

# LETTER

FROM

## MR. G. WALKER TO THE EDITOR OF BELL'S LIFE.

*Extract from Bell's Life in London, of February, 1844.*

“MR. EDITOR,—I am called upon unexpectedly to defend myself as a Chess author against a charge preferred against me by Mr. Lewis, in his new Treatise on Chess, just published; which charge, it seems, has been brewing eleven years and in answer to which no medium of publicity presents itself equally suitable for my reply as your journal. I at once give Mr. Lewis's ‘bill of griefs’ in full. He says—

“‘I cannot close this preface without noticing the conduct of Mr. George Walker, in his ‘Treatise on Chess,’ published in 1833, and again in 1841. Long after the publication of the former edition I was informed by a friend, that Mr. W. had been guilty of a wholesale — what shall I call it? — appropriation of many pages of original matter from my ‘Second Series of Lessons,’ published in 1832. I found, on examination, to my great surprise and regret, that Mr. W., who on all occasions has vehemently (though not always justly) exclaimed against the practice of *plundering* from others without acknowledgment, had himself, without permission from me, or any avowal on his part, copied from my work what *he* well knew was alone my property, and this not a move or two to criticise or comment on, but whole pages. This is no doubt an *easy* way of obtaining reputation as a chess writer, but probably few persons would be found to follow Mr. W.'s example in this particular. In the last edition of Mr. W.'s book, whether from a returning sense of propriety or from some friendly hint, he says in his preface, after mentioning my name, that he has not hesitated to avail himself occasionally of my labours, ‘*feeling that to shrink from naming a contemporary author is equally contemptible as ridiculous;*’ he also states that he holds ‘*such borrowing to be perfectly legitimate, when the avowal of obligation is openly proclaimed;*’ but Mr. W. need not surely be reminded, that where there is a borrower there must also be a lender; and that before making use of another person's property, it is indispensable to obtain the consent of the owner. I am not aware that I have myself taken any *original* matter from Mr. W.'s book; if I have so done, it has been from inadvertence, for which I beg his and my readers' pardon. Whether Mr. Walker will have the manliness to confess that he has done wrong, and is sorry for it, is a matter that concerns himself, but is of no importance to me.’

“I must necessarily answer this ‘railing accusation’ at some length. Mr. L. now first charges me with taking from him certain original chess matter eleven years ago; having himself declared in print, that no chess writer can make a book but by borrowing from former authors—that his own works are thus compiled—that in my last edition I acknowledge the obligation—and Mr. L. having himself remained with me for years after the alleged offence on terms of intimate personal acquaintance. With respect to the ‘friend's’ first enlightening him, presentation copies of my book were sent on its first publication to Mr. L. and many other chess players.

"The following paragraph, oddly enough, immediately precedes the attack upon me in Mr. L.'s preface. Could the two have come from the same pen?—

"I have availed myself largely of the labours of former writers, without which it were in vain to attempt writing a work on chess; but I have not thought it necessary to state, on all occasions, from whom this or that variation or move has been taken. The works of all the best authors have been consulted," &c.

"And in the preface to the book I am accused of taking from, in 1832, Mr. L. says—

"In writing a work on Chess, the greatest part of it must of necessity be taken from other authors; I have accordingly selected from them what I have thought would be useful to my readers \* \* \* \* \* Should the reader, therefore, meet with any thing in this volume particularly excellent, he will generally be right in supposing it derived from other writers."

"In the introduction to the last edition of my own treatise, I have dwelt at greater length on the same theme. In the preface to the book of which Mr. Lewis complains, I say, 'The author flatters himself that in comparing the boldness of Greco with the certainty of Lollé—the genius of Salvio with the science of Ponziani—and the fine play of Philidor with the skilful accuracy of Lewis—he has been enabled to present the student with much of the varied excellence of those writers, without in the slightest degree endangering his proper claim to the merit of originality.' And again: 'High praise be given to the translations of Mr. Lewis, to whom British amateurs are justly and deeply indebted for his strenuous and varied efforts to promote the cause.' In fact, in that little book of 160 pages, I quote Mr. L.'s name six several times, giving besides, the title of his work at full length; while—in my last edition, being a larger volume, I name Mr. L. as an author about twenty different times, exclusive of the complete list of his chess works published in my bibliographical catalogue. Is Mr. L. equally liberal? Let the public judge between us.

"From the present attack I gather one remarkable fact, that Mr. Lewis at length recognises my existence as a chess writer, this being the very first time he has ever quoted 'George Walker' at all! Two other chess names yet exist, not deemed, I presume, by Mr. L. of sufficient importance to be placed on his records; at least, I have turned over the leaves of his new eighteen-shilling book, page by page, and find neither of these authors once noticed. Their names are *only* M'Donnell and De la Bourdonnais! To the former we are indebted for several new modes of playing the Bishop's, the Muzio, and the Evans Gambit, all given in my own work; while to De la Bourdonnais we owe the best methods of defence in the Evans Game and Bishop's Gambit. In stating this fact, I impute no blame to Mr. Lewis. There is no Act of Parliament compelling one author to notice another. True, most other chess writers of the day, as Calvi, St. Amant, Jaenisch, Von Der Lava, and myself, act as if we considered ourselves bound by moral right to notice and praise the exertions of fellow-labourers in the vineyard. Possibly our conduct in this respect is wrong; at least, it is not sanctioned by Mr. Lewis. I bow to his experience. Mr. L. adopts the 'silent system' upon principle, and his so doing may be called mere matter of taste. So in the case of the fifty games, printed in his book of 1832, and there named to have been played partly by him and partly by different players, no names having been affixed to any of them, Mr. L.'s printer now commits the mistake, of course without Mr. L.'s sanction, of uniformly announcing them in Mr. Lewis's advertisements, as '*Fifty Games of Chess, played between the author and some of the best players in Europe.*' Several of those fifty games were given to Mr. L. by me; as for instance, the ninth, played by M'Donnell and Popert; the tenth, won by M'Donnell of Mr. Slous; and the thirty-fourth, won by Capt. Evans of M'Donnell. The thirtieth was won by Capt. Evans of Mr. Brandreth, &c.

"Having now, after a fortnight's search in the London book-shops, procured a copy of my humble second edition, I have carefully looked through it, and find Mr. Lewis's charge possibly attaches to certain variations of the Cochrane Gambit, all of which are now nearly useless, because superseded by a stronger mode of play since discovered. I beg of the chess world to examine for themselves; to compare the books together, and not be content with forming a silent opinion, but to say openly whether I did more than strict right would warrant, favour being altogether out of the question. In Mr. L.'s new work

he uses nearly the whole volume of Ghulam Kassim, and borrows largely from Major Jaenisch. He is quite right in so doing, as he has quoted their names, but did he ask *their permission?* or *obtain their consent?*

"I must here state a curious fact connected with Mr. L.'s very book of 1832, from which he complains I borrowed. Just before that work was issued to the public, Mr. L. put into my hands some of its latter proof-sheets. Several important errors struck me, but he was too late to correct the work then at press. This being the case, and Mr. Lewis asking the favour of my assistance, I was furnished by him with what printers term 'clean sheets,' and actually gave the leisure of several weeks to going through the whole minutely, returning each sheet as finished, to Mr. L., and trying over with him my criticisms on the chess-board. I do not pretend to say I supplied any original matter, but certainly in many places I solved mates of seven or eight moves in three or four, forced checkmate when the direction merely was to win queen, and made good a vast number of similar imperfections. Not a few of the checkmates in the Cochrane Gambit itself were thus supplied by me. My task being performed, Mr. Lewis made sundry cancellings in the printed work, corrected the errors, and, substituting a fresh title-page, brought it out as a second edition; but, upon his system, forgot to acknowledge my help in the preface. Such chess amateurs as have the two editions, will, on comparing them, at once discover what was the value and extent of my labour upon this occasion.

"Reflection convinces me that Mr. Lewis's present attack rests in reality on far other grounds than those assigned. He appears, indeed, I fancy originally to have considered chess writing as a 'snug little farm' within a ring fence, exclusively his own property, and not to be invaded by foot of other man. Such delusion is not uncommon. Have my books entrenched on this would-be monopoly? Is this the real offence?

"When I printed my 'Chess Treatise' in 1832, at three shillings, and in 1833 at five, the sole competing work being Mr. Lewis's at two pounds, I considered I had opened up new ground, and could in no respect interfere with Mr. L.; yet he speedily started in opposition with a five-shilling book, called 'Chess for Beginners.' Not liking to be cut out in my own road, I put on 'Chess made Easy,' in 1837, at three and sixpence, when Mr. L. directly answered with an abridged edition of 'Chess for Beginners,' at half-a-crown, under the title of 'Chess-Board Companion.' Here I gave in, for it was clear that if I carried on the war with 'Chess for the Masses,' at a single shilling, my competitor would rejoin with a sixpenny 'Chess for the Million.' Mr. Lewis has just published a first book again, called 'Lessons' at seven shillings, and the 'Treatise' at eighteen; in fact, he continues printing the same matter over and over again, in different sizes to suit all customers. I cheerfully admit his books have one advantage over mine, they are larger.

"When we see books lowered to half price to clear off heavy remainders, it is fair to suppose they are unsuccessful. Mr. Lewis probably feels sore on this point, but is it quite sane to vent his wrath upon me? The plan of charging subscribers twice the price at which the public are afterwards admitted, may not find general favour, though of course Mr. L. has a right to 'do as he likes with his own.' Mr. Lewis's 'Lessons on Chess' came out at 40s., and the prospectus assured subscribers, that the public would be charged three pounds; but, instead of this, doubtless in pure philanthropy, the whole was lowered to twenty shillings, with Edinburgh, &c., were all kindly cut down to 10s., Greco, Match Games cost. Judging from the past, one would, therefore, hesitate to pay eighteen shillings for the 'New Treatise'; the chances being, that by waiting six months it may fall at least to nine. Many persons consider a prospectus to be a pledge. Singular opinions of all sorts prevail in the world. In the prospectus of the present work, Mr. Lewis offers 'A New Treatise on Chess,' and promises subscribers that it shall include '*the best method of playing Pawns at the end of the game, and a more copious analysis of the Checkmate of Rook and Bishop against a Rook than has hitherto been published.*' The work also was to be complete in five or six parts, forming one octavo of about 500 pages. The volume is now issued at eighteen shillings; but when we look for Pawn play, ends of games, and the war of Rook and Bishop, we find only a statement, that Mr. Lewis has been obliged to omit all

this, and intends publishing it as a supplementary volume. Possibly, however, the said supplement will not exceed half-a-guinea, and who regards now that obsolete coin?

"I fear, Mr. Editor, to trespass on your patience by saying more, and deeply regret I could not say less. At the same time, I must respectfully apologise to the British circle of chess players for thus intruding myself upon their notice. My 'Treatise on Chess' will be reprinted in an enlarged form, probably next year, and will include this letter, with such other remarks on the subject as I may consider it necessary to append. Meantime, I have the honour to be, Mr. Editor, your obedient servant,

"GEORGE WALKER,

"Author of various works on Chess."

"17, Soho-square, London,  
January, 1844."

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*Note, May, 1846.* The foregoing letter was written by me after fewer days' reflection, than the provocation had cost Mr. Lewis years. It has never been replied to. On coolly reviewing the case, I think I was perhaps wrong to notice in so many words an attack so evidently contemptible, thus "answering a fool according to his folly." But, after all, Mr. Lewis in private life is a gentleman, and therefore his charge, however stupid, is not to be met absolutely with the silence of scorn, lest a good-natured world be led to believe it ever had the slightest foundation. If assaulted by a man of character, we are bound to defend our honour "*à l'outrance*." If jostled in the street by a scavenger, we quietly give him the wall, and leave him alone in the glories of stench and filthiness. Through life, my treatment of all forms of printed attack has been, and will be, based upon this system. I regret Mr. Lewis should have thus committed himself. Personally, I can bear him no ill will for having forgotten the old proverb, that "those who live in a glass-house should not throw stones." His "Elements of Chess," taken almost to a word from "Von Nieveld's *La Supériorité*," &c.; his "Oriental Chess," concocted upon terms of equal cheapness from its Indian composer, "Trevangd-charya;" and other grave cases of mystification as to real authorship, have marked through life the chess-track of Mr. Lewis. Comparison with the works quoted will prove this. Mr. Lewis virtuously disclaims borrowing from me. For the sake of his twenty-seven readers (and a boy), it is to be regretted he has not done so. They would have had a better book.

G. W.