

**ON PHTHISIS AND THE SUPPOSED INFLUENCE
OF CLIMATE: BEING AN ANALYSIS OF
STATISTICS OF CONSUMPTION
IN THIS PART OF AUSTRALIA, WITH REMARKS
ON THE CAUSE OF THE INCREASE OF THAT
DISEASE IN MELBOURNE**

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On Phthisis and the Supposed Influence of Climate: Being an Analysis of Statistics of Consumption in This Part of Australia, with Remarks on the Cause of the Increase of That Disease in Melbourne by William Thomson

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WILLIAM THOMSON

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BY
WILLIAM THOMSON, F.R.C.S., F.L.S.

"The goodness of the air in places is better distinguished by experience
" than by signs."—BACON, *Historia Vitæ et Mortis*.

MELBOURNE
STILLWELL AND CO.

1879

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A.30965.

“ THE fact is, that at all these sanatoria, a
“ great amount of capital has been spent, and
“ the doctors and people connected with each
“ individual place find very good scientific
“ reasons for pronouncing their own locality
“ and elevations, the one that offers the best
“ conditions for chronic disease in general, and
“ for pulmonary disease in particular.

“ These one-sided views are often, if not
“ generally, entertained and defended in perfect
“ good faith, the concentration of thought on
“ one locality warping the judgment. In
“ science, however, we must learn to make
“ allowance for local partiality, and try to be
“ guided by purely scientific reasoning.”

Dr. J. Hughes Bennett, 1878.

“It is my hope and desire that it will
“contribute to the common good; that through
“it the higher physicians will somewhat raise
“their thoughts, and not devote all their
“time to common cures, nor be honoured for
“necessity only.”

P R E F A C E .

During many voyages in medical charge of passenger ships sailing between England and various parts of the world—India, China, North and South America, the West Indies, and six several times to different ports in Australia, the author had fair means of noting the effect of sea life on health, and of early hearing about the good repute Australian climates were rapidly gaining for their supposed salutary influence, especially over phthisis.

So prepared, he entered practice here in 1854, and began that series of observations to which he now makes what he trusts may prove no unimportant addition.

Cases soon came under notice disproving a power in climate to prevent or cure phthisis, or indeed, modify any specific malady. Satisfied by clinical evidence, he was not slow to say so.

One early instance occurred in a young Tasmanian gentlewoman, in whom physical signs alone plainly denoted double pulmonary phthisis. Yet diagnosis was doubted, because the disease was held to be unknown among natives of the climatically favoured island. Autopsy, in presence of more than one medical man, revealed anfractuons cavities and vomicæ, riddling both lungs.

A reason once is a reason ever. The case foreshadowed others likely to follow, for which, indeed, one had not long to wait. Few Victorians were then old enough to test the theory; but from the older colony numbers sufficient were not wanting.

In 1857, the author wrote to the then newly inaugurated *Australian Medical Journal*, that "men of deliberation would not hesitate "to pronounce as premature any opinion as "to the influence of climate on the health "and lives of the inhabitants of a country "before it was peopled."

In the year following, 1858, Dr. Hall, of Hobart Town, wrote in the same periodical that "Tubercular Diseases" were in that

colony, "a trifle beyond the London rate;" and then added, "Scrofula is not a Tasmanian disease; it ought not to be in so dry and propitious a climate." These conflicting statements were hard to reconcile.

When called, in 1859, by the Medical Society of Victoria, to edit *The Australian Medical Journal*, the author placed himself in direct communication with Mr. R. Brough Smyth, of the Surveyor-General's staff, and Dr. G. Neumayer, Director of the Flagstaff Observatory, with a view to arrange about making a joint series of observations on our medical climatology, and special reports for publication in the journal, in the January number of which, for that year, appeared the first instalment of our several contributions. Before then, Mr. Smyth had himself supplied meteorological reports to the journal, so that, while Dr. Neumayer may have been "the first person to make observations on the climate of Victoria on an extensive scale," as is in the *Practitioner*, of November, 1878, claimed for him, he, noble worker though he