

## Samuel Dickstein (1851 – 1939)



Samuel Dickstein was born on 12 May 1851 in Warsaw (at that time occupied by the Russian Empire). In 1866 he entered the Main School in Warsaw where he studied until 1869, the year in which it was converted into the Russian University of Warsaw. He continued his education at this newly established university (where Russian was the language of instruction at the time) until 1876 when he graduated with a Master's degree in mathematics. Moreover, all the time he spent at the university, he held positions in secondary schools teaching mathematics. In order to promote a Polish education in 1878 – 88 he directed his own private secondary school in Warsaw which was held in very high esteem. In 1906 he became the chairman of the Educational Board of Scientific Courses Society. In 1915, after the refoundation of the University of Warsaw (after the Russian withdrawal) Dickstein was appointed professor and started to give lectures on algebra and on the history of science. In 1921 he became a honorary professor of

mathematics and taught at the university until 1937.

In 1884 Dickstein and A. Czajewski founded together *The Mathematical and Physical Sciences Library* in order to publish academic handbooks. The Polish Mathematical Society referred to this idea later in 1953 when they initiated a series of books called *Mathematical Library. Mathematical and Physical Papers* – a journal edited by Dickstein together with E. and W. Natanson and by W. Gosiewski was the first journal set up in Poland which was uniquely devoted to mathematics and physics.

In 1897 the first issue of *Mathematical News* was released. This periodical was founded and financed independently by Dickstein. Not only did it present scientific articles but it also turned towards didactics and popularization of mathematics. During period 1897 – 1939, forty-seven volumes came out from this publishing house. Since 1955 the Polish Mathematical Society has carried on Dickstein's work by publishing *Mathematical News*, an annual of the Polish Mathematical Society.

In 1890 Dickstein became a member of the Society of the Friends of Science in Poznań and from 1893 he was a member-correspondent of the Polish Academy of Skills in Cracow. In 1905 he took part in the foundation of the Warsaw Scientific Society, where he was elected the first vice-chairman. The fact that in 1906 Dickstein founded the Mathematical and Physical Science Circle was of great importance for the Polish science. Samuel Dickstein maintained far-reaching contacts with scientists from other countries. He was a member-correspondent of the Scientific Society in Liège, a member of the Scientific Society in Prague and an honorary member of both the Jednoty Českých Matematiků a Fysiků and the International Committee for Teaching Mathematics. In recognition of Dickstein's historical research, he was appointed vice-chairman of the International Academy of the History of Science. The Polish Science owes to Dickstein the fact that he brought in Stanisław Zaremba and Kazimierz Żorawski to Cracow.

Dickstein did not confine himself to publishing and organizational activities only. He conducted also research into algebra and history and he was writing handbooks for secondary education. Dickstein's most important work, a monograph – *Hoene-Wroński. Life and work*, in which he analyzed this prominent nineteenth-century mathematician, was published in 1896. And it was Dickstein who discovered the personage of Adam Kochański.

Samuel Dickstein died on 28 September 1939 in Warsaw. To honour this great mathematician and ardent scientist, in 1978, the Polish Mathematical Society founded the Samuel Dickstein reward for exceptional achievements in the area of: the history of mathematics, the philosophy of mathematics,

didactics of mathematics, the popularization of mathematics and other outstanding achievements in the area of education, publication and organization.

It is hard to overestimate Samuel Dickstein's contribution both into Polish mathematics and into Polish science as a whole. Bronisław Knaster wrote in [2]:

*According to Stefan Mazurkiewicz's apt remark, Dickstein's systematic and many-sided efforts to create a "scientific atmosphere" which was absent in the then Poland, are particularly worth noticing. It was not only his editing and publishing activity, nor collecting priceless mathematical works to create a library (towards the end of his life he had given it to the Warsaw Scientific Society but only part of it remained untouched after World War II and it now constitutes part of the Mathematics Institute Library of the Polish Academy of Sciences), nor his diligence both in improving our mathematical abilities and in bringing up new scientists by publishing valuable academic textbooks and translating foreign works, but also – in great measure – his support for original research and announcement of their results were the activities which helped in creating the "scientific atmosphere".*

Roman Duda wrote about *Mathematical News* and its founder in [1]:

*Mathematical News was an extremely authorial periodical. On every page and in almost each line it could be felt that it was prepared under the auspices of one and the same person – its "editor and publisher". Samuel Dickstein's consistency as far as adapted form is concerned, his unstinting generosity and unusual diligence are virtues which made the periodical interesting and enticing for people.*

More information about Samuel Dickstein can be found in:

- [1] Duda, R., *Stulecie Wiadomości Matematycznych*. Wiadomości Matematyczne XXXIII (1997) str. 111 – 135 (in Polish).
- [2] Knaster, B., *Wspomnienie o Samuelu Dicksteinie (1851 – 1939)*. Prace Matematyczne I 1955 str. 4 – 12 (in Polish).
- [3] Kuratowski, K., *A half century of Polish Mathematics. Remembrances and Reflections*. PWN Warszawa 1980.
- [4] Mostowski, A., *La vie et l'oeuvre de Samuel Dickstein*. Prace Matematyczno-Fizyczne XLVII (1949) str. VII-XII.
- [5] <http://www-history.mcs.st-and.ac.uk/history/Biographies/Dickstein.html>.