Among the minor treasures in the library of the British Chess Problem Society is a small black notebook modestly entitled "Chess problems of G. C. Alvey". Alvey (1890-1929) was a leading figure of British chess composition during one of its most productive periods, and this notebook was compiled after his untimely death in order to make his work conveniently available to posterity. Early in 2003, Michael McDowell, a present-day admirer of Alvey's problems, went through the compositions in the book and demonstrated some of them in a lecture to the Society, and their reception suggested that the publication of an expanded selection would find an appreciative readership.

Alvey's early problems were of the conventional kind "White is to play and force mate within *n* moves against any Black defence", but after a while he came under the spell of the "fairy chess" enthusiastically championed by T. R. Dawson in the pages of the *Chess Amateur*. This embraced imaginative composition of all kinds: problems with unorthodox objectives of play, puzzles in which the main task was to work out how the given position was reached, and compositions which explored what might happen if the players had use of pieces other than the normal king, queen, rook, bishop, knight, and pawn. Fairy chess was to prove ideally suited to Alvey's talents; he had the creative insight to see what was possible in a new field, together with the constructional skill to master these new possibilities and to present them in a refined and polished form.

This little book will delight all those who seek more from chess than an answer to the arid question of whether *A* is better than *B*. Alvey's early death meant that his output was relatively small, but it was of consistently high quality, and the best of his work has never been surpassed.
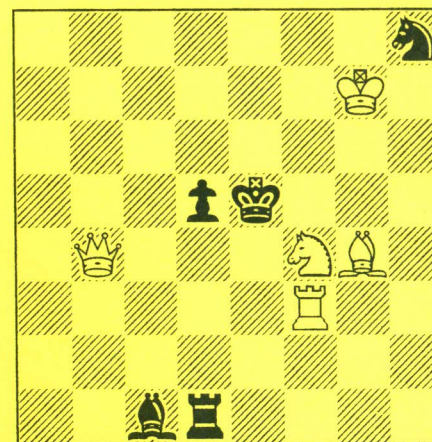
A selection of chess problems
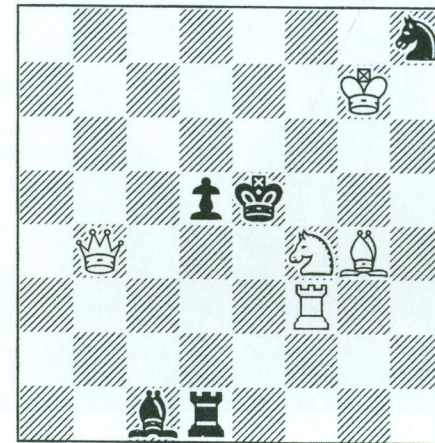
by

G. C. Alvey

with a commentary by

Michael McDowell

A selection of chess problems

by

G. C. Alvey

White to play and mate in two

with a commentary by

Michael McDowell

G.C.Alvey 1890-1929
(from *Chess Pie* 1922)

"... he was always cheerful, humorous, a genial friend ever full of good fellowship - solving problems from diagrams or mentally - setting up choice things with a circle round him ..." (T. R. Dawson, *Chess Amateur*, October 1929)

Introduction

G.C. Alvey was born on 31st July 1890 at Chesterfield, Derbyshire. He was baptised George Clarence Vincent, but chose not to use his third initial. He was educated at Chesterfield Grammar School and, displaying an aptitude for Mathematics, passed the Entrance Examination for Oxford, but family circumstances prevented him from taking up his place. According to T.R. Dawson's obituary in *The Problemist* he attended Sheffield University. He joined the Civil Service, and was a Clerical Officer in the Ministry of Pensions at the time of his death. During the First World War he joined the 15th Battalion, Prince of Wales' Own Civil Service Rifles, which saw service in France and Palestine.

Alvey's sons Norman and John recall: "Despite living and working near London father kept his Derbyshire accent. He was a very practical man and his DIY at their flat in Wimbledon was so good that mother was reluctant to leave it for their house at New Malden. He collected stamps, designed conjuring tricks and made his own fireworks. On bonfire night his dirigibles, constructed of tissue paper and thin stakes, flew for miles when lighted. We listened to station 2LO on a radio he had built using a crystal, a cat's whisker and a coil wound round the centre of a lavatory roll. He played rugby, and used to smoke a 'Sherlock Holmes' pipe. He was also a keen photographer."

Alvey began composing around the age of 17 and first came to prominence in 1911, when he took second and fourth prizes from a field of 123 in the two-move section of a tourney organized by the *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*. His composing career lasted a little over two decades, and in the early days his output consisted mainly of two-movers, with occasional three-movers and selfmates. At the time the orthodox two-mover was dominated by the conventions of the English School, whose exponents aimed to combine dual-free settings with artistic keys and pure and economical mates. Leading composers such as Blake and Heathcote were slowly weaning English composers away from total accuracy of play towards an emphasis on complex variation play, a trend which quickened with the formation in 1913 of the Good Companions Chess Problem Club of Philadelphia. Alvey became a typical English composer, and was noted for the excellence of his constructive technique.

In 1921 Alvey joined the solving ladder of T.R.Dawson's fairy column in the *Chess Amateur*. This had a profound effect on his composing, as he almost completely abandoned directmates in favour of fairy composition. He experimented with a number of unorthodox genres and pieces, and established a reputation as a fine composer of problems involving retrograde analysis.

Alvey made a significant contribution to the British Chess Problem Society, as a lecturer and a tourney judge. He was ill for the last year of his life and died from peritonitis on 6th September 1929, aged 39. His premature death was a great loss to chess problem composition in Britain.

Acknowledgements

This selection has been made from a collection of 112 examples of Alvey's work which was compiled by T.R.Dawson from Alvey's manuscripts and published chess literature, and deposited in the BCPS library.

I would like to thank the following: Norman and John Alvey, who provided background details about their father; Michel Caillaud and Frank Moralee, who checked a number of retros for soundness; Udo Degener, curator of the Albrecht Collection of orthodox two-movers; and John Beasley, publisher of the booklet.

Notation and terminology

A number of standard chess problem terms are used throughout the booklet. Below are some definitions which do not feature in the text.

S: The symbol used to denote a knight (from the German *Springer*). Chess problemists reserve N for an unorthodox piece, the Nightrider (see problems **30** and **31**).

Key: The unique opening move which solves a problem.

Pure mate: A mate in which each square around the mated king is guarded or blocked in one way only.

Economical mate: A mate in which all the mating side's men with the possible exception of king and pawns take part.

Mirror mate: A mate in which none of the squares adjacent to the mated king is occupied.

Mutate: A problem in which if it was Black to move in the diagram White would have mates prepared for all possibilities. White has no pure waiting move, and the key sets up a new zugzwang, with at least one changed reply.

Plug: In a mutate, a black pawn placed above a white piece to prevent it from making a waiting key.

Retro: A problem involving Retrograde Analysis, in which deductions must be made about the play in the imaginary game leading up to the diagram position.

The problems

1

2nd Prize, *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*
Tourney 1911

Mate in 2

2

v. 4th Prize, *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*
Tourney 1911
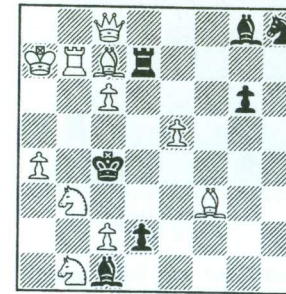
Mate in 2

1 is based around the play of the black rook. The key, **1.Ba5**, threatens 2.cxd7, and gives the variations 1…R on file 2.Rb4; 1…Rxb7+ 2.cxb7; 1…Rf7 2.Qe6 and 1…R else 2.Qg4. The bishops provide some by-play: 1…Bd5 2.Be2 and 1…Ba3 2.Sxa3. At first glance the arrangement at the bottom of the board looks clumsy and disconnected from the main idea; however it is necessary to stop the potential cooks 1.cxd7?, met by 1…Ba3!, and 1.Qxd7?, met by 1…d1Q!
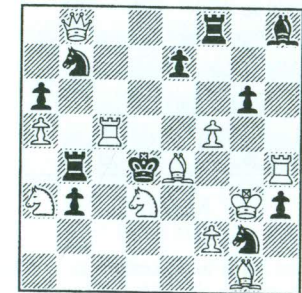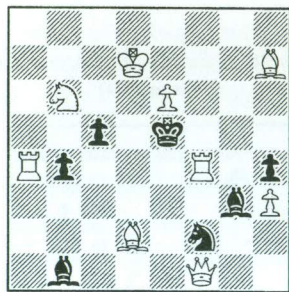
The excellent key of **2**, **1.Sf4**, gives one lateral and one diagonal flight on opposite sides of the king, and threatens 2.Se6. 1…Kxc5 2.Se6 and 1…Sxc5 2.Se2 end in pure mates, the other variations being 1…Kxe4 or Sxf4 or Sxh4 2.f3, 1…Rb6 or Rc4 2.Rc4, 1…Rf6 or Be5+ 2.Qe5 and 1…Sd8 2.Qxb4. The g-pawn could be removed if the black bishop was moved to g7, but this would introduce another dual after 1…Bh6, and composers of the time tried to keep the number of duals to a minimum.
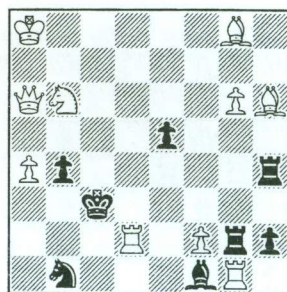
3
Globe and Traveller
April 1911

4
4th Prize, *Chess Amateur* Tourney
1911-12

Mate in 2

Mate in 2

5
Mention, *Chess Amateur* Tourney
1911-12

6
Hampshire Post
23rd May 1913

Mate in 2

Mate in 2

3 opens with a makeshift key, **1.Qg1**, but the problem is noteworthy as an early example of tertiary black correction. A random move of the f2 knight errs by clearing a path for the queen to mate at c5. 1...Sd3 corrects the error, but interferes with the bishop, allowing 2.Qe3. 1...Se4 corrects the secondary error by closing the e-file, but the blocking of e4 allows 2.Rf5. Other variations are 1...c4 2.Ra5; 1...b3 2.Bc3; 1...bB any 2.Qa1 and 1...gB any 2.Qg7.

The content of **4** is fairly simple. The strong 1...Sxd2 makes the key **1.Qe2**, threatening 2.Rd3, easily found, as recapturing is the only possible response. The most interesting variation is 1...b3 2.Sd5, a combination of selfblock and white self-interference. Other lines are 1...e4 2.Bg7; 1...Rd4 2.Rc2; 1...Rh3 2.Qxe5; 1...Bxe2 2.Rc1 and 1...Rg3 2.Rxg3. A typical English problem of the period.

Accurate mates following moves of a black queen was a favourite theme with composers of the English School. Alvey's setting **5** incorporates a flight, and displays some ingenuity in the prevention of duals. The waiting key **1.Qb7** abandons the set variation 1...Qxe6 2.Qxe6, and the nine moves of the queen lead to five mates: 1...Qxb8 2.d6: 1...Qxd5+ 2.Qxd5; 1...Qe4 2.Sd4; 1...Qxe6 or Qc7 or Qd6 2.Qb1; 1...Qxf4 or Qd4 or Qxc3 2.Sg5. 1...Ke4 2.Qb1 and 1...B any 2.Qh7 complete the variations. The white king is carefully placed to prevent a dual 2.Qb1 after 1...Qxd5.
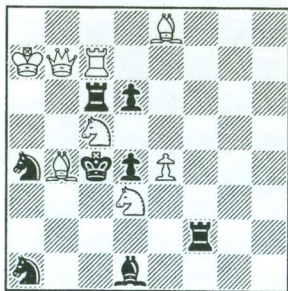
6 is ordinary by Alvey's standards, but is included for historical reasons. After **1.Qa3**, threatening 2.Qxd6, the variations 1...Rxa3 2.Bc3 and 1...Bb6+ 2.Bd4 feature a change of intersection point which allows the simultaneous shutting off of rook and bishop. A number of European publications have designated this idea the "Alvey theme" or "Berger theme", the latter from Professor Johann Berger's 1st Prize *Tidskrift för Schack* 1917: 1K5s, 1P4Sp, R3B1kB, 2Q1p3, 3p4, 5p2, 4q3, r7, #2, 1.Qc1. The idea was shown long before 1913, for example by Godfrey Heathcote (1st Prize *Liverpool Mercury* 1893, 2K1SR2, 2s3pr, sR1Bk3, 4p2p, p2bB2P, Pr6, 6P1, 4Q3, #2, 1.Qc3). No British source ever used the term "Alvey theme", which is best forgotten. The problem contains little variety: 1...Rb4 or Bc7 or Bd8 2.Bd4; 1...Bb4 2.Bc3 and 1...Rf6 2.Bxd6.

7

3rd Prize ex aequo,
Manchester Weekly Times 1914

Mate in 2

8

2nd Prize, *Fraternity Saturday*
Problem Tourney April 1919

Mate in 2

9

1st Prize, *British Chess Problem
Journal* May 1919

Mate in 2

10

Surrey Weekly Press
30th May 1919

Mate in 2

The defences of the c6 rook dominate **7**. After the key **1.Bd2**, which threatens 2.Qb4, lifting the rook from the board allows four mates which are separated by arrival effects; however it is curious that the threat is not defeated by a departure effect, but by four further arrival effects! 1...Rb6 2.Qd5; 1...Ra6+ 2.Qxa6; 1...Rxc7 2.Bb5; 1...Rxc5 2.Qb5. 1...Sb6 interferes with the rook for 2.Qa6, and matching selfblocks plus unguards allow the knight to abandon c5: 1...Sxc5 2.Sb2 and 1...dxc5 2.Se5. The interference in the variation 1...Sc2 2.Qb3 is superfluous, as the problem is sound without the bishop, whose only function is to prevent a dual after 1...Sb3.

The key piece of **8** is out of play, but **1.Qh4** threatens 2.Qf2 and leads to a trio of defences at g6 which defend by unpinning the knight. In each case the white battery opens and shuts off a black piece. 1...Bg6 2.Rf5; 1...Rg6 2.Rf6; 1...Sg6 2.Rf8. Two further battery mates follow selfblocks by the queen: 1...Qxf1 2.Rg3 and 1...Qg1 2.Rf2, and there is a simple unguard by the bishop 1...Bg3 2.Qg3. The dual after 1...Bg1 is unimportant as both mates are forced separately. The pawn at b6 shields the white king against checks. Moving the king to d2 allows a black pawn at d3 to be used instead, but at the cost of a less open position.

Of his own directmates, **9** was Alvey's favourite. After **1.Re1**, threatening 2.Se6, a trio of interferences, one incorporating a selfblock, is complemented by three further selfblocks above the king: 1...Rc6 2.Re4; 1...Sc7 or 6Se5 2.Qb4; 1...S4c5 2.Qb2; 1...Rc5 2.Qd3; 1...Bd5 2.Sf5; 1...Qe5 2.Rd1. In addition there are four by-play variations: 1...Be4 2.Rxe4; 1...Bxf3+ 2.Sxf3; 1...Be3 2.Qxe3; 1...Qd6 or Qh3 2.Bxf2. The only weakness in the problem is the underemployed bishop at g1. It is unusual to see four mirror mates in a problem featuring more than the simplest play.
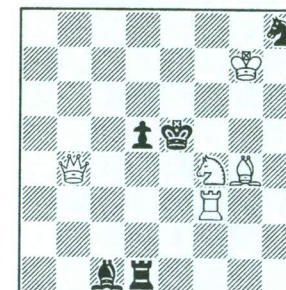
**10** is a well-known mutate showing changed and transferred play in a perfectly natural setting, free from plugs. The waiting key **1.Rd3** cuts out the set 1...Rd4 2.Qe7, and gives the variations 1...Rd2 2.Re3; 1...Rxd3 2.Sxd3; 1...R else 2.Rxd5 (Set 2.Sd3); 1...Bd2 2.Rxd5 (Set 2.Sd3); 1...d4 2.Qxd4 (Set 2.Qe7); 1...S any 2.Sg6; 1...B random 2.Re3. The set mate 2.Qe7 reappears after 1...Bxf4, changing the set 2.Qxf4.

Why did Alvey contribute such a fine problem to a relatively minor column? Perhaps he underestimated its quality, or perhaps like many composers he simply liked to support editors with whom he was friendly, in this case Percy Grimshaw.
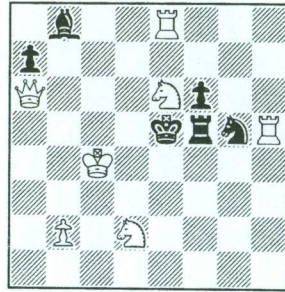
11
2nd Prize, *British Chess Problem Journal* August 1919

Mate in 2

12
Hampshire Telegraph and Post 19th December 1919
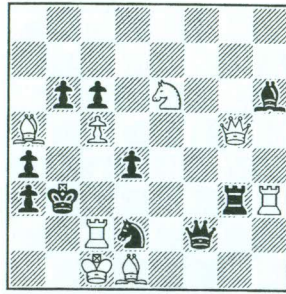
Mate in 2

The arrangement on the c1 to h6 diagonal indicates that crosschecks will feature in **11**. After **1.Qg8**, threatening 2.Sxd4, a random check is met by 2.Sf4. There are two corrections: the complex 1...Sf3+ unpins the rook but also interferes with the queen, allowing 2.Sg5, while the selfblock 1...Sc4+ forces the other battery to open for 2.Rd2. The remaining variations are 1...a2 2.Rc3 and 1...bxa5 2.Qb8. Three mates follow the non-defending 1...bxc5, of no consequence today but serious enough then for the judge, G.W.Chandler, to suggest moving the white pawn to e5 and removing the c6 pawn, regarding the resulting double threat as the lesser evil. A more serious defect is the under-use of the pin-line. While not perhaps a first-class example of its theme, the problem is entertaining nonetheless.

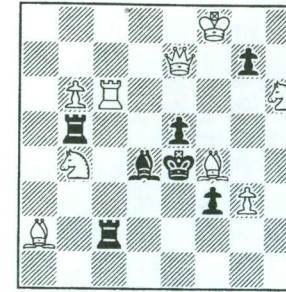**12** is a pretty lightweight. The key **1.Qa3** threatens 2.Qc5 and leads to a nicely balanced pair of variations which combine half-pin with selfblock: 1...Rf4+ 2.Sd4 and 1...Se4 2.Sf3. The double-pin mate 1...Sxe6 2.Qg3 adds a classy touch, and the selfblock 1...Bd6 2.Qc3 explains the pawn at b2.

13
2nd prize, *Hampshire Telegraph and Post* 1920-I
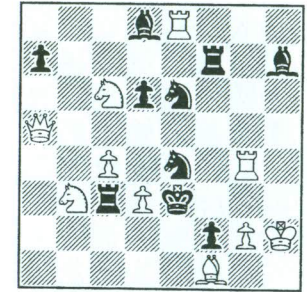
Mate in 2

14
Surrey Weekly Press May 1920

Mate in 2

The flight-giving defences 1...f2 and 1...Rxb4 quickly indicate the battery-forming key of **13**, but there is a pleasing blend of variations dominated by the check given by the key, which interferes with both rooks. As Alvey himself pointed out, the check element is not necessary to force the mating move. **1.Qb7** (2.Rc5) 1...Bc5+ 2.Rd6; 1...B else 2.Rc4; 1...Rxb6 or Rd5 2.Bd5; 1...Rxb4 2.Rc3; 1...Rxc6 2.Bb1; 1...gxh6 2.Qh7; 1...exf4 2.Re6. Some composers might have used a black pawn at b6, since 1...Rxb6 simply repeats the mate after 1...Rd5. The problem was occasionally republished with the f4 bishop at g5 and the g3 pawn omitted. This removes the only dual in the problem (after 1...g5), but at the severe cost of losing the variation 1...exf4 2.Re6.

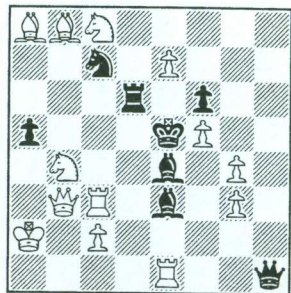Complex half-pin play forms the core of **14**. **1.Sb4** threatens 2.Sd5. Both 1...Sc7 2.Qxa7 and 1...Sf6 2.Qg5 incorporate interferences on rook and bishop, while 1...Sf4 interferes with the rook for 2.Rg3. The by-play variation 1...Rf5 2.Rxe4 exploits another interference, and 1...Rxb3 or Rxd3 2.Sc2 rounds off a fine display, though the impact of the two leading variations is diluted somewhat by the fact that the interferences on the d8 bishop are merely cosmetic; the solution is unaffected if this bishop is removed. A couple of units can be saved if the minor variation ending 2.Sc2 is eliminated, for example in the dual-free setting 4bR2, 6r1, 3Sps1b, Q7, 5s1R, 3pSk2, 3P1p1B, K4B2, 1.Sec4.
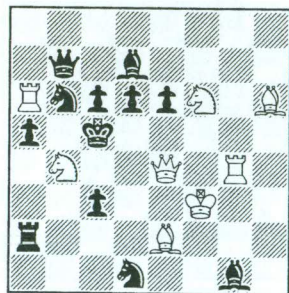
15
2nd Prize,
The Observer 1920

Mate in 2

15b
P.F.Blake, 1st Prize,
The Observer 1920

Mate in 2

16
3rd Prize, *Hampshire Telegraph
and Post* 1920-II

Mate in 2

17
Chess Amateur
December 1921

Selfmate in 5

15 is Alvey's directmate masterpiece, a wonderful double half-pin with interaction between pieces from both lines. The retreating key **1.Qb2** threatens 2.Rc5 and allows a check. Both thematic variations from the bishops interfere with the rook: 1...Bd5+ 2.Rc4 and 1...Bd4 2.Sd3, while 1...Sd5 interferes with the bishop for 2.Sc6. The selfblock 1...Rd4 2.e8Q completes the second half-pin. There are a couple of by-play variations; 1...Rd5 2.Sc6, and 1...Bxf5 or Bc6...xa8 2.Rxe3. A harmless dual 2.Rc6 or 2.Rxc7 follows 1...Kd4. The judges, A.C.White and G.W.Chandler, caused some controversy by awarding first prize to a problem by P.F.Blake (**15b**, solution **1.Qb1** (2.Sd3) 1...Rb2 or Rd2 2.Rxa5; 1...Sb2 2.Qxg1;

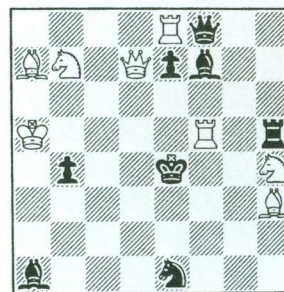1...Sf2 2.Be3; 1...Bd4 2.Se4; 1...d5 2.Bf8; 1...axb4 2.Qxb4; 1...Qxa6 2.Sxa6). P.H. Williams wrote in the *Chess Amateur* for March 1921 "Nobody denies the excellence of Mr.Blake's problem, but the universal opinion is that it should take second place to Mr.Alvey's extraordinary work. Its complexity and faithful following of the modern trend of construction are points which are conspicuous, and worthy of highest honour." The skill exhibited in this problem and **14** makes it all the more surprising that Alvey did not join the research into complex thematic blends sponsored by the Good Companions. His name is noticeably absent from *The Good Companion Two-Mover*, a representative collection of over 900 problems published in 1922.
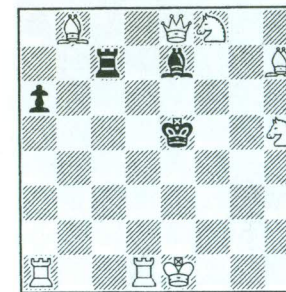
16 is built around three variations featuring pin-mates in which the line-pinned pawn interferes with another black piece. **1.Sg2** (2.Sc5) 1...e6 2.Qd5; 1...e5 2.Rf4; 1...Sd3 2.Sd6. There is some by-play: 1...Bd4 2.Qxd4; 1...Bd5 2.Qxd5; 1...Rxf5+ 2.Qxf5 and 1...Sxg2 2.Bxg2.
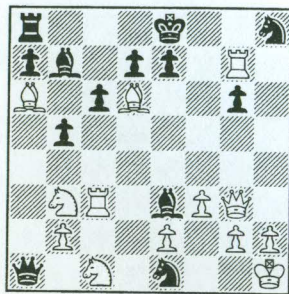
In a selfmate White plays and forces Black to give mate in the stipulated number of moves. The overall standard of Alvey's selfmates did not match that of his directmates, however **17** is notable for its perfect construction. Castling is in the air, and examination of the solution shows how carefully the key piece must choose its destination. **1.Rd8 a5 2.Qb5+ Bc5 3.O-O-O a4 4.Bb1 a3 5.Qe2+ Be3.**

18
Chess Amateur
March 1922

a) Mate in 2
b) Remove e3; Mate in 2

19
The Observer
25th June 1922

Mate in 2

20
British Chess Magazine
June 1922

Mate in 2
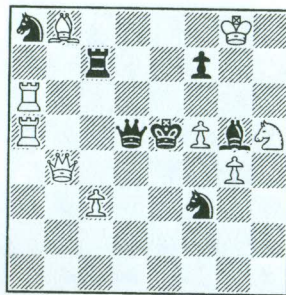
21
Chess Amateur
September 1922

Mate in 2

18 is a retro in which the legality of castling must be determined.

In a) the bishop at a6 is the result of the d-pawn promoting at c8. For castling to be legal the promoting pawn must have captured the rook from h8 at c7. However, for the rook to reach c7 either the king must have moved, or, if the rook entered via b6, then the black bishop must have visited a8 in order to let the promoted bishop reach a6! Hence Black may not castle, and **1.Qh4**, with a double threat, solves.

In b) castling is legal, as the black bishop may have been captured at c7. The solution is **1.Qh3**, threatening 2.Qxh8, and giving the variations 1...O-O-O 2.Rxc6 and 1...Sf7 2.Rg8.
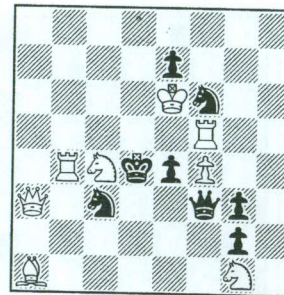
There is only one change in the mutate **19**, but it is a striking one, with the key move changing the direction of the check. Like **10** the problem shows that Alvey had the knack of avoiding plugs. **1.Kh7** Waiting. 1...f6+ 2.Qe7 (Set 2.Re6); 1...Sb6 2.Bxc7; 1...Q any 2.RxQ; 1...S any 2.Qd4; 1...B any 2.Qe7 or 2.Qf4 accordingly.
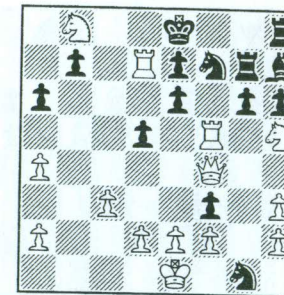
20 is another mutate, **1.Ra4** producing two changes. The concurrent 2.Qc5 replaces 2.Qa8 after 1...Qd3, but the mechanism which forces 2.Se5 instead of 2.Sb2 after 1...e3 or Qe3 is interesting. Other variations remain as set: 1...Q else or Kd3 2.Qxc3 and 1...S any 2.Rd5. The g1 knight is underused, merely guarding e2 after the flight, but this could hardly have been avoided.

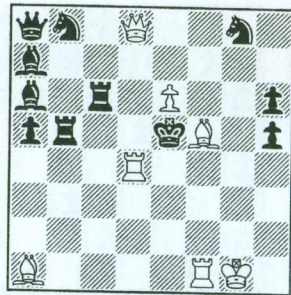Like **18**, **21** is based around the legality of castling. The captures must have been Pb2xBa3, Pg2xQh3, Pd7xBe6 and Pc7xBd6, the first capture having been made by a white pawn. If the bishop reached h7 before Pg7-g6 the queen must first have been captured, emerging via h7 after the king moved. If Pg7-g6 was played early to free the f8 bishop, the other bishop could only have reached h7 via e8. In either case O-O is illegal and **1.Qb4**, threatening 2.Qxe7, solves (1...Kf8 2.Rd8 and 1...7S any 2.Sxg7).

22
3rd Prize
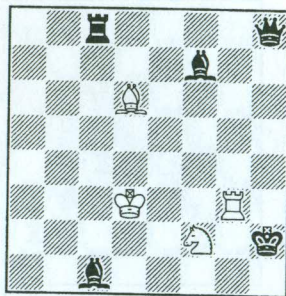*British Chess Magazine* 1922

Mate in 2

23
Chess Amateur
May 1925

White retro-mates in 2 (Höeg form)

24
Chess Amateur
October 1925

What is the fewest number of
moves made by the black king?

25
1st Prize *Chess Amateur*
Grasshopper Tourney 1925

Mate in 2
Grasshoppers a1, h2, h6, h8, g3, f6, g8

The small white force in **22** is fully utilised. **1.Bh3**, threatening 2.Re1, leads to some neat interference unpins from the rooks: 1...bR random 2.Qd5; 1...bRc5 2.Rc4; 1...cR random 2.Qd6; 1...cRb6 2.Rb4; 1...Rxe6 2.Rf5. 1...Rc7 leads to a dual mate 2.Qxc7 which is never forced. Twenty years earlier this would have been viewed as a major flaw, but the prize designation is evidence of the gradual relaxation of the conventions of the English school. The knight contributes two by-play variations 1...Se7 2.Qh8 and 1...Sf6 2.Qxf6, and the queen must recapture after 1...Bxd4+.

**23** is a Höeg retractor, in which the two sides retract alternately while seeking an opportunity for an immediate direct mating move which terminates the play. After each retraction the adversary may add one of his own pieces on the vacated square, a presumed uncaptured piece, provided that the position is legal after the addition. Addition is compulsory if it is needed for legality.

There are a number of tries in **23**. If White attempts Kc2-d3 Black leaves a rook at d3, then retracts Bc4-f7+ and instead plays Qb2 mate. If Kd4-d3 is attempted a knight is uncaptured at d3 and Qh7-h8+ retracted for Rc4 mate. After Kd2-d3 Black does not retract Bb2 or a3-c1+ because White would leave a queen or rook at c1 and mate accordingly; however Black can safely retract c2-c1B+, leaving White without a retraction which can be replaced with a mating move. The solution is to retract **Kc3-d3**. Now the only way to legalise the double check is for Black to leave a pawn at d3 and retract Pc4xd4(e.p.)+. White then retracts Pd2-d4 and mates by Rg7.
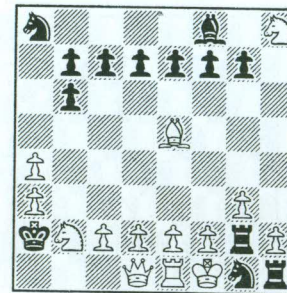
Alvey composed a number of retros in which the solver's task is to determine the minimum number of moves which the black king must have made in the play leading to the position. In **24** the black knight reached a8 before Pa7xb6, hence the a8 rook never emerged and one of the rooks is the promoted h-pawn. After Pa2-a4 the a1 rook was captured at b6. The black king reached a2 via g2, having passed through b4 before the queen was captured at a3.

Retract 1.Sd3-b2 Kb1-a2 2.Sc1-d3+ Ka1-b1 3.Bd6-e5+ Kb1-a1 4.Sg6-h8 5.Sf4-g6 6.Sd5-f4 7.Sc3-d5 8.Sb1-c3 9.Sd3-c1 Kb2-a1 10.Sf4-d3+ 11.Sd5-f4 12.Se3-d5 13.Qc1-d1 14.Rd1-e1 15.Ke1-f1 Ka1-a2 16.Sf1-e3 Sh3-g1, and 20 moves of the king back to e8, giving a total of **35** moves.
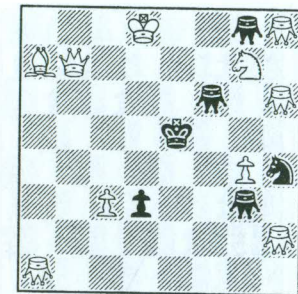
The grasshopper moves on queen lines, but must jump over a hurdle to the square immediately beyond. **25** has historical significance as the first prizewinner in the first ever tourney for problems featuring the grasshopper, and it illustrates a variety of grasshopper effects. The key **1.c4** threatens 2.Qd5, which also follows the flight. 1...Gxh8 and 1...Gb3 both eliminate potential white self-checks, and are met by 2.Qe7 and 2.Se8 respectively. 1...Gc3 abandons the guard of d6 and acts as a hurdle for the a1 grasshopper, allowing 2.Bb8. 1...Gg5 changes grasshopper guards of f4 and is a subtle line-clearance which allows 2.Sf5 because 2...Gf4 is now illegal! Finally the selfblock 1...Gd6 restricts the f6 grasshopper for 2.Se6. Dawson considered this to be Alvey's best problem.
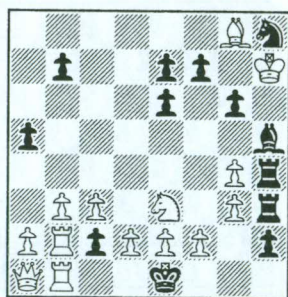
26
Chess Amateur
February 1926

What is the fewest number of
moves made by the black king?

26b
G.C.Alvey, T.R.Dawson and
Dr.J.Sunyer, *Chess Amateur* April 1926

What is the fewest number of
moves made by the black king?

27
Chess Amateur
August 1926

Helpmate in 2
Duplex

28
Hamburger Correspondent
9th January 1927

Play a game without captures in which
White stalemates on his 14th move.
Grasshoppers d1, d8

In **26** a white knight was captured at e6.
The black pawn could only reach c2 if
White's b and c pawns cross-captured.
The king's-side was fixed by the
following sequence: Ph2xg3, Ph7-h2,
Rh3, Pg3xh4, Pg2-g3, Bf1-g8, Bh7,
Pg7-g6. Only then could the f8 bishop
emerge to be captured at c3. The tempo
moves Pa6-a5 and Pa7-a6 are used at
specific points during the solution
when the black king must wait at g2
and b2.

Retract 1.Sd1-e3 2.Rc1-b1 3.Rb1-b2
6.Qd6-a3 7.Ra1-b1 8.Rb1-c1 18.Kc1-
b2 Kg1-f1 19.Se3-d1 20.Sg2-e3
21.Se1-g2 23.Ka3-b2 24.Rb2-b1 Kg2-
f1 25.Sf3-e1 **Pa6-a5** 26.Rh1-a1 Kf1-g2
27.Sg1-f3 34.Kf1-g2 Kd1-c1 36.Se1-f3
42.Kb4-c4 Kd1-c1 44.Rg2-g1 Kd1-c1
45.Sf3-e1 46.Se5-f3 Kf1-e1 47.Sc4-e5
48.Se3-c4 Kf1-e1 49.Sd1-e3 51.Ra1-b1
54.Kc1-b2 58.Sb1-a3 59.Kb2-c1
63.Kd3-c4 Kc1-b2 64.Qe5-d6 Kb2-c1
65.Sa3-b1 **Pa7-a6** 66.Sb5-a3 Ka3-b2
67.Sc7-b5+ Kb4-a3 68.Pb2xBc3+ etc.
65 king moves above plus 4 more to e8,
for a total of **69** moves.

A revised version added an extra move
of the white king, raising the black
king's total to 70 moves.
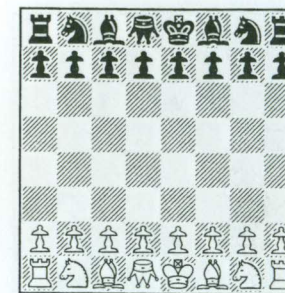
In a duplex helpmate either side moves
first and helps the other side to give
mate in the specified number of moves.
The miniature **27** shows matching
critical manoeuvres with excellent use
of the board. Few helpmates published
at this time displayed such artistic
balance.
Black begins: **1.Bc8 Bc7 2.Rb7 Ra4**.
White begins: **1.Rg8 Rb6 2.Bg5 Be2**.

In 1882 G.R.Reichelm set a classic
construction task, asking for the
shortest game ending in stalemate with
no pieces captured. C.H.Wheeler was
first to discover a solution ending on
Black's twelfth move (*Sunny South*
1887, 1.a4 c5 2.d4 d6 3.Qd2 e5 4.Qf4
e4 5.h3 Be7 6.Qh2 Bh4 7.Ra3 Be6
8.Rg3 Bb3 9.Sd2 Qa5 10.d5 e3 11.c4
f5 12.f3 f4 stalemate). With **28** Alvey
set a similar idea – From the initial
game array, but with grasshoppers
instead of queens, play a game without
captures in which White stalemates on
his 14th move. Dawson preferred the
fairy problem, perhaps because the final
position is unique, whereas small
variations are possible in the orthodox
task. **1.a4 a5 2.e4 Ra6 3.f4 Rg6 4.e5
Rg4 5.Gh5+ f6 6.Sf3 d6 7.d4 Bf5 8.e6
h6 9.d5 Bh7 10.Bb5+ Sd7 11.c4 Rg6
12.f5 c5 13.Sg5 b6 14.Sf7 stalemate.**

29
2nd Prize
The Problemist 3rd Tourney 1927
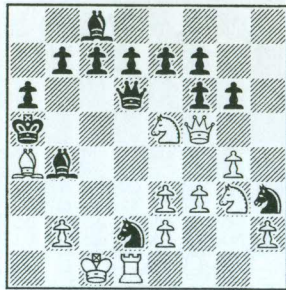
White retracts one move so
that he may then mate in 1
or help Black to mate in 1

29 is a variation on the legality of castling idea, with retroanalysis used to eliminate a potential second solution. The problem solves by retracting Bc2-a4 for **1.Sc4** mate or **1.b3 2.Ba3**, while the try is to retract O-O-O? for 1.Sc4 or 1.Sf1 Sxf3. The a8 rook never emerged, so the h8 rook must have been captured at e3. The white bishop was taken on f6, and, if White could castle on the last move, the h1 rook was captured on g6. The order of play must have been Pg2-g4, Rh1-g6, Ph7xg6, Rh8-e3, Pd2xe3, Bc1-f6, Pg7xf6. Only then could the black king emerge, but the barrier across the f-file meant that to reach a5 it had to pass through e1, invalidating castling!

30
v. *Chess Amateur*
May 1927
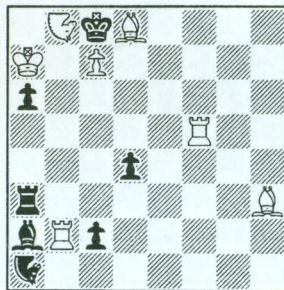
Mate in 2
Nightriders b8, a1

The next two problems employ the nightrider (N), which moves in successive knight steps along a line unless blocked. They illustrate Alvey's ability to vary a basic matrix. Both are taken from an article by Dawson in the March 1927 issue of *Chess Amateur*, to which Alvey contributed a number of problems showing a "triple Grimshaw", mutual interferences between a black rook, bishop and nightrider. In **30** the thematic mates feature shutoffs from the battery in a style reminiscent of problem **8**. **1.Nf6** (2.Rb8) 1...Rb3 2.Rf3; 1...Bb3 2.Rd5; 1...Nb3 2.Rc5. The fairy problem scores higher for thematic purity and unity, as each interference shuts off the remaining two pieces. A by-play variation 1...Nd7 2.Ne4 is incorporated naturally and determines the key square.

31
v. *Chess Amateur*
May 1927
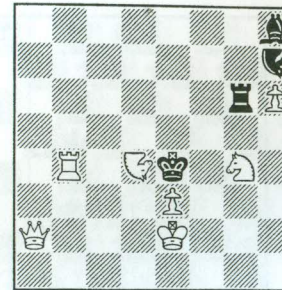
Mate in 2
Nightriders d4, h7

The thematic mates in the lighter setting **31** are less unified, but the defences retain the double interferences: **1.Qf7** (2.Qf5) 1...Rf6 2.Nb3; 1...Bf6 2.Qb7; 1...Nf6 2.Qe6. As compensation, the by-play is superior. 1...Rg5 interferes with the nightrider for 2.Qf3, while 1...Be5 causes the threat to lose control of d5, the selfblock allowing 2.Sf2. 1...Bxd4 forces a simple recapture.

32
Chess Amateur
July 1927
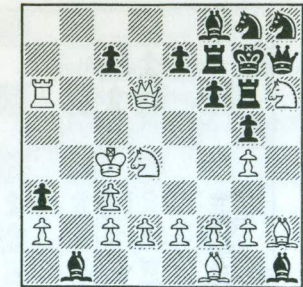
White retracts and mates in 1
What were the last 32 moves?

32 Retract **Sc6-d4**! and play **Sf5** mate. The arrangement in the north-east corner was established first, ending with Sg4-h6. There followed the captures Ph3xBg4, Pd4xRc3 and Pb2xc3, after which white pieces emerged via b2. The last 32 moves must have been **1.Sc6-d4 Pa4-a3 2.Qa3-d6 Pa3-a4 3.Bd6-h2 Ph2-h1B 4.Kb3-c4 Ph3-h2 5.Kb2-b3 Ph4-h3 6.Kc1-b2 Ph5-h4 7.Kd1-c1 Pb2-b1B 8.Ke1-d1 Pb3-b2 9.Qc1-a3 Pb4-b3 10.Qd1-c1 Pb5-b4 11.Ba3-d6 Pb6-b5 12.Bc1-a3 Pb7-b6 13.Rb6-a6 Pa6-a5 14.Rb1-b6 Pa7-a6 15.Pb2xPc3 Pd4xRc3 16.Rh3-c3 Pd5-d4**, preceded by 17.Rh1(2)-h3 Pd6-d5 18.Ph3xBg4 etc. The opening knight retraction is cleverly determined, as retractions to other squares would block lines which must be kept open.

33
Chess Amateur
August 1927
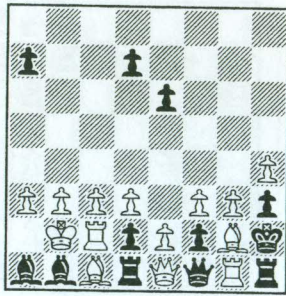
What were the last 31 moves?

In the humorous **33** the traffic jam can only be unblocked by a lengthy follow-the-leader sequence which swings to and fro across the board. Retract **1.Pa2-a1B+ Ka1-b2 2.Pe7-e6 Bb2-c1 3.Rc1-d1 Qd1-e1 4.Qe1-f1 Rf1-g1 5.Rg1-h1 Bh1-g2 6.Rg2-g1 Rg1-f1 7.Qf1-e1 Qe1-d1 8.Rd1-c1 Rc1-c2 9.Bc2-b1 Rb1-c1 10.Rc1-d1 Qd1-e1 11.Qe1-f1 Rf1-g1 12.Rg1-g2 Bg2-h1 13.Rh1-g1 Rg1-f1 14.Qf1-e1 Qe1-d1 15.Rd1-c1 Rc1-b1 16.Bb1-c2**, which can be preceded either by the cycle of zigzag moves as above, or by Pc2-c3; Pc3xSd2 etc.

34
Chess Amateur
October 1927
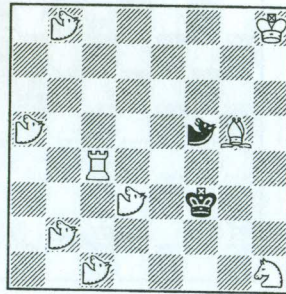
Mate in 2
Fiveleapers a5, b2, b8, c1, d3, f5

34 employs the fiveleaper (sometimes known as the √25 leaper), a piece which can move to a square five units away, namely 0,5 or, using Pythagoras, 3,4. The bishop and knight guard the plus-flights, while the fiveleapers at b8, a5, b2 and c1 each guard one of the star-flights (e4, e2, g2, and g4 respectively), leaving the rook and the remaining fiveleaper free to set up a battery. The key **1.Rc3** simply threatens to move the fiveleaper, which has four possible destinations, a7, h6, g7 and d8. The black fiveleaper has four moves, each a capture which forces the threat piece to reclaim the unguarded flight, giving the variations 1...Fxb8 2.Fa7 (guards e4); 1...Fxa5 2.Fh6 (guards e2); 1...Fxb2 2.Fg7 (guards g2) and 1...Fxc1 2.Fd8 (guards g4). A wonderful exercise in geometry, perfectly constructed.

35
Dr.J.Sunyer and G.C.Alvey
Chess Amateur October 1929
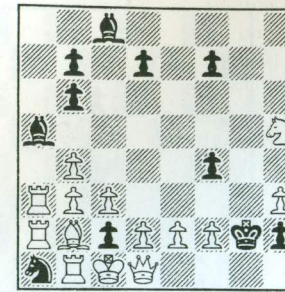
White retracts and mates in 1
What is the fewest number of moves made by the black king?

The extraordinary **35** has an interesting history. Sunyer published an unsound setting in the *Chess Amateur* for August 1926. Alvey's correction was published with his obituary, and, like the original, claimed that 100 black king moves were necessary to unravel the position. Although the ingenuity of solvers has reduced the figure to **96**, this is still a record for the number of moves a piece must have made in the play leading to a given position. The following summary is taken from the Retrograde Analysis Corner website:

Retract **Sg3-h5** for **Qf1** mate. Black's captures were Pa7xb6 and Pexf. White's were Paxb, Pg2xh3, cross-captures on the b and c files, and Phxg followed by a promotion to rook on g8. The black king entered the corridor via a3, after which the three white rooks had to be shuffled through the corridor via g2. While the rooks and other white pieces were being manoeuvred into position the black king had to play waiting moves, except

when the white rooks were just entering the corridor, at which time the king had to wait on g2. For these moments, the Pe7-e6xf5-f4 manoeuvre provided the necessary three tempi.

A sample proof game: 1. h4 c5 2. h5 Qb6 3. h6 Kd8 4. hxg7 Kc7 5. Sc3 Sf6 6. Sa4 Qb3 7. Sb6 axb6 8. cxb3 Ra3 9. g8=R Bg7 10. Qc2 h5 11. Qf5 Se4 12. Kd1 Bc3 13. Kc2 Ba5 14. Rh4 c4 15. Rf4 c3 16. Kd3 c2 17. Sf3 Sc3 18. bxc3 h4 19. b4 h3 20. Bb2 h2 21. Ke3 Rh3 22. gxh3 Kc6 23. Bg2 Sa6 24. Rh1 Sc5 25. Bf1 Kb5 26. Bc1 Ka4 27. Se5 Sb3 28. Sd3 Sa1 29. Rh8 Rb3 30. Sb2 Ka3 31. axb3 Ka2 32. Qb5 Kb1 33. Sd3 Ka2 34. Ba3 Kb1 35. Sb2 Kc1 36. Sc4 Kd1 37. Se5 Ke1 38. Sf3 Kd1 39. Sg1 Ke1 40. Bg2 Kd1 41. Bd5 Ke1 42. Qa4 Kf1 43. Sf3 Kg2 44. Rb1 **e6** 45. Rb2 Kf1 46. Sd4 Kg1 47. Ra2 Kf1 48. Bg2 Ke1 49. Bf1 Kd1 50. Rg4 Ke1 51. Rg1 Kd1 52. Rh1 Ke1 53. Sf3 Kd1 54. Sg1 Ke1 55. Bg2 Kd1 56. Be4 Ke1 57. Bf5 Kf1 58. Sf3 Kg2 59. Rb1 **exf5** 60. Rbb2 Kf1 61. Sd4 Ke1 62. Kf3 Kd1 63. Kg2 Kc1 64. Kf1 Kd1 65. Rg8 Kc1 66. Rg1 Kd1 67. Rh1 Kc1 68. Sf3 Kd1 69. Sg1 Kc1 70-74. Kc4 Kf1 75. Rb1 Kg2 76. Bc1 Kf1 77-78. Qb2 Kf1 79. Ra4 Kg2 80. Qa3 Kf1 81-82. Ra2 Kf1 83. Bb2 Kg2 84. Kb5 Kf1 85. Sf3 Kg2 86. Rb1 **f4** 87. Bc1 Kf1 88. Se5 Kg1 89-91. Sf1 Kg2 92. Bb2 Kg1 93. Rd1 Kg2 94. Bc1 Kg1 95-96. Qb1 Kg1 97. Ba3 Kg2 98. Qb2 Kg1 99. Rb1 Kg2 100-101. Qe1 Kg2 102. Rd1 Kg1 103-104. Rab1 Kg1 105. Bc1 Kg2 106. Ra2 Kg1 107-109. Kb2 Kg2 110. Ra4 Kg1 111. Ka2 Kg2 112. Ba3 Kg1 113-114. Kc1 Kg1 115-116. Ra2 Kg1 117. Kb2 Kg2 118. Rb1 Kg1 119. Qd1 Kg2 120. Kc1 Kg1 121. Bb2 Kg2 122. R4a3 Kg1 123. Sg3 Kg2 124. Sh5.
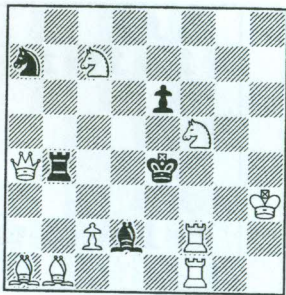
36
Chess Amateur
September 1929
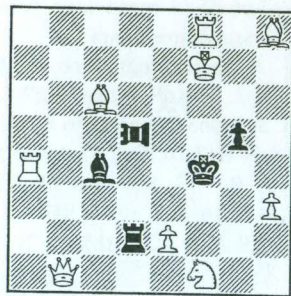
Mate in 2
Empress (R+S) d5

37
Source and
date unknown

Add a black pawn to make a sound
mate in 2

36 was Alvey's last composition and features the Empress, a piece which combines the moves of rook and knight. It illustrates an idea impossible to show in an orthodox two-mover, namely three double checks countered by non-capturing mates. It is a demonstration rather than a solving problem, as the black battery can only be controlled by a check, but the key gives two flights. The thematic mates are nicely separated: **1.Qb8+** Ec7++ 2.Kg6; 1...Ed6++ 2.Ke7; 1...Ee5++ 2.Kg7. The remaining variations are 1...Kf5 2.Sg3 and 1...Ke4 2.Qe5.

Composers occasionally produce neat settings with interesting play which unfortunately do not leave scope for a satisfactory key. Rather than discard **37** Alvey decided to turn it into a joke problem, by adding the amusing stipulation. The accuracy and variety of the play, given the economy of the position, is noteworthy.

Add a black pawn at **g4** for **1.Kg3** Waiting. 1...Sb5 2.Qa8; 1...S else 2.Qc6; 1...e5 2.c3; 1...exf5 2.Qe8; 1...Rxa4 2.c4; 1...Rc4 2.Qxc4; 1...Rd4 2.Qxd4; 1...Bc3 2.Re2; 1...Be1 2.Rxe1; 1...Be3 2.Sd6; 1...Bf4+ 2.Rxf4; 1...B else 2.Qxb4. Forcing the king to g3 keeps the play accurate, by preventing potential duals after 1...Be3, 1...Be1 and 1...Bf4.