

Obituary.

EDWARD CHARLES STIRLING.

Dr. J. C. Verco, the President of the South Australian Branch of the British Medical Association, has given a masterly summary of the chief landmarks in the career of Edward Charles Stirling. Had he been an ordinary man, there would have been little left for us to say, but the facts that his interests were diverse and manifold and that he excelled in every branch of learning that he approached, render it almost impossible for anyone to traverse the whole field of his activities within the scope of a newspaper article. Dr. Verco and our Adelaide colleagues have referred to the deceased scientist as a prime mover in the history of medicine in South Australia. We find traces of his influence in matters medical throughout the whole of the Commonwealth and claim for him an international reputation.

Edward Charles Stirling was born in 1848—70 years ago. Dr. Verco records the main facts concerning his school and student life. He left Cambridge in 1873 and, after holding a series of less important positions, was appointed to the staff of St. George's Hospital as Assistant Surgeon. Before he left England for South Australia in 1881 he had held the position of surgeon at the Belgrave Children's Hospital and, at his old medical school, the positions of lecturer on histology, lecturer on operative surgery and lecturer on physiology. It will thus be seen that by the time he had reached his thirtieth year he had demonstrated his extraordinary versatility and ability in branches of study not usually combined.

In Adelaide the qualities which had attracted the attention of his contemporaries in London, again made themselves evident. At first he became surgeon at the Adelaide Hospital and lecturer on clinical surgery at the University. A few years later he was handed the lectureship of physiology and in 1900 he stepped into the newly-created chair in this science. One year after his return to Australia he was appointed a member of the Board of Management of the Public Library, Museum and Art Gallery. Subsequently he became the honorary Director of the Museum and, still later, he became the paid Director. The Museum attracted him very strongly and he worked long and arduously in the endeavour to make the collection of Australian fauna the most complete in the world. After he had relinquished his salaried position, he was again appointed an honorary Director by the University of Adelaide.

His association with the University of Adelaide, which started shortly after his return from England, governed the remainder of his life. The Medical School was founded nineteen years ago, thanks to the generosity of the late Sir Thomas Elder. Edward Charles Stirling was an important actor in its foundation and, indeed, it may be said that without him the school might have assumed a very different

shape. It is little wonder that he should have been selected to fill the position of Dean of the Faculty of Medicine.

Dr. Verco has referred to his achievements as a naturalist, as an ethnologist, as an anthropologist and as a palæontologist. His contributions to the proceedings of the Royal Society, the Royal Society of South Australia and of other not exclusively medical scientific publications have dealt largely with these sciences. It is significant that the Netherlands Government conferred upon him a gold medal in recognition of his contributions to science and art. In 1892 he took part in an expedition across the Australian continent from Darwin to Adelaide with the Earl of Kintore. He made a valuable collection of flowers, plants, animals and birds, and many of these found their way into the museum as specimens. In 1892 the remains of a whole herd of *Diprotodon australis* were discovered in a salt pan in Central Australia, known as Lake Callabonna. *Diprotodon*

is the largest marsupial that ever existed. Were it still extant it would rank as next in size to the elephant. Fragments of the huge bones of the *Diprotodon* had been found on the Darling Downs. To Owen or to Huxley a damaged skull was a prize. Until the studies of Edward Charles Stirling the limbs of the animal were unknown and the ideas of the creature as a whole were erroneous. A palæontological camp was established at Lake Callabonna, from which several entire skeletons were disinterred with infinite patience and skill. From this material the casts so often seen in museums were completed. For these worthy scientific achievements Edward Charles Stirling was elected in 1893 to the Fellowship of the Royal Society of London. In 1894 he joined the Horn Exploring Expedition as Medical Officer and Anthropologist and again returned with a wealth of material, much of which was unique. In his descriptions of the results of these expeditions he has evinced a very wide knowledge of the contributory sciences and has added many fascinating chapters to the history of Australian fauna and flora. It is stated that his dissections of the *Notoryctes typhlops*, the marsupial mole, and his description of its anatomy and physiology are pat-



terns of excellence and will be held up to students of many generations as a guide. In 1914 he served as Chairman of the South Australian Committee in connexion with the visit of the British Association to Australia.

During these expeditions Edward Charles Stirling embarked in a study of the Australian aboriginal man. He brought back with him specimens of skulls and bones, "implements of peace and war and religious emblems." His knowledge of botany and his deep interest in the peculiarities of Australian flora awakened in him a passion for horticulture. His garden at Mount Lofty was at the same time his pride and the admiration of all visitors.

For some years he took much interest in public affairs. In 1884 he contested a seat in the House of Assembly and was placed at the head of the poll for the constituency of North Adelaide. In Parliament he advocated the extension

1885; ... 35 years ago