

One hundred and fifty years ago (on 8th May 1836) there appeared in the old sporting paper "Bell's Life in London" what was probably the first review of a new chess publication ever to be written. The reviewer was that racy chess editor George Walker, once described as "the reprobate of a pompous chess era":- "We have just received the first number of "Le Palamède", a new French monthly magazine devoted to chess - editors La Bourdonnais and Méry. The plan of the work is at present better than the execution, but being young there's time to improve. The style is too stilted - too much of the "roaring boy" and the "I and Jupiter", but this will rub down. The editors play fast and loose between jest and earnest - they give us an anecdote of Deschapelles playing the Club at Berlin which we hope is not true, otherwise it depicts conduct so stupidly vulgar on the part of the Frenchman that the Prussians ought to have done themselves justice by pumping on him. Dull as we are from our beef and pudding in this tight little island, we will grant that Deschapelles can give us pawn and two when we have seen it done. With all that gent's talk about advancing chess by "de belles parties" his exertions in this respect have hitherto been remarkably quiescent. Where is his treatise on chess? Where are his brilliant games, played by himself? Alas, to these queries it seems that only one answer can be given - THERE ARE NONE!"

A still more trenchant review by Walker was published in 1848, when he uncovered, much to his own delight, a mild chess "Watergate" which involved his arch-enemy and rival author, William Lewis. A new chess book appeared purportedly written by "Carl Frederick Vogt", a mysterious German who had never been heard of before, and translated into English by another literary "newcomer", Mr U. Ewell. The book discussed extensively the relative merits of various authors on the game from Lucena onwards, and particular praise was awarded to William Lewis. But alas, it turned out not only that Herr Vogt was a "Herr" in nubibus, but that Mr Ewell had achieved a transformation of identity which Dr Jekyll would have envied:-

"U. Ewell - You You Ell - Double You Ell - W.L. - W. Lewis!"

Walker recommended the book as follows:- "Under the title "Letters on Chess" conveying pleasing promise of matter at least original we have been duped into buying a four-shilling volume, or rather pamphlet, of 134 widely printed pages, purporting to be translated by one Mr Ewell, from the German of one Mr Vogt, and to treat of the merits of authors on the game. The writer might have been Shem in the Ark addressing Japhet, considering that he knows nothing of any writer on chess since 1828, save Lewis. From this and various other indications it is more than probable that the book is the production of Mr Lewis himself, particularly as his great name is emblazoned gloriously in the Lewis style on every page, and it has long been notorious that Mr Lewis is unhappily ignorant of the existence of any author since his own epoch - the year One. Four shillings is the price of this ponderous and solemn trash - at four penn'orth of bad coppers the stuff would have been equally "a sell"."

Lewis never acknowledged the work was his, though it was produced by his own publishers. But setting aside the "Lewis laudation", it was by no means such "trash" as Walker made out. John Keeble once showed the BM a letter he had received from H.J.R. Murray, who wrote: "The review does not increase one's opinion of Walker, and is equal to Staunton at his worst".