

## VALEDICTORY ADDRESS BY DR. D. W. BURTON AT ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BORDER BRANCH

At the Annual General Meeting of the Border Branch held in East London on 11 February 1956 the outgoing President, Dr. D. W. Burton delivered his valedictory address.

Dr. Burton said that in choosing his subject he had decided to resist the temptation to wax forth on such contentious contemporary subjects as medical aid schemes, the specialist—v G.P. battle or

compulsory membership of the Association. Instead, he would delve into the past and talk about the times when all was peaceful, when there were no wrangles about the profession being mercenary and when only local opposition was the witch-doctor.

He proposed to talk briefly of the rise and progress of the Border hospitals. He had chosen this subject primarily because the

year 1956 marked the centenary of the first civil hospital founded in King William's Town. This was founded in March 1856—a notable event in Border history and one which enabled them to assess the great advances in hospitalization made during a century of urgent endeavour and enterprise in an area where the evils and oppressions of barbarism, heathenism and witchcraft dominated and influenced the lives and characters of all tribes on the ever-restless Cape Frontier.

Dr. Burton recalled that King William's Town, the oldest of the Border towns, was founded in May 1835 by the Governor, Sir Benjamin D'Urban. The Port of East London was proclaimed by Sir Harry Smith in January 1848. Beyond the northern boundary of British Kaffraria, Sir George Cathcart founded the District and Town of Queenstown in 1853. In such manner arose the three main towns of the Border in early days when civil hospitals were unknown and military hospitals were exclusive military institutions administered by military personnel.

#### *The First Civil Hospital on the Border*

In March 1856, when the nearest public hospital was at Grahams-town—over 70 miles distant from King William's Town—the first civil hospital in Border history was established in the capital of British Kaffraria. Situated in the Pensioners' Village and known as the Native Hospital, this institution consisted of about 20 cottages originally built to accommodate pensioners. As pensioners had failed to come to the Cape Colony, the unoccupied thatched cottages were combined to form a hospital over which Dr. John Patrick Fitzgerald assumed duty as Superintendent. Although it was styled the Native Hospital, indigent Europeans were received as patients and all expenses were borne by the Imperial Government. During the 3 years of its existence the entire staff consisted of Natives trained by the doctor, assisted by interpreters and a few local Europeans. It was of interest to know that before his arrival in King William's Town Dr. Fitzgerald (under the direction of Sir George Grey) had established hospitals for the Maoris in New Zealand. In this first Border hospital the numerous starving victims of the Cattle Killing Delusion were accommodated in 1857. While thus busily engaged, Dr. Fitzgerald made plans for the construction of the present Grey Hospital, the doors of which were opened for the reception of patients in June 1859, when Dr. Fitzgerald was in England on sick-leave.

Concerning Grey Hospital, it was noted in the doctor's records of 1859 that trained nurses were not to be had for love or money. Of more than passing interest was a letter addressed to Sir George Grey requesting the Governor to engage the services of Florence Nightingale on behalf of the Grey Hospital.

The speaker referred to Dr. Fitzgerald's work at the Grey Hospital as an ophthalmic surgeon, in the course of which he restore the sight of more than 200 blind Natives, to the confusion of the witch-doctors. After 35 years service on the Border and at the age of 76 years, Dr. Fitzgerald returned to England, where he died in 1897 at the age of 82.

#### *Frontier Hospital, Queenstown*

Dr. Burton then passed on to the Frontier Hospital at Queenstown, which came next in order of time. Before this hospital was established, beds for accident cases were set apart in Queenstown gaol. In 1876 the Hon. Charles Brown laid the foundation stone of the Frontier Hospital, of which the inception had been promoted by Drs. Bisset-Berry and Weakly with the support of other residents. Miss Alice Perrin was the first matron. In that year two farms were granted for hospital maintenance—Hospital Farm at Thomas River and Glen Thorn at Imvani—the rents from which were to be devoted to hospital purposes. With permission, the two farms were sold for about £16,000, which was invested.

#### *Frere Hospital, East London*

Last of the three Border hospitals came the Frere Hospital at the 'Fighting Port'. Named in honour of the Governor Sir H. B. E. Frere, this hospital was founded in 1881. The foundation stone was laid by Mr. Richard Walker, the first Mayor of East London. On that occasion, in a procession up Oxford Street marched the bands of the Rev. Mr. Muller's School and The Volunteer Artillery, with the civil and civic authorities and the Sunday schools. In his speech Mr. John Gately, referring to the Grey Hospital at King William's Town, then under the Imperial Government, said that patients half dead in East London had to be sent to the King William's Town hospital, greatly to the discomfiture of Dr. Fitzgerald. That was soon to be ended; in August 1882 the Frere Hospital was under construction. The first Superintendent and Matron were Mr. and Mrs. Sunfield.

Amongst those interested in the founding of the Frere Hospital Dr. Burton specially mentioned Dr. Paley and Dr. Darley Hartley. Those, he said, were the days when red lamps shed rays about the front doors and verandahs of doctors' houses. In those bygone years, when East London was East London West and Panmure laid claim to the East side of the Buffalo River, these doctors were prominent in their work for the hospital. Dr. Paley, ever dear to all East London residents, was District Surgeon; his colleague, Dr. Darley Hartley, was the first Editor of the South African Medical Journal, which saw the light of day through its first issue at East London.

The speaker then spoke of a gap of 50 years until the opening of the New Frere Hospital in 1932. The total building-cost was £89,628 and it was constructed to accommodate 202 beds. Today the official bed state was 456.

Dr. Burton recalled that the first Chairman of the Hospital Board was Mr. S. T. Wakefield; and he read the names of the honorary staff at that time: Consulting Surgeon—P. Ganteaume; Consulting Physicians—J. Bruce-Bays and E. R. Grey; Radiologists—J. Alexander-Brown and Murray Craib; Anaesthetist—J. Wroth-Adams; Visiting Surgeons—A. M. Pollock, J. P. Ziervogel, G. J. Smyth and W. Waddell; Visiting Physicians—J. Tremble, G. Nesbitt, L. Jaffit and F. B. Watts.

Having spoken of the three hospitals in the larger towns, the speaker then referred to the prodigious labours of the mission hospitals Lovedale, St. Matthews and Mount Coke.

Having reviewed what has been accomplished in so short a time, Dr. Burton went on to say that, comparatively speaking, they were slowing up and that progress on the Border, particularly in the last 20 years, had been tardy. He thought they could all vouch for the fact that the present hospital accommodation was insufficient to meet the growing demand consequent on the increase in population. In addition there was a very urgent need for a chronic sick hospital on the Border. Dr. Burton then said: 'So I would conclude this address with a special appeal to the Branch, its Divisions, Hospital Committees and Hospital Boards to clamour and to keep clamouring for improvements. If we do not raise our voices, the Provincial Authorities in Cape Town naturally assume that we are content and happy with our lot and we shall consequently be kept on the "Waiting List". I trust that this appeal will be taken up not only by our local Division but also by the country areas. The Frere Hospital, with its auxilliary and, specialist services, draws a large number of hinterland patients and accordingly, if the country Divisions lend us their support, they will at the same time be furthering their own interests.'

'Let us make this centenary year of hospitalization on the Border a year of earnest endeavour in an attempt to rectify what is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs.'