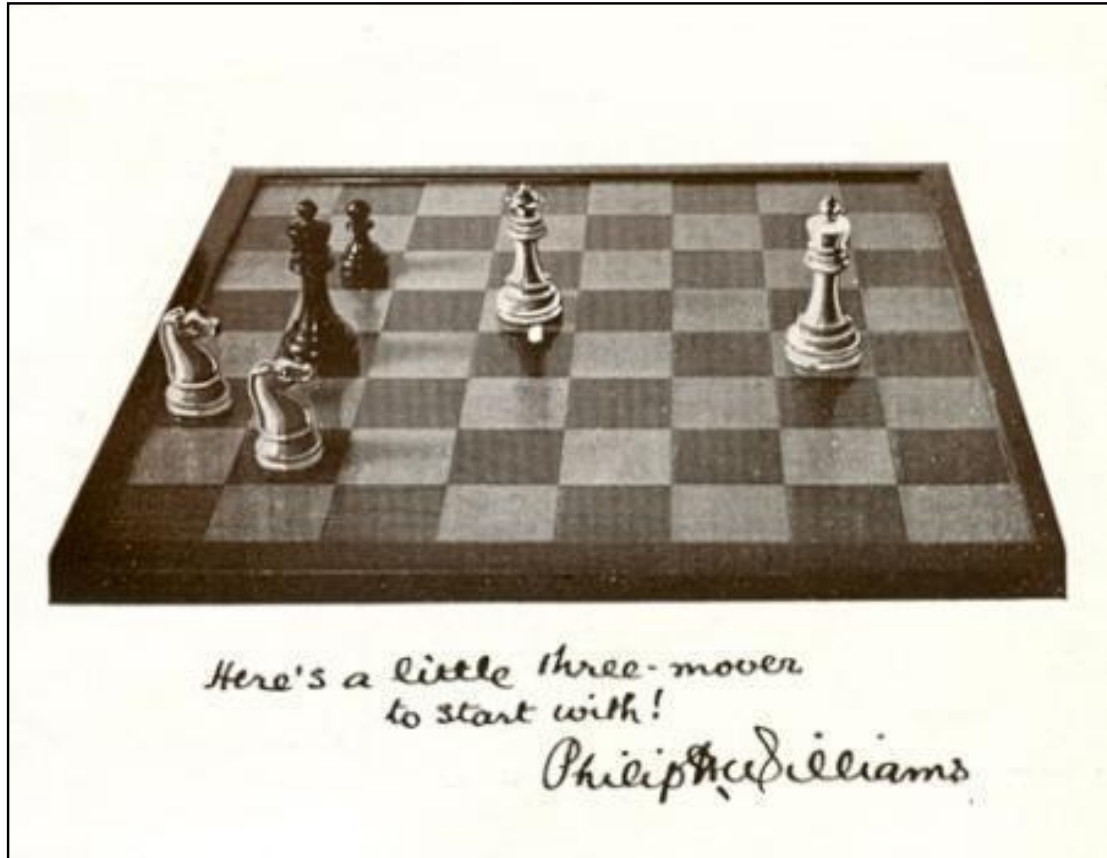


# 'Genius'

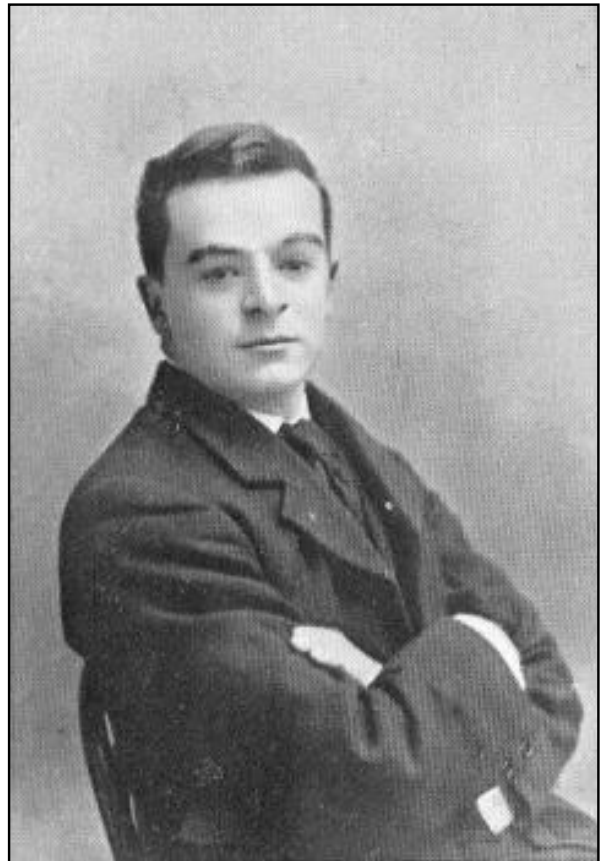
## Edward Winter

(2003)



The above illustration of a problem by Philip Hamilton Williams is from his highly entertaining book *Chess Chatter & Chaff* (Stroud, 1909). In his 1903 work *The Modern Chess Problem* (page 182) the white king was on h4. The composition (dedicated to B.G. Laws) had been published on page 271 of the June 1901 *BCM*, but with the white king on f4 (which, rather curiously, allows other mates).

Our article on [Esperanto](#) quoted a number of passages from Williams' writings, and we wonder whether any figure in chess history has received such eulogistic obituaries as those accorded to him in 1922, following his death at the age of 48. The praise of his brilliance and personal qualities went far beyond the customary panegyrics, and the word 'genius' was used frequently. This contrasts starkly with the meagre recognition given to him nowadays, although that may change with the reprinting by Moravian Chess of the *Chess Amateur*, where he wrote a discursive problem column unlike any other before or since.



Philip Hamilton Williams: *The Chess Bouquet*  
*Modern Chess Problem*  
*American Chess Bulletin*

, page 68; *The*  
(first and third editions);  
, March 1910, page 60

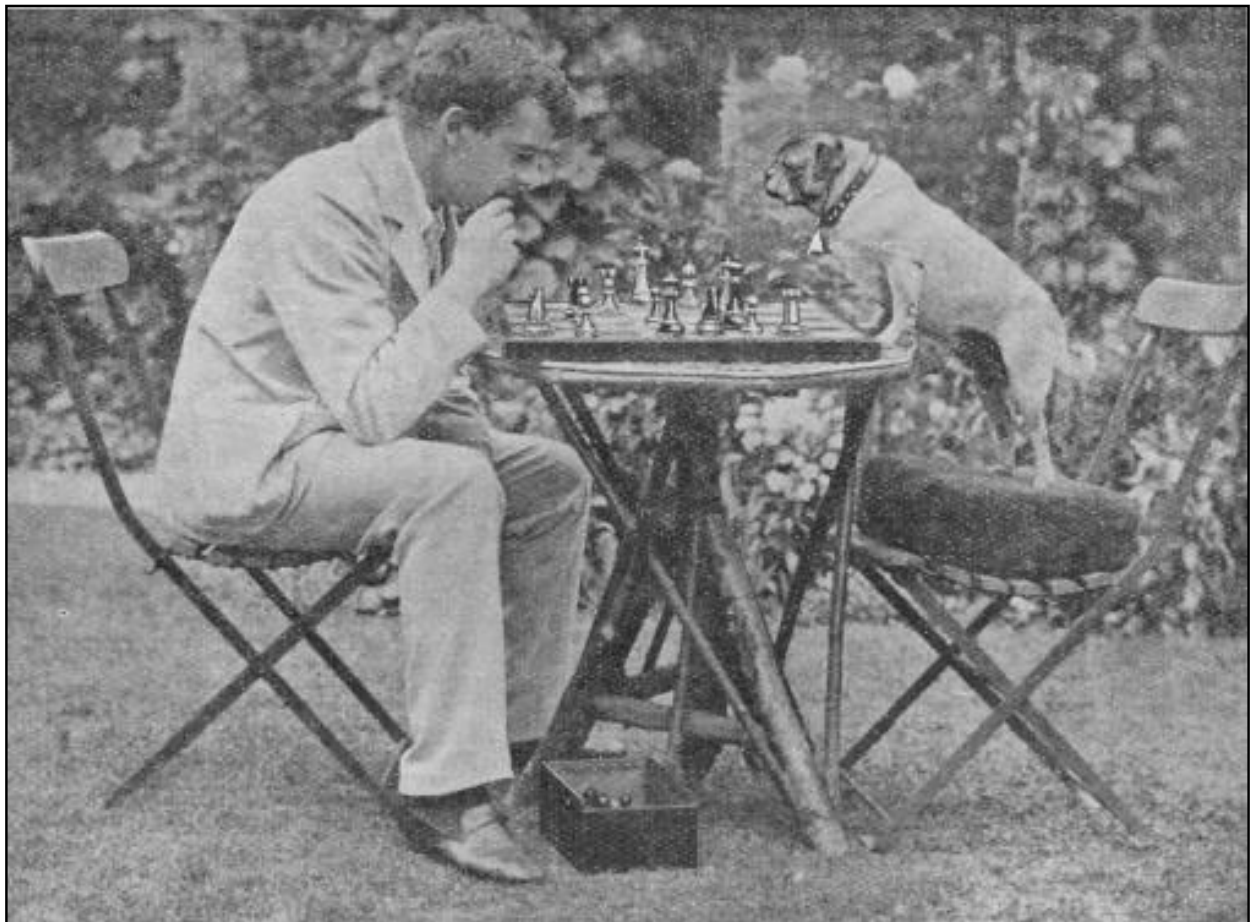
The *BCM* (October 1922 issue, pages 375-376) reported that on the morning of Thursday 14 September 1922 Williams was found dead in bed:

'Only on Monday last he delivered a lecture on "Chess Psychology" at the newly-formed Royal Mint Chess Club, and those who listened to his entertaining remarks on that occasion will feel honoured to be the last to have heard one of the most entertaining and genial chess enthusiasts they are ever likely to meet.

... As one who had known him almost from boyhood I may say that I have never met anyone who was so invariably genial and humorous, and his humour never had anything rancorous in it. I should imagine that he was absolutely without an enemy. His genius showed itself in many ways. Professionally he was a Chartered Accountant. Like his mother, he was very fond of chess and quite early in his career became a well-known problemist. To his genius in this department our problem editor will no doubt refer.

As a chessplayer, he had not the patience to enjoy match game play, but preferred Kriegspiel, at which he was always the life and soul of the table. To hear his remarks as umpire was always a matter of hilarity, and his good-natured banter never had any sting in it. He was a first-class musician and had composed several cantatas, he was also an excellent accompanist and improviser, and in addition to this was a first-class amateur photographer, being one of the first to take up colour photography.'





Philip Hamilton Williams: two photographs from *Chess Chatter & Chaff* and one from page 119 of the *Chess Amateur*

, January 1909

The notice of his death on page 1 of the October 1922 *Chess Amateur* included the following:

'He was, as Mr Brian Harley writes, "a genius, and unlike most of that ilk, a thoroughly kind, simple-hearted man". This describes Mr Williams. We, who knew him during a long sequence of years, who realized the breadth of his versatile genius, the kindliness of his heart, the generosity of his motives, have suffered a grievous loss.'

Pages 10-12 of the same issue had an outstanding tribute to him by Harley. Two brief excerpts follow:

'Williams' position in the world of chess problems is a very assured one. In his enormous gallery of over 1,200 published positions, begun at the age of 15, are many masterpieces – usually on a small scale. He rarely attempted big canvases. It was not his *métier* . Elegance and piquancy are what we expect in a P.H.W. composition. He is *par excellence* the composer of *ideas* , often beautiful, often humorous, sometimes both ...

We have lost a unique personality – a genius, without egoism, but with the kindest heart in the world.'



Philip Hamilton Williams: *BCM* , October 1922

Readers will, we hope, look out for P.H. Williams' problems and writings. (Various editions of *The Modern Chess Problem* are not difficult to find.) He was indeed an exceptional figure (already described on page 60 of the March 1910 *American Chess Bulletin* as 'England's chess genius'), and below we give a problem dating from 1904:



*Mate in three*

This was one of 42 compositions by Williams which appeared in 777 *Chess Miniatures in Three* by E. Wallis (Springfield, 1908), a book to which Williams contributed the Preface. On page 245 of *Miniature Chess Problems from Many Countries* (London, 1981/1982) Colin Russ called it 'a truly extraordinary miniature'.



Philip Hamilton Williams: *Chess Amateur*

, October 1922, page 10.

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