

andrerhüser Septembur 3<sup>te</sup> 1887.

# INTERCOLONIAL MEDICAL CONGRESS.

## FOURTH DAY.

The sittings of the Intercolonial Medical Congress were continued on Friday at the University. In the early portion of the afternoon many of the members inspected a number of pathological and other specimens, and subsequently assembled in the library, where Dr. Foreman gave a very interesting address in gynaecology, and at the conclusion of which he was warmly thanked for his valuable paper.

### ADDRESS IN STATE MEDICINE.

Dr. Whittell next delivered an address on State Medicine, a report of which we hold over.

Dr. GARDNER moved a hearty vote of thanks to Dr. Whittell for his interesting paper, which had been listened to with so much pleasure. Carried.

### THE NEXT PRESIDENT.

The Hon. Dr. CREED proposed—"That Mr. Fitzgerald, of Melbourne, be president elect of the next congress," and in doing so paid a high tribute of praise to the position occupied by Mr. Fitzgerald in the medical world. Dr. GARDNER seconded the motion, remarking that no man in Victoria held a better position with the profession and the public than Mr. Fitzgerald. (Hear, hear.) The motion was carried unanimously, and Mr. FITZGERALD briefly acknowledged the great compliment paid him. During his visit to Europe he had asked several eminent scientists if in the event of a congress being held in Australia they would come out, and on the whole they had returned a very favorable answer, provided sufficient time were given them. (Applause.)

Dr. JAMIESON moved the appointment of the president (Dr. Verco), Professor Watson, and Drs. Stirling, Gardner, Thomas, and Cleland as a publication committee, with full powers. The motion was carried, the names of the Hon. Dr. Creed (N.S.W.) and Dr. Jamieson (Victoria) having been added.

The members then divided into sections, and in the State Medicine department the Hon. Dr. Creed (Sydney) read a paper on

### CREMATION.

Dr. CREED said he should endeavor to deal with cremation as a question concerning the whole of Australasia, and the facts he would instance would, he thought, be of such a character as would induce some thought in all persons feeling interest in the sanitary protection of the population of these colonies, as to whether the time had not arrived to make some change in the present method of disposing of the dead. To be studied with effect the question must be viewed from its three standpoints, viz.—The religious, the sanitary, and the sentimental. With regard to the religious objection, it was true that Christians with few exceptions had hitherto buried their dead, but this probably came about from the fact that the early missionaries of the faith were Jews, who always buried, and as at that period cremation was the means very generally employed by the pagans a consequent desire arose to make a marked difference in the new faith. Many worthy persons objected to the burning of the dead from a dread that it might tend to weaken belief in the doctrine of the resurrection, but it needed but little thought to see that the beneficent Being the author

to weaken belief in the doctrine of the resurrection, but it needed but little thought to realise that the beneficent Being, the author and ruler of the universe, must be as able to recreate the body whether it had been resolved into its original elements by the ordinary process of decay, or by the quicker and more cleanly method of burning. If they might exercise their reason in matters of religion he thought the doubts of those worthy persons who feared that their chances of resurrection would be endangered by the destruction of their bodies by fire were most aptly met by the remark of the benevolent and truly religious Earl of Shaftesbury. When appealed to on the subject by an ardent opponent of cremation, who advanced this argument against it, he said—"But, my dear sir, what would in such a case become of the blessed martyrs?" The sanitary standpoint was of much greater importance, and though no doubt of less immediate urgency in a new country such as this, which did not yet possess a dense population, than in Europe, yet it was very advisable that the question should be taken into consideration at once, so that we might in a measure prevent the evils which always followed ordinary burial in a greater or less degree, instead of attempting to remedy them when they had been created. The advantages of cremation were best shown by producing evidence of the dangers which had arisen from the usual methods of disposing of the dead. He would therefore give some few examples which would prove the magnitude of the evils which arose from the present system of burial. Sir Henry Thompson, one of the foremost thinkers of the age, under whom Dr. Creed was a student, advocated cremation, and in an article in the *Contemporary Review* declared that by selecting a portion of ground distant some five or ten miles from any very populous neighborhood, and by sending our dead to be buried there, we were "laying by poison, it was certain, for our children's children, who would find our remains polluting their water sources when that now distant plot was covered, as it would be, more or less closely, by human dwellings." Dr. Creed then mentioned instances that had occurred in Sydney of graveyards that had been required for building purposes and were now the centres of thickly populated neighborhoods. As instancing a strong example of the danger arising from cemeteries, the doctor alluded to the report of Dr. Ashburton Thompson, Chief Inspector to the New South Wales Health Board, on the outbreak of typhoid fever in the municipal district of Leichardt, near Sydney. In speaking of the contamination of a well which formed the water supply to a dairy there, he said, "Disgusting as such water is, however, sewage is not the only organic matter it contains. On both ridges are cemeteries, that to the west being the Balmain Cemetery, which has been established about 16 years, and which now holds about 9,000 bodies, that on the east being the Balmain Roman Catholic Cemetery, established about 12 years, and holding about 1,000 bodies. The soil was supposed to be impermeable until about November last, when the corporation cut Norton-street down 3 feet; a shallow section of the lowest part of the cemetery was thus made, and I am told by many people that so foetid a soakage flowed from the face to the street as rendered the latter almost impassable for nearly six weeks. A clay soil delays putrefaction, but it happens in time, and as is thus proved, when the coffins begin to leak the putrilage is no longer confined to the grave, but enters the subsoil waters. With this it flows under Norton-street, and down the slope to

Norton-street, and down the slope to Helsarmel Creek, 240 yards away. There it meets a similar drainage from the Roman Catholic Cemetery on the opposite ridge, and both together come to light again at last in that unconsecrated cauldron, the dairy well." As showing how terrible diseases had been brought into activity by the ignorant or unthinking use of the pick and shovel, in 1828 Professor Bianchi demonstrated how the fearful reappearance of the plague at Modena was caused by excavations in ground where 300 years previously the victims of the pestilence had been buried. It was remarked by Mr. Cooper that the opening of the plague burial grounds at Eyane, in Derbyshire, occasioned an immediate outbreak of disease. He also describes how the malignity of the cholera which scourged London in 1854 was enhanced by the excavations made for sewers in the soil, where in 1865 those dying from the plague were buried. Other instances were quoted of epidemics breaking out through the medium of cemeteries, and the highest medical authorities were cited to show that there was no question as to the places and cause of their origin. In the interests of our descendants we should attempt to make some change in the direction of the removal of one patent source of ill, and he was of opinion that this could be done by the introduction of cremation. This would at once destroy all possibility of danger as arising from the dead body, destroying as it would in a comparatively few minutes the whole of its organic matter, and leaving nothing but about 3½ per cent. of mineral matter, pure and sightly in appearance and in fact. By this method, in a properly constructed crematorium, the entire process of the resolution of the body to its original elements would be completed in about an hour without the possibility of offence to any of the senses of the bystanders, and with the certainty that it would then be harmless to the living for all time. A crematorium generally approved was that of Siemens. In this apparatus no fuel came into contact with the body, which was placed in a chamber which had been raised to a temperature of 2000° Fahr. by means of heated air and gas, which completely consumed all the destructible portions without the escape into the open air of anything but completely odorless and colorless gases. A more recent apparatus was that of Signor Vernini, an Italian engineer, and he was informed by Signor Fiocchi, a cousin of the inventor, that it was in more general use than any other. From the description of it he was inclined to think that it possessed several advantages which would render it a desirable one to choose when we were able to give practical effect to our opinions in Australia. One of these, and not the least, was that it had no visible chimney, and that the appearance of its being an industrial establishment was thus removed from the building, and one shock to sensibility was removed. It was very rapid and effective in its work, and the draught is arranged in such a way that none of the ashes were carried away by aspiration. The cost of a complete apparatus of this character he was informed was £1,000. The charges made for the cremation of a body at the crematorium at Woking, near London, was £6, which includes transport to the crematorium. This cost would be much lower when the custom was more general in England, which it was rapidly becoming. It was frequent in Germany, where during the first year of its establishment at Gotha 52 bodies were cremated; still more common in Italy, for at Milan 150 cremations took place in the same period, at a cost for each of about 24s. The cost was now even

less, and with Vernini's apparatus it could be done for about 12s., and the cremations were so numerous as, according to his informant, Signor Fiocchi, to be seldom less than five a day. He said that 4,000 bodies had been cremated in Milan since the process was introduced about 10 years since. It was also an established custom in the United States, where 118 were cremated last year; whilst in Brazil it was compulsory by law in the case of the bodies of all persons who have died from yellow fever. In Spain the sanitary council have formulated several propositions relating to cremation, amongst which is the following:— "Cremation should be voluntary, except during times of epidemics and after great battles." Dr. Creed was of opinion that it was very advisable that there should be direct legislation on the subject, and that cremation should only be carried out under proper regulations and in suitable apparatus. One of the objections raised to its becoming general was that it might possibly be made use of as a means of concealment of crimes against life, but the evils likely to result from this had been, he thought, much exaggerated, and with proper regulations there would be less risk of undetected crime than there was at present in many of the colonies with the laxity which prevailed as to the permission of burial before registration of the death and without the production of fitting certificates as to its cause. We had all become so accustomed to accept burial as the inevitable means for the disposal of the bodies of our fondly-loved friends that it was only after careful thought as to the details of the two processes that men could be expected to accept cremation, not only as the best from a sanitary standpoint, but also as the preferable means for preserving that sanctity and refined sentiment with which it was the desire of us all to surround the remains of our loved ones. If we calmly thought of the two processes, scientifically the same, for they were each a process of oxidisation, the one lingering and slow, extending of a series of years, the stages of decomposition rendering the body a mass of foetid corruption—a source of danger to those left behind and a loathsome object to the survivors, who, however devotedly attached, could not but, if they saw it a few days after interment, view the once loved object with loathing and disgust; the other a rapid, cleanly, decent method, which in a few short minutes reduced the corruptible shell of humanity to a small quantity of ashes, so pure, so free from odor or infection, that though the death might have occurred as a consequence of the most loathsome disease yet they could be immediately received as a sacred relic and stored in some consecrated spot. He thought the object of the advocates of cremation would be best carried out by the establishment of societies for the purpose in all the colonies. The duty of such societies would be to detect and bring before the public any instances of danger to health which had been created by the burial of bodies in unsuitable cemeteries, to disseminate literature giving information on the subject amongst the people, to provide in due time fitting apparatus for carrying out the process, to advocate the passing of laws to ensure its being done without shock to the sensibilities of those persons whose prejudices prevented their being favorable to it, and to provide regulations which would prevent it in some rare instances being made a means for the concealment of crime. In this way public thought would be so educated by example that in a

would be so educated by example that in a very few years cremation would become as general and as much desired by the majority as burial was at present. A danger to health would be removed, and he thought they would agree with him in believing that refined sentiment would be better conserved than it was at present. (Loud applause.)

#### MODIFICATION OF SYMPTOMS IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.

Dr. J. P. BAKER, of Strangways, S. A., gave an address on "Modification of Symptoms in Central Australia," a report which we are compelled to hold over for want of space.

#### GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY IN REGARD TO SIGHT TESTING FOR LAND AND SEA SERVICE.

Mr. RUDALL, F. R. C. S., read a paper on the above subject, which he summed up at the conclusion into nine points. 1. It was the duty of the Government to pass laws which could not be evaded to ensure the public safety in travelling. 2. This duty was the more imperative, as travellers were by the nature of the case precluded from taking steps to protect themselves. 3. No law would be effective which did not provide for a definite standard of sight to be maintained, and for the examinations being made by technically-competent examiners. 4. It was desirable that in each capital city an office with the requisite material, with a staff of trained examiners and one or more clerks, should be established by the respective Governments. 5. A permanent and always accessible record of the sight of every candidate passed should be kept in such office, and likewise a record of the cause of rejection of every candidate not passed. 6. In the event of any candidate being obliged to be examined at a distance from the capital the examination must be conducted according to a definite scheme, and a regular schedule setting forth the sharpness of sight for form and color, the refraction, &c., filled in by the examiner, who must be qualified for the duty. 7. On the first opportunity the candidate must be passed through the central office. 8. An office and staff would serve for the examination of sight for all railway and marine signal men, locomotive engine drivers, pilots, soldiers, sailors, and policemen. 9. To the head, or to the whole professional staff, the Government might submit many questions of injury to sight, &c., on which it desired information.

#### THERMAL SPRING DISTRICT OF NEW ZEALAND.

A paper by Dr. GINDERS, of New Zealand, dealing with the above subject, was read. The doctor gave a lengthy account of the springs for which New Zealand has become famous, drew attention to the various ailments for which they are efficacious, and gave hints to patients as to the best route to be adopted for reaching them, and the accommodation and probable tariff likely to be found on arrival.

The congress then adjourned.

## MEDICAL CONGRESS DINNER.

A dinner was tendered to the Intercolonial Medical Congress by the president and South Australian members at the banqueting room of the Town Hall on Friday evening. There was a large attendance, and the president (Dr. Verco), who occupied the chair, was supported on his right by his Excellency the Governor, Sir H. Ayers, K.C.M.G., and Dr. T. N. Fitzgerald, and on the left by the Chief Justice (the Hon. S. J. Way), Sir Thomas Elder, K.C.M.G., and the Rev. W. R. Fletcher, M.A. (vice chancellor of the University).

The PRESIDENT gave the toast of "The Queen," which was drunk with the customary honors. In giving "The health of his Excellency the Governor" he said the name of Sir William Robinson would be as cordially received as that of her Majesty. (Loud and prolonged cheers.) It was not merely as her Majesty's representative that they honored him, but as their patron, who had done much towards making the conference the success it had proved. The congress had decided to meet again in Victoria, and he hoped they would always remember with pleasure that his Excellency was their first patron, and had materially contributed to the success of the initial gathering. (Cheers.)

His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR (Sir William Robinson, K.C.M.G.), in responding to the toast, said:—Ladies and gentlemen—It is not every day that a patient, if I may so term myself for the occasion, can be where over 100 medical men of skill and ability are solicitous of his health and welfare. We all know, some of us by experience, what we derive from the skill, kindness, and ability of one medical man when we require his services. I feel on this occasion, as there are so many who have just drunk my health so cordially, certain that the good things of which I have partaken will not go against me in any way to night or to-morrow morning; and I shall long remember this dinner not only as one of the most agreeable at which I have ever assisted, but as one followed by none of the evil results which occasionally follow such good dinners. Gentlemen, I feel that an occasion such as the dinner to this congress, the consideration of which is devoted to matters of so much interest and usefulness, should be of a cheerful and merry nature, and it would ill become me to go into the duties you have met to discharge; but I feel compelled to say that I have watched your proceedings with interest, and I have admired the talent and energy that has been brought to bear upon the subjects you have had under your consideration. I am delighted to find that you have decided to give this congress a permanent character. In doing this you have acted wisely, and I congratulate you on so doing. (Hear, hear.) There is, however, one complaint which, it seems to me, is assuming gigantic proportions in Australia, to which no reference has been made during the conference. I have experienced the symptoms myself in common with hundreds of others. They are first a sort of nervousness, then a good deal of hesitation about one's speech, as though what one had eaten had not agreed with him, and altogether feelings of discomfort. I do not know the professional name of the scourge, but I would call it "speechomania"—(laughter)—and throughout the colonies it is increasing to such

an extent that everyone is expected to be able on all occasions to make a speech. At times it does not trouble one much, but on this occasion I felt the whole of the symptoms acutely when I learnt that I had to follow your president, who is such a master of oratory. (Hear, hear.) Such an address as his I have seldom listened to, and rarely had the misfortune to follow. In all portions of Australia, whatever his personal qualifications, the representative of her Majesty is sure of a hearty reception, and this is not the first time I have had to acknowledge in heartfelt words the cordial reception I have received as the representative of her Majesty. (Cheers.) I have great pleasure in proposing the toast of "The Inter-colonial Medical Congress." I believe great and valuable results will follow from this gathering, especially as it has been decided to hold future gatherings of a similar nature in the other colonies. I venture to say that no one entertains feelings of higher respect and admiration for the medical profession than I do, and no one more sincerely desired for this congress beneficial results. I have great pleasure in submitting the toast allotted to me. (Cheers.)

The PRESIDENT (Dr. Verco) in replying to the toast, said one of the most pleasant results of the gathering would be that in the future in reading the writings and the reports of utterances of the eminent medical men of the colonies they would not be merely perusing the writing of strangers, but would have the authors photographed before the mind's eye. This would add considerably to the pleasure of such studies, and he ventured to say would considerably increase the value of them. These gentlemen would no longer be strangers but friends, and their thoughts would come to them with an additional force for this reason. He had heartily enjoyed the sittings of the congress, and would look back on his presidency of the first medical congress in Australia with pleasure and pride. (Hear, hear.)