

Marshall's 'Gold Coins' Game

Edward Winter



Frank James Marshall

On page 138 of *My Fifty Years of Chess* (New York, 1942) Frank J. Marshall wrote the following introductory note to his game against Levitzky (or Levitsky) at Breslau, 1912:

'Perhaps you have heard about this game, which so excited the spectators that they "showered me with gold pieces!'. I have often been asked whether this really happened. The answer is – yes, that is what happened, literally!'



Black played 25...Qg3, and White resigned.

There are, though, varying accounts of this incident, and several Chess Notes items have discussed it (see, in particular, pages 303-305 of *Kings, Commoners and Knaves* (London, 1975) by David Hooper and Kenneth Whyld). For example, C.N. 670 quoted from a letter dated 13 October 1975 in which Irving Chernev informed us:

' Let us put the quietus on this, once and for all! Frank J. Marshall himself (in person, not a moving-picture) told me himself that it was true. The spectators, he said, threw gold pieces on his board at the conclusion of his brilliant win over Levitzky. While Marshall's memory was sometimes faulty (he remembered very few of his great games) this was an incident one could hardly forget.

In C.N. 2148 Owen Hindle (Cromer, England) quoted from page 62 of *Marshall's Chess Swindles* (New York, 1914), which gave the Levitzky v Marshall game with notes by Hermann Helms taken from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. At the end Helms wrote:

'After the game a number of enthusiastic spectators presented Mr Marshall with a handful of

gold pieces, saying the game had given them great pleasure.'

That sounds decidedly less colourful than 'showering'. On the other hand, Al Horowitz's *All About Chess* (New York, 1971) gave the game twice (on pages 63 and 150), each time with a denial, based on a statement by Marshall's widow, that any gold had been given ('... Caroline Marshall, who ought to know, disclaims knowledge of even a shower of pennies').

Discussing the matter on pages 98-99 of his book *American Chess Heritage* (New York, 1978) Walter Korn wrote:

'Eyewitness reports, as circulated in Europe in the 1920s, come close to corroborating Marshall's story. Two of the Czech participants at Breslau, Oldrich Duras, who had shared 1st prize with A. Rubinstein, and K. Treybal, both senior master members of the Dobrusky Chess Club in Prague, often took pleasure in recounting this and other episodes to the junior members, including myself. As corroborated by their compatriots Dobiáš, Hromádka, Pokorný, Thelen, and other Czechs who had also been to Breslau, what really happened was the paying of a bet. As the story was told, the Leningrad master Levitsky was accompanied by another Russian, P.P. Saburov, a well-to-do patron of the game. Another visitor was Alexander Alekhine, a dapper, prosperous aristocrat who was on his way from Stockholm (where he had won 1st prize) to a tournament in Vilna. Saburov, Alekhine, and a few other Russian guests made it their duty to place a wager on Levitsky's win over the "played-out American". However, Marshall upset their patriotic predictions and the bettors tossed over their pledges. Rubles, marks, Austrian crowns, and similar coinage of the period were minted partly or fully in gold. As related by Zidlicky, even the silver Maria Theresa thalers came in the "shower", something not mentioned in the respectable accounts of the tournament book.'

On page 204 of *Frank J. Marshall, United States Chess*

Champion (Jefferson, 1994) A. Soltis asserted that this was 'the best explanation of what actually happened'. He also reported that Marshall's original handwritten notes to the game merely commented, 'A purse was presented to me after this game'. We wonder whether a reader can discover more details in the local press. The tournament book states that the game was played on 20 July 1912.

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