

William Archer Porter Tait, D.Sc., M.Inst.C.E.

WILLIAM ARCHER PORTER TAIT, second son of Professor Peter Guthrie Tait, was born in 1866. He was educated at the Edinburgh Academy (1875–1881). From school he went to the University of Edinburgh, where he took the degree of B.Sc. in engineering in 1885. He spent a year as an apprentice fitter in the shops of Messrs Brown Brothers, Hydraulic Engineers (Bonnington). From November 1885 till October 1887 he was a pupil of the contractor's engineer on the Lanarkshire and Ayrshire Railways, then under construction. He was awarded a Miller Prize a few years later for a paper on these works.

In November 1887 he was articled to Sir J. Wolfe Barry and Mr H. M. Brunel for a term restricted to three years on account of previous experience, and in their office he saw a good deal of important work, such as the Tower Bridge foundations and the Barry Docks.

During the years 1888–1890 he frequently attended Sir J. Wolfe Barry when he was giving evidence before parliamentary committees or in courts of law. Having completed his apprenticeship he remained as an assistant for some months with Sir J. Wolfe Barry, until in 1891 he became an assistant engineer on the Glasgow Central (underground) Railway, then in course of construction. During the three and a half years he held this post he saw a good deal of work—tunnelling, diversion of gas and water mains, construction of sewers, etc.—which was of great value to him when in August 1894 he became a partner in the firm of J. and A. Leslie & Reid.

In consequence of the death of his partner the whole burden of carrying out the Talla scheme for the supply of Edinburgh fell upon him. By the time the Talla scheme was finished he had achieved a leading position in his own branch of the profession, which he maintained till the end of his career. He served for many years on the Council of the Institution of Civil Engineers, and a few months before his death he was elected a Vice-President in recognition of his professional eminence and his work on the Council. A paper, "The Talla Water Supply of the Edinburgh and District Waterworks," he contributed to the *Proceedings* (vol. clxvii, 1906, p. 102) of the Institution won for him a Telford Prize. One only of his schemes was a failure—a scheme he drew up for Manaos. This scheme failed, not because of any inherent defect, but because in the then condition of Manaos no scheme promoted by a foreign syndicate had a chance of fair play.

Mr W. A. P. Tait was in great demand as an expert witness before parliamentary committees and in courts of law. He had a very strong resemblance to his father in person and disposition. He had the same massive head and the same measured utterance as of a man who had formed his opinion with the utmost care and who was bent on delivering it in the most exact form of words. Like his father, too, he had a singularly even temper, which was seldom ruffled, so that the wiles or the thunders of the parliamentary bar left him unshaken. The phrase "expert witness" was a byword not so long ago for mendacity, not altogether without justice, as the following anecdote may serve to show. An engineer, a good deal senior to Tait, was highly annoyed on hearing that counsel proposed that Tait should be the leading witness in a certain case and that he (the senior) should follow. He somewhat heatedly said: "I want to go first. I ought to be allowed to tell the first lie." The retort was characteristic: "You may follow me, and still do that."

Mr Tait was elected a Fellow of the Society in 1898, served on its Council from 1914–1917, 1918–1921, and held the office of Vice-President for the period 1921–1924. He acted as the Society's Representative on George Heriot's Trust from 1918 until 1927, when he was elected its Representative on the Governing Body of the Heriot-Watt College—a post which he resigned, owing to ill health, early in 1929. He died on 23rd June 1929.

He was the author, jointly with Mr B. Hall Blyth, of the following paper in the Society's *Proceedings*: "Note on the Rainfall on the Drainage Area of the Talla Reservoir" (vol. xxv, 1905, pp. 616–29).

J. G. T.