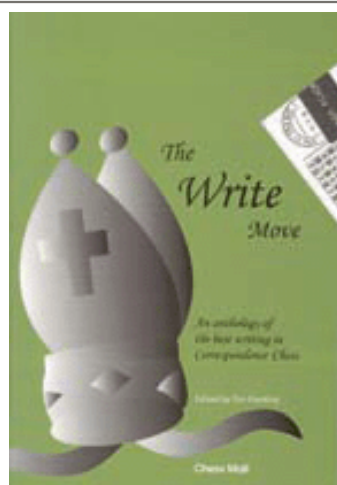




COLUMNISTS

The Kibitzer

Tim Harding

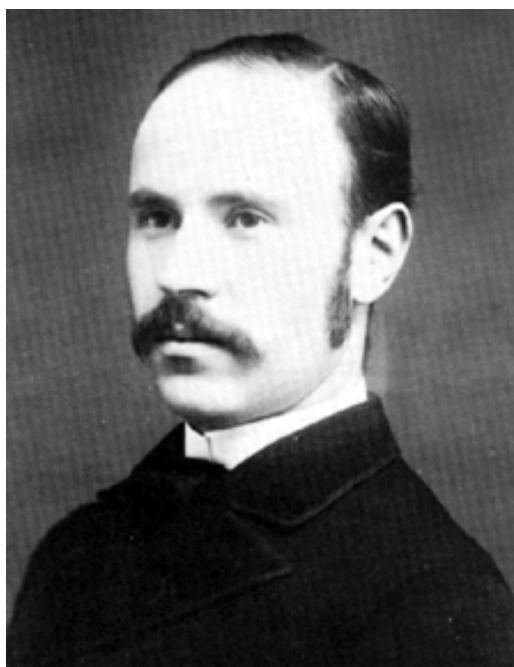


[The Write Move](#)
by Tim Harding

The Family Life of Grandmaster Gunsberg

Before I start the main topic this week, I want to ask you please not to overlook the final postscript section, as if you miss it, you will not get the most out of next month's column. Now to Gunsberg, whose family life was probably more complicated and interesting than that of the average grandmaster...

Chess biographies rarely have anything much to say about the family lives of the masters and grandmasters who are their subjects. They tend to be game collections with a record of their matches and tournaments. In fact there are very few proper biographies of chess masters at all, with Richard Forster's mammoth book on Burn (reviewed in [March 2005](#)) being a notable exception. Rather different is Kurt Landsberger's [book](#) on Steinitz, which comes at its subject from a rather different direction, because the author was related to Steinitz. Here we get more on the life, but the book is rather incoherent in places and, not being a chess-player, Landsberger missed the significance of some events in Steinitz's career. In the case of Gunsberg, his public chess career (as player and chess journalist) is perhaps well documented, but there is much to be found out about his life that is probably relevant to how his career developed.



Isidor Gunsberg

Recently in his *Chess Notes* Internet column, Edward Winter suggested that Isidor Gunsberg might be a suitable subject for biography, and as it happens I had recently spent an evening with a former opponent who is working on just that topic. Alan Smith, for many years one of Manchester's leading players, is researching a Gunsberg biography and I would urge any researcher who has information on Gunsberg to contact him c/o this column. What worries me most is that somebody else will go off in a hurry and do a poor and incomplete job, as in the case of the Sir George Thomas book that I reviewed in [May 2006](#), which I fear has probably spoiled the chance that we can ever get a proper Thomas biography. Perhaps somewhere we should establish a register of chess research interests, to increase co-operation and avoid duplication of effort.

As it happens, last year I happened to discover, almost by accident, a very special nugget of information about Gunsberg that is not central to my own doctoral researches. I thought it would probably remain secret for some time. I passed it on to Alan Smith and to a couple of other serious chess researchers whom I knew would keep a confidence, and deliberately did not publish it here, because I knew of Smith's ongoing project. Unfortunately, the secret is now out on Winter's website, because somebody else discovered it independently, so now I may as well tell you what I have found out about Gunsberg. The lost secret will be revealed later in the article.

Genealogical research is very popular these days, now that much of it can be done online. A certain amount of British census and birth marriage death registration information is available free, and more can be found if you are willing to pay for a subscription or spend a day at the Family Research Centre in Islington, North London. (By the way, that will be moved in a few months to the main national archive in Kew, which is less convenient for most people.) As a result, some people have been sending in to Edward Winter little discoveries they have made from the censuses about chess masters and he has included them in his web articles. So I was quite amused a while back when one of these items featured the information about the Gunsberg family from the 1891 and 1901 English censuses, because I knew that a key fact about Gunsberg's life could never be discovered from census information alone.

The census gives a series of snapshots ten years apart, and a chess master could miss a census altogether if he happened to be abroad at a tournament on census day, though that is not the case with Gunsberg. However, Elizabeth Tansley, from Taunton, the person who sent her new discoveries about Gunsberg, to Mr. Winter, dug much more deeply into his life. I would hope she would now join forces with Alan Smith, and I will put them in touch if she contacts me.

To put my discovery in context, it is necessary to say a little about who Isidor Gunsberg was and why we should care. At his peak around 1890-1, he was probably in the world's top five or certainly top ten players. He came third in a strong New York international tournament, then he tied a match with Chigorin and then became the second challenger to world champion Steinitz. (I am not counting Zukertort as Steinitz was technically the challenger against him in the first title match.) Although Gunsberg lost the match, as was expected, he did win four games and drew many of them. But I don't want to fill up this article with a lot of well-known facts, but rather will concentrate mostly on little-known points.

Gunsberg was born in Budapest (according to *The Times*) on 2 November 1854 and died in London on 2 May 1930. Apparently his father was a Polish Jew. Some sources say his family emigrated to England in 1863 (e.g. Golombek's *Encyclopaedia*); while a *Times* law report says it was 1862. Others say he came to England in 1876, probably after some time in Paris; that is not necessarily a contradiction as the family could have gone abroad again. I didn't see him in the 1871 census, but perhaps I missed it. I leave this for other researchers to unravel.

He seems to have been quite a strong amateur player by 1877. The *Field* of 6 January 1877 (page 25) printed a game Gunsberg-Janssens played at the Divan. The *Field* printed several more Gunsberg games that year. *Land and Water* of 22 Dec 1877 (page 544) reported on a match between the Jewish Chess Club of Aldgate at Bermondsey, a well-established chess club for working men. Aldgate won +4 =2 -2; the result "not very much to be wondered at" as their team included Gunsberg and Abraham Mocatta, the central figure in London Jewish chess of this period. (In July 1879 the *Field* printed a game between Mephisto and Mocatta. Did Mocatta know the secret? Surely he must have.)

Gunsberg virtually disappears from the London chess scene in 1878, although *The Field* of 28 September (page 401) published a game that S. Hamel (of Nottingham) lost to Gunsberg in Paris. This looks like part of a disinformation campaign to make people think the young master was living abroad, when he was actually employed in London as operator of the inventor C. G. Gumpel's new chess "automaton," Mephisto. (Unlike Kempelen's earlier automaton, the operator was not concealed in the machine. Probably Mephisto was run by electricity with Gunsberg

concealed in an adjacent room, but this is another task for his biographer!)

In *The Illustrated London News* of 6 April 1878, P. T. Duffy wrote about the launch of Mephisto at a dinner given by Gumpel. *The Field* and other columns printed plenty of games by Mephisto after that. On 17 August, Duffy complained that the Counties Chess Association, unusually meeting that year in London, had allowed Mephisto to enter (and win) the Handicap intended for amateurs and called it a “blunder not likely to be repeated.” Rev. Skipworth of the Counties Association however wrote in (maybe not on this occasion) to say that it had always been open for professionals to play in the Handicap.

Gunsberg’s main period of Mephisto activity ended in 1879. In November 1881, the astronomer R. A. Proctor started *Knowledge, An Illustrated Magazine of Science* and in the first issue he announced that they had made arrangements with the proprietor of the mechanical chess-player to have games played with Mephisto “specially for our chess columns, and to comment on them.” Thus Mephisto started getting bylines. In March 1882, two correspondence games were ongoing at odds of pawn and two moves, the Chess Editor (i.e. Gunsberg) v Chief Editor (Proctor). In other games they played without odds and Proctor even won with white, in sixty-nine moves. Here is the game that “Mephisto” won (from *Knowledge*, vol. 2 page 121 et seq.):

Isidor Gunsberg – R. A. Proctor
Knowledge magazine corr., 1882
Guioco Piano [C54]

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Bc5 4 c3 Nf6 5 d4 exd4 6 cxd4 Bb4+ 7 Bd2 Bxd2+ 8 Nbx d2 Nxe4 9 Nxe4 d5 10 Nfg5



10...dxc4?

10...Bf5 was tried in a subsidiary game mentioned in *Knowledge* vol.2 p.156.

11 Qh5 Qe7

If 11...g6 12 Qh6.

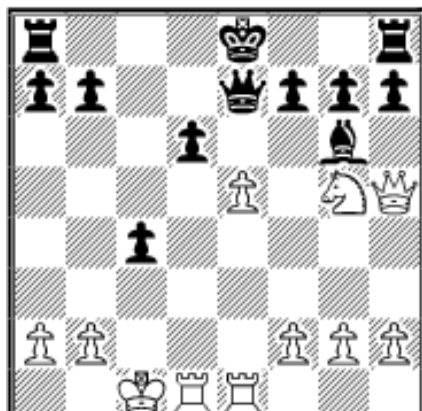
12 0–0–0 Bf5 13 Nd6+ cxd6

Or 13...Qxd6 14 Qxf7+ Kd8 15 Qxf5.

14 Rhe1 Ne5

Not 14...Be6? 15 Rxe6.

15 dxe5 Bg6



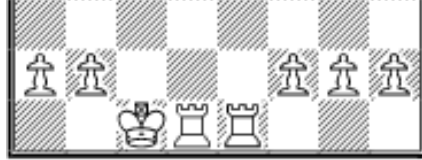
Castling would have been better.

16 exd6 Bxh5 17 Rxe7+ Kf8 18 g4 Bg6

If 18...Bxg4 19 Rxf7+; better is 18...h6.

19 Rd4 h6 20 Nxf7 1–0

It was around 1881 that Gunsberg emerged from the



shadows and started to play regularly under his own name again, losing a match to Blackburne. He had another sideline because in the 1881 census he described himself as a “tobacconist and professional chess player.” This

sounds as if he had a little shop or booth. He was living at 287 Mile End Road, married to Jane Gunsberg (born about 1853 and probably née Isaacs), whose occupation was given as chess player! Elizabeth Tansley has discovered a little about her; see *Chess Notes CN 5129* at Winter’s website. They may have had at least one child who died in infancy, but by the 1891 census they had moved to a better address and had three living children: Alfred (6), Bertie (5) and Lionel (3). They were also prosperous enough to employ a live-in general domestic servant and indeed this must have been essential with Gunsberg away from home so much.

In 1883, he won fourth prize in the second tournament of the great London congress (called the Vizayanagaram tournament, because of its Indian sponsor). His mediocre result in this event, won by another upcoming player, Curt von Bardeleben, shows he was not yet quite of master strength, but in the next few years he must have improved rapidly.

Perhaps he was earning some money from other chess journalism, but it does not seem to be until 1889 onwards (when he was becoming known as a very strong player) and then the 1890s that these columns really multiplied. Ken Whyld’s bibliography of *Chess Columns* says that he wrote the column in *Our Corner* from July 1883. This was a little magazine edited by Annie Besant for the Freethought Publishing Company. I only saw the first volume, January-June 1883, which had chess by B. G. Laws and a report on London 1883, saying that Steinitz was expected to help on his return from America. Of course he did not return for a long while so maybe that is how Gunsberg got the job, but I gather from Tony Gillam that the column was not very good. Once Gunsberg’s results improved in the later 1880s, so did his journalistic opportunities.

This nearly got him into trouble. In the light of the case of 1916, reported in *The Times*, and mentioned in *Chess Notes*, I note that much earlier in his career F. J. Lee (another chess professional) tried to sue Gunsberg for libel in October 1890 over remarks in *Evening News and Post*. I don’t know what he said. *Chess Player’s Chronicle* (volume xi, p. 389 of the late series) mentions this and commented: “The unpleasantness so long existing between various of the professionals in the chess world has reached a climax hitherto unknown.” A vacation judge refused to make an order to give leave to prosecute. In the 1916 case, Gunsberg won damages of £250, partly thanks to the support of witnesses like Anthony Guest (chess columnist of the *Morning Post*) and GM Blackburne. The strong London chess player Herbert Jacobs was junior barrister for the plaintiff. The *Times* chess correspondent gave evidence for the defence. (For the details, see an online article by Winter about chess cases that actually came to court.)

Gunsberg’s Peak Years

The peak of Gunsberg’s career as a professional player came in 1889-90. In 1889, he took third prize in the New York tournament, the sixth American Chess Congress, a mammoth double-round event of twenty players: leading Europeans and Americans, playing each other with white and black. Moreover, any draws in the second round had to be replayed and only counted as a draw if the same result occurred again. (This seems unfair to the people who had black in second round draws.) It meant that although the maximum score was 38, everyone in practice would have to play over forty games! Chigorin and Weiss scored 29 each and Gunsberg $28\frac{1}{2}$, ahead of Blackburne and Burn, with celebrated masters such as Mason, Judd, Delmar and Bird well in arrears.

As a result of this success, Gunsberg had a great opportunity. He was invited to Havana to play a match with Mikhail Chigorin that could be called a “Candidates Final.” This started on 1 January and continued well into February. The winner was to be the first to score ten wins, or a drawn match if the score reached 9-9. Chigorin won the first two games, but after successive wins in games 8-10, Gunsberg held a two-game lead! After eighteen games they were level again and there had only been four draws. Then game 19 was a draw after which the match took a remarkable course: the last four games were all won by black, resulting in a 9-9 tie.

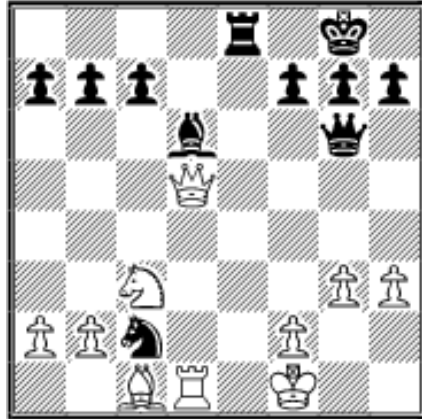
Undoubtedly, Chigorin should have won the match had he not been so averse to draws and liable to blunders. In game 21, when Chigorin led 8-7, he reached a position where Gunsberg had the potential for an attacking build-up, but that was not the Hungarian's forte. Instead, he sacrificed a piece for perpetual check, but Chigorin spurned the draw and lost.

M. I. Chigorin – I. Gunsberg

Havana match (21), 1890

Ruy Lopez [C65]

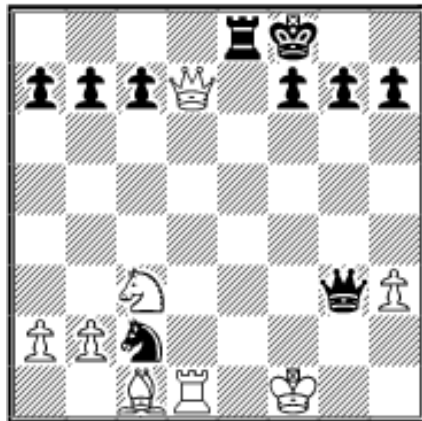
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 0-0 Be7 6 e5 Ne4 7 Re1 Nc5 8 Nxd4 Nxd4 9 Qxd4 0-0
10 Bc4 d6 11 Nc3 dxe5 12 Qxe5 Bd6 13 Qh5 Be6 14 Bg5 Qd7 15 Bxe6 Nxe6 16 Rad1 Rae8 17
Bc1 Nd4 18 Rxe8 Rxe8 19 Qd5 Qg4 20 Kf1 Nxc2 21 h3 Qg6 22 g3



22...Bxg3!? 23 Qd7?!

If 23 fxg3 Qxg3 24 Qe4 Qxh3+ (not 24...Rxe4?? 25 Rd8+ etc.) 25 Kg1 Qg3+ draws. If White wants to try to win, he should play instead 24 Qf5, and meet 24...Ne1! 25 Qg4 Qh2 by 26 Bf4 (If 26 Bh6, Black draws by queen checks on the h-file; 26 Ne2!? may be playable.) 26...Qh1+ 27 Kf2 h5 28 Qg3 h4 29 Qg4 c5 with a difficult position where White may not be able to make progress, but should not lose as long as he avoids 30 Nd5?? Nd3+!.

23...Kf8 24 fxg3 Qxg3



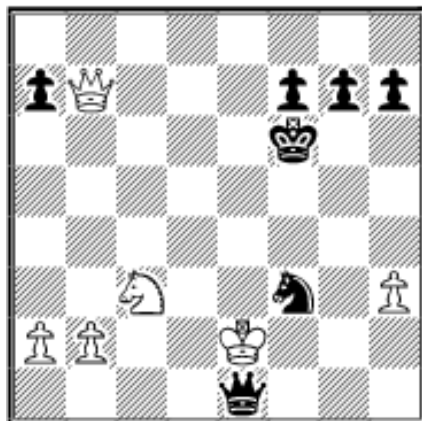
25 Qg4?

This is a blunder. After 25 Bd2, Fritz8 thinks Black should take perpetual check (which Gunsberg was likely to have done) although Black may have options to play on.

25...Re1+ 26 Rxe1 Qxe1+ 27 Kg2 Qxc1

Chigorin has returned the extra piece, but he does not have perpetual check despite the exposed black king.

28 Qc8+ Ke7 29 Qxc7+ Ke6 30 Qc8+ Kf6 31 Qxb7 Ne1 + 32 Kh2 Qf4+ 33 Kg1 Nf3+ 34 Kf1 Qc1+ 35 Ke2 Qe1+!



The point is that the knight is immune, because of the skewer on the long white diagonal.

36 Kd3 Qf1+ 37 Kc2 Qg2+ 38 Kc1 Qh1+ 39 Nd1 Qxh3 40 Qxa7 Qc8+ 41 Nc3 Qc4 42 a4 Nd4 43 Qb6+ Kg5 44 a5 Qd3! 45 Qd8+ Kg6 0-1

White will be mated on c2.

In the book *Mikhail Chigorin: the First Russian Grandmaster*, by Alexander Khalifman and Sergei Soloviov, it says that Chigorin wrote of his opponent shortly after the match. "In our opinion Gunsberg belongs

to the category of players, who are more capable of contriving ingenious defensive plans, rather than attacks; the latter are beyond their means." This was rather unfair to a player who had just

proved himself to be in the world's top ten players, if not the top five. Gunsberg was one of the first of a new breed of positional players whose game was founded on a good defence, it's true, but who was also capable of mixing it in tactical situations and who also had a good temperament for matches.

It is true that Gunsberg would not have been the obvious challenger for the world title, but after all Steinitz had recently beaten Chigorin in a title match that had been quite close, and by drawing with Chigorin he had shown himself worthy. Another factor was probably that there were people with money in the Jewish community, especially in America, who were willing to back him.

The Match with Steinitz

Typical of the misinformation on the Wikipedia website is the statement I read there (of course it may be changed later), to the effect that Gunsberg was the first British citizen to challenge for the world chess championship. This is untrue as Gunsberg was not naturalised British until the twentieth century. (The *Chess Notes* article has the details.) The first – and so far only – male Briton to play a match for the world chess championship was Nigel Short.

Gunsberg and Steinitz played the first game on 9 December 1890. The match was for the best of twenty games and Steinitz won 6-4, with nine draws, the twentieth game not being played as the match was decided. Steinitz scored the first win in the match, but at one point Gunsberg even took the lead with successive victories. When Steinitz lost he could play very badly.

W. Steinitz – I. Gunsberg

Fifth Match Game, New York 1890

Queen's Gambit Accepted [D20]

1 d4 d5 2 c4 dxc4 3 e3 e5 4 dxe5 Qxd1+ 5 Kxd1 Nc6 6 Bxc4 Nxe5 7 Bb5+ c6 8 Be2 Be6 9 Nc3 0-0-0+ 10 Kc2 Nf6 11 Nf3



11...Neg4 12 Rf1 Bf5+ 13 Kb3 Nd7 14 e4 Nc5+ 15 Kc2 Nxe4 16 Nh4 Nxc3+ 17 Kxc3 Be6 18 f4 Nf6 19 f5 Bd5 20 g4 Be7 21 Kc2 Be4+ 22 Kb3 Nd7 23 g5 f6 24 Bg4 Nc5+ 25 Ka3 Rd3+ 0-1

Despite this trouncing, Steinitz led for most of the match. Overall, Gunsberg was beaten but not disgraced. Had his health and family circumstances not changed, and above all had Lasker not emerged, Gunsberg might have been able to have another shot at the title a few years later.

Despite his loss in the match, it was financially of benefit to Gunsberg no doubt because the terms meant he

received expenses, a loser's purse and more money for the games he won, as reported in Landsberger's [biography](#) of Steinitz. Moreover he won a valuable bet. The same book (page 249) tells the story. The Steinitz-Chigorin telegraph match had been adjourned while the Gunsberg match was played and a member of the Manhattan chess club offered a bet of \$250 that Steinitz would win the match with the Russian. Gunsberg took the bet with alacrity.

The Three Wives of Isidor Gunsberg

When Gunsberg returned to London, however, his wife was seriously ill, if not dying. The census of 1891 was taken on 5 April. Referring once more to *The Chess Player's Chronicle* (Volume 12, no. 418 of 9 May 1891), I found on page 41: "Our readers will, we are sure, share our regret at the serious illness of Mrs. Gunsberg." Therefore, Gunsberg's proposed match with Blackburne was "at present abandoned." Her death was reported in the issue of 30 May, on page 66, and she was only 38. *CPC* said she was not a chess player and had been ailing for several months. So on reading this,

I knew that Gunsberg had more than one wife, because I already knew that a Mrs. Gunsberg edited a chess column between 1895-7 and that a Mrs. Gunsberg played in a postal chess tournament in 1903. Naturally, I at first supposed they were the same person, but not so!

On the death of Jane, Gunsberg was left a widower with three sons, Alfred (aged 6), Bertie (5) and Lionel (3) according to the Census, but Mrs. Tansley has checked the birth records and obtained rather more precise information. She says the sons and their birth years were as follows: Alfred (1884), Herbert (1886) and Lionel (1887). Perhaps it is not surprising in the light of this responsibility that he had to carry alone that his own health declined in 1893 and he was never the same force as a player that he had been in 1890. It is also not surprising that he felt in need of a new wife, but where and when he met her is (as yet at least) unknown.

At least one important detail, though, is now known: who wife number two was and when he married her. If you went by census information alone, you might think his next wife was the woman shown as Mrs. Gunsberg in the 1901 census: Agnes Jane (née Ramage) aged 38 and born in Birmingham. Last December I went to the Family Record Centre and by studying not only the full census data (more than is available free online) and the birth/marriage/death information, I was able to establish that between the first Mrs. Gunsberg and Agnes Jane there was another wife: Miriam Gunsberg (née Clarke), whom he married in 1893 and who died in August or September 1897. This is the secret I was hoping to keep for Alan Smith to reveal in his book, but which Mrs. Tansley has independently discovered and given free to the world through the medium of Edward Winter's website.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF MARRIAGE

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number: G004906

| No. | Name | Age | Rank or Profession | Residence at Date of Marriage | Father's Name and Profession | Place of Birth |
|-----|------------------------|-----|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Isidor Arthur Gunsberg | 39 | Widower, Journalist and Chess Player | 120 Southampton Row | Abraham Gunsberg (deceased), merchant | Prague |
| 2 | Miriam Clarke | 31 | Spinster | (illegible), Surrey | Thomas Clarke (deceased), merchant | (illegible) |

Married in the Parish Church of St. George in the Parish of St. George Bloomsbury in the County of London.

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a register of Marriages in the Registration District of St. Giles in the Fields & St. George Bloomsbury

Gives at the General Register Office, under the Seal of the said Office, the 16th day of December 2006

MXC967458

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE. PENITENT COMPANIES

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

So far I have not obtained the death certificate of Miriam Clarke Gunsberg (it costs six pounds a time), but I suppose it is likely she died in childbirth. I did pay for the marriage certificate in order to be absolutely certain that it was the chess player Gunsberg who married her. Was Miriam Clarke a Gentile (that's my guess) or had he converted, or were they obliged to marry in church? Please study the image provided. Unfortunately, some readers may not find it easy to make out all the text, so here is what most of it says.

“Marriage solemnized at The Parish Church in the Parish of St George Bloomsbury in the County of London.

Sixteenth December 1893. Isidor Arthur Gunsberg, age 39, Widower, Journalist and Chess Player. Residence 120 Southampton Row. Father: Abraham Gunsberg (deceased), merchant.

Miriam Clarke, 31, Spinster. No rank or profession stated. Residence (illegible), Surrey. Father: Thomas Clarke (deceased), merchant.”

Miriam was therefore the one who wrote the chess column, but not the woman who played in the *Womanhood* tournament of 1903. The first chess column in the *Lady's Pictorial* (a weekly magazine) was published on 18 May 1895, and was bylined "Mrs. I Gunsberg" from the beginning. That article featured Mrs. Baird, the famed problem composer. Subsequent articles profiled other "prominent lady chess devotees" such as Mrs. Arthur Smith of Brighton (8 June 1895). The column was still running two years later, when the London Ladies international was held. Tournament reports appeared in the *Lady's Pictorial* on 3 July, 10 July, 24 July, 7 August and 14 August; that was the last column and there was no chess in the paper on 17 and 31 July. It is known from the B/M/D indexes that some time in the quarter July-September 1897, Miriam Gunsberg died. (If somebody has already paid for the certificate, please send me a scan or photocopy.)

By her, Gunsberg had two daughters who survived to the 1901 census: Winifred Grace, who was then six years old, and Miriam, aged four. So poor Isidor Gunsberg was now even less able to maintain his chess-playing strength than he had been in late 1891; he had to support, educate and keep under control five children, the eldest of whom was only twelve or thirteen, and the youngest still a baby. Moreover, to pay the bills he had numerous chess columns to conduct. Even if financially he was better off than before (and he must have needed at least one servant and a nanny), he can have had no time or energy. After a suitable period of mourning, wife number three was urgently required!

Somewhere, perhaps at the London Ladies Chess Club (which had begun in 1895), he met Agnes Jane Ramage. In the 1891 census there was an Agnes L. Ramage (born about 1864 in Birmingham) who matches the 1901 census entry for the third Mrs. Gunsberg. No occupation is listed for her. If this is the right woman, she was the daughter of Peter Ramage ("New Church minister") and Elizabeth Ramage, both originally of Glasgow.

In the census taken on 31 March 1901, whose online version has some misprints (or rather misreadings of the manuscripts), the family has just moved out of London, and now lives in Monken Hadley, Hertfordshire. In the household there is a new baby, Kathleen Ramagr [sic] Gunsberg, aged 0, who was born in Brixton. As the 1911 census data for England is not going to be put online until 2009, I cannot tell you if Gunsberg and his third wife had more children, but patient searches in the birth indexes at Islington would reveal this.

The adults are given as:

Gunsberg, Iridor [sic] **Arthur** born Hungary 1854, Hungarian subject?, Monken Hadley, Hertfordshire, "Journalist own Ac" (i.e. self-employed).

Gunsberg, Agnes Jane age 38 born Birmingham.

The other children were the ones already mentioned: Miriam (aged about 4), Winifred Grace (6), Lionel (13) and Herbert (15) who are listed as "scholar and Alfred Tsidor [sic] whose occupation is given as assistant journalist at home."

So Alfred Isidor Gunsberg was now able to help his father with the chess columns and indeed had perhaps been doing so for some time. He was also playing some postal chess, though with no great proficiency. In preliminary section-E of the first *Womanhood* postal tournament he won two games and lost four. Unfortunately, his wins were not published. Incidentally, there were two women in his section; he beat one and lost to the other. Admittedly, he was only fifteen, or just sixteen, years old when playing these games.

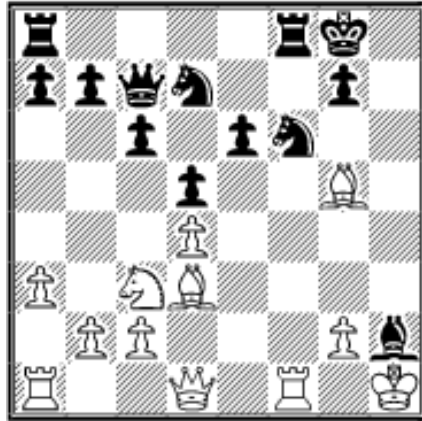
Mr. H. Morgan – Alfred Isidor Gunsberg

corr, 1901

French Defence [C01]

From *Womanhood* vol. 6 (June 1901) page 66:

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 Be3 Nf6 5 Bd3 Bd6 6 Nc3 0-0 7 Nf3 c6 8 a3 Be6 9 0-0 Nbd7 10 Ng5 Qc7 11 f4 h6 12 f5 Bxh2+ 13 Kh1 hxc5 14 fxe6 fxe6 15 Bxg5



15...c5?!

Better is 15...Bd6.

16 Qe2 Rae8 17 Bg6 cxd4 18 Bxf6 Nxf6 19 Bxe8 dxc3?

19...Rxe8 would be better, but it is the next move that was a real blunder.

20 Qxe6+

20...Kh8??

He had to play 20...Kh7, so that after 21 Rf3 Rxe8, the king has a flight square on g6. So White would probably play 21 Qh3+ instead.

21 Rf3 cxb2

Now if 21...Rxe8 22 Rh3+ is fatal, but there is no defence anyway.

22 Rh3+ 1-0

White announced mate in nine moves: 22...Nh7 23 Rxh7+ Kxh7 24 Bg6+ Kh6 25 Bf7+ Kg5 26 Qg6+ Kf4 (or 26 ..Kh4 27 Qh5+ Kg3 28 Rf1) 27 Rf1+ Ke5 28 Qe6+ Kd4 29 Qxd5+ Kc3 30 Qd3#.

The following year Alfred Gunsberg played in section H of the second *Womanhood* tournament. He scored 3/6, but one of the wins was by default because a Miss P. Renton retired. In 1903, Alfred's status as a perennial duffer was confirmed when he managed only 2/6 in his section of *Womanhood*-3. As he did not win all his games, he obviously was not getting help from Dad.

Very curious, though, was the result of preliminary section I, which was won by a Mrs. Gunsberg with 6/6! When I first saw this, I believed the player was Alfred's wife, but now I know that he was only seventeen or eighteen at the time. Research at the "Free B/M/D" website shows that Alfred got married in 1908, so the Mrs. G. must surely have been his new (second) stepmother: Agnes Jane Ramage Gunsberg. The question arises why she didn't take up her place in the final, played in 1904. Maybe she was pregnant or too busy with children, or was there another reason? Were people hinting that grandmaster Gunsberg had given her too much help?

Now that domestic life was on a more even keel, Isidor Gunsberg occasionally played in international events in the early twentieth century. In the great Monte Carlo 1902 tournament, he finished in the middle of the field. Rhoda Bowles wrote in *Womanhood* (April 1902, p. 387) that he:

"...has greatly pleased his many friends by the good form he displayed. Many of his games were reminiscent of his forcible style of years ago, when he stood well among the leading masters of the world. It is obvious that if his opportunities for serious play were greater, he could still hold his own in the best company."

He is mentioned again by Mrs. Bowles in her October 1902 column, as being about to give a

course of four Saturday afternoon lectures at the London Ladies Chess Club. Mrs. Bowles calls him “one of the finest lecturers upon chess.” The December column said that there was a large attendance on each occasion: “Mr. Gunsberg is clear and distinct, and lectures without any hesitation, so that the players can follow all variations as easily as if she were having a private lesson.” The article gives quite a lot of detail on what the lectures were about. Her January 1903 column reports on a 25-board simul given by Gunsberg at the Ladies Club, where he drew two and lost only to the Irishwoman Kate Finn, who became the first British Ladies Champion in 1904.

So Isidor Gunsberg does seem to have been popular with the ladies and one wonders where he met his wives, perhaps at simultaneous displays or through other chess contacts? Whether Miriam Clarke and Agnes Ramage were known for anything to do with chess before they married him is something that any serious biographer of Gunsberg needs to find out, if possible.

As for the fate of his children, I know little or nothing, but Alan Smith and Mrs. Tansey have probably discovered some things. Did the boys fight in the Great War? They had all got married before it started: Alfred in 1908 and the others in 1913.

Gunsberg’s obituary in the June 1930 *BCM* (pp. 176-8) was written by Joseph Blake, who wrote that:

“An early discovery that chess journalism yielded, with diligence, a better livelihood than chess play, Gunsberg conducted at different times more chess columns, and more at one and the same time, than any other English chess journalist has ever done.”

That last clause looks like a paraphrase of his *Times* obit which said: “At one time he probably conducted more chess columns than any else has ever done.” But if you read closely it is actually a rather different claim. Blake’s wording, restricting it to English journalists is more precise; I am not sure if the *Times* statement is literally true. Whyld’s *Chess Columns* lists twenty-four columns conducted by Gunsberg at one time or another.

The War hit Gunsberg hard. As a 1916 court report in *The Times* shows, “when war broke out most of the newspapers on which Mr. Gunsberg was engaged discontinued their chess articles, and the *Daily Telegraph* was the only one which he was able to retain.”

Although he may have got some new columns later, hard times were ahead. There would still have been at least one child in the house to the end of the war. Maybe one or more of the sons was a casualty of the conflict. At some point they must have left Hertfordshire. Mrs. Tansley has discovered:

“On 20 July 1923, giving his address as 14a Lunam Road, Upper Norwood SE19, he filed for bankruptcy at the High Court. The bankruptcy was not finally discharged until 17 April 1930 in the month before his death.”

Blake mentions a testimonial just before death. One can guess that it was this which discharged the bankruptcy. *BCM* says he left a widow. When did Agnes Gunsberg die?

To conclude on a lighter note, the following passage from one of Mephisto’s chess columns in *Knowledge* (volume 4, 1883, p. 281) may be revealing about Gunsberg’s attitude to female chess players, especially in the light of his having subsequently married two of them.

“Members of the fairer sex have a more sensitive and complex nervous system, rendering them more susceptible to mental influence than their less gifted masculine fellow-creatures. Hence, in accordance with the theory advanced in our recent article on the subject of mind influence, the Chess play of ladies would be more inclined to vary through this influence than that of men. The idea is certainly supported by the fact that we have not many strong lady Chess players. We will not, however, now examine whether this disadvantage only

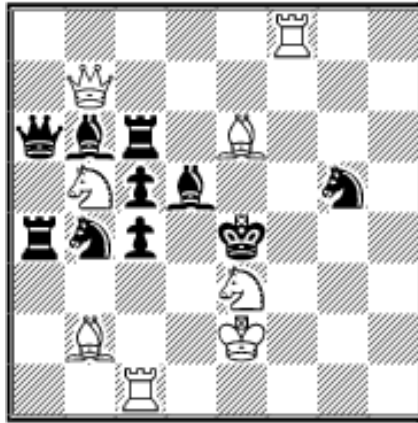
forms the minor obstacle to success, or whether the want of perseverance and powers of concentration of thought, are the real causes of failure in feminine Chess practice. We will chivalrously assume the former to be the major and not the minor obstacle, especially as it may be possible that a too extensive practice of Chess playing amongst ladies would result to the disadvantage of us men."

But does the final sentence mean he suspects that if the ladies worked more at their chess they would beat their men folk, or does he mean they would neglect their household duties?

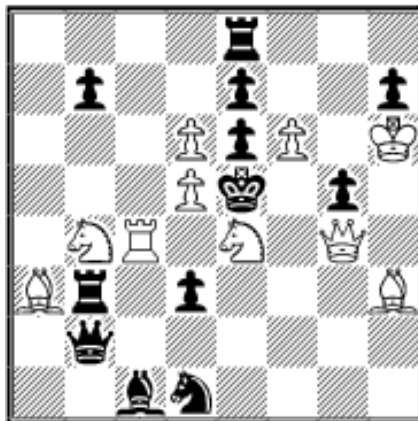
Postscript on Chess Problems

Grandmaster John Nunn disagrees with some things I said in my [June 2007](#) column about chess problems being in decline, so I have agreed to write about them in next month's column. Here are some examples from the recent British chess problem solving competition. Nunn suggested the two longer ones, but you may find them difficult, so I am also showing the three two-movers that were included in the contest for solving against the clock. These will all be discussed next month; try to solve them without moving the pieces or using a computer.

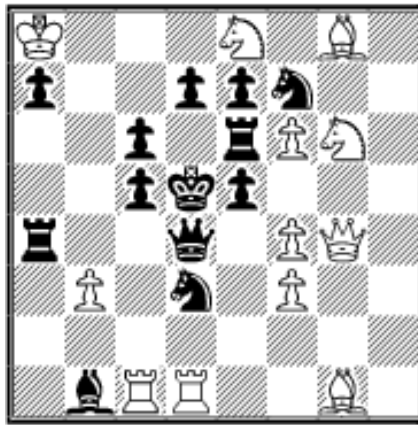
Problem 1. White to play and mate in two



Problem 2. White to play and mate in two

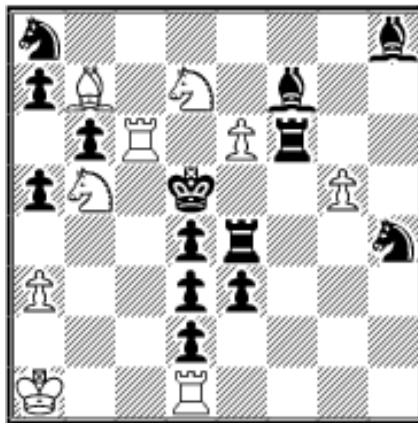


Problem 3 White to play and mate in two



You may be able to solve two-movers by trial and error, but for the rest you need to work out the logic of the position. So here are the challenging ones:

Problem 4. White to play and mate in four (against any defence)



John says that this one is “really beautiful” and all the leading solvers managed it. I am going to have a go myself after submitting this column. The aim is to find White’s first move and all variations after that where Black manages to put off mate until White’s last move. In the competition, these full-length variations are to be written up to White’s penultimate move (but I probably won’t go into all that detail in my article).

Problem 5. White to play and mate in three (against any defence)



Apparently this tripped up some of the leading solvers, including two grandmasters!

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