

## Society Reports

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### SECTION OF MEDICAL HISTORY IN THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (VICTORIAN BRANCH)\*

At a meeting of the Section held on 19 September 1961 Dr. M. L. Verso presented a paper entitled 'The Medico-Chirurgical Review'. In his opening remarks the speaker referred to a paper he had read before the Section several years ago on the life of Dr. James Johnson (1777-1846). Johnson had had a varied career. He had served as a naval surgeon during the Napoleonic Wars, he had been Physician-Extraordinary to King William IV and he had written a number of books on both medical and non-medical subjects. His influence had dominated the practice of tropical medicine for a period of forty years. His most outstanding achievement, however, had been the management and editorship of a quarterly medical periodical, *The Medico-Chirurgical Review*.

Dr. Verso then went on to show how by a study of the files of *The Medico-Chirurgical Review* one could obtain an incomparable picture of the state of medical knowledge and medical practice in Johnson's day. Particular emphasis was laid on medical theories current at that time and how observations and experiments then being made laid the foundations for later discoveries. Among the topics mentioned were the theory of marsh miasmata, the germ theory of disease, vitalism, phrenology, homoeopathy, mesmerism, Broussaism, bizarre methods of treatment, and social problems that affected doctors at that time.

At a meeting of the Section held on 27 November 1961, Dr. Clive Fitts presented a paper entitled 'A Medical Backcloth' in which he sketched some fragments from his early memories to illustrate a medical way of life that has now passed.

Starting with his boyhood in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond, Dr. Fitts described his home where, although it was the Edwardian Age, family life was still conducted according to the standards of Victorian times. The neighbourhood had a medical flavour for many medical personalities were associated with the area and the proportion of boys from the vicinity who became doctors was quite high. One frequent visitor to his home had been the famous surgeon, Hamilton Russell.

As a young graduate Dr. Fitts had sailed overseas as a ship's surgeon to England where he had served terms on the staff of the Brompton and other hospitals. In his leisure hours he had acquired an interest in church architecture and on a visit to Switzerland he had developed a passion for mountain climbing. To keep fit for this sport he had fallen into the habit in England of going for long walks on which he had been able to explore old churches and other places of interest. In that way some interesting pieces of English social history had been brought to his notice. His ramblings in Norfolk had led him to the vicinity of Ketteringham where the relations between the parson and the squire in the mid nineteenth century had formed the theme of Owen Chadwick's book, *Victorian Miniature*. Dr. Fitts outlined the story and pointed out that it had a link with Melbourne, for the squire had been Sir John Boileau and branches of his family were now living in Melbourne.

\* On 1 January 1962 the Association in Australia severed its link with the parent body and became the Australian Medical Association.