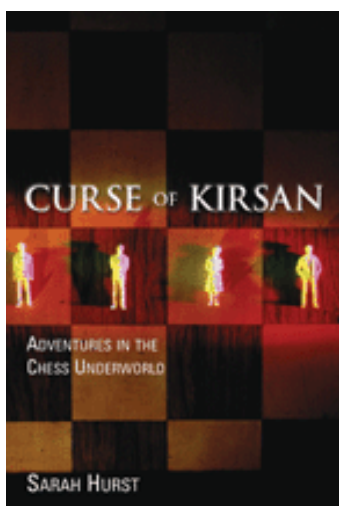


SKITTLES
ROOM

From the Archives

Hosted by
Mark Donlan

Curse of Kirsan
by Sarah Hurst

From the Archives...

Since it came online over eight years ago, ChessCafe.com has presented literally thousands of articles, reviews, columns and the like for the enjoyment of its worldwide readership. The good news is that almost all of this high quality material remains available in the [Archives](#). The bad news is that this great collection of chess literature is now so large and extensive – and growing each week – that it is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate it effectively. We decided that the occasional selection from the archives posted publicly online might be a welcomed addition to the regular fare.

Watch for an item to be posted online at least once each week, usually on Thursday or Friday. We will update the [ChessCafe](#) home page whenever there has been a “new” item posted here. We hope you enjoy *From the Archives*...

There have been many players who made an impact on the game, although they did not win any championships, nor discover or invent unique opening lines. Such a player was the British player Henry T. Buckle. According to the *Oxford Companion to Chess ...* “[h]e is usually regarded as second among English players only to Staunton during the 1840’s; Steinitz, however, regarded Buckle as the better player. In 1843 Buckle won a match against Staunton, who conceded pawn and move (+6 =1), and in 1848 he defeated Kieseritzky (+3 =3 -2). He won a knock-out tournament, London 1849, defeating Williams (+2) in the second round. In 1851 Buckle defeated Loewenthal (+4 =3 -1) and held his own in a series of friendly games against Anderssen who declared him to be the strongest player he had ever met.”

“In his youth Buckle suffered ill-health which interfered with his schooling, and on account of which he was often sent abroad to fairer climates. Nevertheless he read widely, successfully educating himself and learning to speak seven languages. His father, a merchant, died in 1840 leaving him an ample fortune. In the 1850’s Buckle largely gave up serious chess in favor of literary pursuits and began his great work, for which he is still remembered, *A History of Civilization in England*, the first two volumes of which were published in 1857 and 1861. At Damascus, on one of his many trips abroad, he contracted a fatal illness, allegedly crying as he died ‘My book! I haven’t finished my book.’”

The following account is from the July 1891 *British Chess Magazine*. Although it was written almost thirty years after Buckle’s death, it provides interesting insight into a much overlooked personality in the history of the game.

Henry Buckle Part I

by Charles Tomlinson

Henry Thomas Buckle was one of those fortunate individuals who inherit from their parents an ample fortune, and are not ruined by the bequest. On the contrary, he retained throughout a life, too brief for himself and for his country, a love of culture which after many years of patient and arduous study, culminated in the *History of Civilization*, which took the mind of England by surprise. This laborious fragment is very pleasant reading, and however much the historical critic may object to some of its conclusions, there can be no doubt as to the superiority of the style, and the wealth of knowledge, supported by superabundant evidence contained in the notes.

But it is worth while to insist upon another most remarkable fact, namely, that it is possible for a man of high literary and scientific culture to attain the first rank in chess, so that in a short match with Staunton, the only odds that great player could give to Buckle was pawn and move, and of the three games played, Buckle won two and lost one. This little match occurred some time after the remark recorded in my notice of Simpson's Divan, to the effect that Buckle had never played a match with Staunton, because he wished to retain friendly relations with him; implying thereby that he could meet Staunton on the chess field on equal terms, and hold his own, but this does not seem probable.

Buckle was born on the 24th of November, 1821, at Lee, in Kent, [England] where his parents were on a visit to his uncle. His father was a ship-owner and merchant. Soon after his birth, the family returned to their house in Mark Lane, where, as was the custom with merchants before the time of railroads, they lived; from thence they shortly afterwards removed to 35 Mecklenburgh Square, and after the death of the father to 59 Oxford Terrace.

Buckle was delicate in health as a boy, but he was so fortunate as to have a sensible physician in the person of Dr. Birkbeck, president of the London Mechanics' Institution (whose scientific lectures I had the privilege of attending in my young days). He advised that Buckle's brain, which was always active, should be employed as little as possible in book learning. He never cared for children's books and toys, and had no sympathy with boyish games. He loved to hear his mother read and explain portions out of the Bible, and he was never tired of perusing three famous books, namely Shakespeare, the Arabian knights, and Don Quixote. As he advanced in boyhood, he was sent to a day school in

Kentish Town, with instructions to the master, Dr. Holloway, that he was not to study more than he liked, and that he was never to be whipped. A delicate state of health interfered with his schooling, and private tuition was tried with no better success. The fact is that with such a mind as Buckle's, self-education was more potent than school or college. He had a remarkable facility for acquiring languages, and in his frequent travels on the Continent, he managed to acquire a

speaking knowledge of French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch, and a reading knowledge of nine others, in addition to Hebrew, Greek and Latin. He found a language master of know use to him, except for practice in conversation and pronunciation.

Buckle's father had intended him to become a partner in his firm, and made him work in the office during some months, to the young man's infinite disgust; but he afterwards admitted that he thus acquired business habits which were of use to him. After the death of his father, in 1840, he never entered the office again, but had made preparation for his great work which had some time before been conceived. Travels on the Continent, and the collecting of a large library, with many hours a day devoted to study, formed a considerable part of Buckle's life. He declares that he was economical in most things, but never grudged money for books and cigars, and his biographer laments the smallness of his income; but seeing that it was fifteen hundred a year, we think it just possible that one might live comfortably on that sum, even with a devouring taste for books and cigars. But Buckle's books were acquired much in the same manner as I have heaped together a not inconsiderable library, and I have done as Buckle did on several occasions, weeded it out for the sake of a shelf-room. Buckle picked up most of his books at book-stalls or at book sales, and some of his best purchases he enters at from one to four or five shillings; and when he got all he wished out of one set of books, he sold them to make way for another. In like manner, I once had a considerable library of chess books, but when papers in the Saturday Magazine were complete, I got rid of them for the sake of shelf room.

The reader of the *B.C.M.* will probably think that the above details are somewhat too ample for the title of this paper. I therefore pass over any further notice of the book which made Buckle famous, and conclude this part of my subject by stating that he contracted typhoid fever at Damascus, and died on the 29th May, 1862, at the early age of forty.

We are not informed as to when or how Buckle learned chess. His proficiency in that difficult game, and indeed in all games requiring mental skill in contrast to physical exertion, was the result of that singular brain-power which enabled him to master a difficult subject easily and pleasantly. He seems to have grasped the principle of the game much in the same way as it is said Des Chapelles acquired draughts and chess; that is, by merely watching the players at the cafe. It does not appear that Buckle, any more than Des Chapelles, De la Bourdonnais, Boncourt, MacDonnell, and other great players, ever opened a book on chess, or even cared to record the games that they played. Hence we have but few published games of Philidor, or the early masters; and even in the best days of the old Westminster Club, it was thought and innovation when Mr. Lewis published *Fifty Games* as specimens of modern play, but withholding the names of the players and adding no notes. So also in Mr. Cazenove's collection, published about the same time, the names of the players are not given. The same remark applies to the earlier collection by Greco. To have given the names would have been a breach of etiquette. The custom is even now partly followed when a professional player gives his own name, but not that of his amateur opponent, or gives only one or two letters of the name. The publication of names, if not introduced was promoted by Mr. George Walker, who was also

the first to make chess books cheap. Buckle shared in the carelessness of the olden time. Many of his best games are lost, and the large number that are preserved fail, I think, for the most part, adequately to represent his skill. He seems to have known little or nothing of the book openings. He generally adopted the safe Giuoco Piano, and when second player, he usually preferred an irregular defense. In giving the odds of a pawn his defense could not differ from the recognized one, at least in the early part of the game; but in giving a knight his opening was peculiar, at least in the games that I have examined.

We must not judge of Buckle as a chess-player by such Divan [odds] games, because when heavy odds are given, the superior player reckons a good deal on the inferior skill of his opponent, and indulges in combinations which he knows to be unsound. Captain Kennedy thus refers to his play: "These contests of his at odds were always full of interest and entertainment to lookers-on, and a gallery two or three deep often surrounded his board in the Strand Divan, where it was his custom in the afternoon to recreate himself with his favorite game. I have occasionally heard roars of laughter elicited from the spectators from the crest-fallen aspect of some poor discomfited rook-player, who, with much care and solicitude, having obtained as he fondly believed, an impregnable position, had suddenly found his defences scattered like chaff, and himself accommodated with a mate, after the sacrifice by his keen-witted opponent of two or three pieces in succession."

It was such a scene as above described that suggested to me the following lines on my poem on chess.

*When some young chessling wields his timid spear,
Against a mighty man of valor there,
Caissa with some members of her court
Presides, in careless mood, to see the sport;
Directs the converse that descends to chaff,
Favors a titter, scarcely checks a laugh.
Her arrowed wit and published satire strike
Foeman and friend impartially alike:
Wounds to self-love she makes her captive feel,
Wounds hard to bear and harder still to heal.*

Buckle's strong play led him into some curious adventures on the Continent. For example at Dresden, after watching some chess players in a cafe, one of them challenged him. The German played carelessly at first, but soon acquiring a taste for Buckle's quality, bestowed more attention on his game. After receiving check-mate, he got up and made a profound bow, saying "Whoever you are, you should play only with the best players." Buckle did so, and soon got a reputation in the place, but one man spread a report that refused to play with so an inferior man as Buckle, whereupon Buckle posted up a large placard challenging the man to play a single game for five hundred dollars. It is scarcely necessary to add that the challenge was not accepted. On another occasion, at Rome, while watching a game, he was invited to play for a scudo. Buckle assented. "Or perhaps a couple of scudi!" the man added. Buckle agreed. "Well,

perhaps it would make a better game if we were to play for five scudi, if you like." But the man declined, probably suspected that he had a strong player before him. When at Dublin, the owner of a bookseller's shop told him of the fame of the Dublin Chess Club, that their chess players were far superior to the Saxons, and could easily beat Staunton. Buckle consented to visit the club in company with the bookseller, and it is needless to add that he beat their best player even, and then gave odds with a similar result.



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