

ABSTRACT OF PROCEEDINGS, AUGUST, 1905.

MONTHLY MEETING.

At the monthly meeting of the Royal Society of Tasmania last evening, His Excellency the Governor (Sir Gerard Strickland) presided; Lady Strickland, with Miss Drummond and suite, being also present.

Public Health Work.

The meeting first discussed Dr. Elkington's paper on "Some economic and social aspects of public health work." Mr. Nat Oldham attended with his lantern, and with the aid of which illustrated some insects which are transmitters of disease.

His Excellency, in opening the discussion, said the paper proved very fascinating to him, and he had gone over it at least four times. He had almost completely failed to find points to criticise. It was written in an exceedingly bright and epigrammatic style well sustained throughout. (Hear, hear.) Dr. Elkington had been in contact with epidemics of plague in India, and Tasmania was now fortunate in having the advantages of it, though our conditions here were very different. We had no problems arising from congested populations. It was just the contrary. Our population was sparse, and we lived in one of the most healthy parts of the world. Yet the public health, and the care and nurture of infantile life needed such an officer to guard them; also in aiding to increase the reputation of the State as a health resort, thereby attracting to Tasmania an ever-increasing number of the most eligible people from other parts of the world and the Australian Commonwealth. He doubted whether the system obtaining in Tasmania of reporting infectious diseases was as efficient as Dr. Elkington implied. The result of his (His Excellency's) observations was that it was not, owing to difficulties, thoroughly efficient anywhere. Certainly, if it was so in Tasmania, it was very greatly to the credit of the Health Department, for, after all, it was the key of success in sanitary science, and the only hope for the abolition of the antiquated and often impossible quarantine laws. He ventured to disagree with Dr. Elkington as to the yellow fever being more likely to threaten the western seaboard, including Australia, and especially Tasmania and New Zealand, by the opening of the Panama Canal, though he did not deny its impossibility. And if it did reach our shores, he thought it would be successfully stamped out with not very serious trouble. The danger of its reaching the

colder climates of Tasmania and New Zealand he thought was still more remote.

Dr. Gerard Smith spoke in commendation of the aid of local authorities in matters of public health; but it was very necessary that they should co-operate with the head of the State Public Health Department. He thought that the therapeutic side of the medical profession was paying great attention to preventive medicine.

Dr. Crouch commended the paper.

Mr. Clemes spoke in sympathy with what the paper had said on the importance of preventive medicine.

Mr. Russell Young said the intelligent way in which Dr. Elkington had brought the subject before the public quite justified the action of the Government in obtaining the services of such an able and independent medical gentleman to take in hand the control of the general health of the community. (Applause.) He emphasised the importance of the health of the people, and especially in Tasmania, which was becoming such a noted health and holiday resort.

Mr. R. M. Johnston spoke of the noble purpose of the paper, and the great public service which Dr. Elkington discharged. Dr. Elkington's directing skill in the interests of public health was of great value and importance. Infantile mortality stood lower in Tasmania than in the other States.

Bishop Mercer wondered why it was that the large amount of insanitary environment among Jewish communities in great cities did not so much affect their health as other people. He was told that they had longer bodies. (Laughter.) Perhaps Dr. Elkington could explain. The State should make some better regulations for the protection of health in mining districts. It was very striking the marvellous advantage the Japanese army derived from attending to sanitary matters. He wished to add his tribute of thanks to Dr. Elkington for having contributed such a valuable paper to the society and the State, and trusted it would do much lasting and far-reaching good. (Applause.)

Dr. Elkington, in replying to the discussion, said that notifications of fevers and contagious diseases were now received in the great majority of cases in Tasmania. He joined issue with His Excellency as to the danger of yellow fever reaching Australia through the Panama Canal, and quoted Manson, a great authority on the subject, to show there was a danger, and Manson was the greatest authority on tropical medicine. The

physical characteristics of the mosquito that conveyed yellow fever were such as to enable it, under given conditions, to be a potent and dangerous factor. It was the best of all sea travellers of the mosquito family, and its distribution was well-nigh universal. A close connection of that mosquito existed in Tasmania, particularly on the East Coast, namely, the *Stegomyia notoscripta*, the other being the *Stegomyia fasciata*. Certainly, Tasmania's cold climate was a protection. As to what the Bishop of Tasmania had said in reference to the Jews, their superior health in congested and insanitary surroundings was due to the excellent domestic management of the Jewish women. In many points they set an example to their sisters of other faiths. It was exceedingly rare to find their children fed artificially; their cooking was good, and they were particularly keen in the observance of their religious duties and rites. As to the absence of sanitation in mining districts, he was painfully aware of it. It was almost wholly due to a lack of sanitary inspection and enforcement. As to the care and feeding of infants, he hoped, with the aid of the Director of Education, to soon have practical demonstrations given to girls in school on the subject. Referring to the work of local authorities, he acknowledged that the City Local Board of Health and its officer formed a shining example to local sanitary authorities in Tasmania. But local sanitary authorities were not invariably essential. In New Zealand they were retained, but were more or less of a phantom, for there the State took up practically all the work.

A hearty vote of thanks was passed to Dr. Elkington for his paper amid applause.

The Housing Question.

Bishop Mercer read a paper on "The Housing Question," reviewing certain economic principles bearing thereon.

Discussion on the paper was postponed till the next meeting.

New Member.

Mr. J. Adam was unanimously elected a Fellow of the society.

Obsidian Buttons.

Mr. Morton (the secretary) read a paper on "Record of Obsidianites or Obsidian Buttons in Tasmania," prepared by Mr. W. H. Twelvetrees, F.G.S. The author said during recent years some more of these interesting, though still mysterious objects have been found in Tasmania, and it seems desirable to place the localities on record, as a knowledge of their distribution and conditions of occurrence may assist in forming some idea of their age. Mr. Twelvetrees said the locality-list brought up to date stands as 22 specimens of Obsidian buttons found in Tasmania. The writer further said: "It might be as well to record the information obtained as to their occurrence before the particulars pass into oblivion. It seems to be clear, said Mr. Twelvetrees, that no evidence has come to light which would require us to assign to them a date so far back as early or middle tertiary. They have nowhere been found in gravel protected by the middle tertiary basalt." Mr. Twelvetrees said he had repeatedly made inquiry at Derby (Tasmania), but always with negative results.

The proceedings then terminated.