

JULY 11th, 1906.

The monthly meeting of the Royal Society was held on July 11, His Excellency the Governor (who was accompanied by Lady Edeline Strickland and Mr. Geo. Browne, Private Secretary) in the chair.

#### School Hygiene.

Dr. Elkington, Chief Health Officer, gave a most interesting and important address on "School Hygiene," illustrated with diagrams, the lantern-slides showing the different ways in which children sit at school, getting into bad habits, spoiling their eyesight, curving their spines, and doing themselves all sorts of injuries, which were owing to bad ventilation, badly constructed schoolrooms, badly placed windows, and wrongly constructed desks. All these could be obviated if schools were properly built, and modern appliances used, specimens of which were thrown on the screen. The greatest of the faults committed in the name of education in the past, said Dr. Elkington, had been the non-recognition of the physical side of the child's environment, whether as an all-controlling factor in the development of the spiritual side, or as an all-important influence upon the child's future. This was not fair to the child, since it interfered with his mental equipment for the struggle of modern competition, and frequently saddled him with a lasting physical defect. It was neither reasonable nor fair to anybody to continue attempting to force impressions, through eyes which were prevented from seeing and ears which could not properly hear, to reach brains somnolent and unresponsive from carbonic acid poisoning. In London, great efforts were being put forth to better the physical and moral status of the County Council school population, and the results amply justified the cost. Throughout the British Isles the work was going on apace. Germany had for years appreciated its value, with the result that the proverbially bespectacled student of a generation ago was becoming rarer. Switzerland had a widely organised system of examination and inspection, practically dominated by the school medical officer, who was a sort of hygienic autocrat. Many of the American States placed the hygiene of their schools directly under the State health authority, and Japan had an exhaustive system of medical inspection and supervision by some 8,424 specially appointed doctors. So much does America value hygiene that it is the only compulsory subject in the school curriculum in a number of the States. It was well for the teachers to become acquainted with the main principles governing site, structure, circulation, planning, lighting, and air supply; but from a practical point of view these were of less importance than

the knowledge of how to utilise to the best advantage what was provided. For those who could afford to erect a private school on correct lines, there was a large available literature in several European languages, and even in Japanese. When money was to be spent on school buildings, it was generally better to expend it on the inside than on the outside. Mechanical ventilation or adjustable desks would be a more important innovation than a bell tower. School hygiene did not necessarily imply large expense, nor could a system be run on formal cut and dried lines, suitable for all latitudes and all classes of schools. Like Opie's colours, it required to be mixed with brains. Its resources were available for the smallest of back-black schools in Canada or Australia, and were essential for the largest of the great establishments of London or New York. School hygiene was not intended solely for the child. The teacher was the mainspring of the school, and causes which operated adversely upon his or her physical condition, tended to interfere with educational result. School hygiene was not a question for State educational systems alone. Its importance was as great in private as in public schools, and its economic results were equally striking in both. As a rule, physical culture should be regulated by a medical man, as serious damage might be done to individual weakly children by physical overstrain. In the absence of a trained instructor, it should never be undertaken. Ordinary healthy children derived more benefit from a noisy scamper round the playground than they would get from a half-hour's ordeal of club-waving or toe-touching mechanically directed by an uninterested and unskilled teacher. After dealing with the benefit to be derived from the medical inspection of schools, Dr. Elkington concluded by describing the different mechanical appliances, such as windows, school desks, warning apparatus, etc., used in modern schools, which were thrown on the canvas by Mr. Nat. Oldham.

A discussion followed the paper, in the course of which Mr. Smith, headmaster of the Model School at Battery Point, spoke of the splendid work done by Dr. Elkington in improving the conditions of the schools in Tasmania; efforts which were very much appreciated by the teachers throughout the State.

Bishop Mercer said if the Government compelled children to go to school they must make the schools healthy places for the children to work in, no matter what the cost. Many of the schools in the country were old-fashioned to a degree. The teachers suffered even more than the children by bad conditions.

Mr. Oldham said it was not State-schools only, but private schools, that wanted looking after.

The Chairman said he could not adequately express the very high appreciation which Dr. Elkington deserved for his efforts in popularising a really sound system of school hygiene. Nowhere had he seen the work done so systematically and so thoroughly as here.

#### Notes on King Island.

A paper, entitled "Notes on King Island, and Recent Discoveries," prepared by Messrs. R. M. Johnston, I.S.O., and Alex. Morton, was read, from which it appeared that within the last few months several interesting specimens of animal bones had been discovered at King Island by Mr. J. McKie Bowling in a sand dune at Surprise Bay. Mr. H. H. Scott, curator of the Victoria Museum, Launceston, considered they were the bones of an extinct emu, and other remains. Arrangements were accordingly made, with the approval of Mr. A. G. Webster, chairman of trustees of the Museum, for a visit to the spot by Mr. Alex. Morton, accompanied by Mr. R. M. Johnston, to whom the necessary leave of absence was granted by the Premier. Messrs. Morton and Johnston obtained a number of bones, of which they found an immense quantity huddled together, representing a great range of species, in the sand dunes. Among the animals represented were wallaby, wombat, emu, marsupial rats, a number of skulls of a carnivorous marsupial closely allied to the Tasmanian devil, and the fossilised metatarsus of the emu. It was highly desirable that those dunes should be still further examined, so that not only the Tasmanian Museum, but other Museums throughout the world should contain specimens of this extinct species. The birds were

very similar to those found in Tasmania, while one or two Victorian species seemed to have established themselves, such as the Gang-gang Parrot. Particularly noticeable was the number of black magpies, or jays (*Strepera fuliginosa*). Among others were musk duck (*Biziara lobata*), the blue heron (*Herodias pacifica*), the black duck (*Anas superciliosa*), Jameson's gull (*Larus Jamesonii*), Pacific gull (*Larus pacificus*), the scoty oyster-catcher (*Himantopus fuliginosus*), and many others, which gorged themselves on the vermin cast up in the kelp which strewed the shore. Three snakes similar to those found in Tasmania were common—the tiger, the diamond, and the whip snake. Two or three species of lizards and several frogs were found, as also six specimens of beetles, and seven or eight species of land and freshwater shells. In the early part of last century the island was a favourite resort of sealers, the seals being indiscriminately slaughtered, but that had recently been stopped by the Fisheries Commission, with the result that seals once more abounded. Very excellent blackwood grew on the island, large quantities being shipped to Melbourne and Launceston. They recommended the reservation of a large area as a timber reserve. The dairying industry promised to become a very important one, but better communication was required with the mainland. If the Marconi system of wireless telegraphy could be installed connecting the island with Victoria and Tasmania, they were convinced it would soon repay the initial outlay, and materially help to increase the population and prosperity of the island.

A paper on the "Geology of King Island" was read by Mr. R. M. Johnston, and illustrations of the scenery were depicted by means of lantern slides.

A vote of thanks to Dr. Elkington, and Messrs. Morton and Johnston terminated the proceedings.