of a man. And the theme of a problem can also subsist in demonstrating the *particular powers of a single piece or the harmonious action of two or more pieces*, often culminating in *sacrifices*. These can be sometimes merely the means to the realization of a theme, sometimes an end in themselves.

These are the most important elements from which problem themes are built. But a theme rarely consists in a single such manoeuvre. Usually it consists in an harmonious whole constructed from various elements, the most outstanding of which form the problem's *reason for existence*.

B. Mainplay and variations

The idea of a problem is realized by a series of individual moves by the attacking and defending sides. By long-established convention, the attacking side is always denoted by White.

The principal idea which the author wishes to show in his problem comes into existence only after certain moves of the defender. This forms the most important part of the problem's content, its *mainplay*. But Black also has at his disposal a greater or smaller selection of other moves, each of which also allows White to achieve his aim within the stipulated period. Thus we have *variations*, which can originate at any point in the play. This enhancement of problem content by the use of variations is very important.

Where the primary attraction of a problem lies in a particular variation, we can talk about the *principal variation* of a problem. But often a problem contains additional variations of almost the same value, and in such a case its true theme lies in the harmonious blending of several attractive lines of play into a single whole.

Almost all problems contain side variations, which do not contribute to its thematic content. While these add nothing to its artistic value, they may be important in increasing its difficulty. Even so, we shall not count a problem as perfect when a single pretty line is accompanied by a whole raft of worthless variations; inevitably, the comparison comes to mind of a pearl among rubbish.

C. Originality

The requirement of originality, so important in all artistic work, cannot be underestimated even in the problem. A genuinely new and original idea gives a problem value even in the face of constructional defects, the more so if we take into account how difficult it is to achieve true originality.

Nowadays, when some thousands of different chess combinations have been presented as problems, it has become necessary to seek originality not in the basic manoeuvres themselves, which are limited in number, but in finding different and ever more perfect renderings. In place of intrinsic originality, we have rather originality in the means of realization. In this sense, chess combinations are truly inexhaustible.

The greatest scope for variety and freshness of thought lies in problems whose theme consists in the blending of several interesting lines of play into a unified whole. Clearly, no less originality lies in such a blend than in many problems where the so-called theme, if we examine it more closely, takes the form of a manoeuvre which is infrequently seen because it is difficult or impossible to realize along artistic lines, or even where the originality lies merely in the unsatisfactory form of the problem and in its complete disregard for normal artistic principles.

It is difficult to show something truly new in a single variation, and it follows that problem activity in the future will concentrate more and more on harmoniously contrived sets of attractive variations. It is the chief merit of our Bohemian problemists that composition of this nature has taken deeper root here than anywhere else in the chess world. True, the principle is everywhere acknowledged that attractive variations enhance a problem, but the true importance of this principle is still imperfectly understood. Rather, we see the gross undervaluing of

many problems which feature several variations of equal value, on the grounds that they do not have a true mainplay but only variations.

The requirement of originality places no light burden on the composer, but even so he must be on his guard against banality, whether it lies in the use of hackneyed manoeuvres or in the automatic multiplication of variations. He must give inject some fresh vigour into his work, either by the ideas he incorporates or by the original ways in which he realizes them.

D. Correctness

From the name itself, it is apparent that without correctness a problem is nothing. Incorrectness can take various forms, be it *incorrectness of content* or *incorrectness of position*. A problem is incorrect in content if the solver can avoid the author's intended play and solve it in another way, still reaching mate in not more than the given number of moves.

A correct problem has only one first move which leads to the required result. If there is more than one, the problem has a *complete additional solution*, and it is not correct.

Avoidance of the intended play can also occur on the second or third move, in which case we say that the problem has a *partial additional solution*. Such a solution invalidates the problem if it occurs in the mainplay or in a thematically important variation, and devalues it if it occurs in a variation which would otherwise enhance the artistic content of the problem. However, most problems also contain variations of no artistic value, and we call additional solutions in such variations *duals*. Needless to say, they have no influence on the value of the problem. A dual cannot detract from the beauty of a variation if there is no beauty to detract from.

(Translator's note. I have thought it appropriate to translate the Czech terms literally on their first occurrence, but our modern English usage is *cook* for Pospíšil's *complete additional solution* and *dual* for his *partial additional solution*, duals being classified as *significant* if they bypass thematic play and *insignificant* otherwise, and to avoid confusion I have rendered Pospíšil's "dual" as "insignificant dual" in what follows. Modern Bohemian usage is in fact somewhat different from Pospíšil's, "additional solution" being used for a solution which diverges at move 1 and "dual" for a solution which diverges later and bypasses some of the thematic play; non-thematic play is normally ignored whether it is dualized or not.)

The deeper and more complicated problems can rarely be set without insignificant duals. The removal of these duals is either not possible at all or possible only at an unacceptable artistic cost. The defending side usually has at its disposal several bad moves, which present the attacker with several routes to his goal or allow him to attain it in fewer than the required number of moves. To deny the defender such moves would be pointless or even impossible. Insignificant duals are also a feature of problems employing multiple threats; also, in particular, of four-movers, where their removal is often wholly impossible.

On the other hand, a problem cannot be considered perfect if thematic content which is less than outstanding is accompanied by a mass of dualized variations. In such a case, even "insignificant" duals lower the value of the problem.

A similar effect is caused by an *alternative mating move*. If it occurs in an attractive pure mate which is part of the thematic play, it destroys or at least reduces the value of the problem; but it is unimportant if it occurs in a mate without artistic value, even if this occurs in the mainplay or in an important variation.

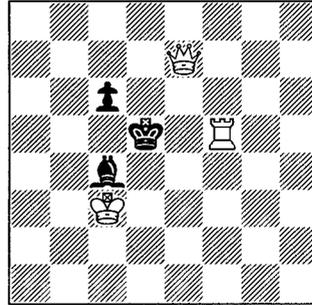
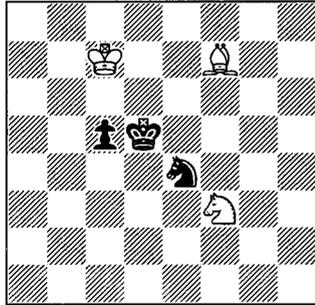
An *inversion of moves*, which sometimes occurs particularly in simple problems, is treated in the same way as an additional solution or dual.

This has dealt with correctness of solution; but the problem retains some connection with the parent game, in that it is an idealization of a game, and it follows that *legality of position* is a further requirement. Of course, there is no need to demonstrate the legality of every problem position by playing a game to it; rather, the need is merely to demonstrate when a position is impossible, for example one with Black pawns on f7, g7, h7, and h5. Often the demonstration consists in looking at the number of pawn captures that must have been made; if these exceed the number of men missing from the other side, the position is clearly impossible. If it is not possible to demonstrate impossibility by some such means, the position should be taken as legal. Again, we sometimes come across a position such as the following: White Bc5, Pb2, Pd2. Such a bishop could not have arisen other than by the promotion of a pawn, and the position is called "relatively impossible". Such a problem cannot be regarded as wholly correct, and the more strict of judges would not allow it to compete in a tourney.

2. The problem as a work of art

A. Purity of mate

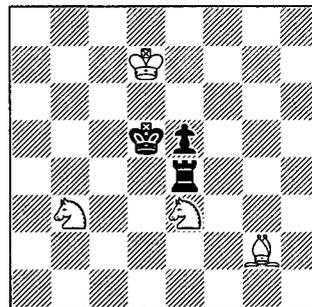
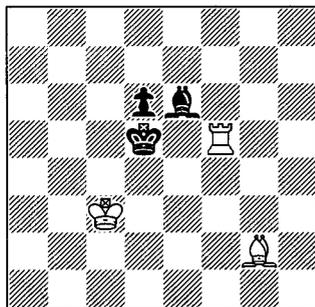
This requirement creates the first special rule of chess aesthetics. A mate is pure if each square in the king's field is either covered by a single attacking man or blocked by a defending man. For example, the mate in the left-hand diagram below is pure, because squares e6, d5, and c4 are covered by the White bishop and by no other man, d4 and e5 by the knight alone, c6 and d6 by the king alone, and c5 and e4 are blocked by Black men and are not covered by any White man. In contrast, the mate on the right is far from pure, because e5 and c5 are covered by both queen and rook and c4 is both blocked by the Black bishop and covered by the White king.



The principle of purity of mate does not perhaps go so far as to demand that every mate in a problem be pure, but the more pure mates a problem contains the higher is likely to be its aesthetic value. One condition that is necessary, however, is that at least one mate in the mainplay be pure. And unless a variation results from some special feature in the play, we regard it as significant only if it leads to a pure mate.

The theme of many problems consists in harmonious combinations of pure mates.

From time to time we come across examples where a mate is in principle impure, but can still be treated as pure. This happens particularly in the case of mates given by double check. For example, in the left-hand diagram below, where White has just given mate by Rf5, the square d5 is doubly covered; but it is possible to give such a mate the standing of a pure mate, or in other words the requirements of purity often apply only to the eight squares surrounding the Black king. (Translator's note. This is indeed what Pospíšil says. Nowadays, we regard such a mate as pure only if both checks are necessary, as would be the case here were the Black bishop on e6 to be replaced by a Black queen.)



A similar case arises when a pin is necessary to create the mate. The mate on the right is impure on account of the square e4, but the necessity of the pin reduces the impression of impurity and in many cases such a mate can be treated as equivalent to a pure mate.

In many problems, where the main interest lies in the unfolding of the solution and the mate is merely the necessary termination of the play, even a complete absence of pure mates can often be overlooked; but such a problem cannot be regarded as perfect, and so we often see reworkings of old ideas in a more artistic form.

The requirement of purity of mate is not an arbitrary rule imposed by the caprice of individuals, but rather the result of an attempt to refine the play right up to the mating move. This idealization is based on the most refined utilization of the position and of the available material, on the elimination of everything superfluous, and the retention only of the necessary interplay between the attacking and the defending forces.

B. Comparability of aims and means

The refinement of combinational play leads to the further requirement of economy of means. The reason is perhaps the same as above. The principle manifests itself in numerous ways, but its most important requirement is that every White piece still on the board should participate in the mate in the mainplay; should a piece not be needed in the mate, it must be sacrificed at some point in the play. This requirement does not apply to the Black

men, nor to the White pawns and king.

It is of course unrealistic to demand strict economy of force in every mating position in a problem, but the minimum requirement is that at least one mate in the mainplay be economical. Of course it is better if the remaining mates are economical as well. In problems whose theme is the harmonious combination of variations, the requirement of economy applies to each of the thematic lines.

But the principle of economy also demands that as much advantage as possible be taken of the powers of the attacking men. The relative power of the pieces should show itself even in the guarding of the king's field in the mate; the more powerful pieces should shoulder the greater part of the burden. Neglect of this principle, unless inherent to the theme of the problem, always gives a bad impression.

Economy applies most tellingly to the concept of beauty of mate. An unnecessary White pawn, sitting in the Black king's field, gives a most unfortunate impression to an onlooker of taste and discernment; similarly, the presence of several White men in the mating field, even if they are needed to guard squares, does not conduce to the most beautiful of mates.

The concept of economy applies to the whole of the solution; not only must the men be used effectively in the final position, they must also contribute to the play leading up to it. The less a man is used in the mate, the more important a role it must fulfil in the preceding play.

Again, an unfortunate impression is given if a powerful man does not take an active part in the solution, but is confined to passive guard duty. There must always be a balance between active and passive duty. A man which plays only an insignificant role in one variation must be given a correspondingly greater role in another.

A further principle of economy is that of obtaining great results from small means. The ideal is that rich and attractive play should be produced by apparently insignificant force; if the author uses a lot of powerful men, we demand correspondingly impressive results. We judge a problem more harshly when its content fails to match up to the material used to construct it.

Obviously, the principle of economy of force does not apply only to the White men, but to some extent also to the Black.

The absolute requirement is that every man on each side be necessary to the problem. The ratio of the men on each side is irrelevant. We are not talking just of a victory for one side or the other, but of victory within a given number of moves; the difficulty lies not in achieving the victory itself, but in clinching it as quickly as possible. Nor does it matter if the side trying to hinder or delay victory disposes of relatively little force. It is superfluous to attempt to equalize the forces of the two sides in a problem, or to give the defender a great preponderance over the attacker; but it has to be said that a complete deficiency of force on the defending side gives an unfortunate impression unless it is compensated by some point of particular thematic interest.

To eliminate a gross disproportion of force by adding unnecessary Black men is wholly to be condemned. The most that is permitted is to replace a weak but necessary man, such as a pawn, by a stronger one.

C. The initial position

There are several artistic considerations affecting the starting position of a problem: the appearance of the position in itself, its connection with the assumed game leading up to it, and its connection with the play leading forward from it.

The importance of the starting position, which creates a kind of interface between the assumed introductory game and the subsequent solution, is obvious. The position is the outward form of the problem. It makes the initial impact on the judge or solver, and contributes significantly to his or her subsequent judgement by awakening a friendly or hostile mood.

A position is attractive if there are not too many men on the board, either as a whole or in any particular region. Rather, the pieces should be evenly distributed, so that the attackers and the defenders alike have a free range of action. Neither should too many men be open to capture, whether they be White or Black. In the same way, too many pawns on the verge of promotion give an unfortunate effect; in particular, White pawns on the seventh rank are to be avoided as much as possible. Doubled pawns give a poor impression, and still worse are tripled pawns and opposing pawns which are on the same file having passed each other in play.

Additionally, the position must be easily and plausibly reachable in play; it should not betray such signs as might lead the observer to try to prove illegality, because the moves needed to refute such an attempted proof are likely to be the reverse of plausible. This applies particularly to implausible positions of the pawns and to the presence of large numbers of men in the middle of the enemy camp. On the other hand, if there are only a few men on the board it hardly matters whether the majority of the White men occupy the lower four ranks and the Black men the upper four.

The position of the king is also important, and we prefer to see it in its own camp. We cannot regard a position as attractive if the Black king is surrounded by its opponents and is far from the pieces of its own side. Similarly, the White king should not be placed in the middle of a group of Black men.

All this being said, the requirement of plausibility need not be carried to extremes. We do not require the

assumed game to have featured either a good opening or first-class play. Such requirements might produce positions which would be wholly plausible, but from an artistic point of view very unattractive.

The position should also be such as to give no clue to the solution. The men should have a wide choice of moves, both in attack and in defence. The White men should not be placed at a distance from the battlefield, in positions where they are clearly useless and from which they must be advanced as quickly as possible. A position is unsatisfactory if the final mating configurations are largely in place at the outset. A particular give-away to the place of execution is a group of Black men conspicuously placed, and White pawns also frequently betray it. A large number of White pawns is never conducive to a beautiful position, either from this point of view or from that of the strict requirements of economy.

D. Artistic considerations affecting construction

(i) Threat and waiting play

In a game, there are two ways in which the result can be decided. Either the attacking side makes a threat of some kind, and the defender, forced to cover this threat, allows some other winning continuation in its place, or the result is decided by zugzwang: the defender, compelled to move by the rules of the game, has to make a choice between weakening moves, and these either gradually erode his position or cause his immediate collapse. In general, wins by threat occur in the middle game, and by zugzwang in the endgame.

So it is with the problem. The first move may be a direct threat, to which Black has various defences some of which lead to the thematic variations. Alternatively, it may be a waiting move. Here, there is no question of defence against a threat, because no threat exists; if the defending side were not forced to move, the attacker could not give mate within the number of moves demanded. However, the rules of the game do compel the defender to move, and each of his possible moves allows a winning reply.

The construction of a problem, be it a threat or a waiting problem, is palpably an important criterion in the judgement of its value; it is the skeleton on which the problem is built. A threat exerts direct pressure, more or less strong, whereas a waiting move eschews such direct pressure and offers something quite different, the delicate control of the complete opposing force. The general principle of refinement of play naturally favours gentle threats and waiting play, and deprecates multiple strong threats.

A single-move threat, where the key threatens immediate mate, is not something we can commend, but it would be wrong to disdain it entirely. There are themes which cannot be realized without such a threat. Such a threat is of course a defect, but it is justified until such time as a better setting is shown to be possible. However, when we do need recourse to such a threat, it should be met by a large number of moves, so that neither the keymove nor the threat itself is unduly obvious.

A threat should be as long as the stipulation allows, so a three-mover should feature a two-move threat and a four-mover a three-move threat, although in the latter case a two-move threat is also acceptable. It should also be as gentle as possible; a quiet threat is always better than one which proceeds by checks.

It may happen that the first move of a problem creates more than one threat. Although we do not stigmatize this as an irrevocable defect, in the case of the simpler problems, particularly three-movers, it is best eliminated as far as possible. But complicated more-movers can often be realized only by the use of multiple threats. We assess the construction according to the strongest threat, and the remaining threats usually become part of the variation play. More rarely, the threat also forms the mainplay. In a problem where several variations are effectively equal in importance, the matter is neither here nor there, but otherwise it is usually best for the mainplay to follow a defensive move rather than to be threatened. And further on in the solution there may be subvariations, which may result either from threat or from waiting play.

All this reduces to the principle that a long, quiet, gentle threat is to be preferred to one which is short, checking, and strong. Waiting play is clearly better still, always provided that the position is not such as to make the need for a waiting move obvious to the solver.

The construction of a problem gives a clear measure of a composer's technique, though naturally only to the extent that he attaches importance to the matter. A problem in which an excellently contrived attacking force is harmoniously united with ingenious use of the defensive force has always the stamp of a masterpiece. Such *construction in depth* can compensate for mediocre content, or, when combined with beauty and variety of content, can create a true masterpiece. But just as it is a mistake to underestimate the value of construction, so it is an equal mistake to overestimate it. Sometimes composers forget the importance of the content of a problem, and devote all their attention to its form. Just as we do not like to see a beautiful idea in mean clothes, so do we dislike the opposite. Excellence of construction is not to be sought *at the expense of other artistic principles*. In particular, waiting play is often attainable only at a cost in other directions. The majority of problem themes, particularly the more complicated themes, cannot be shown in waiting form; but where waiting play does not betray itself by the various signs which are obvious to the eye of the expert, we have that very rare thing, the work of a master.

Better, however, is a work which is harmonious in all respects than one which is perfect in one respect but banal and aesthetically unsatisfactory in another.

(ii) The nature of the moves

The superficial character of the moves of the solution, as the bearers of the theme of the problem, ties up very closely with both the content and the form of the problem.

The key is particularly important. It carries the greatest responsibility for making the problem difficult; and as far as possible it should not merely be the first move of the solution, it should form a substantial component of the theme.

It is not so much that the key should be apparently the weakest move on the board, superficially the least attacking; rather, it should be surprising because of its apparent purposelessness. A good key does not harass the Black king, take away some of the defensive moves of a Black man or attack him, or bring an important attacking man nearer to the field of battle. A good key does the reverse of all this. In particular, we condemn a check or a capture of a Black piece on the first move. Such problems, even if sometimes they embody an idea to which we do not deny recognition, place themselves outside the framework of established chess aesthetics.

The capture of a Black pawn on the first move is something that we are willing to allow in case of need. It usually occurs only in complex problems, where there is no other way of avoiding alternative solutions.

Of course, we cannot equip every problem with a good key, but it is for the author at least to examine the possibility of such a key and to see if it can be introduced without otherwise degrading the problem.

Nor is the quality of the subsequent moves an indifferent matter. Quiet moves are always preferable to checks; captures and exchanges of pieces are too reminiscent of normal play, and we do not like them except of course where the theme of the problem is the running down and capturing of a certain man. It is always good if the later moves of the solution have the same qualities as the key, although of course the requirements here cannot be so strict.

If we proceed by checks, their effect is softened if they are also sacrifices. Sacrifices always enhance a problem, and they often form an important part of the theme. Even more does a sacrifice heighten the effect of a quiet move. The main purpose of a checking move is to create the mating net or to force the Black king to the decisive square.

The use of checking moves in the middle of the solution usually allows the greatest freedom in placing the defending men, and hence leads to the most attractive starting position. This is their justification; but quiet moves are decidedly to be preferred if they can be achieved without an adverse effect on the initial position.

The quality of the moves in side variations is of course irrelevant.

The nature of the final mating move is the exact opposite of the key. Its nature has already been explained in the section dealing with purity and economy in the mate. We can characterize it most simply by saying that it must take the greatest possible advantage of the attacking force.

(iii) Length

Modern problems are constructed to a length of 2 to 5 moves. Longer problems, formerly so strongly favoured, are now completely eschewed. This reduction in length has led to a condensation and crystallization of problem content and the elimination of everything superfluous, and it is usually obvious to the composer from the outset how many moves his theme will demand. As a basic principle, it is appropriate here to say that a given idea is always best set in as few moves as possible, and this is the principle that the author should always bear in mind. It is often possible to condense and improve an idea by setting it in a different form.

Again, the defending side's moves must be used to display the theme; they supply part of the introduction, and save the need for so many moves by the attacker. Technical mastery usually lies in the proper use of these two principles, which form perhaps the most difficult part of problem technique. It is one of the chief signs which distinguish the work of the expert from that of the beginner. The smallest number of moves in which a theme can be shown is obviously one more than the length of a checking sequence leading to mate. Of course, in many cases it is desirable or even necessary to use more moves, and condensation of the theme needs to be reconciled with the desirability of quiet moves in the solution. A quiet key, in particular, is never a superfluous addition, and the harmonious blending of all the moves always brings a problem to life. To conceal a simple and too obvious idea is a frequent reason for increasing the length of the solution, and increasing the number of thematic variations and improving the construction provide further reasons.

The best lengths for a problem are three and four moves. Two-move problems normally offer too little scope for depth and difficulty, while five-movers are unduly burdensome. Of course, the same artistic principles are valid for problems of all lengths, a point particularly to be borne in mind in the case of two-movers.