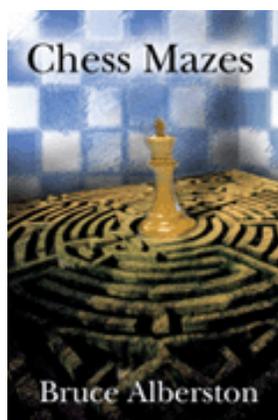




## SKITTLES ROOM

## From the Archives

Hosted by  
Mark Donlan



*Chess Mazes*  
by Bruce Alberston

## From the Archives...

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There have been many players who, although they did not win any championships, discover or invent unique opening lines, did impact upon the game. 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 Löwenthal (+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 2: Buckle as a Chess Player

Charles Tomlinson

I have obtained some of the foregoing particulars from Mr. Huth's biography (2nd edition 1880). Considering how uneventful is the life of a literary man, and Buckle's is no exception, we protest the expansion of this work into two volumes, printed on very thick paper, at the cost of thirty-two shillings. Indeed, judging from many recent specimens, biography would appear to be a lost art. Instead of looking into a man's works for his life, we have ponderous volumes of so-called biography, in which the most trifling details are set down, together with long extracts from reviews and the most unimportant letters. Whereas a neat little volume at the cost of a few shillings ought to be sufficient for the sketch of the author in his public and domestic relations, with a judicious selection from his correspondence.

But to return to our immediate subject, from which we are tempted to wander, while in search of details of Buckle's chess. I can not help remarking, that anyone who has a competent knowledge of the game, must be startled at the outrageous comments before us. We are introduced *per saltum* into the Café de la Régence, where we find young Buckle, scarcely out of his teens, playing Kieseritzky, "and even the redoubted St. Amant himself. Each of these masters gave him a Pawn, but each was beaten." This information is given in the first chapter of the book. There is much confusion of statement on the part of the biographer, who is probably not a chess player for in the *Chess Players' Chronicle* for 1843 it is stated that Kieseritzky gave Buckle the odds of QB, and St. Amant certainly have given as much, but we are not informed when or how he acquired such a mastery over the game. So much so that a few years later, that is in 1848, he is said to have played Kieseritzky even, and beaten him; while in 1851 the too partial and too sanguine biographer declares that Buckle was "entitled to the championship not only of England but of the whole world." The biographer sometimes displays a sense of uneasiness in the use of this excessive laudation. For example, after stating that Buckle "is the first to have raised history to a science" he adds, "I know well that I should be accused of the common fault of the biographer, that I have gazed upon the brightness of my hero until I can see nought else."

Now considering the very small part that Buckle took in the tournament of 1851, the above statement must be regarded as the incense offered up at the shrine of his divinity by an idolatrous biographer. Buckle consented to serve on the committee of the great chess tournament, and even he paid his entrance fee as one of the combatants for a prize; but his biographer coolly adds that he "could not give the necessary time and did not play." In the second heat however, his name was drawn by lot in conjunction with that of Löwenthal, and he consented to play, provided an exception was made in his favor, that is, instead of having to win seven games, the victory was to be declared in favor of

him who first scored four games. Whether this arrangement was quite fair to the other players we do not stop to inquire. The first game was played at St. George's Chess Club, in Cavendish Square, on the 26th July, and Löwenthal won. Buckle won the second game, and lost the third, and at the fourth after playing from two o'clock till eight, Löwenthal was too exhausted to proceed. The sitting was adjourned till next day, when Buckle won, and he also won the following game after a five hours' contest. An interval of three days now occurred, in consequence of Löwenthal's illness, and when they met again, Buckle was beaten after a nine hours' contest. They were now three to three; Buckle won the deciding game, but Mr. Huth does not mention a game that was drawn, so that the victory on the part of Buckle was but slight. The exhaustion felt by Löwenthal in such prolonged match games does not seem to have been felt by Buckle. His biographer informs us that "during these days he worked on as usual up to about one o'clock, then played his match, and afterwards, if there was time, went to the Divan. The only exception he made was after the nine hours' game, when he writes 'In bed at 11:30, but was too tired to read.'"

My limited space does not permit me to quote any of these games, as illustrative of Buckle's play; but as they are well reported in Staunton's volume on the Chess Tournament, it may suffice to refer to that work (p. 225 et seq.). The first game is admirably played by Löwenthal. Staunton who was by no means friendly towards him, admits that he "managed the attack in the most finished style." In the second game, Buckle had a mate in two moves, but did not see it, although at length he won. In the third game the editor again refers to Löwenthal's admirable play. In the fourth [see below], much purposeless manoeuvring on the part of both players is complained of, but Buckle is complimented on his skill in conducting the end game. In the fifth game, Löwenthal is evidently nervous and out of play. In the sixth, the editor remarks on Buckle's eighteenth move on the unskilful mode in which he has opened the game. In the seventh game, Löwenthal is again in not good form, and so he loses the deciding game. In the tabular statement at p. 377, a drawn game is entered, but this is not given in the report.

After going through a considerable number of Buckle's games from books that I have on my shelves, I was much struck with the dull monotony of his openings. It seems to me that chess loses much of its interest and beauty if a player, however skilful, persistently adopts a close game when defending, or only one form of play when he has the first move. Several of the editorial remarks on Buckle's reported games refer to his defective opening, such as: "We can not congratulate Mr. B. on his opening, which constrained without being secure" (Brien in C.P.C. 1854). But no sooner is the opening got over, and the middle game entered upon, than Buckle shines forth as a player of extraordinary merit. He was however, so much accustomed to play with inferior men at various odds, that his fame is to a great extent erected on these brilliant encounters. But when he plays a serious game with such accomplished strategists as Boden and Williams (whose imperturbable coolness is very different from Löwenthal's nervousness), Buckle meets with his equals in the middle and end game, and his superiors in the opening. Even with Zytorgorski, he only made a draw, at least in the single game that I have in my books between the two. Williams in his *Horae Divaniana* gives four even games,

which he played with Buckle, and won three of them. As the book is not now readily accessible, the last and best of the four games may be quoted and played over with interest.

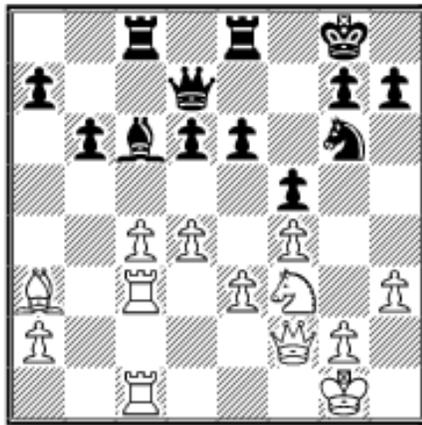
Buckle played a considerable number of off-hand skirmishes with distinguished opponents, and often won. Hence his biographer enters all these won games on the credit side of his account, and for that reason supposes him to be entitled to the championship of the world. Such a lofty position could only be earned by a man who played long and serious matches, in some cases for a high stake, as when Staunton encountered St. Amant for a hundred guineas to the winner of the first eleven games, or when Morphy for merely nominal stakes encountered several European masters of the first rank. But it is idle to compare Buckle's occasional games with those prolonged and serious matches. We are willing to admit the great merit of Buckle as a skilful and original master of the game; but as he often stated, he practised chess merely as an amusement, and objected to matches as taking more out of him than he was willing to give to any such "frivolous triumph"; but he always loved the game, and continued during some years to visit the Divan at least twice a week. Here he became so absorbed as to forget aught else. We are informed that on one occasion he forgot a dinner engagement. In his letter of apology to the hostess next day (19th January, 1856) he says: "I went out in the afternoon to enjoy myself, which I accomplished by playing chess for seven hours, and difficult games too." It was on the occasions as these that he played the off-hand games above referred to; and among a number of such games, played with so great a master as Anderssen, he may have won the odd game, but this does not place him in the first rank which his biographer claims for him, namely as a greater player than the champion player of the '51 Tournament.

On the occasion that Buckle was at Margate, he was informed by letter of some review of one of his works, and he replied: "I have not thought it worth while to buy the Review, and shall wait till I can read it in town for nothing – which is about the value of most criticisms." Should anyone of the chess masters of the present day estimate my critical remarks on Buckle as a chess player at a similar rate, I will submit, but at the same time shall be glad to learn his reasons why. And now, taking leave of Buckle I will apply to him the words which the celebrated Bayle applied to Greco: "He played at chess so skilfully that it cannot be thought strange that I consecrate to him a little article. All those who excel in their profession to a certain degree, deserve that distinction."

### *Löwenthal-Buckle*

Match 1851, Game Four

**1 d4 e6 2 c4 Bb4 3 Nc3 Bc3 4 bc3 f5 5 e3 Nc6 6 Nf3 Nf6 7 Bd3 b6 8 O-O Bb7  
9 h3 O-O 10 Ba3 Ne7 11 Rb1 Re8 12 c5 Ng6 13 Qe2 Ne4 14 Be4 Be4 15 Rb3  
Qf6 16 Nd2 Bd5 17 c4 Bb7 18 Bb2 Qg5 19 f4 Qe7 20 Qf2 Bc6 21 Ba3 d6 22  
cd6 cd6 23 Nf3 Qc7 24 Rc1 Qd7 25 Rbc3 Rac8**



26 Nd2 Bb7 27 Nf3 Rc7 28 Nd2 Rec8 29  
Bb2 Ne7 30 Kh2 b5 31 cb5 Rc3 32 Bc3  
Nd5 33 Bb2 Rc1 34 Bc1 Qb5 35 Nf3 Nc3  
36 Ng5 Qd5 37 a3 h6 38 Nf3 a5 39 Qc2  
Ne4 40 h4 Bc6 41 Bd2 a4 42 Bb4 Nf6 43  
Bd2 Qb5 44 Bc1 Bf3 45 gf3 Qf1 46 d5 Qf3  
47 de6 Ne4 48 Qg2 Qh5 49 Kh3 g5 50 fg5  
hg5 51 Kh2 g4 52 Qc2 Qh4 53 Kg2 Qg3  
54 Kf1 Qf3 55 Ke1 Qh1 56 Ke2 Qg2 57  
Kd3 Qc2 58 Kc2 g3 0-1



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