

***JOSÉ RAÚL  
CAPABLANCA***



***CHESS  
FUNDAMENTALS***

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**José Raúl Capablanca**

# **Chess Fundamentals**

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# PREFACE

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*Chess Fundamentals* was first published thirteen years ago. Since then there have appeared at different times a number of articles dealing with the so-called Hypermodern Theory. Those who have read the articles may well have thought that something new, of vital importance, had been discovered. The fact is that the Hypermodern Theory is merely the application, during the opening stages generally, of the same old principles through the medium of somewhat new tactics. There has been no change in the fundamentals. The change has been only a change of form, and not always for the best at that.

In chess the tactics may change but the strategic fundamental principles are always the same, so that *Chess Fundamentals* is as good now as it was thirteen years ago. It will be as good a hundred years from now; as long in fact as the laws and rules of the game remain what they are at present. The reader may therefore go over the contents of the book with the assurance that there is in it everything he needs, and that there is nothing to be added and nothing to be changed. *Chess Fundamentals* was the one standard work of its kind thirteen years ago and the author firmly believes that it is the one standard work of its kind now.

J.R. CAPABLANCA

New York

Sept. 1, 1934

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# PART I

## CHAPTER I

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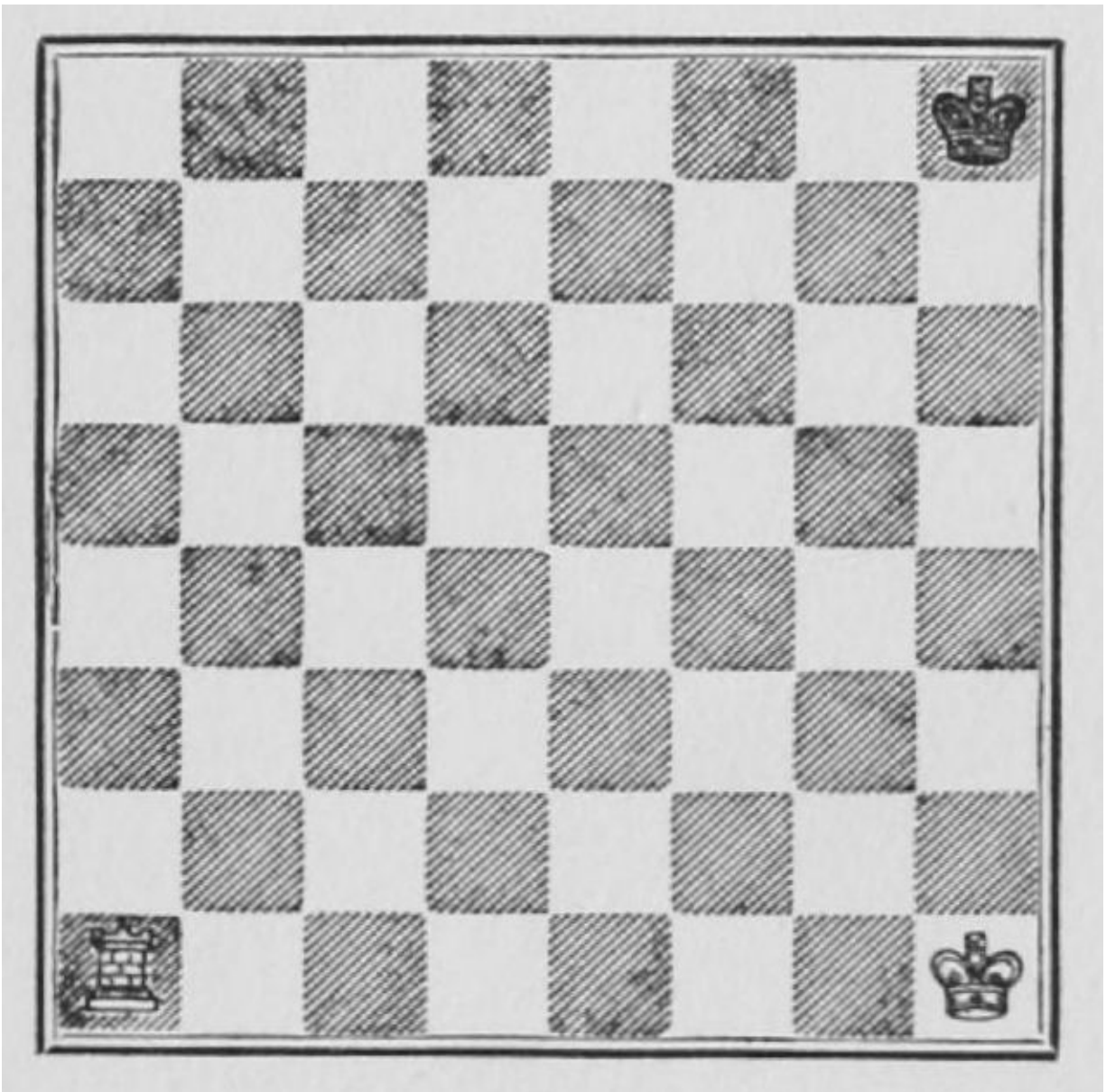
First Principles: Endings, Middle-Game and Openings

The first thing a student should do, is to familiarise himself with the power of the pieces. This can best be done by learning how to accomplish quickly some of the simple mates.

#### 1. SOME SIMPLE MATES

**Example 1.**—The ending Rook and King against King.

*The principle is to drive the opposing King to the last line on any side of the board.*



In this position the power of the Rook is demonstrated by the first move, R-R7, which immediately confines the Black King to the last rank, and the mate is quickly accomplished by: 1R-R7, K-Kt1; 2K-Kt2.

The combined action of King and Rook is needed to arrive at a position in which mate can be forced. The general principle for a beginner to follow is to

keep his King as much as possible on the same rank, or, as in this case, file, as the opposing King.

When, in this case, the King has been brought to the sixth rank, it is better to place it, not on the same file, but on the one next to it towards the centre.

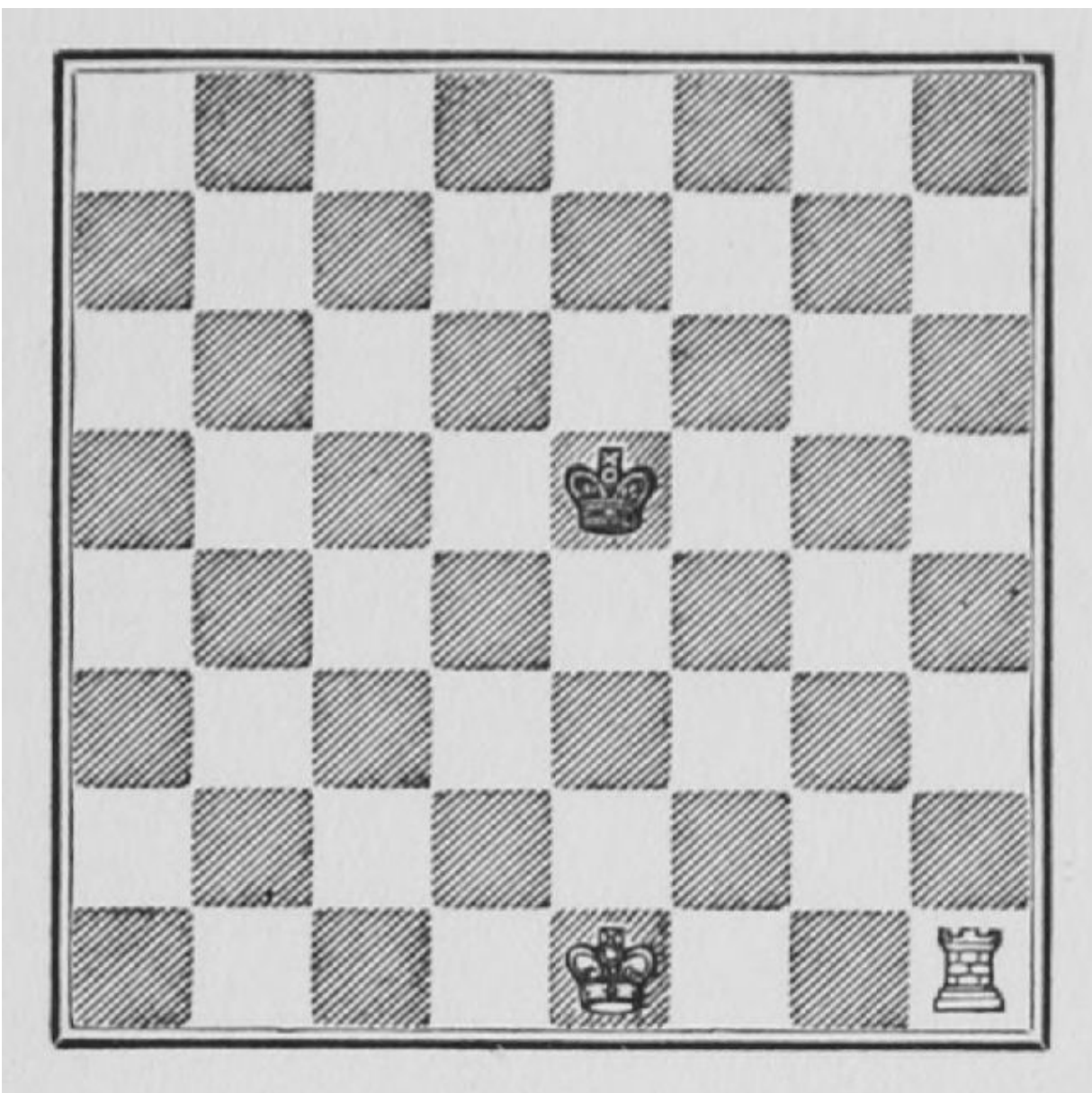
2...K-B1; 3K-B3, K-K1; 4K-K4, K-Q1; 5K-Q5, K-B1; 6K-Q6.

Not K-B6, because then the Black King will go back to Q1 and it will take much longer to mate. If now the King moves back to Q1, R-R8 mates at once.

6...K-Kt1; 7R-QB7, K-R1; 8K-B6, K-Kt1; 9K-Kt6, K-R1; 10R-B8mate.

It has taken exactly ten moves to mate from the original position. On move 5 Black could have played K-K1, and, according to principle, White would have continued 6K-Q6, K-B1 (the Black King will ultimately be forced to move in front of the White King and be mated by R-R8); 7K-K6, K-Kt1; 8K-B6, K-R1; 9K-Kt6, K-Kt1; 10R-R8mate.

Example 2.

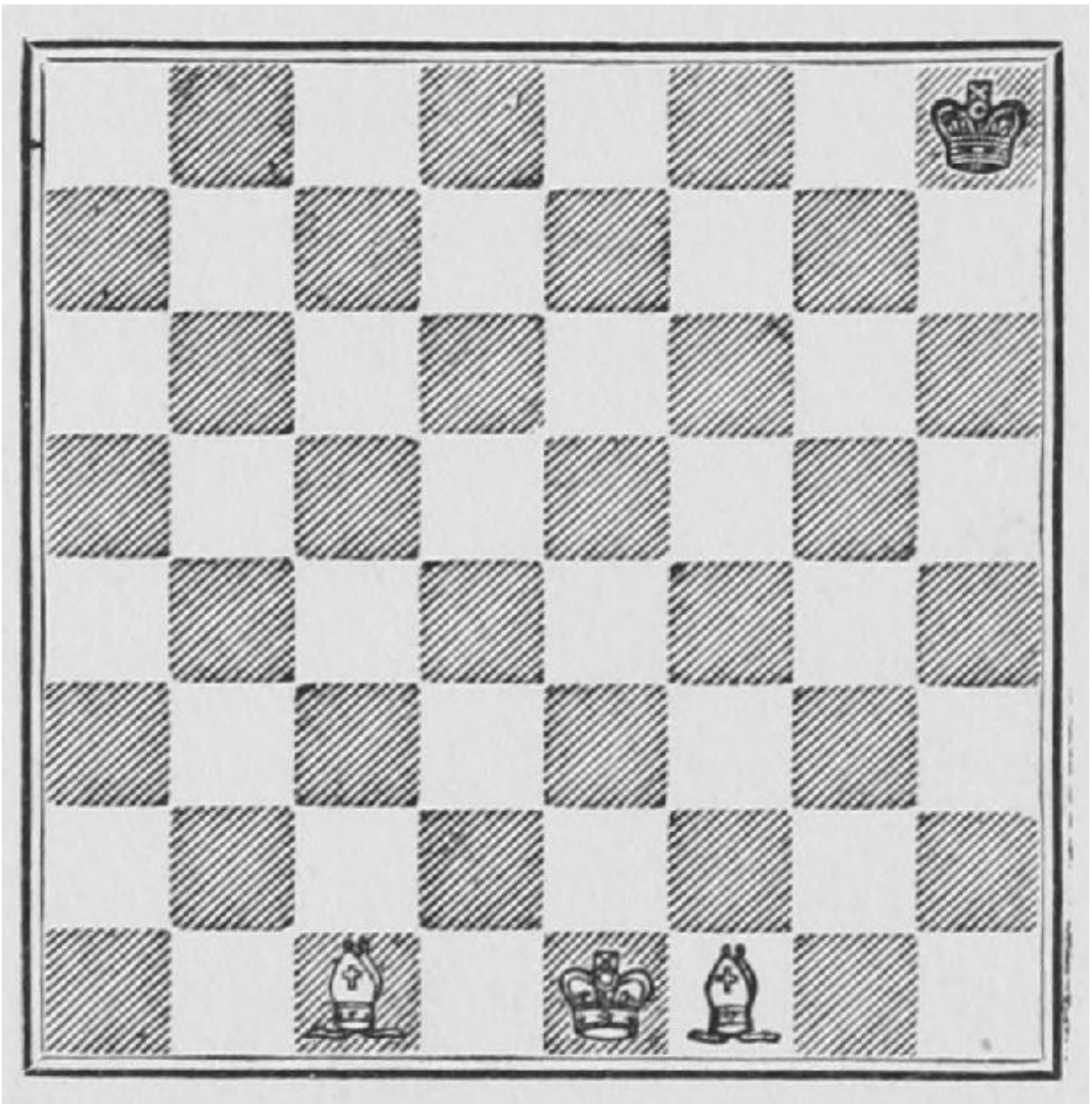


Since the Black King is in the centre of the board, the best way to proceed is to advance your own King thus: 1K-K2, K-Q4; 2K-K3. As the Rook has not yet come into play, it is better to advance the King straight into the centre of the board, not in front, but to one side of the other King. Should now the Black King move to K4, the Rook drives it back by R-R5ch. On the other hand, if 2...K-B5 instead, then also 3R-R5. If now 3...K-Kt5, there follows 4K-Q3; but if instead 3...K-

B6; then 4R-R4, keeping the King confined to as few squares as possible.

Now the ending may continue: 4...K-B7; 5R-B4ch, K-Kt6; 6K-Q3, K-Kt7; 7R-Kt4ch, K-R6; 8K-B3, K-R7. It should be noticed how often the White King has moved next to the Rook, not only to defend it, but also to reduce the mobility of the opposing King. Now White mates in three moves thus: 9R-R4ch, K-Kt8; 10R- any square on the Rook's file, forcing the Black King in front of the White, K-B8; 11R-R1mate. It has taken eleven moves to mate, and, under any conditions, I believe it should be done in under twenty. While it may be monotonous, it is worth while for the beginner to practice such things, as it will teach him the proper handling of his pieces.

**Example 3.**—Now we come to two Bishops and King against King.



Since the Black King is in the corner, White can play 1B-Q3, K-Kt2; 2B-KKt5, K-B2; 3B-B5, and already the Black King is confined to a few squares. If the Black King, in the original position, had been in the centre of the board, or away from the last row, White should have advanced his King, and then, with the aid of his Bishops, restricted the Black King's movements to as few squares as possible.



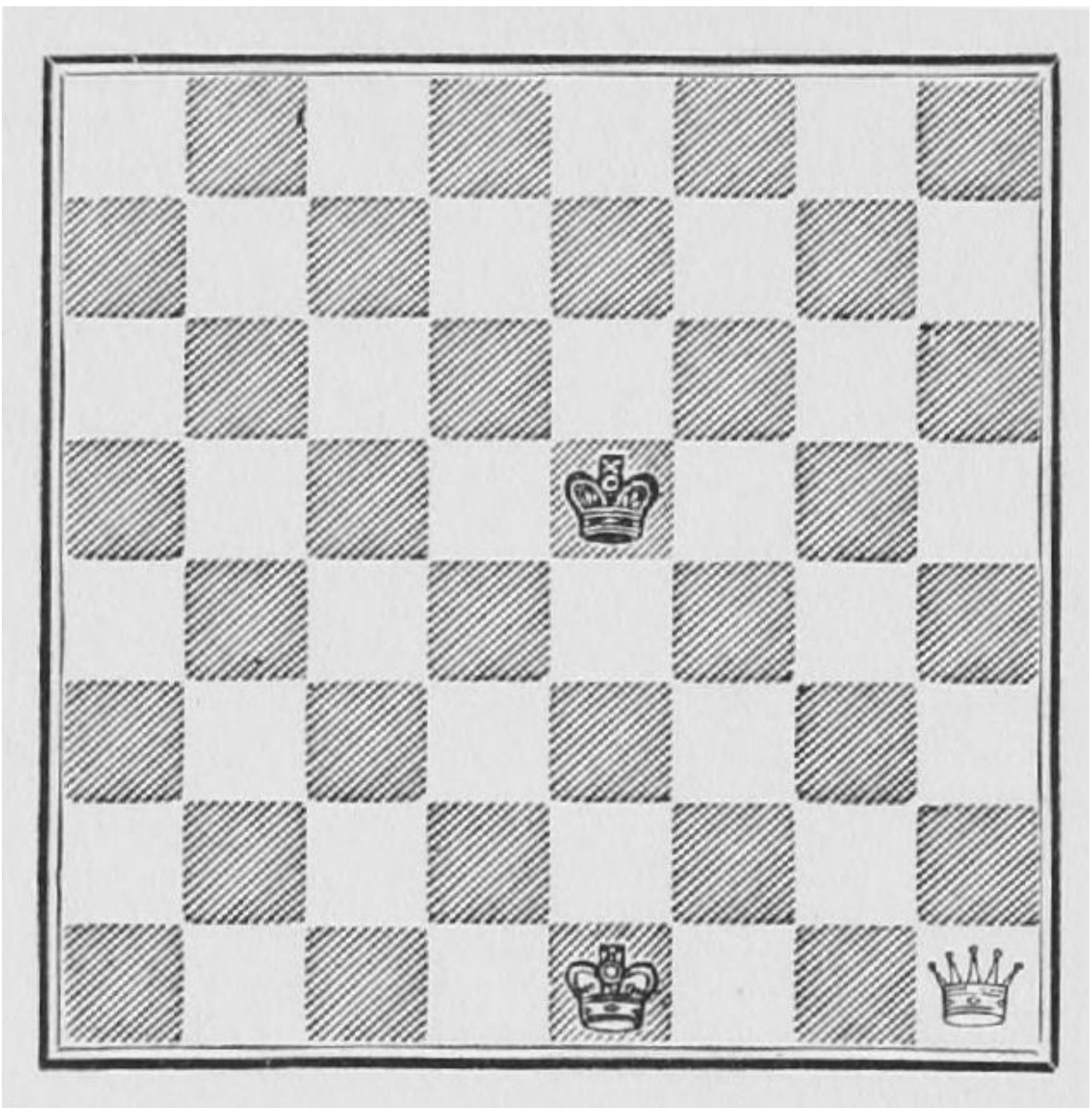
We might now continue: 3...K-Kt2; 4K-B2. In this ending the Black King must not only be driven to the edge of the board, but he must also be forced into a corner, and, before a mate can be given, the White King must be brought to the sixth rank and, at the same time, in one of the last two files; in this case either KR6, KKt6, KB7, KB8, and as KR6 and KKt6 are the nearest squares, it is to either of these squares that the King ought to go. 4...K-B2; 5K-Kt3, K-Kt2; 6K-R4, K-B2; 7K-R5, K-Kt2; 8B-Kt6, K-Kt1; 9K-R6, K-B1. White must now mark time and move one of the Bishops, so as to force the Black King to go back; 10B-R5, K-Kt1; 11B-K7, K-R1. Now the White Bishop must take up a position from which it can give check next move along the White diagonal, when the Black King moves back to Kt1. 12B-KKt4, K-Kt1; 13B-K6ch, K-R1; 14B-B6mate.

It has taken fourteen moves to force the mate and, in any position, it should be done in under thirty.

In all endings of this kind, care must be taken not to drift into a stale mate.

In this particular ending one should remember that the King must not only be driven to the edge of the board, but also into a corner. In all such endings, however, it is immaterial whether the King is forced on to the last rank, or to an outside file, e.g. KR5 or QR4, K1 or Q8.

**Example 4.**—We now come to Queen and King against King. As the Queen combines the power of the Rook and the Bishop, it is the easiest mate of all and should always be accomplished in under ten moves. Take the following position:



A good way to begin is to make the first move with the Queen, trying to limit the Black King's mobility as much as possible. Thus: 1Q-B6, K-Q5; 2K-Q2. Already the Black King has only one available square 2...K-K4; 3K-K3, K-B4; 4Q-Q6, K-Kt4. (Should Black play K-Kt5, then Q-Kt6ch); 5Q-K6, K-R5 (if K-R4, K-B4 and mate next move); 6Q-KKt6, K-R6; 7K-B3, K moves; 8Q mates.

In this ending, as in the case of the Rook, the Black King must be forced to the edge of the board; only the Queen being so much more powerful than the Rook, the process is far easier and shorter. These are the three elementary endings and in all of these the principle is the same. In each case the co-operation of the King is needed. In order to force a mate without the aid of the King, at least two Rooks are required.

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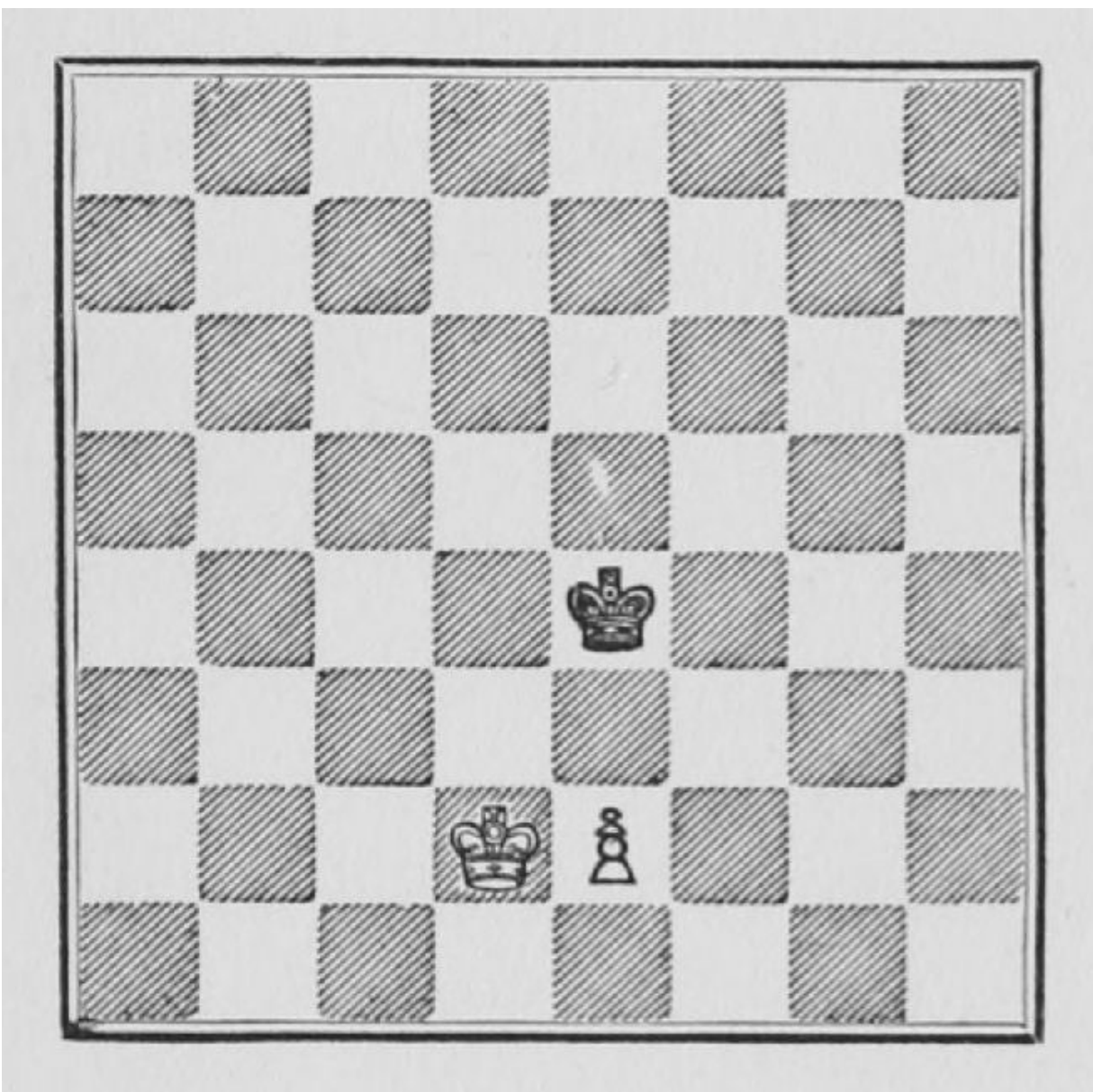
## 2. PAWN PROMOTION

The gain of a Pawn is the smallest material advantage that can be obtained in a game; and it often is sufficient to win, even when the Pawn is the only remaining unit, apart from the Kings. It is essential, speaking generally, that

*the King should be in front of his Pawn, with at least one intervening square.*

If the opposing King is directly in front of the Pawn, then the game cannot be won. This can best be explained by the following examples.

Example 5.



The position is drawn, and the way to proceed is for Black to keep the King always directly in front of the Pawn, and when it cannot be done, as for instance in this position because of the White King, then the Black King must be kept in front of the White King. The play would proceed thus: 1P-K3, K-K4; 2K-Q3, K-Q4. This is a very important move. Any other move would lose, as will be shown later. As the Black King cannot be kept close up to the Pawn, it must be

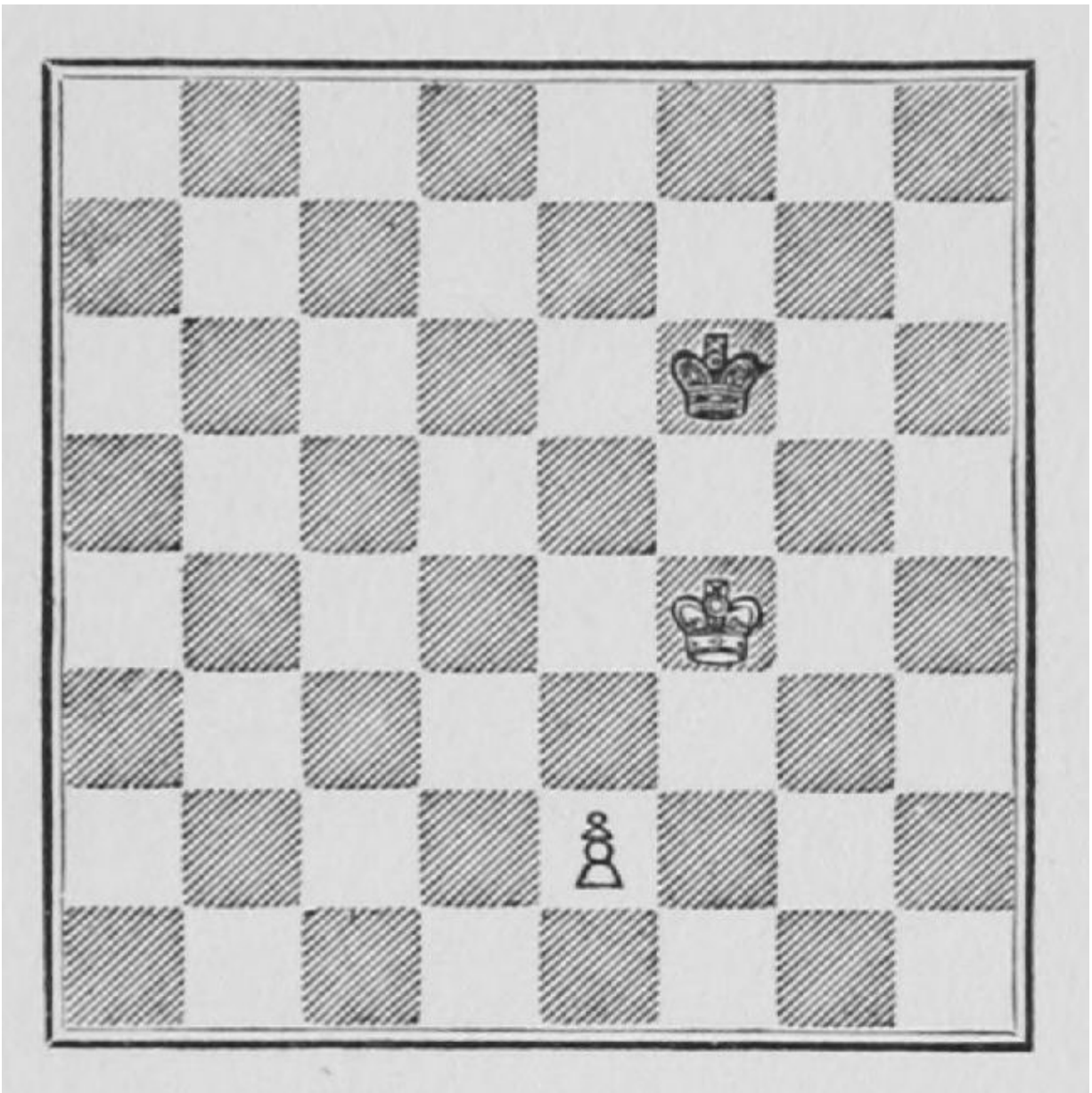
brought as far forward as possible and, at the same time, in front of the White King.

3P-K4ch, K-K4; 4K-K3, K-K3; 5K-B4, K-B3. Again the same case. As the White King comes up, the Black King must be kept in front of it, since it cannot be brought up to the Pawn.

6P-K5ch, K-K3; 7K-K4, K-K2; 8K-Q5, K-Q2; 9P-K6ch, K-K2; 10K-K5, K-K1; 11K-Q6, K-Q1. If now White advances the Pawn, the Black King gets in front of it and White must either give up the Pawn or play K-K6, and a stale mate results. If instead of advancing the Pawn White withdraws his King, Black brings his King up to the Pawn and, when forced to go back, he moves to K *in front* of the Pawn ready to come up again or to move in front of the White King, as before, should the latter advance.

The whole mode of procedure is very important and the student should become thoroughly conversant with its details; for it involves principles to be taken up later on, and because many a beginner has lost identical positions from lack of proper knowledge. At this stage of the book I cannot lay too much stress on its importance.

**Example 6.**—In this position White wins, as the King is in front of his Pawn and there is one intervening square.



The method to follow is to  
*advance the King as far as is compatible with the safety of the Pawn and never to advance the Pawn until it is essential to its own safety.*

Thus:

1.K-K4, K-K3.

Black does not allow the White King to advance, therefore White is now compelled to advance his Pawn so as

to force Black to move away. He is then able to advance his own King.

2.P-K3, K-B3; 3.K-Q5, K-K2.

If Black had played 3...K-B4, then White would be forced to advance the Pawn to K4, since he could not advance his King without leaving Black the opportunity to play K-K5, winning the Pawn. Since he has not done so, it is better for White not to advance the Pawn yet, since its own safety does not require it, but to try to bring the King still further forward. Thus:

4.K-K5, K-Q2; 5.K-B6, K-K1.

Now the White Pawn is too far back and it may be brought up within protection of the King.

6.P-K4, K-Q2.

Now it would not do to play K-B7, because Black would play K-Q3, and White would have to bring back his King to protect the Pawn. Therefore he must continue.

7.P-K5, K-K1.

Had he moved anywhere else, White could have played K-B7, followed by the advance of the Pawn to K6, K7, K8; all these squares being protected by the King. As Black tries to prevent that, White must now force him to move away, at the same time always keeping the King in front of the Pawn. Thus:

8.K-K6.

P-K6 would make it a draw, as Black would then play K-B, and we would have a position similar to the one explained in connection with Example 5.

8...K-B1; 9.K-Q7.

King moves and the White Pawn advances to K8, becomes a Queen, and it is all over.

This ending is like the previous one, and for the same reasons should be thoroughly understood before proceeding any further.

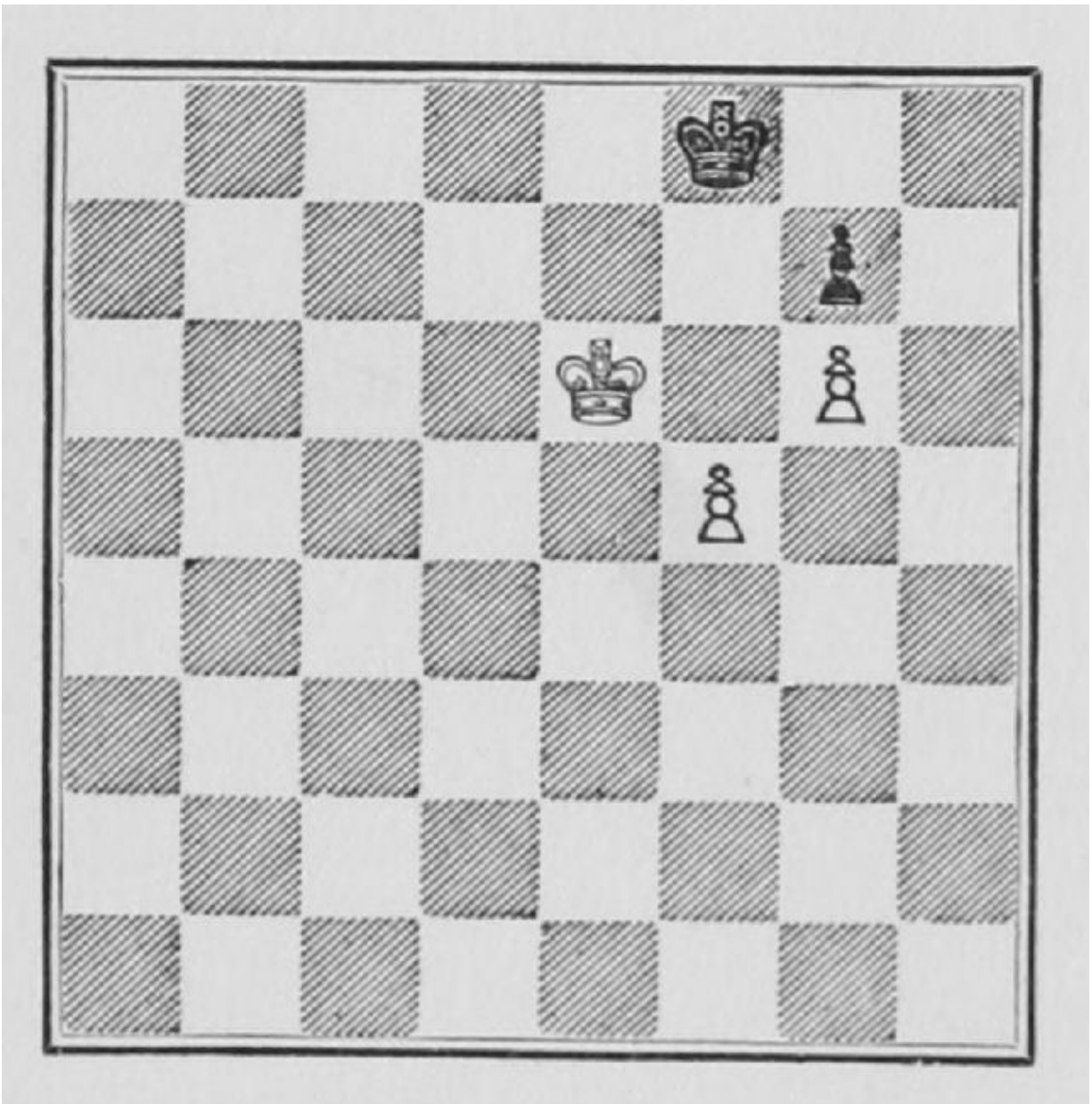
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### 3. PAWN ENDINGS

I shall now give a couple of simple endings of two Pawns against one, or three against two, that the reader may see how they can be won. Fewer explanations will be given, as it is up to the student to work things out for himself. Furthermore, nobody can learn how to play well merely from the study of a book; it can only serve as a guide and the rest must be done by the teacher, if the student has one; if not, the student must realise by long and bitter experience the practical application of the many things explained in the book.

Example 7.

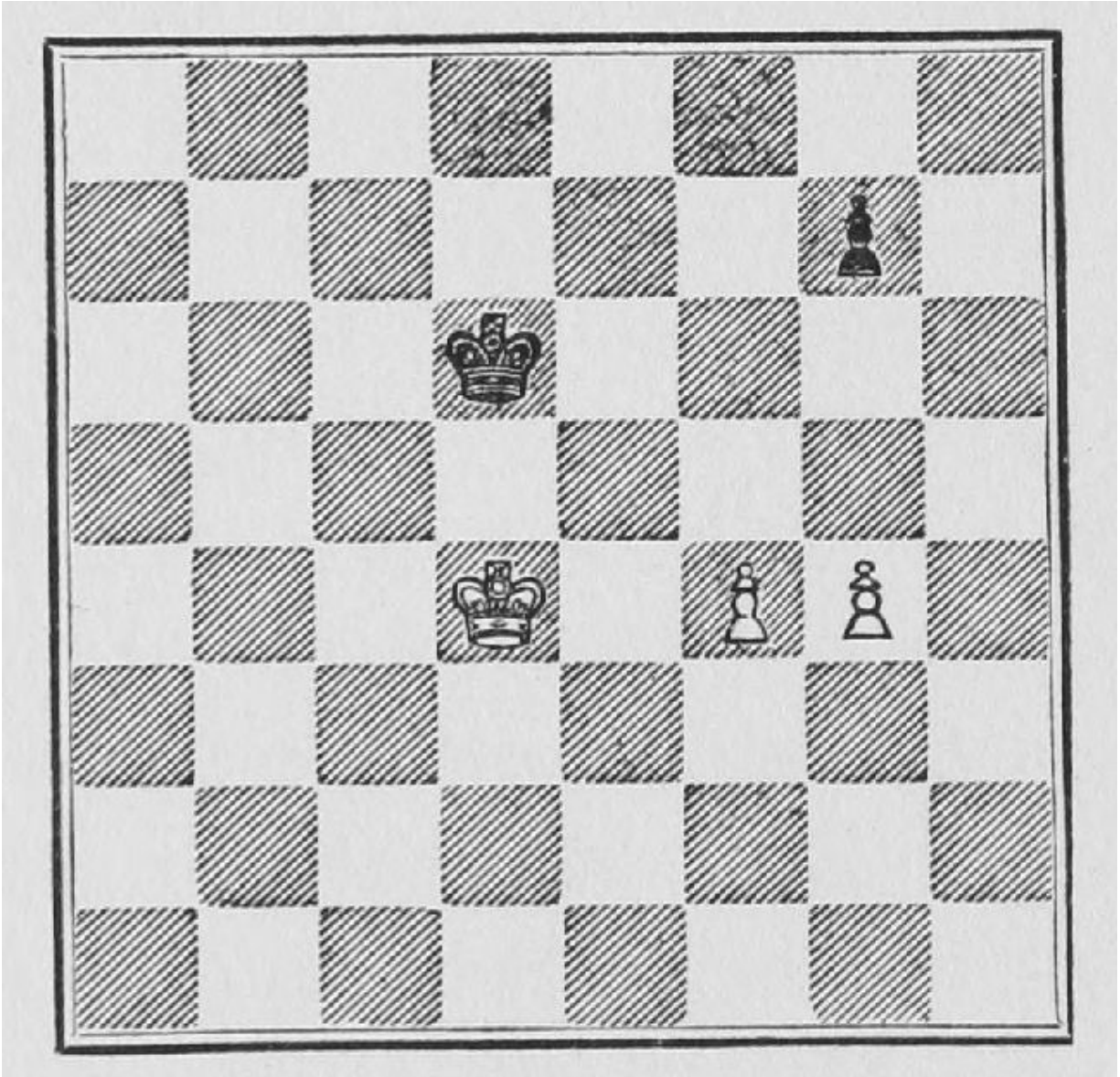




In this position White cannot win by playing 1P-B6, because Black plays, not P×P, which would lose, but 1...K-Kt1, and if then 2P×P, K×P, and draws, as shown in a previous case. If 2P-B7ch, K-B1, and White will never be able to Queen his Pawn without losing it. If 2K-K7, P×P; 3K×P, K-B1, and draws. White, however, can win the position given in the diagram by playing:

1K-Q7, K-Kt1; 2K-K7, K-R1; 3P-B6, P×P. If 3...K-Kt1; 4P-B7ch, K-R1; 5P-B8(Q)mate.

4K-B7, P-B4; 5P-Kt7ch, K-R2; 6P-Kt8(Q)ch, K-R3; 7Q-Kt6mate.



**Example 8.**—In the above position White can't win by 1P-B5. Black's best answer would be P-Kt3 draws. (The student should work this out.) He cannot win by 1P-Kt5, because P-Kt3 draws. (This, because of the principle of the "*opposition*" which governs this ending as well as all the

Pawn-endings already given, and which will be explained more fully later on.)

White can win, however, by playing: 1K-K4, K-K3. (If 1...P-Kt3; 2K-Q4, K-K3; 3K-B5, K-B3; 4K-Q6, K-B2; 5P-Kt5, K-Kt2; 6K-K7, K-Kt1; 7K-B6, K-R2; 8K-B7 and White wins the Pawn.)

2P-B5ch, K-B3; 3K-B4, P-Kt3. (If this Pawn is kept back we arrive at the ending shown in Example 7.) 4P-Kt5ch, K-B2; 5P-B6, K-K3; 6K-K4, K-B2; 7K-K5, K-B1. White cannot force his Bishop's Pawn into Q (find out why), but by giving his Pawn up he can win the other Pawn and the game. Thus:

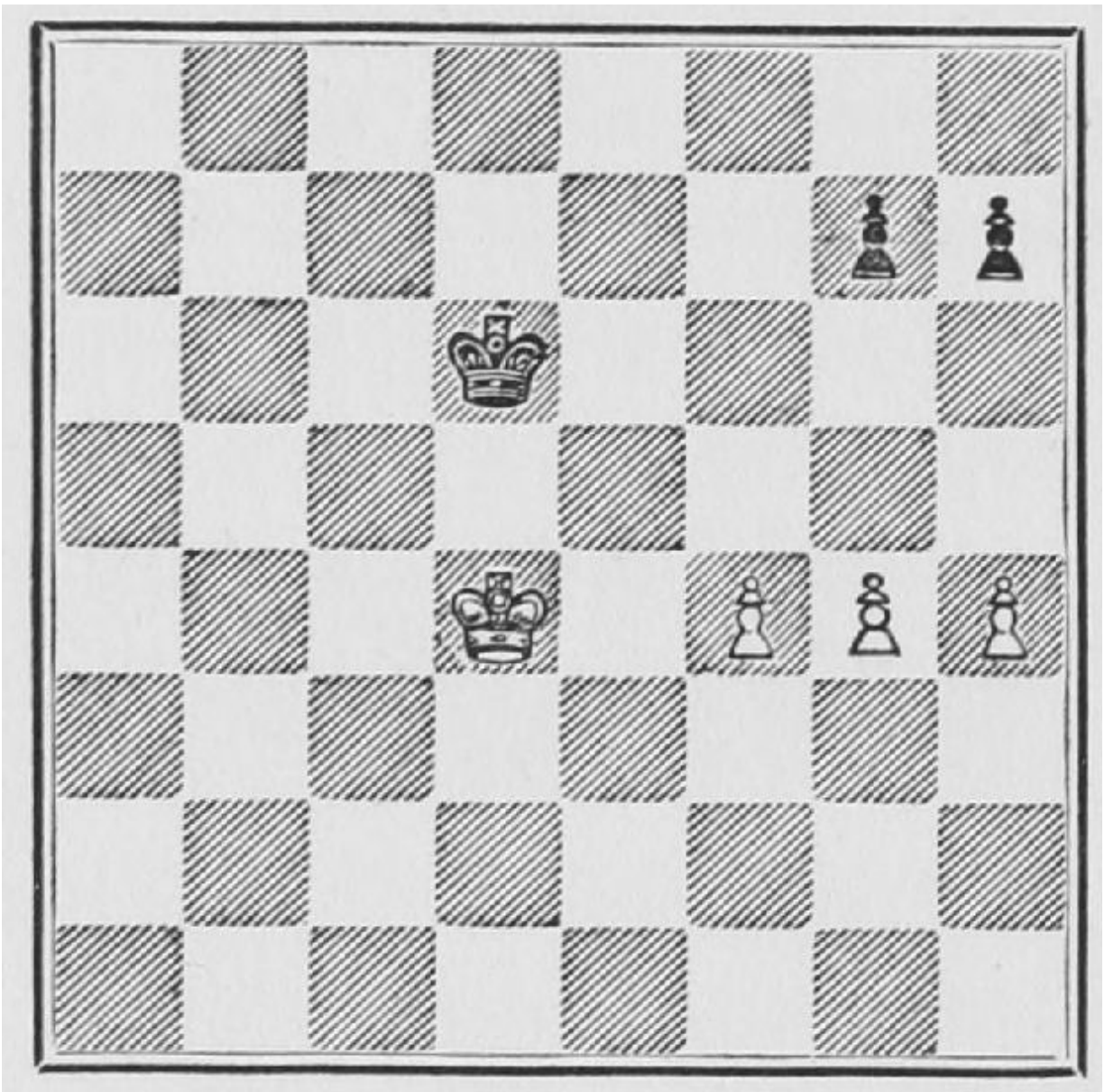
8P-B7, K×P; 9K-Q6, K-B1; 10K-K6, K-Kt2; 11K-K7, K-Kt1; 12K-B6, K-R2; 13K-B7, K-R1; 14K×P, K-Kt1.

There is still some resistance in Black's position. In fact, the only way to win is the one given here, as will easily be seen by experiment.

15K-R6 (if K-B6, K-R2; and in order to win White must get back to the actual position, as against 16P-Kt6ch, K-R1 draws), K-R1; 16P-Kt6, K-Kt1; 17P-Kt7, K-B2; 18K-R7, and White queens the Pawn and wins.

This ending, apparently so simple, should show the student the enormous difficulties to be surmounted, even when there are hardly any pieces left, when playing against an adversary who knows how to use the resources at his disposal, and it should show the student, also, the necessity of paying strict attention to these elementary things which form the basis of true mastership in Chess.

**Example 9.**—In this ending



White can win by advancing any of the three Pawns on the first move, but it is convenient to follow the general rule, whenever there is no good reason against it, of *advancing the Pawn that has no Pawn opposing it*. Thus we begin by—

---

1.P-B5, K-K2.

If P-Kt3, P-B6; and we have a similar ending to one of those shown above. If 1...P-R3; 2P-Kt5.

2.K-K5, K-B2; 3.P-Kt5, K-K2.

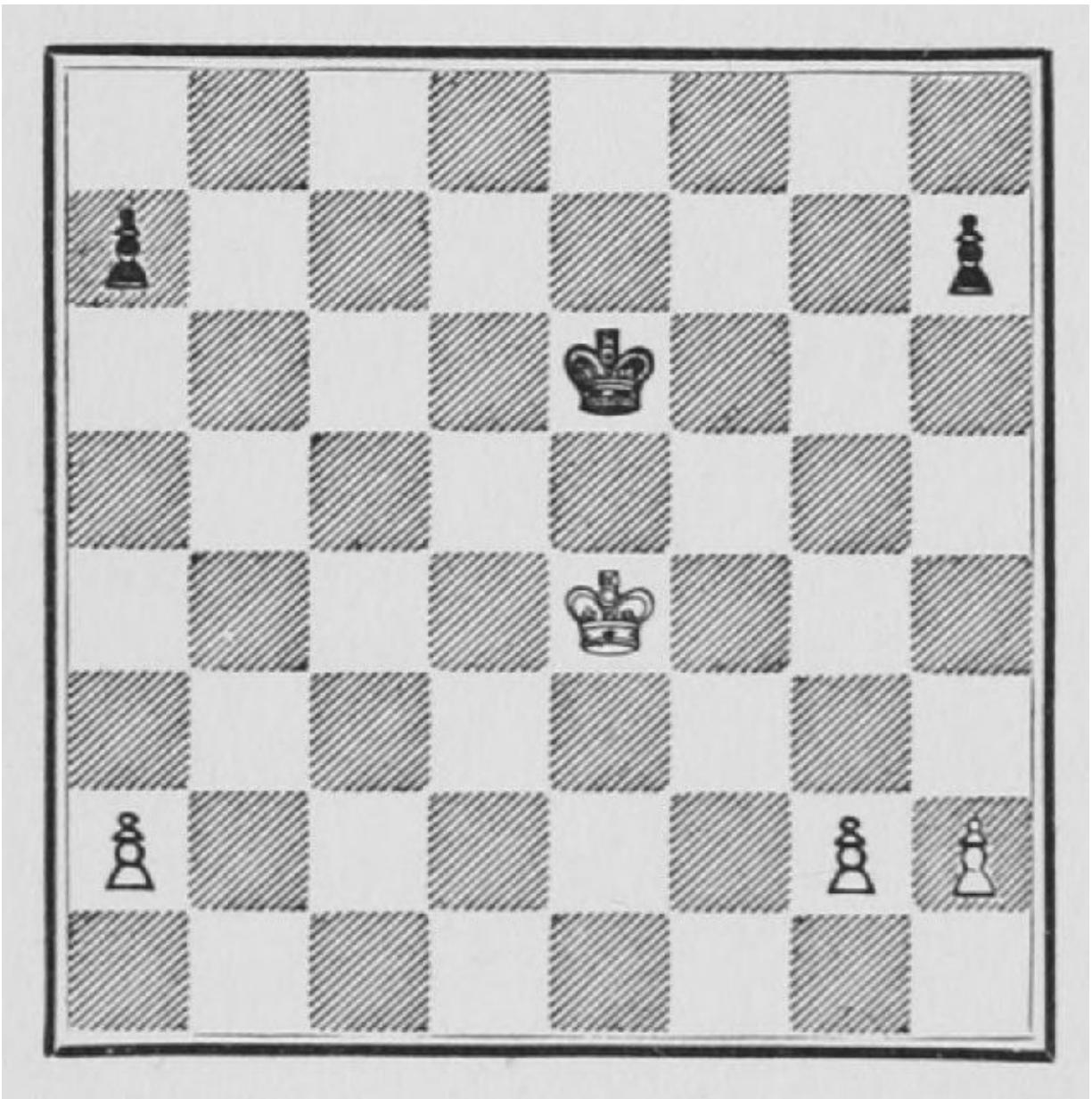
If 3...P-Kt3; 4P-B6, and if 3...P-R3; 4P-Kt6ch, and in either case we have a similar ending to one of those already shown.

4.P-R5,

and by following it up with P-Kt6 we have the same ending previously shown. Should Black play 4...P-Kt3, then RP×P, P×P; P-B6ch with the same result.

Having now seen the cases when the Pawns are all on one side of the board we shall now examine a case when there are Pawns on both sides of the board.

**Example 10.**—In these cases the general rule is to *act immediately on the side where you have the superior forces*. Thus we have:



1.P-KKt4.

It is generally advisable to advance the Pawn that is free from opposition.

1.....

P-QR4.

Black makes an advance on the other side, and now White considers whether or not he should stop the advance. In this case either way wins, but generally the advance should be stopped when the opposing King is far away.