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THE STUDY OF TROPICAL DISEASES.

AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH.

DR. RAMSAY SMITH IN SUPPORT.

Dr. W. Ramsay Smith, the Chairman of the Central Board of Health, was interviewed on Friday in reference to the proposal of the Bishop of North Queensland (Dr. Frodsham) in relation to the establishment of a national scheme for furthering the study of the diseases of tropical Australia. Dr. Ramsay Smith is a busy man with a multitude of affairs to look after in connection with his public official positions, yet has the genius to utilize to the full odd moments of quietude which others often waste in the hard reading and study which is to him a means of relaxation. Thus the reporter found him seated at his desk, surrounded by photographic negatives and positive prints, zinc and copper process blocks, and printed proofs of illustrations representing osteological and pathological specimens which he had prepared to illustrate articles on special departments of medical research. On being asked if he would like to make any remarks in reference to Bishop Frodsham's scheme—which has been discussed in leading and special articles published in The Register—he at once consented to express his views.

"The importance of the subject," said the doctor, "is beyond discussion, and I have dealt with it elsewhere and in various ways during the last few years. As you know there have been former movements in connection with the question, but they have generally been initiated by those who had something to gain from their advocacy, or were trying to persuade various Governments to establish posts for them. The time I refer to was several years ago. The present movement initiated by Bishop Frodsham is open to no such objection. It is, I believe, thoroughly Australian in character; it is free from any suspicion of place seeking, and the proposals put forward are more definite, since they refer to the diseases of the Australian tropics and not to tropical diseases in general, a good many of which are not seen in Australia.

—Laymen and Medical Discovery.—

"I know the Bishop, having travelled with him some years ago, and I know his scheme. It reminds one of the remarkable fact that most of the greatest scientific discoveries that have given medicine its commercial value have been made by men outside the profession, and that many of the principal humanitarian movements of modern times have also been initiated by outsiders, who seem from their very distance from the arena to get a better perspective of the problems that are being attacked.

—The Scientists' Despair.—

"The greatest loss of scientific research work in Australia arises from a want of the centralizing of information as to what has been done, and the progress that is being made in the elucidation of various subjects. This applies especially to health matters, though not to those alone. We lack a system of exchanges, for when, after laborious toil, we have seemed to succeed in accomplishing something, our efforts prove to have been duplicated unknowingly. For instance, during a recent tour in the other States I found that problems were being worked at in relation to flour and milling wheats which South Australian research had solved long before; but the results of what had been done here had not been properly made known in the neighbouring territories. Much original work is never published on account of the lack of funds to produce costly illustrations. I can speak feelingly when I think of what I have personally spent on such work. In many cases, too, the drawback alluded to operates as a force to prevent special research being taken in hand. It should be remembered that it is the best work, too, that suffers from this lack of centralized information and funds for its prosecution, and adequate publication.

"I am at one with Dr. Frodsham in relation to the feasibility of his scheme for a systematized study of Australian tropical disease, as contrasted with the present practice of Australia in contributing a subsidy of £200 per annum to the English Schools of Tropical Medicine, and I agree with him in the belief that those institutions are not likely to extend their usefulness to Australia.

—Tiger Shooting in the Zoo.—

"A school of tropical medicine, to be of any benefit to Australia, should really be a tropical school of medicine. To teach the natural history of tropical diseases in London and Liverpool is like trying to teach tiger shooting in the Zoo. I don't say it can't be done, mind. A man might learn something about firearms and find out at the Zoo which is the business end of a tiger as compared with a mule, for purposes of assault or of defence; but it is doubtful whether the information taught would be worth the fee paid for it. I fail to find that Australia has benefited to the extent of a single penny in connection with the subsidy to the English school. We have not even a copy of its proceedings or a report of its investigations on the shelves of the health departments of our States.

—Australia's Opportunity.—

"What we ought to do is to spend the money in investigating the particular diseases in the Northern Territory, Queensland, and other parts of Australia. We have the materials for that work, we have the men; we only want the money, and not very much of that. I have no fault to find with any person, corporation, or State giving money for research in medicine or science; but there comes a time in the development of our country when one has the right to ask, 'Cannot the money be expended in a way that will give a better return?'

—The Man on the Spot.—

"I have said we have the men. As an illustration of what can be done I may instance the case of Dr. John Burton Cleland, a native of Adelaide, who was the first Australian to gain the diploma of the London School of Tropical Medicine. This young man won that distinction at a time when there seemed no hope of his making use of the special knowledge he had acquired; but by good fortune he heard incidentally of an opening in Western Australia, and was engaged by the Government of that State as its bacteriologist, and has since carried out a large amount of original and valuable research work. Some of the results of his labours were produced at the recent Science Congress, and elicited warm commendation. Such work is of benefit, not merely to Australia, but to the whole world, and yet there exists scarcely any proper means of letting it be known in any degree. That incident will show how a man will, in certain circumstances, make use of opportunities that otherwise would be totally neglected, even if known. I ought also to speak of the foresight of our own Government in appointing to Port Darwin a medical officer—I mean Dr. Strangman—who has studied tropical diseases in other parts of the world, and is deeply imbued with the spirit of research. It is a real pleasure to assist such men. Bishop Frodsham's scheme I consider a genuine thing that will benefit the whole Commonwealth, and the information that the special clinical observations he proposes would place at disposal would be cheap at £700 per year.

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Mr. Harold Parsons returned to Adelaide on Saturday by the R.M.S. Mooltan to take the position of violoncello teacher at the Conservatorium of Music. Mr. Parsons has spent two years in England, Germany, and Italy studying, and Professor Ennis, who came back in the Mooltan, says Mr. Parsons has benefited largely by his association with players of the cello in the old world and the instruction he has received from the best teachers available. Mr. Parsons has worked exceedingly hard, and his playing, according to Professor Ennis, shows a vast improvement. He will begin his duties at the Conservatorium when the first term opens next month.

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Mr. Harold Parsons, the newly appointed cellist of the Elder Conservatorium, who has spent two years in study in Europe, and was for some time a pupil of the greatest cellist of the day (Herr Hugo Becker), arrived by the Mooltan on Saturday.

Professor Ennis, Mus. Doc., returned to Adelaide by the Mooltan on Saturday, accompanied by Mrs. Ennis, who had been for some months in the old country visiting her relatives. Dr. Ennis undertook the trip mainly in order to recruit his health and accompany his wife upon the return voyage to Australia, and was in London for little more than three weeks. This limitation prevented his hearing much music, and his opportunities were further curtailed by an attack of influenza, which confined him to his room for several days. The doctor however, attended two concerts given by the Queen's Hall Orchestra, directed by the most famous English conductor of the day (Mr. Henry J. Wood). He also heard three concerts by the London Symphony Orchestra. The first of these was directed by Sir Charles Stanford and the second by the veteran chef d'orchestra (Dr. Hans Richter). The programmes presented were almost entirely confined to the standard classics, and, with the exception of some selections by Debussy, Sibelius, and Elgar, Dr. Ennis made the acquaintance of nothing new. He also attended performances of the German Opera Company at Covent Garden Theatre, where he heard "Die Meistersinger," "Tristan and Isolde," "Lohengrin," and "Der Freischutz." Two of the operas were given under the baton of the famous Herr Nikesch. Dr. Ennis describes the orchestra of over 100 performers that assisted as simply perfection, and states that the cast of each work was magnificent. Mr. Bryceon Treharne arrived in London just a fortnight after the doctor, and the two musicians naturally spent much time together during Dr. Ennis's last week in the English capital.

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Professor J. M. Ennis, Director of the University Conservatorium of Music, returned to South Australia by the R.M.S. Mooltan, with Mrs. Ennis, on Saturday. Mr. Ennis left Adelaide on November 29 and reached London on December 30, and for five days he was laid up with influenza. His stay in London was brief, as he had to leave again on January 23, but during the interval between his recovery from his indisposition and his departure he attended several concerts and met a number of people who are prominent in the musical world. He heard the London Symphony Orchestra, and the Queen's Hall Orchestra on five occasions, and was much impressed with the magnificent performances they gave. The professor noticed that although several works by living composers were presented, the programmes were drawn largely from the classics. He heard four operas—"Die Meistersinger," "Tristan und Isolde," "Lohengrin," and "Der Freischutz," the second and fourth mentioned being conducted by Herr Arthur Nikesch. In London Professor Ennis met Mr. Treharne on several occasions, and he also met Mr. Harold Parsons, who accompanied him back to Adelaide. The weather was exceedingly cold in London in January, and when Professor and Mrs. Ennis were travelling from England across the Channel to catch the mailboat at Marseilles the water froze on the deck when the spray dashed over it.