



C O L U M N I S T S

New Stories about Old Chess Players

Jeremy P. Spinrad



The Mysterious Albert Ensor

by Myron Samsin

It may seem surprising in a field like chess history, but there are times when one gets “scooped.” Writing on a subject that seems particularly arcane, esoteric, and obscure, one finds that another writer has written a piece on exactly the same subject. With luck, this can lead to a happy collaboration. In my discussion of the Scandal of 1880 ([here](#) and [here](#)), I noted that I would be writing a future article on the amusingly sleazy character Albert W. Ensor. A correspondent wrote that he had been gathering information on this player for some time and was about to produce an article. He is Myron Samsin, already noted for his investigation of chess origins in [The Anatomy of Chess](#). I was able to give Myron a couple of extra sources, and he came up with the following excellent article, which now makes a “guest appearance” in this space. – Jeremy Spinrad

Before I begin this essay, I have a confession to make – which is more, by the way, than Albert Ensor would have given you. I have followed this man for three years. I have followed him across four countries, and lost his trail in two more. I have followed him through a dozen journals and newspapers. I still don't know who he is. I hereby give up trying and present you, dear reader, with what I have found. Maybe you will understand him better than I do. Maybe you will unravel his mystery. I would give anything to sit across a chessboard from Ensor and ask him myself, but I can't. He is long gone, and all that remains are the reports of journalists from more than a century ago. These anonymous men captured his peculiar style far more vividly than I can, so I will try to let them tell you his story.

In a life of adventures just beyond the law, Ensor won the chess championship of Canada, set his sights on the championship of the United States, and claimed to be the champion of all England. He may be forgotten now, but in his day he set the pens of chess writers moving on both sides of the Atlantic, for reasons sometimes honest and more often not. He was part scoundrel, part con artist, and part hustler. But he was entirely an enigma.

Ensor's early years are obscure. He claimed he was born in France in 1833, the son of a Nottingham lace manufacturer traveling on the Continent, and that he was educated at Heidelberg and Dieppe. Ensor's own word, though, ought to be taken with a good helping of salt. A search of British vital records

turns up two other possibilities, both inconclusive. An Albert Ensor was born in Birmingham, England in 1844, under entirely unremarkable circumstances in that grimy, bleak, industrial Midlands city. This date would fit well with the timeline of his later life. A more intriguing possibility, based on his gentlemanly and educated manner, is that he had some connection to the Ensors of Rollesby Hall, a landowning family with holdings near Norfolk. Unfortunately nothing can be proven, as the young Ensor left behind few confirmable traces.

If his own story is to be believed, Ensor was by turns: an engineer and journalist in London, a surveyor in South America, a midshipman with the Royal Navy, a traveler throughout India, and a businessman in Europe. Though he always claimed innocence, he had the ill fortune to be arrested and imprisoned in various countries – in Germany for gambling, in France for forgery, and many more. Each time, he managed to prove his innocence to the authorities and escape without penalty, only to repeat the cycle in another place.

In May 1873, fate deposited him in Toronto, Canada. The Canadian Chess Association was holding its tournament in that city, determined to crown a champion. The previous year's attempt, its first ever, had been abandoned incomplete. This year's winner would thus become the first Canadian champion, and recipient of a respectable sum of cash. Ensor entered, and easily won four knockout games to take the first prize. The chess players of the young Dominion were no match for him, although several strong players from Montreal were absent – notably H. von Bokum, who had split a series of games with Ensor earlier that year.

Soon after, Ensor left Canada for greener pastures in the United States. He turned up in Rochester, NY, where he was soon at work entering the good graces of its finer citizens. His distinguished manner, skill at chess, and exotic tales of his past won him much admiration in society parlors. The good people of Rochester were therefore quite surprised on the morning of March 2, 1875, when the newspapers blared:

COUNTERFEITER ARRESTED – A PECULIAR CASE

Yesterday Detectives Rogers, Burchell, and Hughes arrested a man by the name of Albert W. Ensor, alias W. H. Murray, on the charge of passing counterfeit bills of a Chicago national bank. Ensor or Murray has the reputation of being a fine chess player, and has given several specimens of his playing during his residence in this city. – *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, March 2, 1875

If the case began as a peculiar one, it would only become more so. Ensor claimed he received the money from a man named George Mason in payment for fine laces and furs. Mason, on the other hand, claimed to be a US government detective, employed to catch counterfeiters like Ensor. Other information then appeared in the papers revealing Mason to be a lifelong

criminal, and in fact a longtime friend of Ensor's. The entire confusing menagerie eventually headed to New York, to sort out in federal court just who was actually telling the truth.



Ensor himself was oddly sanguine about everything happening around him:

The prisoner is singularly philosophic in his deportment. He declines counsel, preferring to cross-examine witnesses himself, which he does in a keen, shrewd manner. When asked by the commissioner if he could furnish bail to the amount of \$3000, he spoke out in a drawling tone, "Well, I should think the champion chessplayer of England ought to find enough persons to go his bail!" This he said, not boastingly, but in a quiet, absent-minded manner. He appears when speaking to stare vacantly, as though he were looking into the spirit world, and yet he realizes perfectly well all that is going on about him. When informed that he would be committed to answer to the charge, he took the matter very philosophically. Indeed, his singularly calm deportment suggests the idea that were he sent to the gallows he would accept his fate without moving a muscle. There is certainly some mystery connected with this man which has not yet been brought to light. – *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, March 22, 1875

After a trial that threatened to become a courtroom circus, Mason was convicted of being the real felon, and Ensor sent back to Rochester. Not, however, before having to face Mason one last time. Evidently prison security left a lot to be desired in those days:

Mason was visited at the jail in the afternoon to give his version of the affair, which he gave, as follows: "I came out of my cell this morning to go down stairs and saw Ensor and Long washing themselves. I did not know that Long was in the jail, and looked rather sharply at him. I turned and went back to my cell, not caring to meet them, for I, of course, believing they had perjured themselves, did not feel very

kindly toward them ... I was walking along the corridor cutting my nails with this small pocket-knife (which Mason exhibited), when they turned the corner of the corridor quickly, coming upon me quite suddenly. I started, and Ensor, who is a miserable coward, started and ran downstairs, at which I laughed. Long complained that I had attempted to stab him, and ran downstairs ...” – *New York Times*, April 18, 1875

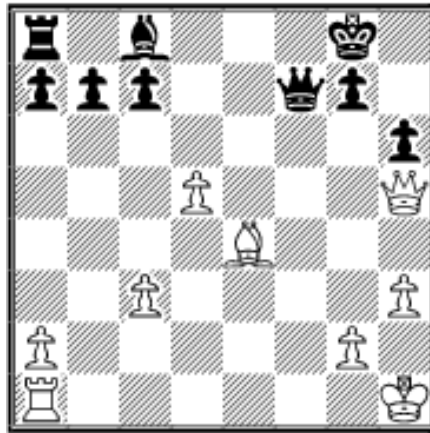
More follies (and lax prison security) awaited Ensor on his return to Rochester:

It appears that yesterday afternoon [Ensor] was taken out of jail by a Deputy US Marshal for the ostensible purpose of giving bail, and he was allowed to drink considerable liquor. It has been usual to give him stimulants at times and when he was returned to the Jail Mr. Beckwith, the Jailor, at his solicitation, gave him some liquor. In the night Mr. B was aroused by a great noise in Ensor’s room and on proceeding thither found him utterly beside himself with liquor, and acting violently. He would strike the stone wall with his fists and also attack his attendants. He was quieted and supposing that he would soon sleep off the effects of the liquor, he was left with attendants. This morning it was discovered that he was suffering from spasms, and the jail physician was called. . . He told his room mates yesterday that he should not live long, and bade them good bye. – *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, May 7, 1875

Ensor apparently proceeded to sober up, since he was reported by the physician better the next day.

His innocence proven by the trial in New York (yet *again*, he would have said), Ensor was released from jail. Perhaps his reputation was no longer what it used to be in Rochester, for he soon moved to Buffalo. There he began a vigorous campaign to restore his name through the press. He began a chess column in the *Buffalo Morning Express*, mostly containing flattering items by and about him. He became a frequent correspondent to the chess column of the *New York Clipper*, one of the most prominent in America, and was chosen as an Executive of the Buffalo Chess and Checker Club. He also began playing competitively again, winning a local Buffalo tournament soon after his arrival. The deciding game was against Henry Richmond, one of the stronger players in the state of New York.

A. W. Ensor - Henry Richmond, Buffalo, 1875 (notes by the editor, assisted by *Fritz8*): **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 d6 5 O-O Nf6 6 d4 exd4 7 cxd4 Bb6 8 d5 Ne5 9 Nxe5 dxe5 10 Nc3 h6 11 Bd2 O-O 12 h3 Ne8 13 Qh5 Bd4 14 Kh1 Nd6 15 Bd3 f5 16 f4 exf4?!** After reaching equality in a relatively tame opening, Black starts a series of ill-advised exchanges. Better is 16...fxe4 17 Nxe4 Bf5 18 Qe2=. **17 Bxf4 Bxc3 18 Bxd6 Qxd6 19 bxc3 fxe4?** Better is 19...Bd7. **20 Rxf8+ Qxf8 21 Bxe4 Qf7??**

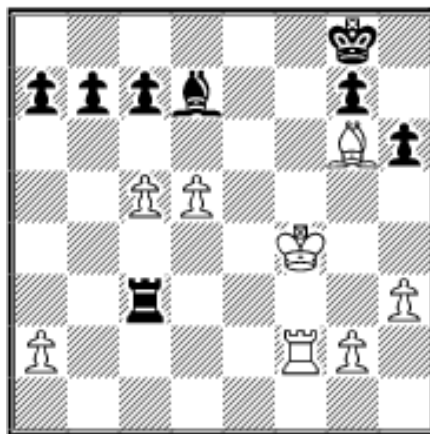


21...Kh8 was relatively best, although after 22 Qe5 the c-pawn cannot be held, viz 22...Qf7 23 Kg1 b6 24 Rf1 forcing 24...Qg8. **22 Bg6?!** Missing 22 Bh7+! Kf8 23 Bg6 Qf6 24 Bd3! intending 25.Rf1+ +-.

22...Qf6 23 Rc1?! 23 Bd3 Bd7 24 Rf1 would have retained the initiative. **23...Bd7 24 c4 Rf8 25 c5 Qb2 26 Rc2??** An error that should lose the game; correct was 26 Rb1=.

26...Rf1+ 27 Kh2 Qd4?! By missing 27...Qf6! 28 Bd3 Qf4+ 29 g3 Rf2+ 30 Rxf2 Qxf2+ 31 Kh1 Qxg3+-, he

throws the game back to White. **28 Qe2 Qg1+ 29 Kg3 Re1 30 Qf2 Re3+ 31 Kf4 Qxf2+ 32 Rxf2 Rc3**



33 Rc2 Leading to an endgame favoring White, but much stronger was 33 Rb2! Rxc5 (if 33...b6 34 c6! and Black must give up the bishop, since if 34...Bc8 35 Re2 and mate shortly.) 34 Rxb7 Kf8 35 d6!+-.

33...Rxc2 34 Bxc2 Kf7 35 Ke5 g6 36 Be4 Be8?? Any remaining hope lay in 36...Kg7. **37 d6 cxd6+ 38 Kxd6 Bb5 39 Bxb7 Bc4 40 c6 Bxa2 41 c7 Be6 42 Bd5 Bxd5 43 c8=Q 1-0** (*Buffalo Morning Express*, Aug 25, 1875)

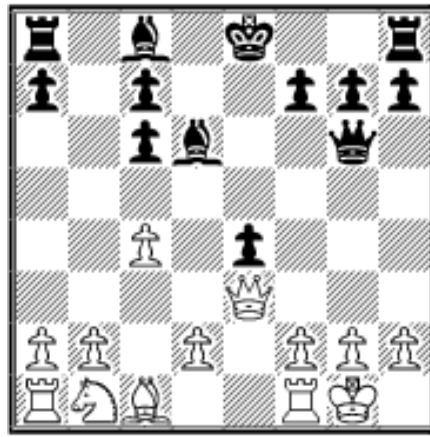
Unfortunately, Ensor also began to show himself somewhat challenged in matters of honesty. In early 1875 he submitted a set of problems to *Brownson's Chess Journal*, all with the attribution "by A. W. Ensor." A sharp-eyed reader must have noticed something amiss, since the following terse announcement subsequently appeared in April's notes from the Editor: "Ensor won't trouble us anymore with his plagiarisms."

This reprimand did not seem to trouble Ensor. Instead, he grew more daring. His *Express* column of August 30, 1875 contained a long article entitled "Chess Literature on the Origin of the Game, by A. W. Ensor" which continued over the next few weeks. He did not bother to tell his readers that the entire article had been lifted word for word from the *Atlantic Monthly* of June, 1860. Yet this pales next to his most brazen piece of literary borrowing, worth quoting in full. From the *New York Clipper*:

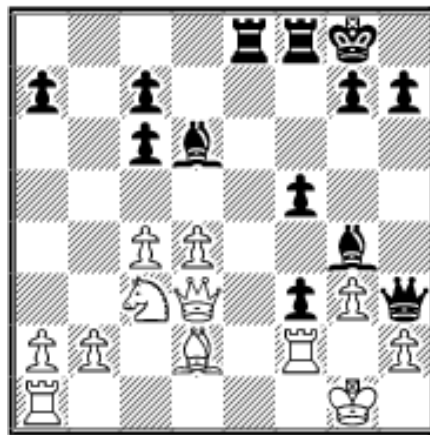
The first of two games conducted "blindfold" and simultaneously, in the Café de la Régence, Paris, by our contributor A. W. Ensor.

Herr Kolisch - A. W. Ensor (notes in italics by the editor, assisted by *Fritz8*): 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nge7 4 c3 d5 5 Nxe5 dxe4 6 Qa4 Qd5 7 Nxc6 Nxc6 8 c4 Qe6 9 Bxc6+ bxc6 10 O-O Qg6 11 Qb3 Bd6

12 Qe3



We may as well observe here as anywhere that it strikes one in perusing this game that Herr K was merely trying to satisfy himself whether our contributor could keep track of a game played in this manner. Luckily, no doubt is left, for, while the attack is tame, inefficient, and about as unlike its author as can be conceived, that of his unseeing vis-à-vis is ideal, its perfect counterpart. **12...O-O 13 d3 Bf5 14 d4 Bg4 15 Nc3 f5 16 f3?** *Better is 16 Qg5. 16...exf3 17 g3?? Of course not 17 gxf3 f4! 18 Qe4 Bf5+, but 17 Qg5 was again best. 17...Rae8 17...f4! was crushing. 18 Qd3 Qh5 19 Bd2 Qh3 20 Rf2*



20...Bxg3! 21 Raf1 Bxh2+ 22 Kh1 Bg3+ 23 Kg1 Bxf2+ 24 Rxf2 Qg3+ 0-1 (*New York Clipper*, Aug 15, 1874)

Nowadays with computer databases it is easy to discover that this is in fact Paulsen-Blackburne, Baden-Baden 1870. Back then, nobody seemed to notice.

Ensor's star only grew. In September 1875 he won a match against Thaddeus M. Brown, a somewhat eccentric composer of chess problems from upstate New York. Emboldened by his victory over the ailing and aging Brown, he next played a match in December against Eduard Alberoni, a French player then visiting America. This match did not go so well; Ensor lost 7-5. It didn't, however, stop him in his quest to be Buffalo's doyen of chess. Challenges and rumors of challenges continued to fly in the press. Judd, Elder, Thornton, and James Mason were all named as potential opponents for Ensor.

And then he got in trouble with the law again. As before, the troubles stemmed from dubious business deals with mysterious characters. With George Mason presumably out of the way, Ensor this time became entangled with a man named Edward Wiggins. He had apparently boarded in Wiggins' home, run up a substantial debt, and found himself unable to pay. Instead, he offered Wiggins a cut of the profit from the Buffalo Woolen Mat Manufactory, a business venture of Ensor's. As before, the whole arrangement soon became surrounded by confusion and landed in court, not once but twice – Ensor suing Wiggins, and Wiggins suing Ensor in return.

The *Buffalo Morning Express* rolled its eyes with the three-word headline, "That Perjury Case."

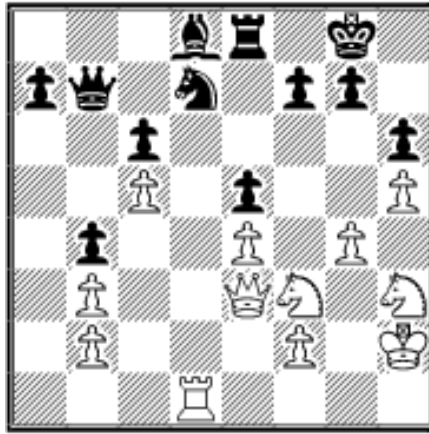
Ensor was acquitted (yet *again*, he would have said), but had outstayed his welcome in Buffalo. He next turned up in New York in the spring of 1876, spending his days at the Café International in the Bowery. This was the New World's answer to Simpson's Divan in London. Professional chess players were always on hand for a game at stakes. They had no short supply of marks from whom they could extract money. New York City was teeming with life and energy, and the Café's resident professionals thrived with it. The professionals did a busy trade, and Ensor soon attached himself to this easy source of income.



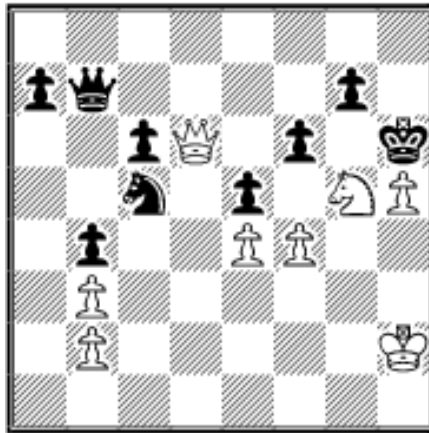
Henry Bird

From April to June of 1876, the Café sponsored a tournament which attracted many of New York's chess notables, as well as Captain George Mackenzie, then considered American champion, and the Englishman Henry Bird. Ensor placed seventh of fourteen (+11 -10 =1), but managed to beat the tournament winner Mackenzie, and Bird.

***Ensor-Bird, New York 1876* (notes by the editor, assisted by *Fritz8*): 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d3 O-O 6 Bg5 h6 7 Bh4 Be7 8 Bxf6 Bxf6 9 O-O d6 10 h3 Ne7 11 d4 Qe8 12 Nbd2 Ng6 13 dxe5 dxe5 14 Kh2 b5 15 Bd5 c6 16 Bb3 Be6 17 g3 Rd8 18 Qe2 Bc8 19 Rad1 Rd6 20 Ng1 Be6 21 Ndf3 Rxd1 22 Rxd1 Bxb3 23 axb3 Bd8 24 c4 b4 25 Qe3 Qe7 26 c5 Qb7 27 h4 Re8 28 h5 Nf8 29 Nh3 Nd7 30 g4?**



30...Be7?! 30...Nf6! should win a pawn, e.g. 31 g5?? Ng4+, or 31 Rg1 Qd7 and 32...Nxg4, or 31 Kg3 Qc8 32 Nh2 Be7 33 f3 Qa6 34 Nf2 Qb5 35 Nd3 Nd7 and the c-pawn falls, since if 36 Rc1?? Bg5—+. Now White gets a bit of an attack going. **31 g5 hxg5 32 Nhxg5 Bxg5 33 Qxg5 Nxc5 34 Rd8 Rxd8 35 Qxd8+ Kh7 36 Ng5+ Kh6 37 Qd6+?!** Ensor would have been better off with 37 Qh8+ Kxg5 38 Qxg7+ Kxh5 39 Qxe5+ Kg6 40 Qxc5. By trying for too much, he risks losing. **37...f6 38 f4?**



Objectively unsound, but psychologically tricky. Relatively best was 38 Nh3, when after 38...Nxe4 39 Qd3 f5 40 f3 Nf6 41 Qxf5 Qf7 42 Qg5+ Kh7 43 Qxe5 Qxh5, White may have enough counterplay to draw. **38...exf4?** Bird loses his way in the complications. Correct is 38...Kxh5! 39 Qxc5 fxg5 and (a) 40 Qe3 g4; (b) 40 fxe5 Qf7 41 Qe3 (not 41 Qxc6?? Qf2+ and mate soon.) 41...g4 42 Kg2 g5 and Black is winning, or (c) 40 Qxe5 Qb5 41 Qxg7 (if 41 Qxb5?? cxb5 42 fxg5 Kxg5 43 Kg3 a5

44 Kf3 a4 and Black will queen an a- or b-pawn) 41...Qe2+ 42 Kg1 Qe3+ etc and wins. **39 Qxc5 fxg5??** Falling apart completely 39...Qd7 was necessary, hoping he can use his extra pawns to outplay. White's knight in the complications after 40 Nh3 Qg4 (if 40...Qd2+ 41 Qf2 Qxf2+ 42 Nxf2 Kxh5 43 Nd3+—) 41 Qf2 f3 42 Qg3 Qxe4 43 Qf4+ Qxf4 44 Nxf4. The text allows mate in 11 at most. **40 Qf5 Kxh5 41 Qh7 1-0** It's mate next move. (*Land and Water*, June 10, 1876)

Later that year the Café hosted another tournament, the great *New York Clipper* Centennial Tournament. Many players from the earlier contest returned, among them Mason, Bird, Delmar, and Ensor. Sponsored by the city's leading sports and entertainment newspaper, the tournament received much publicity in the pages of the *Clipper*. Its chess editor did not quite expect the publicity that came when scandal erupted:

The *Clipper* tournament has just come to a conclusion, and, as usual, there is a row over it. In this case the difficulty arises with Mr. Bird, who, although he has made the best score in the tourney, has been awarded the third prize only. His score is reduced owing to certain competitors having dropped out of the contest during its progress. Delmar and Mason consequently came in before him. — *Land and Water*, Nov 4, 1876

No provision had been made in this tournament for wins by default. If a

player didn't show up for his games, they simply failed to count in the score. Mason and Delmar, therefore, had the chance to beat three tail-enders who then curiously withdrew before playing Bird. Accusations of conspiracy and cheating flew on both sides of the Atlantic. Some writers claimed a conspiracy by Americans against the British. Others denied all. The London *Land and Water* wrote:

The award of prizes in the Clipper Centennial tournament has provoked a paper war between Messrs. Delmar, Ensor, and several of those pseudonymous scribes that have always something to say on such occasions. (*Land and Water*, Nov 18, 1876)

Later, still more shady business came to light:

The origin of the difficulty has been stated – with how much truth I don't know – to be this. X, Y, and Z, having learned in some manner, early in the tourney, that A, B, and C, a trio of professionals, had made a solemn compact not to play with one another until it was ascertained which of them it was who most needed games, and that they then should govern themselves accordingly. X, Y, and Z, attempting to checkmate this, refused to play with A, B, and C until they had seen them play together, and the result was, the withdrawal of some and the dissatisfaction of many. – *Brownson's Chess Journal*, February 1877

The surprising thing about all this chicanery is that Ensor seems to have had nothing to do with it. If anything, he was a victim like Bird, since he, too, failed to play the trio of suspects, Becker, McCutcheon, and Roser. He finished in fourth place (+11 -4), behind Bird (15), Delmar (15½), and Mason (16), though he could not have caught up to third even had he played all his games. Given his checkered past one might have suspected otherwise, but perhaps Ensor's shady side ended just short of throwing games. No one will ever know, since the scandal was never resolved.

Trouble, though, continued to follow him around:

A tournament is in progress at the Café International. The bulletin states that the rules, &c, will be the same as those of the Clipper Tourney with the following exceptions, viz.: It shall be a handicap, no professionals allowed to enter, entrance fee \$2.00; parties withdrawing will have their score cancelled; prizes shall depend on the amount subscribed. A. W. Ensor, manager, Capt. McKenzie [sic], referee. Considerable dissatisfaction has been manifested with the management on the following grounds: 1st. That the manager, when applied to fix the class of an applicant desirous of entering, tells him curtly to "look at the rules," which state simply that the manager shall decide the amount of odds each person shall give or receive. 2d. That the rules do not state what portion of the receipts will be given as prizes. 3d. That after playing ten games or more the odds received by one of the

gentlemen have been reduced. Here we have the purchase of a pig in a bag. You pay your money without knowing whether the prize you aim for be \$1.00 or \$20.00, or in what class you will be placed. You are pleased – you are doing well and begin to take an interest, when lo! Your hopes are blasted by a change in the status. – *Brownson's Chess Journal*, February 1877

Things did not improve. Next month, the *Journal* reported curtly:

The “Amateur Chess Tournament” at the Café International came to a close about ten days ago, Mr. Otto Henshel was the winner. Much fault has been found with the manager, Mr. Ensor, who, it is said, is about to leave for Europe. – *Brownson's Chess Journal*, March 1877



Joseph Blackburne

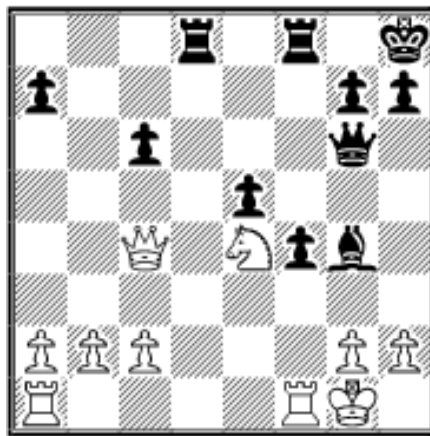
Having duly left for Europe, Ensor's next stop was London. There he seems to have fallen into the same kind of life he had led in New York. Often seen at Simpson's Divan, he must have tried to earn money there as a professional. He definitely tried to enter the circle of London's competitive elite, playing a series of games against Rev. George A. MacDonnell. This may have been a set match or only a few offhand games, and the final score is not known. The only surviving game scores are losses to MacDonnell. He also met Joseph Blackburne, whom he had impersonated in the *Clipper* three years before.

Ensor-Blackburne, London, 1877 (notes in italics by the editor, assisted by *Fritz8*): **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Bc5 5 Nb3 Bb6 6 Nc3 Nf6 7 Bg5 d6 8 Bb5 O-O 9 Nd5?!**



9...Bxf2+! An ingenious stroke that leads to a very lively game. **10 Kf1** *Of course if 10 Kxf2? Nxe4+ 11 Kg1 Qxg5. 10...Nxd5 11 Qxd5* If he had taken the queen, Black would have continued with Ne3+, etc. **11...Ne7 12 Kxf2 c6 13 Bxe7?** *Better is 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Qd4=.* **13...Qxe7 14 Bxc6 bxc6 15 Qd3** *If 15 Qxc6 Bb7. Though material is equal, the vulnerable white king practically gives Black a won game, of the sort very much to Blackburne's taste.* **15...f5 16 e5** The

advance of this pawn was necessary to avoid giving Black an open file for his rook. **16...dxe5 17 Rhe1 f4 18 Kg1 Qg5 19 Nd2 Bg4 20 Rf1 Rad8 21 Qc4+ Kh8 22 Ne4 Qg6**



23 Nf2?? This was suicidal, but we fail to see a good move for White at this juncture. *True. Less bad was 23.Rae1, but after 23...f3 24 Ng3 Rf4 25 Qc3 fxg2 26 Kxg2 Rdf8 Black is in complete control.* **23...Bf3 0-1** (*Illustrated London News, Sep 8, 1877*)

Perhaps he met too stiff an opposition at the Divan, or perhaps another of his business ventures collapsed and sent Ensor fleeing London. Within a few years, he was in New York again. By then it had been nearly a decade since he first dazzled North American chess players. He was a much older man. Years of heavy drinking and dissipated living had aged him still more. He again turned to the one thing he could do well, hoping to bring in a few pennies. But chess in New York was not what it once had been, either. Professionals were now in disgrace after their tournament-fixing shenanigans. Many had been forced out of the business once their income in the cafés dried up. Max Judd commented on this sad scene in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*:

I never saw chess so dead as it is in New York, a tourney going on, but with no interest, not even among the contestants. Ensor plays chess down stairs, giving a knight, at ten cents a game, and winning, of course, nearly every game. The players I saw him give a knight to ought to be getting a queen; and yet, after winning the game, he would point out where his opponent could have won, only so as to make the poor fool believe the next time he would do better—all for ten cents! To what uses poor chess has come! ... McKenzie [sic] used to play at odds with amateurs for twenty-five cents a game. Ten cents a game! Bah. — *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Jan. 17, 1882

Ensor eventually made enough to return to London, but his health was rapidly

failing. He died there in poverty on the 5th of October, 1883. His age was listed as forty years. The cause of death: "cirrhosis of the liver, and exhaustion." Unable to afford a private burial, he was interred in a public grave in London's West End, in the Hammersmith Cemetery. So ended Ensor's epic trail of misadventures, which stretched across oceans and continents – in a neglected, unmarked grave that has since disappeared beneath a century of creeping moss and lawn.

What, then, are we to make of Albert W. Ensor? What is the thread that runs through his short life and makes some sense of it? Ultimately, who *was* he? Ensor deceived and dissembled his way through life, yet he was not a hardened man. If anything he was faintly pathetic, forever in troubles of his own making. Yet he always seemed to have a scheme or heroic tale at hand. Maybe he chose to live his life just beyond the bounds of ethical behavior. Maybe he had psychological problems. Maybe he was too deep into the bottle for there to be any difference. After nearly three years on Ensor's trail, I myself cannot decide. The journalist who wrote, "There is certainly some mystery connected with this man which has not yet been brought to light," was more right than he could ever have known.



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