



C O L U M N I S T S

The Kibitzer

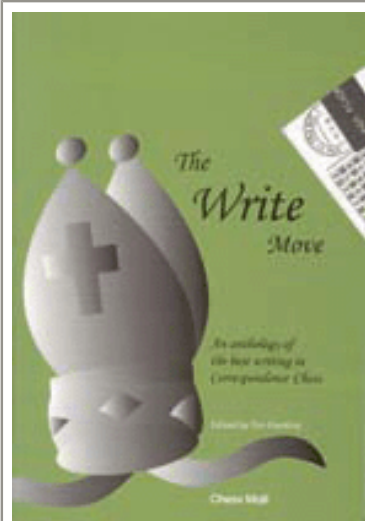
Tim Harding

The Last Homecoming of Mars

George Alcock MacDonnell was born in Dublin, Ireland, on 16 August 1830 and died in London on 3 June 1899. He was one of the most colourful characters on the London chess scene for thirty years or more, and a vivid if unreliable writer who employed the nom-de-plume “Mars.” (By the way, he should not be confused—as he sometimes has been by careless writers—with another Irish master, Alexander McDonnell, 1798-1835, who was the opponent of La Bourdonnais in the celebrated matches of 1834.)

The Rev. G. A. MacDonnell was a fairly strong player; Jeremy Gaige’s *Chess Personalia* accords him an historic Elo rating of 2410. He had no great tournament successes, but obtained some respectable runner-up results, including London 1862 (fourth ahead of Steinitz), Dublin 1865 (second to Steinitz), Dundee 1867 (third), London 1876 (fourth). In the great London congress of 1883, Rev. George MacDonnell played in the supporting event sponsored by the Maharajah of Vizayanagaram, which was won by Curt von Bardeleben. The Irishman finished equal fourth with the future grandmaster, Isidor Gunsberg.

Harry Golombek, in his *Encyclopaedia of Chess*, considered MacDonnell to be “the strongest of all the chess-playing reverends in Britain in the nineteenth century.” Since his rivals for that unofficial title included Skipworth, Owen and Ranken among others, that ranks him high among the amateur players of his day. He seems to have been much in demand in his heyday (the 1870s and 1880s) as a raconteur and was often present at major chess social events.



The Write Move
by *Tim Harding*



MacDonnell also played some matches, notably against G. H. Mackenzie, the Scottish army officer who was posted in Dublin in the early 1860s before he resigned his commission to join the Yankee army in the American civil war. MacDonnell was reputed to be the only player in Dublin that could rival Mackenzie, who later became a very strong master (winner of Frankfurt 1887). Mackenzie narrowly won the match, but the two were evidently almost equals in the early 1860s. However, it must have been in 1862 or early 1863 that MacDonnell moved to London and, as Mackenzie crossed the Atlantic, their paths did not cross again for many years, at which time the Scots-American had become by far the stronger player.

To write a full account of MacDonnell's career would require a much longer article than this, and relatively little is known about his early life before he came to London. He graduated from university at Trinity College Dublin in 1852 (where I am doing my research), and was later ordained an Anglican priest, but I have not yet established the details of his theological training and early ministry. The *Oxford Companion to Chess* (edited by Hooper and Whyld) says he was ordained in 1854 and served with the Church of Ireland until he obtained a curacy in London in 1857. I should be delighted to hear from anyone who has more information about his clerical career. A Rev. George MacDonnell had a parish in the Irish see of Elphin during the 1860s, but I do not think that this was the same man.

MacDonnell's career as clergyman in London was not very successful. As is quite well-known, in January 1872, he officiated at the marriage service of a

Mr. Hampson Jones to a woman who had just been divorced from her first husband on the grounds of adultery with Mr. Jones. MacDonnell was curate in another parish, but performed the ceremony in the church of the parish where the couple lived. The law, as it stood, did not forbid such marriages, but no clergyman could be compelled to perform such a ceremony for the guilty party in a divorce case. The rector of the church in question, Rev. J. E. Kempe, held strong views on such unions and he wrote a letter of complaint to MacDonnell's bishop, as a result of which MacDonnell lost his curacy, and for many years thereafter could get no position in the Church. MacDonnell sued the Rev. Kempe for libel and slander, but lost. The facts and points at issue are quite complex and may be found in a law report on page 9 of *The Times* of Monday 5 August, 1872.

Far less well-known is an earlier court case that may throw some light on George MacDonnell's willingness to perform the marriage service. *The Times* of 9 January 1863 shows he was in trouble with the police, apparently after an argument with his wife at the end of December the previous year. Then living in Camberwell, south London, the Rev. George Alcock MacDonnell answered a summons of assault on the person of a Mrs. Mary Taylor. She gave evidence that on the night of 29th December he came to her house in Kennington and knocked violently. Believing it to be her husband, she got out of bed and opened the door.

The defendant walked in and asked her, "Where are my wife and child?". She said she did not know, whereupon he called her a villain and struck her in the face. Her 19-year-old son then appeared and was also struck, upon which MacDonnell departed. Cross-examining, Mr. G. Lewis, the solicitor for the Rev. MacDonnell, clarified that Mrs. Taylor "had been dressmaker to Mrs. Macdonnell for years and knew of the differences between her and her husband." He said that "some slight differences had arisen between Mr. and Mrs. Macdonnell, and to the great surprise and annoyance of the rev., gentleman, on reaching home in the night in question, he discovered that his wife and child had left the house." On making enquiries, he had reason to believe they were with Mrs. Taylor. When MacDonnell called to the Kennington house, Mrs. Taylor told him a "gross falsehood" although she knew Mrs. MacDonnell and her child were in her bed.

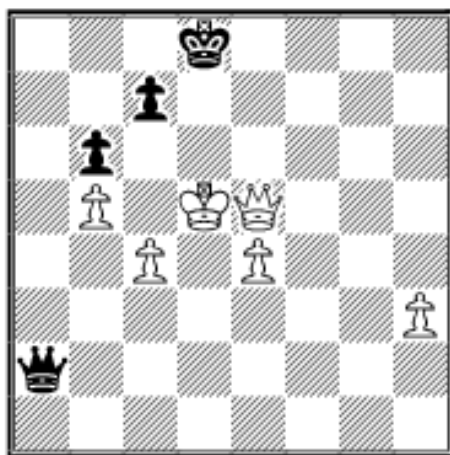
Then a Mr. W. Wallace, a solicitor in the Strand, who said he knew MacDonnell from childhood, testified that he called to Mrs. Taylor's house on the 30th. Again Mrs. Taylor denied that the MacDonnell child was there or had been there, but on leaving he found the girl a few doors away and brought her home to her father. The magistrate, a Mr. Norton, said that "he could make much allowance for the feelings of the rev. gentleman on the occasion, and under the circumstances, yet he was bound to say that he had exceeded the law." Norton tried to persuade Rev. MacDonnell to withdraw and settle the matter quietly with Mrs. Taylor, but MacDonnell's lawyer,

Lewis, wanted the matter brought to a higher court. Norton refused saying the facts had been proved to his satisfaction, and fined MacDonnell one shilling with two shillings costs. He refused the request of Lewis to increase the fine to a level that would have enabled them to appeal to a higher court.

It sounds as if the magistrate, Mr. Norton, acted with great sensitivity and humanity in this case. Shortly afterwards, the churchwarden of St. Peter's of Walworth Road in Camberwell, which had been named as the one where MacDonnell worked, wrote to *The Times* to dissociate them from this turbulent priest. "Although the rev. gentleman doubtless holds his licence as one of the curates of that church, yet, practically he has no connexion with it. For some time past Mr. Macdonnell has had assigned to him a sub-district of the parent district, and officiates in a temporary church provided for him." There is no more evidence, but one can speculate that he may have been working with poor protestant Irish immigrants.

I do not know what happened to George MacDonnell's family after that. In fact, I do not recall reading in any chess book that he had any family at all, let alone this incident. Perhaps the marriage broke up. Does anybody know the sequel?

After the Kempe case brought him some notoriety, MacDonnell for a time used the pseudonym "Hiber" (derived from an old word for Ireland) when participating in chess matters. It was as "Hiber" that he played in the 1872 London tournament where a curious incident occurred, which a reader, Phil Dixon, has asked me to mention. "In the game Zukertort-MacDonnell, Zukertort runs into a 1 move mate instead of 1 of 2 other moves with a winning position... I am curious to know the situation or the reason for what happened."



Here Zukertort played 47 Kc6??, which was met by 47...Qa8 checkmate. Can any reader throw light on this case of chess blindness? It does not seem to have attracted much comment at the time.

Lively Chess Column

Although the Kempe case must have made it hard for him to earn money as a clergyman, MacDonnell recovered and after four years (according to the *Oxford Companion*) he obtained another curacy, and in 1887 they say he finally got a parish of his own and gave up first-class chess play. In the meantime, perhaps he learned to support himself as a writer. His weekly chess column in the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* ran between 1879 and 1896. I have read several volumes of these from

the 1880s and hope to read more in the future. Most of the weekly articles included a section called Chess Chat, signed by “Mars.” These were often written in combative style, but were at other times light and frivolous. This was material that he reworked for his books *Chess Life-Pictures* and *Knights and Kings of Chess*, which consist of portraits of personalities in the chess world and discussions of various topics. You cannot rely on Mars for facts, but his viewpoints are useful and comments are often amusing.

Thus on 3 July 1880, he replied as follows to “Gladiator,” who had contributed to the *Glasgow Weekly Herald* the previous Saturday: “When a writer insinuates that I am an Irishman, I don’t know whether he intends to compliment or sneer at me; but if he happens to be an Irishman himself I know in what light to regard the matter.”

In May 1882, reviewing the “superb” first issue of the *Brentano’s Chess Monthly*, MacDonnell observed that maybe the article on Staunton was not quite accurate. Mars gave his view of Staunton v. Löwenthal. Even if Löwenthal was right about his plus score against Staunton, he wasn’t justified in making it public, but “Staunton’s persecution of the Hungarian from that time forward was inexcusable.” On 14 July 1883, MacDonnell came back to this point in reply to W. N. Potter’s *BCM* review of his first book. Staunton, he said, owes his bad name to his attacks on Löwenthal; Boden & L. both gave Mars essentially the same account, showing that “Löwenthal was the prime offender in the matter, and that his conduct richly deserved some castigation. But the castigation inflicted by Staunton was too severe and too protracted.”

In the column of 29 July 1882, there are some amusing descriptions of players’ behaviour at the board. All but the first of these were probably from personal observation: Alexander McDonnell always sat with his legs sideways, the historian Buckle (“a man of considerable means”) always took off his hat with both hands and put it under the table, where it was liable to suffer damage. Staunton sat quietly with arms folded and never betrayed impatience, his pupil Owen likewise. Boden always wore his hat. Burden swayed when he had a good position, etc.

Summer in Dublin

The remainder of this article will concentrate on one short period in the summer of 1884, when MacDonnell paid what was probably his last visit to his home city. In the *Weekly Irish Times* of 24 June 1899, Frideswide Rowland reported the death of the priest who had performed her own wedding fifteen years previously. “The Rev. G. A. MacDonnell’s last visit to Ireland was on the occasion of the marriage of Mr. T. B. Rowland and Miss F. F. Beechey – two prominent chess players – and the Ceremony was performed by ‘Mars’ to his evident satisfaction.” May we infer from the way she expressed that fact that there was something about the ceremony that was strange and less to the satisfaction of the bride? It sounds like it, but there is

no other evidence!

Back in London after his visit, which lasted several days, “Mars” reported that: “Chess is thriving in Dublin; several suburban clubs have recently been established, and already contain a large number of members. Prominent amongst these are the Richmond, the Lyceum and the St. Kenric clubs. The old City and County Club, so far from being injuriously affected by the formation of the younger associations, is, I understand, in a more flourishing condition than ever. It contains upwards of 100 members, amongst whom are Earl Dartrey, Lord Randolph Churchill, Sir John Blunden, and Messrs. Pim, Monck, and Woollett, all of them well known in this country as very skilful players. Messrs. T. Long, G. F. Barry and Porterfield Rynd, although first-class amateurs, are unattached to any club, being no doubt prevented by their professional avocations from attending clubs or playing chess in the day-time.”

“The great event of last week in the chess world was the marriage of Miss Frideswide F. Beechey to Mr. T. B. Rowland, which took place at Clontarf Church, near Dublin, on Thursday the 5th June. The Rev. G. A. MacDonnell was the officiating clergyman. Miss Beechey has for several years past taken an active part in chess affairs, and contributed not a little to the enrichment of the literature of the game.... The bridegroom is known as the leading Irish composer and solver of problems, and has gained high honours in the several tourneys he has entered.”

And in February 1885, he wrote: “When I visited Dublin last summer, I found Mr. Rynd the strongest player there. He possesses a fine genius for chess, not merely as a general practitioner, but as a blindfold player and problem composer. I hope he will be able to take part in some of our English tournaments this year...”

Before showing some games between them, here are a few facts about Rynd. In 1865 James Alexander Rynd, the son of Dublin solicitor James Goodlatte Rynd, had won the third tournament at the Dublin Congress: the one restricted to Irish residents. As a result of this and other successes, he was regarded as unofficial or official Irish chess champion for decades. In 1869, Rynd entered the King’s Inns, Dublin, as a student training to be a barrister (attorney). On 7 September 1869 he married Anna Cranwill, probably either the daughter or sister of a founder member of the City and County of Dublin Chess Club.

For a few months in 1870-1, Rynd conducted (with the help of Thomas Long) the short-lived chess column in the *Irish Sportsman and Farmer*. Irish bar students often registered with one of the English Inns of Court too; he did this in 1872. On 9 October 1873 his first child was born: Kenneth Arly Rynd, who also became a strong player. Finally in 1874, James A. Rynd qualified

for the Irish bar and he later practised law in England too. At some point he assumed the name “Porterfield” and dropped his given names.

When was he born? Gaige gave Rynd’s birth year as “1855?,” which evidently he did in ignorance that Rynd had won the 1865 tournament. Dutch researcher Harrie Grondijs, in his privately published book *No Rook Unturned: A Tour Around the Saavedra Study*, found Rynd’s *Irish Times* obituary. This implied that he was born in 1846, but the exact date was elusive. My first attempt to confirm Grondijs’s guess was unfruitful, but it is now confirmed in the book *King’s Inn’s Barristers, 1868-2004*, edited by Kenneth Ferguson, and published last year. Rynd was born on 6 April 1846 and died on 17 March 1917. Ferguson’s book is also the source of information about the dates of his legal training.

When MacDonnell was in Dublin for the Rowland wedding, he naturally played some games against Dublin players, or at least against Rynd, who would appear to have been stronger than MacDonnell by then. Four of these survive: one published in his own column, all four in the *Irish Fireside* column of the Dublin civil servant George Frith Barry. After Rynd, Barry was probably the next strongest Irish-resident player at this time. Here are those games. Remember these were casual games and other games were possibly played.

Porterfield Rynd - G. A. MacDonnell

3 June, 1884

Scotch Game [C45]

Notes by MacDonnell in *ISDN* volume 21 page 505 (26 July 1884), but the game was earlier published with different notes by George Frith Barry in his *Irish Fireside* column of 14 July. This was played at 2 Upper Mount-street, Dublin, according to Barry.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Bc5 5 Be3 Qf6 6 c3 Nge7 7 Qd2

GAM: Not commendable.

7...Qg6

GFB: This move is new to us.

8 f3

Barry commented: 8 Nf5 seems better. Then if 8...Nxf5 9 Bxc5 Nfe7 10 f3 and if (8...Bxe3 then 9 Qxe3 0–0 10 Ng3 &c.

8...0–0 9 Bd3 Ne5 10 0–0 d5 11 Na3 Bh3

Threatening to win KB.

12 Rf2 Rad8 13 Rd1 Bxd4

In order to check presently with Kt.

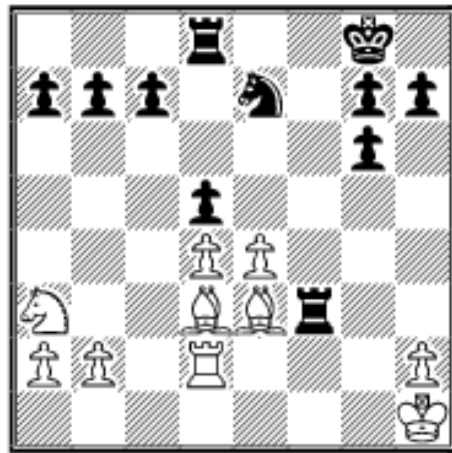
14 cxd4 Bxg2

More lively than sound.

15 Rxc2 Nxf3+ 16 Kh1 Nxd2 17 Rxc6 fxc6

He ought to have taken with the Kt and then captured KP.

18 Rxd2 Rf3?



An ill-considered move. Taking KP and then, if permitted, checking with R was his proper course.

19 Bg5 Re8 20 Nb5

White now gains an appreciable advantage which he utilises in excellent style.

20...dxe4 21 Nxc7

GFB: Well played.

21...Rxd3 22 Rxd3 exd3 23 Nxe8 Nf5 24 d5 Kf7 25 Nc7 h6 26 Bd2 Ke7 27 Bb4+ Kd7 28 Ne6 b6

In order to save QP.

29 Nf8+ Ke8 30 Nxc6 a5 31 Bc3 Kd7 32 Ne5+ Kd6 33 Nxd3 Kxd5 34 Kg1 Ke4 35 Ne5

The dexterous manner in which White here manoeuvred his Kt and B, so as to stop the advance of the black K, was no doubt, very galling to His Majesty.

35...b5 36 Nc6 b4 37 Be1 Ne3 38 Nxa5 Nc2 39 Kf2 Kd3 40 Nc6 Kc4 41 Nxb4

GFB: This makes matters easy. Mr. Rynd has played this end game remarkably well.

41...Nxb4 42 Bxb4 Kxb4 43 h4 and White wins. **1-0**

Porterfield Rynd - G. A. MacDonnell

7 June, 1884

Scotch Game [C45]

Notes by G. F. Barry in his *Irish Fireside* column of 30 June. This was played at 2 Upper Mount-street, Dublin.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Bc5 5 Be3 Qf6 6 c3 Nge7 7 Qd2

This move is the latest favourite among the magnates. L. Paulsen played it against Zukertort in the Berlin tournament and recently against Englisch.

7...0-0

7...Qg6 was MacDonnell's choice on 3rd June; 7...Bxd4 8 cxd4 d5 9 Nc3 Be6 is, we think, a better continuation, and would leave Black with a perfectly satisfactory defence.

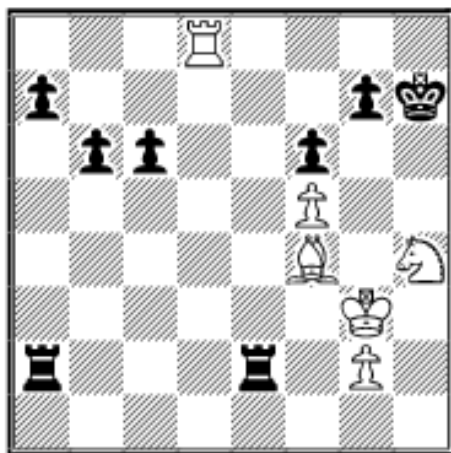
8 Nb5 Bxe3 9 Qxe3 d5 10 Nxc7 Rb8 11 exd5 Nf5 12 Qf4 g5 13 Qe4 Bd7 14 Qc2 Qe5+ 15 Be2 Nce7 16 Na3

This appears to be the best resource.

16...Qxc7 17 0-0-0 Nd6 18 h4 g4 19 f3 f5 20 h5 b5 21 Qd2 Rf7 22 Nc2 b4 23 cxb4 Rc8 24 Kb1 Nxd5 25 Ba6

If 25 fxg4, then 25...Qxc2+ 26 Qxc2 Rxc2 27 Kxc2 Ne3+ and Black will still remain with a piece ahead.

25...Qxc2+ 26 Qxc2 Rxc2 27 Kxc2 Nxb4+ 28 Kb1 Nxa6 29 Rxd6 Nc5 30 h6 Kf8 31 Rhd1 Ke8 32 R1d5 Nb7 33 Ra6 Re7 34 Rxa7 f4 35 Rxb7 gxf3 36 gxf3 Re1+ 37 Kc2 Bc6 38 Rb8+ Ke7 39 Rg5 Bxf3



44...g5??

A slip. By simply playing 44...Rf2 and then waiting for the right moment to win the KBP, or to exchange one of his rooks for White's knight, the three passed pawns would have forced the game. Suppose; for example, 45 Be3 Rf1 46 Kg4 Ra4+ 47 Kh3 (or Kh5) 47...Rxf4+ 48 Kxh4 Rxf5 and wins.

**45 fxg6+ Kg7 46 Rd7+ Kg8 47 Bh6 Re8
48 Nf5 Rae2 49 Rg7+ Kh8 50 Rh7+ Kg8 51 Bg7 1-0**

Porterfield Rynd - G. A. MacDonnell

11 June, 1884

Scotch Game [C45]

Notes by George Frith Barry in his *Irish Fireside* column of 17 Nov. This was played at 2 Upper Mount-street, Dublin.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Bc5 5 Be3 Qf6 6 c3 Nge7 7 Qd2

This variation was introduced by L. Paulsen v Englisch in the Wiesbaden Tournament, 1880.

7...0-0

This is not a good move. The continuation generally preferred, and recommended by the *Chess Monthly*, March '84, p. 207, is 7...Bxd4 8 cxd4 d5 9 Nc3 Be6 is, we think, a better continuation, and would leave Black with a perfectly satisfactory defence. 10 e5 Qg6 and Black has, if anything, a better developed game.

8 f4

Varying from 8 Nb5 as Rynd played on 7 June.

8...Ng6 9 e5 Ngxe5



He prefers to sacrifice the Kt for two pawns rather than play the Q home.

10 fxe5 Nxe5 11 Be2 d6 12 b4 Bb6 13 Na3 a5 14 b5 Bg4 15 0-0-0 Bxe2 16 Qxe2 d5 17 Ndc2 Qd6 18 Bd4 Rfe8 19 Rhe1 f6 20 Qf1 Rac8 21 Qf5

We think White here might have with advantage taken off the Kt with B, then suppose 21 Bxe5 Rxe5 22 Rxe5 fxe5 23 Qd3 &c., or 22...Qxe5 23 Re1 followed

presently by 24 Qe2 or 24 Qf5 according to circumstances.

21...g6 22 Qh3 Bxd4 23 Rxd4 c6 24 Rh4 Nd3+ 25 Qxd3 Rxe1+ 26 Nxe1 Qxa3+ 27 Kb1 Qe7 28 Nc2 Re8 29 Rh3 Qc5 30 Re3 Re4 31 Nd4 Re5 32 g4 Qe7 Draw agreed

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