

ABSTRACT OF PROCEEDINGS, NOVEMBER, 1905.

TROPICAL AUSTRALIA AND OLD-AGE PENSIONS.

His Excellency the Governor, Sir Gerald Strickland, K.C.M.G., presided at the monthly meeting of the Royal Society of Tasmania last evening.

In apologising for his absence, Colonel Legge wrote, calling attention to the death of Captain Hutton, F.R.S.E., and suggesting that some steps should be taken to perpetuate his memory.

Mr. R. M. Johnston feelingly referred to Captain Hutton's death on his way back from a trip to England, and who, he said, was one of the most industrious and eminent of Australasian scientists. Captain Hutton was president of the Australasian Association of Science at its Hobart meeting. He moved,—“That the news of Captain Hutton's death be recorded on the minutes with deep regret; that a letter of condolence be sent to Mrs. Hutton; and that kindred societies in Australia be communicated with, advocating steps being taken to perpetuate his memory.”

Mr. A. G. Webster seconded the motion, which was passed.

Old-Age Pensions.

Mr. R. M. Johnston read a paper on the subject of old-age pensions, apart from political aspects of the question, dealing with the ethical and economic aspects of it. He claimed that it was purely an economic question in relation to the State. The present breadwinners supported the rising generation, who would be the future breadwinners, and were therefore ethically, economically, and justly entitled to an old-age pension where required. He gave a mass of figures, showing how the proposal would work in relation to both the Commonwealth and Tasmania as one of the States. He estimated that about 1.38 per cent. of the population of Tasmania, of the age of 65 years and upwards, would require the pension. He showed that there are at present in the Commonwealth of Australia a population (exclusive of aborigines) of 3,934,376 persons, of whom it is estimated that 159,375, or 4 per cent., are of the age of 65 years and over. By the seven years' experience of New Zealand, it might be safely reckoned, under the conditions prescribed there for old-age pensions, that about 55,781 persons, or about 35 per cent. of the old-age group (65 years and over), would become pensioners. This, at the average pension of £17 per annum, would represent a cost to the Commonwealth States

of £948,177 per annum, and a tax of 4s. 9d. per head. The burden and effect of such a pension to each State on the basis of population was then given, that for Tasmania being estimated as follows:—Percentage of persons, 65 years and upwards, to the total population, 4.52; old-age pension cost, £42,858. Mr. Johnston then proceeded to show that the proposal was practicable and workable. New Zealand had indicated it where only 1.38 of the population had needed it, or 3 per cent. of the old-age group. Last year it cost the New Zealand Government £195,000.

Mr. Ogiivy very warmly commended the paper, but time did not permit of discussing it.

Tropical Australia.

Dr. Elkington read an exceedingly interesting and instructive paper on “Tropical Australia—Is it fitted for a working white race?” He first answered the question, “What is tropical Australia?” It comprised rather more than one-third the entire Commonwealth territory. One-half of Queensland, 523,620 square miles of the northern territory of South Australia, and the north-western divisions of West Australia are included, totalling in all some 1,145,000 square miles. Much yet remained to be opened up, but enough was known to justify bright anticipations of its commercial future. The mines of Chillagoe and Charters Towers testified to the existence of mineral wealth in the east, and mineral deposits are known to exist in the northern territory of South Australia, while the Kimberley districts have not yet been fairly investigated. The presence of so many streams pointed to an economic and profitable source of power for the development of mining and electric-metallurgical industries. The sugar industry of the eastern part of North Queensland formed a valuable addition to the resources of that State, but it did not comprise more than a small part of the agricultural possibilities of tropical Australia. The country ranges from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean, included practically all ordinary varieties of tropical climate, and was dominated by the monsoonal winds. The greater part of it lies between 600ft. and 1,500ft. above sea level; but extensive plateaus exist, covering many hundreds of square miles, at an elevation of over 1,500ft., and ranging in Arnhem Land to 3,000ft. and over. Elevation materially modified climate, and the breezy table-lands of eastern North Queensland at least afford, for many months of the year, as bracing an atmosphere as could be found anywhere in the world. Drought is a rare phenomena

in the monsoonal area, and the great northern rivers testify to the abundance and regularity of the annual revivification from this cause. These also afforded waterways for a considerable distance into the interior, and drained extensive areas of good pastoral country. Very large cattle runs have been taken up, and in the first six months of 1904, some £500,000 worth of cattle were exported from the northern territory alone. Where good pastoral land was plentiful in a well-watered country, it may be reasonably concluded that good agricultural land was not absent. It was already known that the finest quality of cotton could be produced in parts of tropical Australia; the cultivation of tobacco, maize, dates, quinine, spices, opium, and other profitable vegetable products, appeared to require only the necessary population; also the breeding of goats for mohair and hides, raising of poultry, dairying for export, etc. Tropical Australia was by no means an earthly paradise, neither was it a fever-smitten jungle, as some would have them believe. It already supported, in parts, a fairly considerable white population, who did not appear to be degenerating, despite the recklessness and ignorance so often displayed in relation to personal health and habits. Certain diseases exist, notably malaria, dysentery, and ankylostomiasis, but their incidence was mainly local, and the methods of prevention well known. Their limitation and eventual extinction was mainly a question of money. Dealing with the objections raised to the occupation of tropical Australia by a working white race, Dr. Elkington made light of objections to tropical climates by the practice of tropical hygiene, the use of sanitary and preventive precautions, and the adoption of a suitable dietary. So much hinged upon domestic and personal environment and habits. Impure water, improper food, and general neglect of the rules of health, will produce much the same effects, whether the victim resides in Melbourne or Palmerston. Although there appeared to be no insuperable, or even serious, bar to the ultimate colonisation of tropical Australia by a working white race, certain sanitary and other measures, which he indicated, involved much public organisation and outlay, especially in the direction of preventing and stamping out infectious diseases. Tropical Australia was no place for weaklings and degenerates. Newcomers must be taught how

to suitably live, suitable dwellings occupied, use of alcohol interdicted, and regulations made as to working hours, to suit the climate. He concluded—"Before any definite move can be made, much more will require to be accurately known concerning the topographical, and other conditions of the country. From what can be gathered, however, the institution of an inquiry should be amply justified. In this age of land hunger, Australia cannot continue to act as the dog in the manger. Given sufficient industrial attraction, population will soon be forthcoming, and there appears to be no good reason why that population should not be a white one. Should the initial difficulties appear too great, the alternative of a coloured population is always feasible; but I, for one, would regret to think that the national pluck and enterprise upon which we Australians are rather apt to pride ourselves is insufficient to enable difficulties to be faced which have been met and overcome elsewhere under less favourable conditions."

Mr. Moore, M.H.A., questioned whether Dr. Elkington had conclusively shown that in a tropical climate, as in India, white people could develop or maintain a good physique and perform manual labour.

Ancient Egyptian Architecture.

Dr. Gerard Smith, with the aid of lantern slides manipulated by Mr. Nat Oldham, gave an exceedingly interesting and instructive address on architectural forms, and the different kinds of temples, pyramids, etc., of ancient Egypt, with explanations of their ethnological significance.

At the close of the meeting, Mr. A. G. Webster moved a vote of thanks to His Excellency for his constant attendance and presiding at the meetings of the session, which was passed amid hearty applause.

His Excellency assured them that it was a very great pleasure to him to thus meet the leaders of scientific thought in Tasmania. He suggested that the two able papers which had been read that evening should be discussed at the opening of the 1906 session. He also commended the energy, devotion, and ability of the secretary (Mr. Alex. Morton) in organising the meetings. (Applause.)

The proceedings then terminated.