

In memoriam, Philip Burnard Chenery Ayres.

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Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

IN MEMORIAM.



PHILIP BURNARD CHENERY AYRES, C.M.G.,

M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P. Ed., &c.

BORN JULY 13TH, 1840.

DIED OCTOBER 12TH, 1899.

PHILIP BURNARD CHENERY AYRES.

PHILIP BURNARD CHENERY AYRES, C.M.G., M.R.C.S. Eng., L.R.C.P. Edin., late Colonial Surgeon and Inspector of Hospitals, Hong-Kong. Born at Thame, Oxfordshire, England, July 13th, 1840, he was the eldest son of the late Philip Burnard Ayres, M.D., Lond., Chief Medical Officer of the Civil Hospital, Mauritius, and formerly Lecturer on Chemistry at Charing Cross Hospital. Educated for the medical profession at University College Hospital, London, and at Edinburgh, Dr. Ayres was from 1865 to 1873 successively Acting-Surgeon of Wandsworth Gaol, Staff-Surgeon of Mauritius Coolie Emigration Service, Acting-Surgeon Superintendent and Magistrate of Flat Island, Health Officer and Surgeon during the fever epidemic at Port Louis, Mauritius, Civil Medical Officer and Superintendent of Labour Transport in India, Surgeon to the Eastern Bengal Railway, Civil Surgeon, Kooshtea, Bengal, and afterwards Civil Surgeon, Sebsaugor, Assam. In 1873, on the recommendation of the Colonial Office, he was appointed Colonial Surgeon and Inspector of Hospitals, Hong-Kong, which post he held for twenty-four years. On his arrival he found the condition of the Colony, from a medical standpoint, needed serious reform. There was practically no Hospital worthy of the name, and the sanitary condition was most unsatisfactory. He at once began and made the first survey of the native town, accompanied by the Surveyor-General (Mr. J. M. Price), which nearly cost them their lives from illness contracted during their house-to-house visitation. The report which followed was the foundation of all the sanitary measures since taken in Hong-Kong. In his report for 1874 he gave a note of warning of what might be expected to happen under the horrible state of things he described: "Every condition exists for the development of the cholera or fevers of a typhoid character." In this instance it was the Plague, which appeared twenty years later—in May, 1894. In this same report he stated, "I was in the Colonial Service in Mauritius in the fever epidemic of 1867—1868, and I sincerely hope I may never see such another, the death rate at one time exceeding 600 people daily;" but it was his fate to see the epidemic of Plague in 1894 in Hong-Kong, which was almost as terrible an experience. It is perhaps from a sanitary point of view that the Colony is most indebted to Dr. Ayres. From the moment when he landed in Hong-Kong he was ever urging the importance of the subject, and after years of unremitting zeal he was rewarded by seeing many of the reforms he had recommended carried out, but in the last report he wrote for the year 1896 (on his retirement in 1897) he stated, "What all my reports could not do the epidemic has done." The present Civil Hospital, built during his term of office, the nursing staff of trained nurses from the London Hospital, which he instituted in 1889, and the Sanitary Board, will stand as a lasting memorial to Dr. Ayres in Hong Kong. In 1893 the Companionship of the Order of St. Michael and St. George was conferred upon him, and the *China Mail*, referring to this in a leading article, stated: "His honourable decoration of the C.M.G. was no empty compliment, because it meant something very similar to the Victoria Cross, from the fact that he fought against great odds, and was almost alone in his struggle against the abominable condition around him." The following year he had the great satisfaction of receiving a gold medal—"Presented by the Hong-Kong community for services rendered during the Plague of 1894." In the same year the Japanese Government, in acknowledgment of the services rendered to the Japanese Mission for the investigation of the nature of the Plague, presented Dr. Ayres with a ring having the interesting

and suggestive design of two dragons supporting a central ruby. His health began to fail in 1895 in consequence of the great strain and anxiety which the epidemic of the Plague brought upon him, and he took, for the first time since he went to the Colony in 1873, long leave of one year. He returned to Hong-Kong in 1896, and retired in 1897, his health then giving cause for much anxiety. On leaving he received many valedictory addresses from the Hong Kong community, the Police Force, the Chinese merchants, and others, all testifying to the good work which he had done, and their appreciation of his skill, devotion, and self-sacrifice in the performance of his duties, and so he left Hong-Kong, the place he loved so well, in which he had made so many friends, and to which he said farewell with the profoundest regret.

The Colony lost a well-known and striking personality, from which it parted with regret; he carried with him the regard, respect, and good wishes of all those amongst whom he had lived so long, and whose well being he had so much at heart. He was a prominent Freemason, having been Worshipful Master of his Lodge, and an officer of the District Grand Lodge of China, besides having taken several of the Higher Degrees.

Dr. Ayres was not able to enjoy his well-earned rest, for on his return to England in 1897 his health became rapidly worse during the two following years, and his many friends in China and elsewhere will see with surprise and sorrow the announcement of his death at Erith House, Erith, Kent, on October 12th, aged 59 years. He was buried at Brookwood Cemetery (St. Michael's Avenue), Woking, on October 16th, 1899.—*The Lancet*, October 28th, 1899.

The British Medical Journal, in an obituary notice of October 21st, 1899, writes: "It was no light task that fell to Mr. Ayres' lot when he arrived in Hong-Kong, but in conjunction with his friend the Director of Public Works, an immense amount of useful work was done, and the sanitation of Hong-Kong was completely re-organised. Great improvements were made in hospital accommodation. A staff of English nurses was introduced into the Civil Hospital where before coolies served; a Sanitary Board was created, over which he for sometime presided; a Medical Officer of Health was introduced to the Colony, and a Colonial Veterinary Surgeon was appointed; a vaccine institute and numerous other improvements for the public good were instituted under his enlightened guidance. For many years Mr. Ayres was engaged in private practice, but as the Colony increased in size and importance he had to confine his attention wholly to his official duties. For some years the effects of his long residence in the East had been telling upon him, and it was plain that his physical powers were decreasing. His friends—and they included every individual in the Colony—were grieved to see his failing strength proclaim the fact that they must part with their 'Doctor.' Generous, kindly of speech, and untiring in the interests of the sick, never was a medical man regarded with more affection than was Mr. Ayres."

Dr. Ayres possessed considerable powers as an artist in pen and ink. Whilst he was in India sketches from his pen of Lord Mayo hog hunting appeared in *The Graphic*, and he also contributed to the *Calcutta Punch*. His letters often contained interesting and amusing sketches of passing events in his daily life, and people he met, from the time he was a student until he left the East. As a boy he was most anxious to become an artist.

The obituary columns of *The Times*, of October 16th and 17th, 1899, and the *Morning Post*, of October 16th, 1899, also contained notices of Dr. Ayres' career, life, and work in the East.

