

MR. F. C. BURNAND.

The blue ribbon of English comic literature, as we may esteem the Editorship of *Punch*, which has been held within the past twenty years by Mark Lemon, Shirley Brooks, and Tom Taylor, is now transferred to Mr. Burnand, long known as one of the liveliest contributors to that famous journal during the period just named, as well as a writer for the stage. Mr. Francis Cowley Burnand, who is about forty-three years of age, was educated at Eton, and at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he took the University degree. He also won special distinction there, from and after the October term of 1854, till the Lent term of 1858, as founder and leading member of the University A.D.C., or Amateur Dramatic Club, which has continued to flourish. Its history, in the form of "Personal Reminiscences," has been pleasantly related by Mr. Burnand in a volume published last Christmas by Chapman & Hall, which has gone through two or three editions. We are informed that his first dramatic composition was of a little earlier date, being a farce written by him at Eton, probably in 1852, and performed by himself and other boys in the house of their tutor, the Rev. W. G. Cookesley. The great Dons of the University were not quite so facile and condescending; and there is much real humour in Mr. Burnand's report of his interview with the Vice-Chancellor of that time, when he asked permission to act a play. It needed all the tact of the youthful diplomatist, then an inexperienced undergraduate, to avoid shocking the Vice-Chancellor's primness by telling him what the proposed dramatic entertainment was. It was neither a play of Sophocles, or Euripides, or Aristophanes, nor one of Plautus or Terence, nor even one of Shakspeare's; the author was a Mr. Madison Morton, unhappily not a Fellow of Trinity, and its title was "Box and Cox!" The Vice-Chancellor had never heard of either, which may well have been the case; for we know that when Thackeray, about the same time, visited Cambridge to give his "Lectures on the English Humourists," there was an academical dignity of the same rank who had never heard of the author of "Vanity Fair," whether it were Thackeray or Bunyan.

The Cambridge reminiscences of Mr. Burnand must not detain us; there is the volume for all readers who would like plenty of that sort. He came to London, and was called to the Bar in

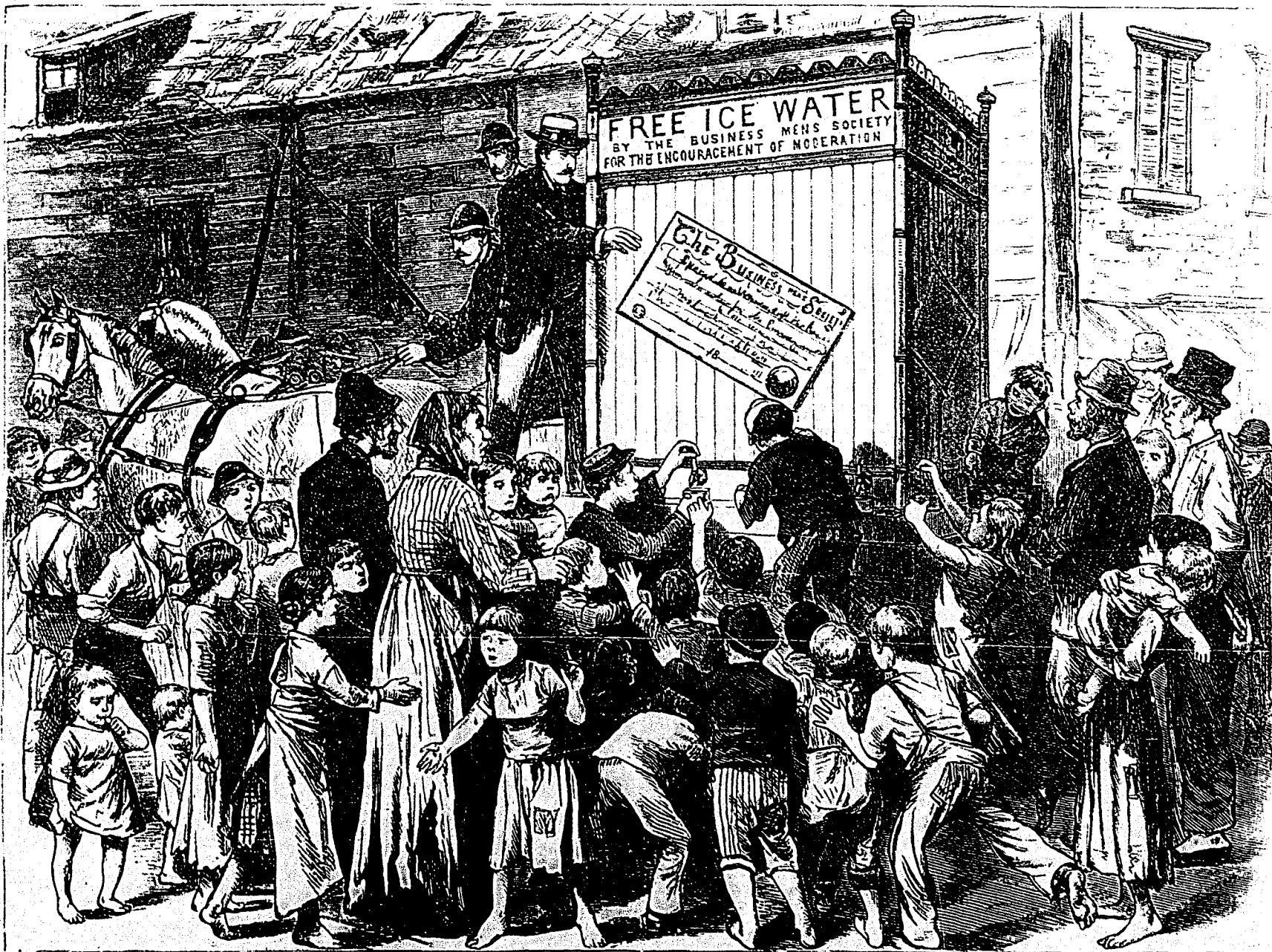


F. C. BURNAND, THE NEW EDITOR OF "PUNCH."

1862, but we do not know that he ever wore a wig except in eating hall dinners at his Inn of Court. He soon began writing extravaganzas or burlesques, and domestic popular comedies, for several of our theatres. Among these were "Ixion," at the St. James; "Black-eyed Susan," at the Soho; "The Turn of the Tide," "Family Ties," "The Club," "Diplomacy," "Robbing Roy," and "Betsy." He also converted "Box and Cox" into a farcical operetta, for which Mr. Arthur Sullivan provided the music.

It was in 1863 that Mr. Burnand was accepted by Mark Lemon, then editor of *Punch*, as a contributor to that *Hebdomadal*; which could not, of course, be named along with the august "*Hebdomadal*" at the other University, but which has greater influence, *pace* the Vice-Chancellor, on the minds of ingenuous youth. It is remarkable, by-the-way, that Mark Lemon's proximate successor and Burnand's immediate predecessor, the late accomplished Tom Taylor, *was* a Fellow of Trinity; so that the Vice-Chancellor might have recognized him. In the meantime, the young literary aspirant from Cambridge began to make his mark with the broadest grotesque parodies of the sensational romances that appeared in some penny magazines for boys and girls of the less educated class. "Mokeanna!" was the first of these sham-dreadful stories, which, we suppose, had been provoked by a silly prose version of the hideous phantasy in "Lalla Rookh," but which must have had something to do with a "moke" or costermonger's donkey.

There were some imitations of fashionable novelists by Mr. Burnand, such as "Stapmore," which had a higher degree of finish, but Thackeray had done that sort of trick, with inimitable humour, many years before. We do not think, indeed, that Mr. Burnand is at his best in literary parodies; and some readers of *Punch* at this day will be relieved when they have seen the last of a current series of similar attempts on the works of Anthony Trollope. The most valuable of Mr. Burnand's writings, in our judgment, are those in the vein of autobiographic half-conscious self-exposure, as in "Happy Thoughts," expressing the sense of awkwardness that besets a man dropping into social or domestic relations for which he is not quite prepared. It is pure comedy, and of a refined sort, not unworthy of the authors of the *Spectator* and its school, or of Smollett or Goldsmith.



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