

JUNE 12th, 1906.

The monthly meeting of the Royal Society of Tasmania was held at the Tasmanian Museum on Tuesday, June 12, 1906. His Excellency Sir Gerald Strickland who was accompanied by Lady Edeline Strickland, and accompanied by Mr. Geo. Browne, I.S.O., presided, and the Chief Justice, Sir John Dodds, K.C.M.G., was among those present. Apologies for absence were received from the Bishop of Tasmania, Colonel Legge, and Sir Elliott Lewis.

Mr. J. W. Tarleton was elected a member of the society.

Biological Ancestry of Human Diseases.

Dr. Gerard Smith read a highly technical paper entitled "The Biological Ancestry of Some Human Diseases." He said that they had no doubt heard of a recent cryptic utterance made by Sir Frederick Treves, which was an expression of the new school of medical thought, Sir Frederick Treves had said that "if there were no diseases, the human race could not exist." That was a statement which, although it embodied a truthful philosophy in respect to our mental attitude with respect to the reasons and causation of disease, yet it went too far for our present comprehension. He (Dr. Smith) wished to present a lesser theory, taking in a certain limited class of bodily disorders. It was that disease in man was healthy life misplaced. Diseases were not rightly termed abnormal, but normal, processes going on under conditions which had changed, and constituted diseases only because the organism in which they occur is in an incompletely developed state, and in a condition of instability and change. Proceeding, Dr. Smith laid it down that the last organs to develop in the order of evolution were the first to fail, whether by disease or advancing age, or, in other words, that physiological recency meant pathological weakness. It would be expected that an organ which had been among the earliest developed would be less likely to be unstable. The longer an organ had performed its functions in an adequate and satisfactory manner, and had therefore attained by survival of a high standard of perfection, the less likely would it be to fail in its function. In spite of ill-treatment, the stomach, one of the earliest developed organs, was the least liable to disease; whereas the lungs, heart, etc., which were of more recent development, were more liable to disease. This, he considered, was in harmony with his theory, the organs being as it were in a state of transition or instability, with the result that normal processes would go on under conditions no longer favourable. By throwing back to an earlier stage of their evolution cells would be put out of

harmony with their surroundings, so to speak, and thus cause disease.

Democracy and Socialism.

Mr. E. C. Nowell read a lengthy paper, in the course of which he attempted to give definitions of democracy and socialism. He described the Athenian polity, showing that in the ancient democracy the whole people exercised direct control of the affairs of the State, both legislative and executive. No such system existed nowadays, except in Switzerland. There was, with the exception mentioned, no modern democracy in the exact sense of the term. Mr. Nowell next dealt with socialism, quoting largely from Professor Flint's standard work on the subject, and also from the works of other British and European writers. According to Professor Flint, socialism sought to re-construct and reorganise the whole social system, and to effect a vast improvement in every department of human life. It aimed especially at a thorough reorganisation of industry and property, at such an alteration of the conditions and arrangements as to the production, distribution, and enjoyment of wealth as would abolish poverty and remove the discontent of the operative classes.

Mr. Nowell also dwelt on the various types of socialism which have been developed—at least in theory—communism, collectivism, co-operation, and State socialism, etc. He concluded by giving a summary of the arguments advanced by American writers in favour of socialism, and quoted an interesting extract from a recent article by Mr. Upton Sinclair, which showed how the perfection of machinery had reduced the amount of human labour requisite to produce articles most extensively consumed.

Mr. E. D. Dobbie, who opened the discussion on Mr. Nowell's paper, saw no objection to the use of the word democracy as applied to modern States. It was true that it had lost in a measure its original significance, as used in reference to the Greek States, but its application with a modified significance to modern States was quite legitimate and perfectly intelligible. The people no longer exercised direct control over the affairs of the State, but they were none the less the repository of political power. The great feature which distinguished modern from ancient democracy was the system of representation. Indeed, without the representative system modern democracy would be impossible, on account of the size of the States. Socialism, he considered, was an unmistakable protest against the present system, and indicated

plainly that there was need for some reform of existing institutions. A contest was approaching between socialism on the one hand and individualism on the other, and he thought that the result would be a compromise, preserving the moderate forms of both. In his opinion, there was no probability that individual production, private ownership of land, would ever be abolished. The present system had its undoubted merits, one of the greatest being the incentive which it gave to individual effort. If that incentive were lost, civilisation would be endangered.

Mr. R. M. Johnston endorsed Mr. Dobbie's remarks. There were two extremes—unrestrained individualism on the one side, and complete socialistic rule on the other. He believed, with Mr. Dobbie, that society would take the middle course.

Preserving Timber.

Mr. R. M. Johnston called attention of members of the society to the process patented by Captain E. T. McFie for preserving timber, and suggested that a series of tests should be made in order to ascertain its merits.

Mr. K. C. Richardson said that the tendency of Tasmanian timbers to split was a bar to their introduction into foreign markets. If any method could be discovered of preventing wind shakes, a great expansion of the timber industry could be looked for. The eucalyptus was, in a sense, an evergreen; the sap was always in the stem. Consequently when the tree was cut down and sawn into billets, rapid shrinkage took place, and as the process was more rapid at the ends of the logs, splitting was almost inevitable. What they wanted was a paint which should prevent this, and cause the pro-

cess of seasoning to proceed uniformly through the piece of timber. He had used several paints for that purpose, but none, so far as he could judge, were equal to Captain McFie's. He would make some tests shortly, when he shipped a small consignment of timber to England, and in due course would communicate the results to the society.

In moving a vote of thanks to the gentlemen who had read papers, His Excellency made some reference to socialism. Something of the character of a socialistic state existed in the religious orders and the guilds of the Middle Ages. In the religious orders property was held in common, and tasks were assigned to the members suited to their several capacities. When their religious enthusiasm effervesced, however, they grew lazy, and for the want of some authority to enforce discipline and compel the members to work, the organisation collapsed. That suggested a difficulty which was the crux of the whole question: How were they to ensure industrious application to work in the socialistic state, and how were they to assign proper tasks to proper persons? And, again, who was to see that those duties were properly performed? So far the State had merely touched the fringe of production. Agriculture, the most important industry, was wholly in the hands of private individuals. He did not know whether in the socialistic State inspectors would be appointed to see that the farmer put the right cow in the right paddock; but supervision and discipline of some sort would be essential.

The vote of thanks was carried by acclamation, and the meeting terminated.