

News for engineers

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A HUNDRED YEARS AGO A VAUDOIS MADE "PUNCH"

The family of Burnand originated at Moudon in the Canton of Vaud. One of their descendants was born in London towards the end of 1836, a few weeks before Queen Victoria ascended the throne. Francis Burnand lost his mother when he was born. His father remarried and had another eleven children by his second wife. It is not surprising that his step-mother was unable to spend much time looking after him, and from a very early age he was full of independence and high spirits.

One of his earliest pleasures was to attend new plays on the London stage and become familiar with actors and actresses. At Eton he acquired style and manners and once at Cambridge he started to write drama. He also acted and became one of the founders of the "Amateur Dramatic Club" of which the then Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII, was patron.

He studied for the Bar, but his inclinations were in a different direction. At one time he thought of taking Holy Orders, but then he was converted to Roman Catholicism and was on the point of taking the vows when fortunately Cardinal Manning persuaded him to follow his real vocation.

At the beginning of 1863 his literary tastes suddenly took an unexpected turn. He had had several humorous essays published in "Fun", when he succeeded in having one of his works accepted by "Punch". It had the mysterious title "Mokeanna or the White Witness" and was a burlesque on the sensational romantic writing recently introduced into the big daily papers. The whole metropolis was intrigued and his publication attracted the great writers and wits of the day.

The same year he was definitely appointed to the team of writers for "Punch", and soon afterwards he published his "Happy Thoughts" which were a marked contrast to "Mokeanna". His colleagues were in the habit of meeting periodically for a dinner. The first time Burnand was invited, Mark Lemon, the founder of "Punch", presided and W. M. Thackeray made a brief appearance. The latter unexpectedly introduced Burnand to the company. His health was drunk, and not very long afterwards he became editor-in-chief of "Punch".

After the death of Tom Taylor, whose tendencies were perhaps too intellectual to please all the readers, Burnand knew how to bring new life to the great periodical by his ideas and his receptiveness to the projects of others. He was in constant touch with great men of the time such as the actor Henry Irving, the traveller Sir Richard Burton, George Sala, whom Charles Dickens had sent to the Crimea for reporting, and Stanley of Africa fame, who fascinated Burnand. He related their exploits in "Punch". The mockery, jeering and banter, the puns and witticisms invented by Francis Burnand to keep his readers interested and amused often called forth unfavourable comment, but it was difficult to have the last word with such a clever adversary. His sense of humour never left him, not even when he was ill.

Parallel with his activities on "Punch" the great humorist continued to write for the theatre, and his burlesques and comedies were very successful in the London of the day.

He was knighted in 1902 and remained editor of "Punch" till 1906. He died on 21st April 1917.

He was an amused observer of the reigns of Queen Victoria and Edward VII (the latter, his old friend at Cambridge), and he characterised a brilliant era in "Punch" and on the stage. His works always carried an original mark, which was no doubt partly due to his Vaudois origin of which he conserved a benevolent and healthy waggishness.

(Based on an essay in French by Paul-Emile Schazmann published by Service de presse Suisse.)

NEWS FOR ENGINEERS New Automatic Levelling Instrument

In levels of standard design, the observer has to get his line of sight horizontal before each measurement. A Swiss firm specialising in this field has just launched a new engineer's level, type GK 1-A, on which an automatic compensating device does away with this operation, which always takes up valuable time. This compensating device consists of a reflecting surface (roof prism) inserted in the optical path of the telescope and suspended like a pendulum. It keeps the line of sight horizontal to within plus or minus 1 inch. This high degree of precision is achieved by a new magnetic system of suspension with extremely little friction, used for the first time. The pendular oscillation is absorbed pneumatically, so that if the instrument is shaken the telescope image returns very quickly to rest. Like all levels made by the same firm, the GK 1-A also possesses the special tilting head instead of the usual three setting screws. This system makes it possible to fix the instrument on the tripod very quickly and at the same time set it roughly level in a very short time and with no trouble at all. The combination of the tilting head and automatic levelling ensures simple rapid work. The very clear upright telescope image greatly simplifies reading on the levelling staff and speeds up work considerably. This is essential in order to benefit fully from the advantages of automatic levelling; the reflected optical path and the elimination of the setting screws have made it possible to give this instrument a modern compact shape. The precision of the GK 1-A available with or without horizontal circle and reading glass, fully satisfies all the requirements of builders and engineers. The telescope has a magnification of 25 times, with an effective aperture of lens of 41 mm; the mean error over 1 km. of double levelling is plus or minus 2.5 mm., and the whole instrument, including its plastic case, weighs just over 5 lb.

[O.S.E.C.]



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