

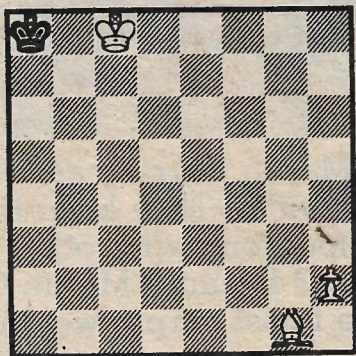


## Grandmaster of detection

A MOST SINGULAR book on chess detection has recently come into my possession. It is based on the experiences of none other than the great sleuth himself, Mr Sherlock Holmes. Although not generally recognised as a chess enthusiast, Holmes did in fact excel at one variety of the game — the solving of retrograde analysis problems.

The idea is that by examining positions one can draw logical conclusions about what must have happened during the course of a game.

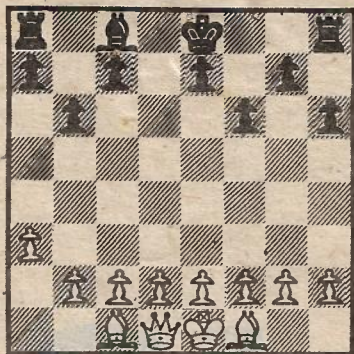
As the book unfolds the reader sees how the Grandmaster of the detective world kept in training in between his famed criminal cases. For instance here is one of the early exercises he set for Watson.



Black moved last — what was his move, and White's move before that?

Clearly Black's last move was king from a7 to a8 in response to a check from the bishop — the question is how did the bishop administer the check (White is moving up the board so it could not have been just promoted)?

Watson eventually fathomed the solution: a White knight from b6 has just moved to a8 giving discovered check, whereupon Black captured it. From then on *The Chess Mysteries of Sherlock Holmes* (Hutchinson) takes the reader through many chess incidents in Sherlock Holmes's life, and the author, Raymond Smullyan, has done a fine job cataloguing them in amusing style. Frequently Holmes and Watson happen across a game where a pawn is positioned carelessly on the border between two squares, and Holmes is able to deduce which square it belongs on. Or they arrive in time for him to prevent some poor dunder from castling, by deducing it would be illegal, as in the following case.



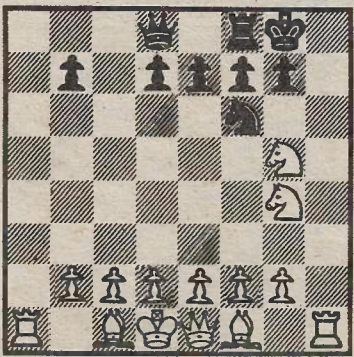
Can Black castle?

The solution goes: White's last move was clearly with the pawn. Black's last move must have been to capture the White piece which moved before that. This piece would have to be a knight, since the rooks could not have got out on to the board. Obviously none of the Black pawns captured the knight, and the Black queen's rook couldn't have captured the knight, because there is no square the knight could have moved from to get to a8. Likewise the bishop couldn't have captured it, since the only square the knight could have come from is d6, where it would have been checking the king. Hence the king or the king's rook has made the capture. So, Black can't castle.

No story of Holmes's life is complete without a titanic struggle with the fiendish Moriarty, and indeed Holmes was once saved from the jaws of death by retrograde analysis. It was on the occasion when Holmes was on the run from his arch-enemy, dodging one attempt on his life after another. Although spending each night at a different house, he mysteriously received a letter one morning from Moriarty himself, in the form of a chess diagram. There was no White king shown, and clearly Moriarty was indicating that wherever the king could be placed it would be finish for him. A complicated retrograde analysis showed the king could indeed be on only one square — g1, where he would be mated in one.

By sheer inspiration Holmes then realised that if the board were considered a grid map of London, the g1 square was where he had intended to spend the next night. He changed his plans, thus averting almost certain tragedy.

One last chess "crime":



White to play and mate in one.

At first sight it appears impossible, until one realises that White and Black are going in opposite directions to usual. Thus 1.Nxf6 (1.Nxc3 actually!) is checkmate. The proof is — how else could the White king and queen have changed places!

MURRAY CHANDLER