

Who was R.J. Buckley?

Edward Winter

(2004)

From the entry on G.H.D. Gossip in *The Oxford Companion to Chess*

'He had an unusual talent for making enemies. In his later years Steinitz had the same problem but claimed at the end of his life that he had six chess friends. Gossip had none.'

The grounds for the statement about Gossip are unknown to us, but the other remark seems to be based on R.J. Buckley's reminiscences about Steinitz referred to in our [Chess with Violence](#) article:

'We never quarrelled. Colonel Showalter [at the London, 1899 tournament] said that he and I were the only exempts. To which Steinitz replied, "No, there are four more, six altogether. From any one of those six I would accept a cigar, and from none other".'

This was one of three chess articles by Buckley that were to have a particular impact. Another concerned the 1910 Lasker v Schlechter match, the terms of which are an unsolved and probably insoluble mystery. One aspect of the controversy is whether the world championship title was at stake. David Hooper stated on pages 183-184 of the March 1976 *CHESS* that he did not believe so, and one of his paragraphs read:

'The *American Chess Bulletin* 1910, page 155 writes: "the champion agreed to play a series of games, but it was expressly stipulated that the result was not to touch the title". I have almost a complete run of this magazine, which Lasker read, and on all other occasions when a comment was published which in any way touched his honour he replied at once: yet on this one occasion he made no comment at all.'

David Hooper was referring to an article by Buckley on pages 155-156 of the June 1910 *American Chess Bulletin*, but the above-quoted reference to Lasker leaves us flummoxed because a rebuttal by the then world champion was reported within the article itself. [See C.N. 3252 below.] The full text of the relevant passage from Buckley's article, with the *Bulletin* Editor's interjection, is as follows:

'The result of the late match points to a contest on different terms, a match for the world championship. The ten games lately played constituted a sort of match, but the object was not the settlement of the championship, as many have supposed. If Schlechter had won all the games, Lasker would still have been titular world champion. The champion agreed to play a series of games, but it was expressly stipulated that the result was not to touch the title.'

This consideration affects opinion of the result.

(In reply to a query on board the SS *Vasari* , on 20 May, Dr Lasker, southward bound, said, "Yes, I placed the title at stake"; thereby confirming our understanding of the matter. Notwithstanding this, we can well believe that, owing to the unusual circumstances of the match, many people would have continued to regard Dr Lasker as champion, even had he lost that final game. Ed., *ACB* .)'

The biggest stir caused by an article of Buckley's came after the death of James Mason in 1905. Buckley wrote in his *Birmingham Weekly Mercury* column:

'And here I may tell the world something which has not before been hinted, either in print or, so far as I know, in any other way. James Mason's true name was neither James nor Mason. His real name was confided to me years ago, as it were, *sub sigillo confessionis* .'

For further details see page 191 of the April 1905 *American Chess Bulletin* , page 11 of *Lasker's Chess Magazine* , May 1905 and C.N. 1673. An extensive article by Jim Hayes was published on pages 10-15 of the March 1997 *CHESS* .



Robert John Buckley

The contribution to chess literature of Robert John Buckley (who was born in Ireland in 1847) essentially amounted to his articles for the local press, which occasionally reached a wider audience. 'Robert J. Buckley – Chess Philosopher' was the heading of a three-page spread in the March 1907 *American Chess Bulletin* (pages 52-54), introduced as follows:

'When in philosophical humor, a mood that is apt to become habitual when long indulged in – Robert J. Buckley, to whom the *Birmingham Illustrated Weekly Mercury* is indebted for regular contributions on chess, is one of the most entertaining writers known to the royal game. Thanks to a ripe experience which dates back to the time of Zukertort and McDonnell [*sic*], not to mention a genius for presenting

his logic in a clear-cut and convincing style, his musings, set in choicest English, are at once instructive and thought-compelling.'

Below are two excerpts from the Buckley material presented by the *Bulletin* :

'The greatest players are those who to great accuracy add great imagination. Blackburne at his best was more imaginative than accurate. He out-imagined the strongest players by the score. Steinitz was highly imaginative and also accurate. So is Dr Lasker. So was Morphy. Though a mathematician, Anderssen's imagination was, perhaps, slightly in excess of his accuracy. The accuracy of Dr Tarrasch is his strong suit; of imagination one discovers hardly a chemical trace.'

'Morphy was a revelation. Steinitz was a revolution. Lasker is an advance on Steinitz. He borrows from all and imitates none. Having assimilated the best of all the schools, he produces something unlike any; in our opinion, fundamentally superior to any.'

A characteristic specimen of Buckley's light reportage was written during the Lasker v Blackburne match in London in 1892 for the *Birmingham Mercury* and was subsequently reproduced on pages 115-116 of *The Chess Bouquet* by F.R. Gittins (London, 1897). Below is an extract:

'The great match was postponed for three days, owing to Blackburne's indisposition, and we were at the British Chess Club on the faith of an announcement made on Monday morning that play would begin at 2.30 precisely. We arrived at midday, and were considerably taken aback at the unexpected news.

But we immediately adjourned to Simpson's Divan, and there received a very hearty welcome. The Grand Old Man beamed radiantly, and all creation smiled. Lasker relaxed his disappointed look, and for the moment seemed consoled. Van Vliet stretched forth the fellowshipial hand. F.J. Lee looked as if he might be happy yet. Even Jasnogrodsky seemed pleased, and for a moment the settled melancholy which is supposed to arise from the burden of his name was chased away. Tinsley smiled the broadest, but then he learned his manners in the country, where people are too unsophisticated to conceal their joy.

It was indeed a memorable moment. Loman was deeply engaged in the Handicap Tourney, but even he found time to bestow a greeting on your humble representative. James Mason emerged from a dark and remote corner, where he hides from the light of day, and engaged us in animated conversation. Müller, who has foresworn chess and has determined to become a millionaire in some other way, warmly gripped the editorial fin. It was clear that something ought to be done. We challenged Lasker, offering to concede to him the odds of the rook. He declined the gage of battle. Perhaps this was best. We have no desire to ruin the reputation of the young. He may have wanted the queen. Mr Bird rushed into the breach and, lifting the gauntlet, cast defiance at our head. The metaphor is not so mixed as we could wish, but no matter.'

Later in the article Buckley wrote concerning one of his skirmishes with Bird, 'The next game was a Muzio, in which we sacrificed several pieces, emerging with an excellent position, but no men'.

Mason's *Social Chess*

(London, 1900) presented three games won

by Buckley, without dates, venues or opponents' names:

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 Nc3 e5 4 Bc4 Nc6 5 d3 Nge7 6 Bg5 Bg4 7 Nd5 Nd4 8 Nxe5 Bxd1 9 Nf6+ gxf6 10 Bxf7 mate. (This game is normally said to have been won by H.T. Buckle in 1840. At which stage confusion may have arisen between the names Buckle and Buckley has yet to be learned.)

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3 g5 4 h4 g4 5 Ng5 h6 6 Nxf7 Kxf7 7 d4 d5 8 Bxf4 Bg7 9 Nc3 dxe4 10 Bc4+ Be6 11 d5 Bf5 12 d6+ Be6 13 Bxe6+ Kxe6 and White announced mate in four moves (14 Qd5+ Kf6 15 Nxe4+ Kg6 16 h5+ Kh7 17 Qf5). (One of 15 games played simultaneously, according to Mason's book.)

1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 f4 exf4 4 Nf3 g5 5 h4 g4 6 Ng5 h5 7 d4 f6 8 Bxf4 fxe5 9 Bxe5 Be7 10 Nd5 Bxe5 11 hxe5 Nge7 12 Nf6+ Kf8 13 d5 Ne5 14 d6 cxd6 15 Qxd6 Nc6 16 Nd5 Rh7 17 Bc4 Na5 18 O-O + Kg8 19 Nxe7+ Kh8 20 Qf6+ Rg7 21 Qh6+ Rh7 22 Ng6 mate. [In C.N. 3743 Alan Smith (Manchester, England) reported that Buckley published the game in the *Manchester City News* of 30 May 1908, where he specified that it was played at Simpson's Divan in London 'sometime in the 1880s' in a match against an Austrian player named Ott which Buckley won 6-0.]



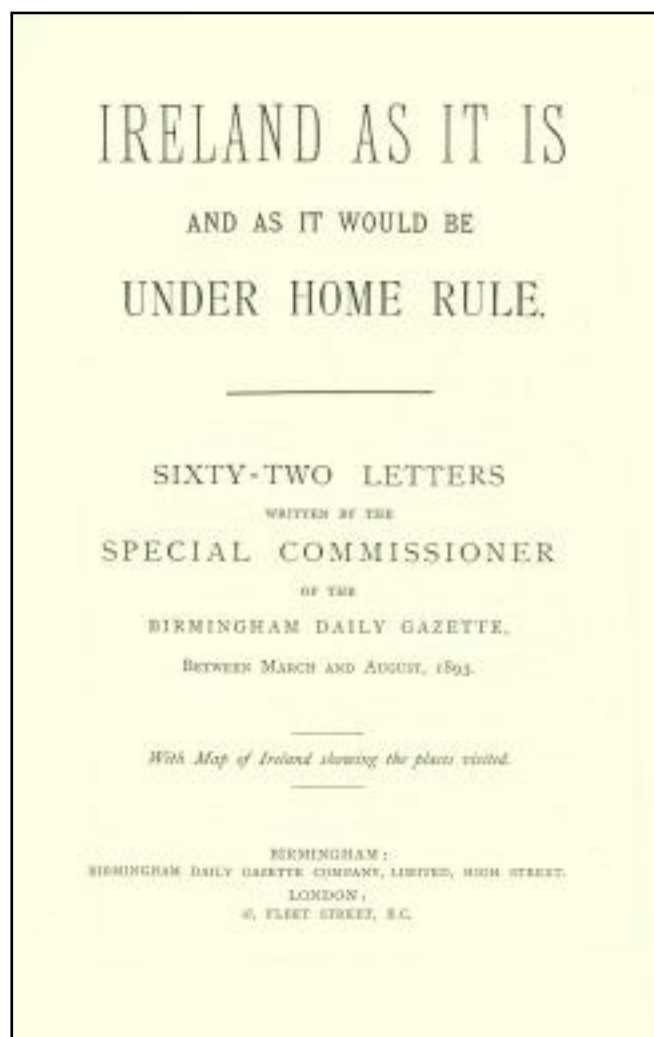
Robert John Buckley

Buckley wrote on many subjects apart from chess. *The Chess Bouquet* observed:

'... perhaps his greatest work is *Ireland as it is and as it would be under Home Rule* (*Birmingham Daily Gazette* 5s).

In 1893, when the Home Rule question was agitating the minds of millions of British subjects, Mr Buckley, heedless of personal danger, visited the various scenes of the conflict, and in a brilliant series of 62 letters completely demolished Mr Gladstone's pet project ...'

The title page did not name Buckley as the author, merely referring to 'the Special Commissioner of the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* although the three-page Preface was signed 'R.J.B'.



Another great interest of Buckley's was music, and in 1904 he wrote a biography of Sir Edward Elgar, whom he knew personally. From page 29:

'It was in the "Black Knight" period [i.e. circa 1893] that I first visited the composer at "Forli", a charming cottage under the shadow of the Malvern Hills ...'

Living Masters of Music

SIR EDWARD ELGAR



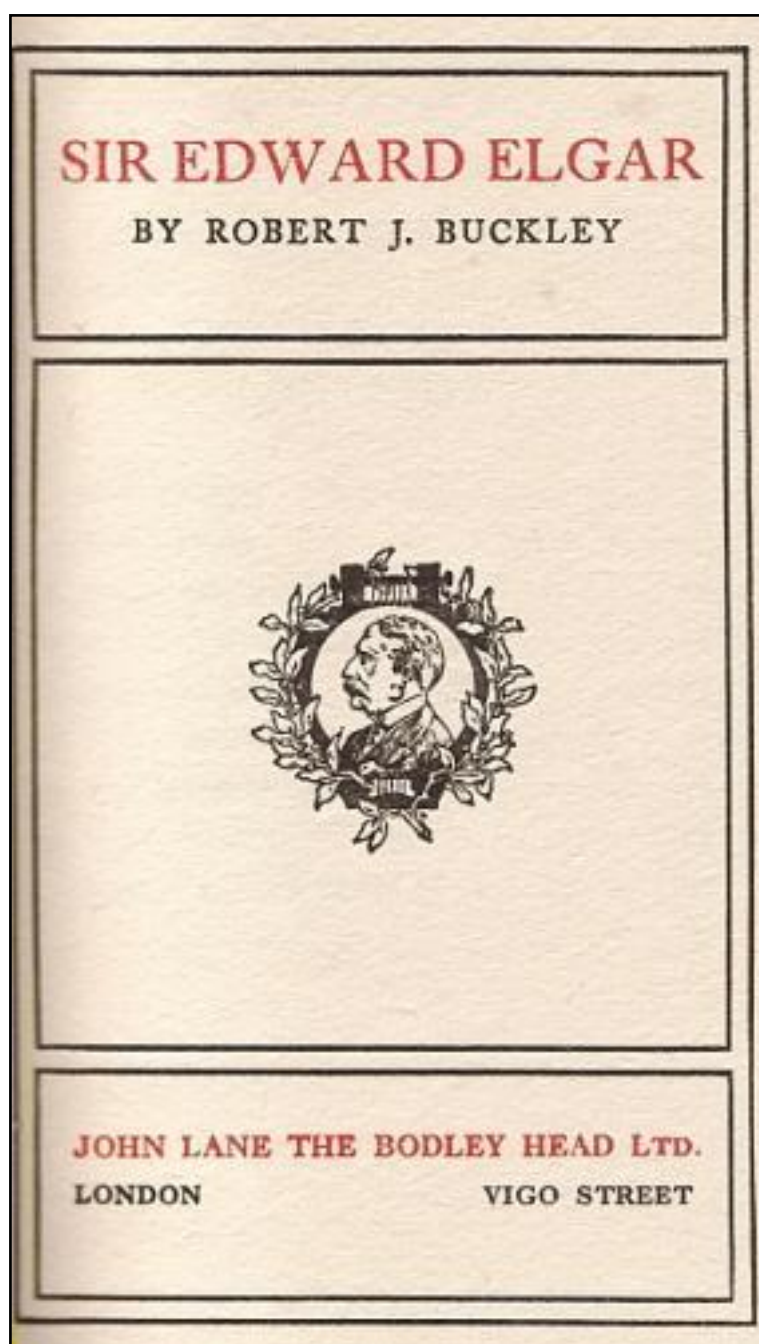
R. J. BUCKLEY

Living Masters of Music

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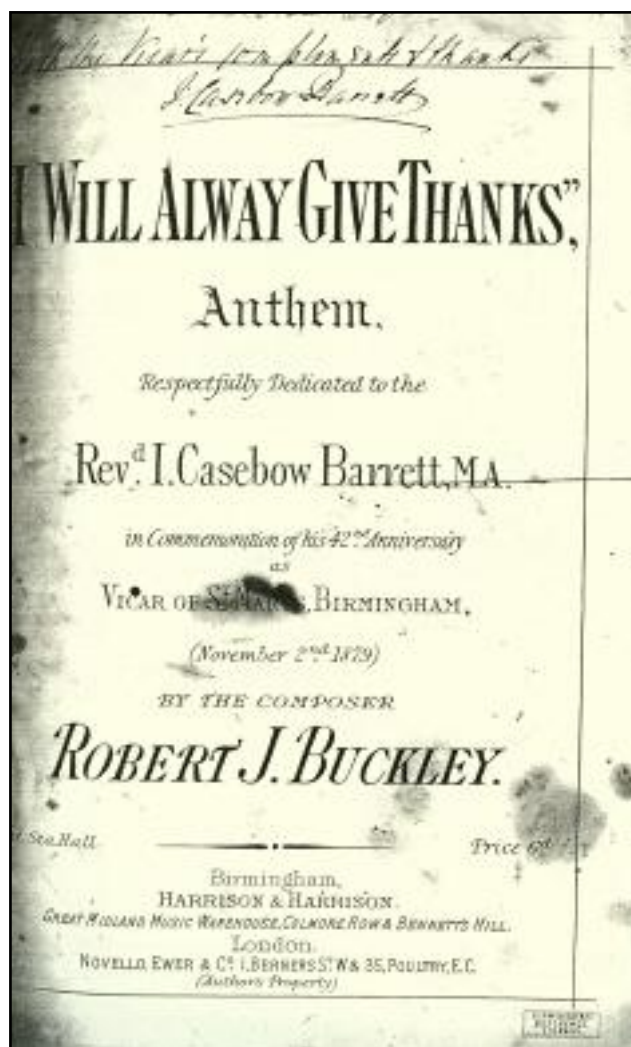
His chess writing continued but was seldom seen beyond local newspapers, an exception being an article entitled 'Blackburne and Winawer' on pages 43-44 of the February 1923 *American Chess Bulletin*

The *Evening Despatch*

of 24 August 1935 reported:

'Now Mr Buckley, who retired from active work in 1926, and has continued the "Arley Lanes" [his non-musical writings] mainly as a means of keeping in touch with the papers he has served during the greater part of his life, feels that in his 89th year he must break this last thread.

A severe fall some months ago placed him under doctor's orders, and it is considered advisable that in future he should devote himself entirely to the books and music which still form his principal interests.'



A very rare mention of him in the *BCM* came on page 417 of the August 1937 issue:

'Information having been received at the Blackpool Chess Congress that Robert J. Buckley, of Moseley, Birmingham, would be 90 years of age on 14 July, and, in consequence, a birthday greeting card signed by one or two officials and others was sent to him. Years ago Mr Buckley was particularly well known. He was, for a very long period, chess editor of the *Manchester City News*, and interested in chess in various ways.'

As far as we are aware, no chess periodical recorded Buckley's subsequent demise. The *Birmingham Gazette* of 27 December 1938 reported under the heading 'Doyen of Music Critics – Death of Mr R.J. Buckley':

'The *Birmingham Gazette* regrets to announce the death, which occurred at 43 Sandford-road, Moseley, of Mr Robert John Buckley, FRCO, for 40 years music critic of the *Birmingham Gazette* and associated papers and, at the time of his retirement from that position in 1926, doyen of the music critics of England.

Mr Buckley had been in ailing health for some time.

Mr Buckley, who was born on 14 July 1847 at Monaghan, Ireland, was brought to England in

infancy, and spent his childhood at Abbot's Bromley, Staffordshire. A self-taught organist – it was his boast that, though a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists and a leading authority on harmony, counterpoint and fugue, he had never had a lesson in his life – he came to Smethwick in 1878 as church organist, later going to Harborne ...

...In 1893 Mr Buckley was sent to Ireland as special correspondent of the *Gazette* during the Gladstone Home Rule troubles. The brilliant series of articles he sent back during six months, and which powerfully influenced national politics, made his reputation.

...He was also a prolific contributor of special articles to newspapers all over the country and conducted chess columns at various times in Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield and Liverpool journals.

In 1933, his resignation from the chess editorship of the *Manchester City News* was signalized by a presentation from solvers of many years' standing – many of whom had never met Mr Buckley in person.

In addition, he was the author of a volume of short stories, three novels and the first – and still standard – life of Sir Edward Elgar, who was an intimate personal friend.'

DOYEN OF MUSIC CRITICS

Death of Mr. R. J. Buckley

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SELF-TAUGHT ORGANIST.

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It was in 1887 that a casual conversation on church matters with Mr. Buckley led the then Editor of the *Birmingham Gazette* to suggest a short series of articles on various popular preachers of the day.

The series thus begun under the title of "Pulpit and Pew" ran in the weekly (now the Sunday) *Mercury* for 21 years; unbroken save when, in 1888

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Our item above on Robert J. Buckley did, by omission, an injustice to Louis Blair, as we had forgotten that in an October 1989 letter to us he pointed out the discrepancy (to use no stronger word) between the *American Chess*

Bulletin

CHESS

BCM

's 1910 item and David Hooper's reference to it in (1976). Mr Blair also discussed the matter in an article entitled 'The Lasker-Schlechter match: a new look at the published evidence' on pages 48-55 of the February 1990



Robert John Buckley

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