

History

Frédéric Lazard (20iii1883 – 18xi1948)

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During the summer of 2009 I glanced at the excellent French website (<http://heritage-echecsfra.free.fr/>) run by Dominique Thimognier, an indefatigably passionate chess amateur who collects documents and memorabilia about the history of chess in France. My attention was attracted by a document put on line: it was the handwritten score of a study (with diagram and solution) composed by Frédéric Lazard. Nothing remarkable in itself, maybe, but it was mentioned that the document had been passed on by Mme Jacqueline Dorison, born Lazard. It came as a shock to me because when I was gathering documentation about Frédéric Lazard about ten years ago, I had desperately tried to trace her. I immediately sent an e-mail and, some time later, thanks to Dominique Thimognier's intervention, I had the pleasure to receive an answer from Mme Dorison. There was some mystery about her: in Lazard's obituary written by the French journalist Louis Mandy, (*L'Echiquier de Paris*, i1949), one could read that Jacqueline Lazard was her 'father's secretary'. Without doubt, she was the right person to ask for information about the French composer.

I met Mme Dorison in Paris in November 2009. She told me that she knew very little about chess before 1943, when she was a child, her father taught her the moves. When he passed away, she was only thirteen and after his death she was unable to keep in touch

with the chess community. During the greater part of her life, she more-or-less forgot about chess. She acquired great interest in chess only in these past few years, some 60 years after her father's death, when she realized that the name of Frédéric Lazard was 'something' in the small world of chess composition. She began to collect information about her father. Unfortunately she lost a lot of personal souvenirs of him in the difficult years that followed his decease.

The Lazard brothers⁽¹⁾, Frédéric and his elder brother Gustave (1876-1948) were two popular figures of Parisian chess life between 1900 and WWII. As players, they took part to many chess tournaments in France and were officials of several chess clubs in the French capital. It seems that Gustave was the first to be bitten by the chess bug, followed by his more gifted younger brother, who showed very quickly great interest in chess composition since his first problem was published when he was only 15, and his first study in 1900.

Georges Renaud and Victor Kahn wrote in their book *L'art de faire mat (The Art of Checkmate)* that he was the most 'versatile' French chess player. Then, many strong amateur players were at the same time good composers: for instance, in the first unofficial chess Olympiad (Paris 1924) Herman Mattison, Valentin Marin y Llovet, Leon Lowenton,

(1) Let there be no mistake with the other (four) Lazard brothers, founders of the famous bank of affairs, first known under the name of *Lazard Frères & Co.* They originated from Lorraine (France) and, before settling in Lorraine, they came from Lichstendadt (Hroznetin in Czech, Lash in Hebrew), a small town in Bohemia. After emigrating to the United States in the 1840's, they began in the dry goods business before turning to the bank business in the 1870's. In the 1918-1940 period, the Lazard bank became supreme in the banking world and today remains, despite of controversial leadership during the current economical crisis, an institution.

Karl Behting, Kornel Havasi and Georges Renaud all took part. All of them were renowned composers. Incidentally, Czechoslovakia, even without Richard Réti and Ladislav Prokes (since professional players couldn't take part), won the team competition, and Herman Mattison was the winner of the individual championship.

Frédéric Lazard never won any major tournament⁽¹⁾ but he won several brilliancy prizes. As a composer of endgame studies, he never won any first prize (but, as a problemist, an obituary tells us that he was honoured ten times with a first prize). Nevertheless, he took part in most of the great study tourneys in the first forty years of 20th century and was regularly honoured. His collection of problems and studies (*Mes problèmes et études d'échecs*, Paris 1929) was prefaced by Alekhine himself, who wrote very kind words about Lazard's artistry.

Despite being seriously ill (he had been suffering from Parkinson's disease since the late thirties and had to cease professional activity), he was arrested as a Jew in March 1944 and sent to Drancy, near Paris, an internment centre in France known as 'the antechamber of death', since most of French Jews who were exterminated in Nazi death camps made their last trip from that transit camp. There he spent five months in the camp infirmary. Because of his bad condition his wife joined him, and remained with him for six weeks, until the liberation of Paris in August 1944.

In November 1945, T.R. Dawson wrote in his *BCM* column: "The old man was interned with his wife by the Germans at an early date in the occupation. Due to bad treatment, his health suffered severely, but we trust he will soon recover in these easier days". Dawson was apparently misinformed about the exact circumstances of Lazard's custody but this

quotation shows that the chess problem community was concerned about Lazard.

When I met her, Mme Dorison lent me one of the two manuscripts she still owns, the one with studies (the other one is a collection of problems). This bound manuscript with stamped diagrams contains 136 studies. Solutions were typed out until September 1941. From this date on the solutions were handwritten. The very last one is dated 20xii1944. Only a handful of studies were composed after he was released from Drancy. A mystery remains about another manuscript with original studies composed from 1945 that could have been entrusted to Louis Mandy: the Lazard family never recovered the material, if there was any. Mandy, a friend of Lazard wrote, ten years after his obituary, another article about the composer in which he published some of the originals composed before 1944, i.e. originals in the manuscript I borrowed – but never hinted at any other studies composed later.

Among the 136 studies, 57 were composed between 1900 and WWII: all of these are well known. The next 79 studies are given as 'unpublished' (*inédits* in French) because, at the time of composing, Lazard couldn't send them to magazines or tourneys. In fact, most of these 79 studies, composed during WWII, were later published in magazines most of them in France, or sent to international formal and informal tourneys. At the end of 2009, nevertheless, nine studies are still unaccounted for, for various reasons (some of them are not correct). Some of Lazard's best results in tourneys were obtained *post mortem*.

Lazard's style during the war years was quite different from his early style. At the end of his career, he had a predilection for stalemate and grotesque studies, even if he was also capable of composing miniatures or pawn studies. He searched for positions where his originality could be expressed itself. I would

(1) Several sources give Frédéric Lazard as the winner of an (unofficial) French championship in 1914, but he tied for second place. In 1924 he was again second. He finished the 1926 championship first equal with André Chéron (another great name in composition, three times French champion), who beat Lazard and won the title in a tie-break.

define his style as ‘anti-Rinckian’, if that neologism is allowed. There was no ‘systematism’ at all in his approach of composition, nor any

dogmatism: he was able to compose everything, and a lot of his compositions are full of wit.

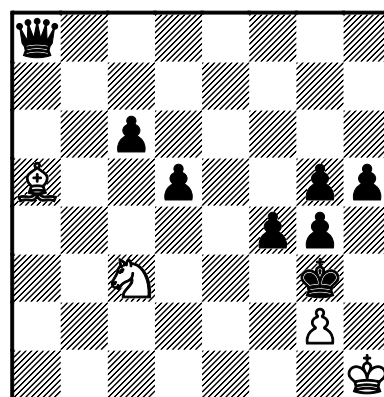


One of my favourite studies from this late period is the next one, honoured with second prize in the 1946-8 Vittorio de Barbieri Memorial Tourney. This tourney was announced in 1946, but the award was not published before November 1948, the same month Lazard died. The composer had three studies honoured (the award was rich with 10 prizes and 10 hm, and a Special Prize).

1.Se4+! Kh4 (dxe4; Be1 mate) **2.Sg3!! Qf8** (fxg3; Bb6) **3.Be1!** (Bb4? d4!;) **3...fxg3** **4.Bf2!! d4** (Qa3 5.Bd4 c5 6.Bxc5) **5.Bxd4 c5** **6.Bxc5 Qf1+** **7.Bg1 Qf2** **8.Bxf2 gxf2** **9.g3+ Kxg3** stalemate.

P.1. F. Lazard

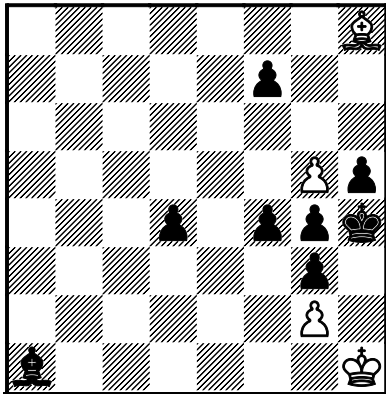
2nd prize De Barbieri MT 1946-48



h1g3 3011.16 4/8 Draw

An oddity is that another ‘sister’ study was composed probably during the same period by an Ukrainian composer (in Lazard’s manuscript his study, number 83, is dated 18iii1941):

P.2. A.S. Kakovin
1st hon. mention
Fizkultura Committee 1940-41



h1h4 0040.26 4/8 Draw

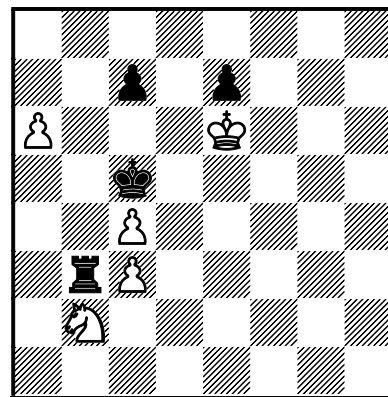
1.g6! fxc6 2.Bf6+ g5 3.Bxd4 f3 4.Bxa1 f2 5.Bd4 f1Q 6.Bg1 Qf2 7.Bxf2 gxf2 8.g3 Kxg3 stalemate.

Lazard’s study has very nice lead-in-play that makes the difference, with two brilliant knight sacrifices in a row. White bishop reaches the a7/g1 diagonal either from b6 (if 2...fxg3 has been played) or from e1, after forcing Black to imprison the king. Also the black queen is present in the initial position and plays, when, in Kakovin’s study, the promoted queen has to be sacrificed immediately. In Ukrainian’s composer’s study, the black

bishop is captured without moving, and moves 2-5 by the white bishop on the a1/h8 diagonal seem mechanical.

The second study in this selection was composed in a very different style. Minor promotion is another attractive theme. One of the most famous studies composed by Lazard, winner of 2nd prize in *L’Opinio* 1935 ahead of Leonid Kubbel, features a similar rook-promotion preventing stalemate. It is short and spiritual. The other reason for choosing it was that it was probably composed in the last days of his forced sojourn in Drancy: in the manuscript, the study is dated 15viii1944 while the camp was liberated on 18viii1944.

P.3. Frédéric Lazard
Le Monde des Echecs 1946



e6c5 0310.32 5/4 win

1.Sa4+ Kc6 2.a7 Rb7! 3.a8R! Ra7! 4.Sb6! Kxb6 5.c5+! The point: 6.Rxa7? Kxa7 and the pawn ending is a dead draw. **5...Kb7+ 6.Rxa7+** wins.