Society Reports

FIRST AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL CONGRESS

SECTION OF THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE

AN event of considerable historical significance to medicine in Australia occurred this year when the Australian Medical Association was formed and replaced the parent British Medical Association as the governing body of the profession.

The first congress of the new Association took place from 19 to 26 May, in Adelaide, South Australia. Among the special sections that held meetings, was an active Section of the History of Medicine whose office-bearers were as follows:

President:	Dr. J. E. Hughes, South Australia.
Vice Presidents:	Dr. B. H. Gandevia, Victoria.
	Dr. Clifford Craig, Tasmania.
	Dr. J. F. C. C. Cobley, New South Wales
Honorary Secretary:	Dr. P. F. Stratmann, South Australia.

The title of the Presidential address given by Dr. Hughes was 'The Physician's Tale' in which the practice of medicine in Chaucer's day was discussed and information was given about the fifteen medical authorities mentioned in the *Canterbury Tales*.

A number of other papers of interest were presented.

Dr. P. F. Stratmann, of South Australia, spoke on Thomas Watson's revolutionary medical textbook, *Lectures on the Principles and Practice of Physic*. Dr. T. E. Wilson, of New South Wales, traced the history of anal fistula down the ages in a paper entitled 'Anal Fistula: A Historical Review'. Dr. F. G. Roberts, of New South Wales, presented a paper entitled 'The History of Sutures'. Dr. M. L. Verso, of Victoria, in a paper on 'The Evolution of Blood Counting Techniques' showed a series of slides illustrating the development of the haemocytometer. Dr. Michael Kelly, of Victoria, in a paper 'Pern of Gippsland (1873–1936): Rheumatologist Against Authority' discussed the life of Dr. Horace Pern who had been one of Australia's leading general practitioners and who had concentrated particularly on rheumatic diseases. He had been an active opponent of the pessimistic outlook on rheumatic diseases held by leading authorities. Dr. K. J. Basedow, of South Australia, in a paper entitled 'The Willows Hospital—A Link with Early South Australia', described how since 1846 four generations of the Scholz family of bone-setters and masseurs, had treated patients in the Barossa Valley, fifty miles from Adelaide. They had established the Willows Hospital where they specialized in fractures, sprains and rheumatic complaints. Although unqualified, they could not be described as charlatans and in the early days they satisfied a need in the district.

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THE Annual Meeting of the Section of Medical History in the Australian Medical Association (Victorian Branch) was held in the Medical Society Hall, East Melbourne, on Monday, 9 April 1962. The following Office Bearers were elected for the ensuing year: *President*, Dr. C. H. Fitts; *Honorary Secretary*, Dr. M. L. Verso; *Honorary Treasurer*, Dr. J. T. Hueston; *Ex Officio Member of Committee*, Dr. B. Gandevia (Honorary Curator of the Museum of the Medical Society of Victoria).

At the conclusion of the formal business of the evening, Dr. Michael Kelly presented a paper in the form of a commentary on a series of slides he had prepared during his

recent trip overseas of the historic places he had visited in Africa, Italy, Great Britain and the United States of America. Particular attention was given to those places associated with two men whose lives Dr. Kelly had studied extensively, Sir James Mackenzie and Benjamin Franklin.

M. L. VERSO

Book Reviews

A Short History of Medicine, by F. N. L. POYNTER, PH.D., F.R.S.L., F.L.A. and K. D. KEELE, M.D., F.R.C.P. (Science in Society, vol. II). London: Mills & Boon, 1962, pp. 146. 17*s.* 6*d.*

There is a growing appreciation that some knowledge of science and its methods are indispensable to a general education designed to prepare the younger generation for the responsibilities of the society in which they will live. If there be two cultures, and no one familiar with the current curricula at, and in preparation for, our Universities could deny the trend, then the earlier it is corrected the better.

The series of volumes entitled *Science in Society* is designed to ensure that *all* students, whether destined for the arts or science, in sixth forms in Grammar Schools shall have texts which will make available to them the broader implications of science.

A *Short History of Medicine* by F. N. L. Poynter and K. D. Keele, two of the most distinguished of contemporary medical historians, is the second volume in this series. It covers the story of medicine from its earliest origins in the East, Egypt and Babylon, to the latest discoveries and victories over disease.

The contributions of the Greeks from Hippocrates, Herophilus, Erasistratus and Asclepiades to Galen, are told to illustrate the rational approach to the understanding of disease. Then come the Dark Ages, to be followed in the fifteenth century by the anatomical researches of Leonardo da Vinci (whose works merit and are here described in greater detail than in many larger texts) and in the sixteenth by the crowning masterpiece of Vesalius. There follows an admirably balanced chapter on the antecedents of Harvey, which reaches its climax with the publication of *De Motu Cordis* in 1628.

The use of the microscope in the discovery of the capillaries by Malpighi, the unsurpassed clinical descriptions of disease by Sydenham, the researches of John Hunter, the discovery of vaccination, the beginnings of clinico-pathological correlations by Morgagni, the use of percussion and auscultation, and many other peaks of medical history in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, are described without undue resort to technical terms; and then follow the dramatic revelations of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to the application of the methods and instruments of physics and chemistry to the study of vital phenomena. A surprising omission here is reference to Wöhler's synthesis, in 1828, of urea from ammonium cyanate, the first convincing evidence of a transformation of inorganic into organic matter, which blurred the distinction between 'living' and 'non-living' and thus gave the major impetus to the application of physics and chemistry to biology. There is a brief but admirable chapter on the evolution of our knowledge of mental disease.

The picture of the conquest of disease is drawn with striking detail. Chadwick's 'Sanitary Idea' is fully discussed; the victories over disease achieved by drugs and chemotherapy, by vaccines and sera, by surgery and anaesthesia, are dramatically