

JULY 8th, 1907.

The monthly meeting of the Royal Society of Tasmania was held in the Society's rooms last evening. His Excellency the Governor, Sir Gerald Strickland, who was accompanied by the Lady Edeline, presided. There was a fair attendance of members.

The acting secretary (Mrs. Morton) stated that Professor Klaatch, who was here in January last, had forwarded casts of two skulls—Neanderthal skull and skull from Java, *Pithecanthropus erectus*.

Mr. A. J. Taylor made some interesting remarks upon the casts, and said they formed the most interesting objects ever presented to the ethnological branch of the Society.

A Seismographic Observatory.

A letter was received from the Premier (Hon. J. W. Evans, C.M.G.), inviting the opinion of the Society on a resolution passed by the Australasian Association of Science that a seismograph station should be established at Hobart.

Mr. A. O. Green pointed out the value of seismograph observations, and moved a resolution in support of the opinion of the Australasian Association of Science that a station should be established in Hobart.

Dr. Noetling seconded the motion, and gave the causes of earthquakes, and pointed out the improbability of such occurring in Tasmania.

Mr. Piessé supported the motion, and spoke of the scientific value of such observations.

The motion was agreed to.

The Northern Territory.

Senator Dobson, who recently contributed a series of articles to "The Mercury" on his visit to the Northern Territory, next gave members some particulars of his trip and observations. He remarked that the area of the country was 325,116,000 acres, which Mr. Deakin had agreed to take over, subject to the approval of the South Australian and Federal Parliaments. It was proposed that they should take over its debt, amounting to £3,217,500, purchase the Port Augusta railway at cost price, £2,318,242, and which was losing £80,000 annually. The train ran once a fortnight. Proceeding to describe the country, Senator Dobson said it seemed to be a desert. Over the whole of the Northern Territory it was impossible to see tropical vegetation. Tropical Australia seemed to him to be unlike almost every other tropical country, there being an absence of indigenous tropical vegetation, and he was sorry to say no experiment had been made by the South Australian Government as to whether any cultivation of tropical plants could be carried on

with profit. He had seen a grove of coconuts in the course of his travels, which had been introduced there, but almost every tree had been burrowed out by white ants, and the trees were slowly dying. Orange and lemon trees suffered the same way. He believed, from the information he gathered, that cotton could be grown there, as well as tobacco. The cattle breeding industry had, he believed, been a success, but the country leased to the breeders was something enormous, because it was necessary that they should have access to water in the event of droughts. One man, he was told, bred 14,000 calves the year before last. One breeder had a lease of 9,000 square miles. He was informed that horses could be bred there, but the specimens which he saw did not confirm that statement. Speaking of his visit to the Adelaide River, Senator Dobson said there were 60 miles of marsh land on either side, and if properly treated and drained it might grow rice or anything else that could be grown in the tropics. Tropical agriculture had not as yet had a commencement. He proceeded to explain how difficult it would be to carry this on, owing to the labour question. Labour would have to be imported from India to cultivate jute for instance, and the industry would have to bear the cost of the importation, the repatriation at the end of a term, and compete with the industry carried on under natural conditions in India. He was told that in India two million acres were kept in cultivation for the jute plant. How could we compete with them? As to the route the proposed railway should take, Senator Dobson took exception to being bound down by the agreement made with South Australia as to any particular route being chosen. In connection with this matter, the question of defence would be found to be closely interwoven with it, and he was not prepared to vote for any agreement that tied their hands to any one direction. He looked to the time when the mails from England would come across the Continent of Europe through Turkey and Persia, through Northern India, down to the Malay Peninsula by Singapore, when they would be within four days' steam of Port Darwin. Senator Dobson next had something to say about Australian defence, and said before they built any railway there ought to be the strictest inquiry by naval and military experts. The taking over of the Northern Territory involved many difficult problems, and it would take months of debate.

A discussion ensued, and His Excellency, after offering some remarks on the discussion which had taken place, moved a vote of thanks to Senator Dobson for his address.