MEDICAL CERTIFICATES AND UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT.

BY A MEMBER OF A COURT OF REFEREES.

THE Unemployment Insurance Act, 1920, which came into force on November 8th, has the effect of enlarging very considerably the number of persons who may claim unemployment benefit. Although the medical profession is more nearly concerned with national health insurance, doctors are in a position to assist very materially in the determination of claims made by those who are out of work.

The statutory conditions for the receipt of unemployment benefit by an insured contributor are set out in Section 7 (i) of the Act. He must show *inter alia* "that he is capable of and available for work, but unable to obtain suitable employment." By Section 8 (5) of the Act he is "disqualified for receiving unemployment benefit while he is in receipt of any sickness or disablement benefit or disablement allowance under the National Health Insurance Acts, 1911 to 1920..." It follows that to succeed in his claim an applicant must in all cases show that he is capable of work; but that if he is in receipt of sickness benefit there is a presumption of incapacity.

Claims for benefit are determined, in the first instance, by the insurance officer, who has to decide whether the statutory conditions are fulfilled. If the insurance officer refuses a new claim, or comes to the conclusion that a person receiving the benefit should have his allowance stopped, the claimant may appeal to a court of referees. This court consists of an employer's representative, a workman's representative, and a chairman appointed by the Minister of Labour. From the court of referees an appeal lies to the umpire.

A large number of these appeals raise questions with which medical practitioners have no concern. Thus an applicant may have been dismissed for misconduct, or he may have left his employment voluntarily for no good reason; but very many cases necessitate the production of a medical certificate. For example, a man may throw up a job or refuse to take it because he is physically unfitted for it. Again, he may have been dismissed because of keeping bad time owing to ill health. While his condition may not be such as to justify his receiving sickness benefit, if he can show that he is capable of doing light work which he cannot obtain he may be entitled to unemployment benefit.

In furnishing certificates to such applicants the medical practitioner can render very material service to those who have to decide claims for out-of-work benefit. But to be of real value the certificate should cover the following points and provide answers to the following questions:

1. Is the applicant capable of work of any kind? If not, he should be receiving sickness benefit; and whether he is or not he cannot claim out-of-work benefit.
2. What work has the applicant been doing? It is very necessary to state, in the body of the certificate, the nature of the work which the applicant alleges he has been endeavouring to do, in order that the court of referees may be assured that the practitioner has had the materials before him upon which to form a judgement.
3. What work the applicant can do—for example, whether indoor or outdoor, manual or sedentary. Information on this point is also valuable, because, while many men who can do heavy work out of doors could also do light work, it is not every one who can do heavy work.
4. When did the applicant become incapable of working, and for how long did his incapacity last? This is important, because, if a man were to be wholly incapacitated, say, for three weeks, and were then to recover, he would not be entitled to benefit during the three weeks, but could claim as from the end of that period.

It is realized that the practitioner who is asked to give a certificate is often in a position of considerable difficulty. Applicants constantly appear before courts of referees who, although they have left their work or refused a job for reasons of health, have never, in fact, seen a doctor. In such a case it is usual to require the production of a certificate, and the doctor seeing the man for the first time may have to form an opinion as to what his physical condition was at some period more or less remote.

In such cases there appears to be only one course for the practitioner, and that is to state his opinion as to the kind of work which the applicant is capable of doing having regard to his general condition.

It has been observed that an appeal lies to the umpire from courts of referees. The decisions of the umpire are

recorded by the Ministry of Labour. The following notes of a few of these decisions are of value as showing how much importance is attached to the medical certificate.

An applicant who was last employed as a labourer in engineering works stated that he had been compelled to give up his former occupation as an iron moulder as he had contracted phthisis, and that he had to leave his last employment owing to the smoke affecting his health. He produced a medical certificate that he was suffering from tuberculosis and was unable to work, and stated that his doctor had ordered him to find lighter employment out of doors. He had only worked for three months during the past year. In these circumstances a claim for benefit was disallowed on the ground that, as the applicant's state of health prevented him from working for more than three months out of the previous twelve months, he was incapable of work.

In another case an applicant left his work as a wagon painter on January 30th, because he was ill. He produced a medical certificate to the effect that he had been suffering from bronchitis since February 11th, and had been absent from work until February 22nd. It was held that the applicant must be regarded as being incapable of work until medical evidence showing that he was capable of work was produced.

Where an applicant who had been doing heavy work produced a certificate to the effect that he had been suffering from bronchitis and attending here (that is, at the doctor's dispensary) for the last four weeks, it was held that the claim should be disallowed until further evidence was adduced that he was capable of work.

In one case where an applicant produced a certificate stating that she was "not fit to do continuously heavy work," it was shown that she could have had full time employment at suitable work, and it was held that in these circumstances she was not entitled to benefit.

THE POETRY OF THE MICROCOSM.

It is curious to reflect that, though there have been many medical poets and not a few medical poems, of which Garth's *Dispensary* might be cited as a prime example, so few poets or poems, whether medical or not, have dealt with the human body. The *Purple Island* of Phineas Fletcher is, perhaps, the exception that proves the rule. This curious work was first published in 1633, but written much earlier, as is proved by its allusions to the Elizabethan Earl of Essex.

"The name of the poem," says an old critic, "conjures up images of poetical and romantic beauty, such as we may suppose a youthful admirer and follower of Spenser to have drawn. A perusal of the work, however, dispels this illusion. The *Purple Island* of Fletcher is no sunny spot 'amid the melancholy main,' but is an elaborate and anatomical description of the body and mind of man. He begins with the veins, arteries, bones, and muscles of the human frame, picturing them as hills, dales, streams, and rivers, and describing with great minuteness their different meanderings, elevations, and appearances. It is admitted that the poet was well skilled in anatomy, and the first part of his work is a sort of lecture fitted for the dissecting room. Having in five cantos exhausted his physical phenomena, Fletcher proceeds to describe the complex nature and operations of the mind. Intellect is the prince of the Isle of Man, and he is furnished with eight counsellors—Fancy, Memory, the Common Sense, and five external senses. The Human Fortress, thus garrisoned, is assailed by the Vices, and a fierce contest ensues for the possession of the human soul. At length an angel interposes, and insures victory to the Virtues, the angel being King James I, on whom the poet condescended to heap this fulsome adulation."

Fletcher's long-protracted allegory was based upon the notion of the mystic philosophers that the human body is a miniature edition (microcosm) of the universe (macrocosm). The idea that the microcosm is a kind of abridgement of all that is admirable in the macrocosm is found in the writings of Paracelsus and the medical astrologers contemporary with Fletcher, and it has been further elaborated by the illuminati of the type of Jacob Boehm, Robert Fludd (*Utriusque Cosmi Historia*, 1617, and *De Supernaturali Microcosmi Historia*, 1619), Van Helmont, who places the soul in the stomach and the spleen (the "Duumvirate"), and the more recent Claude de Saint-Martin, who died in 1803, and in 1782 published the gist of his "spiritualisme pur" in his work *Rapports entre Dieu, l'Homme, et l'Univers*. The *Leviathan* of Hobbes runs parallel with these writers' works, the state therein being represented as a kind of microcosm, analogous to the human body, and the Hobbesian idea recurs in Mr. Morley Roberts's recent *Warfare in the Human Body*, where the human economy is likened to that of the nation or state. Such analogies are perilous, and may lead to much false reasoning by political doctrinaires of communistic tendency. The poet, however, may insist on analogy where the politician or the pathologist

may not, and it is, therefore, the more remarkable that he has through the centuries paid so little attention to the microcosm and its implications. After the *Purple Island* we search in vain for allusions to the brain and human frame in the older anthologies of classic English poetry. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth century poets found their inspiration elsewhere than in the anatomical field, and it is not till we come to the time of John Wesley that we find him singing—on the verge of bathos:

Ah! lovely appearance of death.
What sight upon earth is so fair!
Not all the gay pageants that breathe
Can with a dead body compare!
With solemn delight I survey
The corpse when the spirit has fled,
In love with the beautiful clay
And longing to lie in its stead.

Thus the hymnologist and religious reformer. Far more nobly, but with similar inspiration, Lord Byron sang in the "Giacour":

He who hath bent him o'er the dead
Ere the first day of death is fled,
The first dark day of nothingness,
The last of danger and distress
(Before Decay's effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where beauty lingers),
And mark'd the mild angelic air,
The rapture of repose that's there,
The fix'd yet tender traits that streak
The languor of the placid cheek,
And—but for that sad shrouded eye,
That fires not, wins not, weeps not, now,
And but for that chill, changeless brow,
Where cold Obstruction's apathy
Appals the gazing mourner's heart,
As if to him he could impart
The doom he dreads, yet dwells upon;
Yes, but for these, and these alone,
Some moments, ay, one treacherous hour,
He still might doubt the tyrant's power;
So fair, so calm, so softly seal'd,
The first, last look by death reveal'd!

"I trust that few of my readers," adds Byron in a note, "have ever had an opportunity of witnessing what is here attempted in description, but those who have will probably retain a painful remembrance of that singular beauty which pervades, with few exceptions, the features of the dead a few hours, and but for a few hours, after 'the spirit is not there.'" And he adds the following observation, which might have been made by a medical jurist: "It is to be remarked in cases of violent death by gunshot wounds, the expression is always that of languor, whatever the natural energy of the sufferer's character: but in death from a stab the countenance preserves its traits of feeling or ferocity, and the mind its bias, to the last."

The poet in his famous passage compares modern Greece to the newly dead over which the watcher bends, and the whole of these thirty-five lines, "so beautiful, so original, and so utterly beyond the reach of anyone whose poetical genius was not very decided, and very rich . . . were sufficient," as Sir Egerton Brydges pointed out, "to secure celebrity to this poem."

We have somewhere seen a volume of verse by a medical man with the subtitle "*Carmina Cadaveris*," but we suspect that these songs were of the comic order usual in hospital gazettes. They have not won their author fame. The cadaver, indeed, in any condition save that in which Wesley and Byron viewed it, is an unpleasant subject for poetry, and this both painters and poets have seemed to recognize, for it is not again a subject for art till it reappears either as the "anatomy" or half-fleshed skeleton of the old "dances of death"—of which Holbein was the chief exponent—or as the clean and symmetrical skeleton. Hamlet's famous address to Yorick's skull is the classic instance of what we may call the poetry of the ossuary. Throughout the scene with the grave-diggers Shakespeare makes his hero dwell on the voicelessness of the skull. Its eyelessness is not touched on, and it has been left to the moderns to advert to the skull's expressive look:

The windows and the doors of light and breath
Long since with such gross curtains draped, O skull,
Have put on caverned grandeur after death—
A lofty look, resigned and beautiful!
A lofty look, inscrutably sublime,
A melancholy of high deathless grace.
In this, methinks, that man half conquers Time
And wellnigh baffles the dark grave's disgrace.

In 1832, according to a letter received in August, 1919, by the authorities at the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons of England from Mrs. B. R. Reddell, of Dodgeville, Wisconsin, a MS. poem was said to have been found near a perfect human skeleton in the College Museum. William Clift was then Curator, and he is said

to have sent it to the *Morning Chronicle*, where its publication

"excited so much attention that every effort was made to discover the author, and a responsible party went so far as to offer a reward of fifty guineas for information that would discover its origin. The author preserved his incognito and, we believe, has never been discovered."

According to Mrs. Reddell's letter, he turns out to have been Captain Samuel Curnow, of St. Ives, Cornwall, her great-grandfather. Captain Curnow had gone to London in connexion with events in his family following on the St. Ives election, where his friend Winthrop Mackworth Praed had unsuccessfully contested the seat. Clift makes no mention of the finding of the poem in his elaborately detailed *Museum Diary* for the year 1832, and this is curious, for he was fond of *jeux d'esprit* of the kind, and he now and then records extra-collegiate events. Thus, in this year, he stoically records the death of his son in a cab accident! Nor is the poem by Praed, for it is not in his works, though somewhat in his manner. We may therefore take it that Captain Curnow was the author.

TO A SKELETON.

Behold this ruin! 'Twas a skull
Once of ethereal spirit full;
This narrow cell was Life's retreat;
This space was Thought's mysterious seat.
What beauteous visions filled this spot,
What dreams of pleasure long forgot?
Nor hope, nor joy, nor love, nor fear,
Have left one trace of record here.

Beneath this smouldering canopy
Once shone the bright and busy eye;
But start not at the dismal void,—
If social love that eye employed,
If with no lawless fire it gleamed,
But through the dews of kindness beamed,
That eye shall be forever bright
When stars and sun are sunk in night.

Within this hollow cavern hung
The ready, swift and tuneful tongue;
If falsehood's honey it disdained,
And when it could not praise was chained,
If bold in Virtue's cause it spoke,
Yet gentle concord never broke,—
This silent tongue shall plead for thee
When Time unveils Eternity!

Say, did these fingers delve the mine,
Or with the envied rubies shine?
To hew the rock or wear a gem
Can little now avail to them.
But if the page of Truth they sought,
Or comfort to the mourner brought,
These hands a richer meed shall claim
Than all that wait on Wealth and Fame.

Avails it whether bare or shod
These feet the paths of duty trod?
If from the bowers of Ease they fled,
To seek Affliction's humble shed;
If Grandeur's guilty bribe they spurned,
And home to Virtue's cot returned,—
These feet with angel wings shall vie,
And tread the palace of the sky!

VICTOR G. PLARR.

VOLUNTARY HOSPITALS CONFERENCE.

A CONFERENCE of representatives of London hospitals, convened by the British Hospitals Association, was held in the hall of the Royal Society of Medicine on December 2nd. The Hon. Sir ARTHUR STANLEY presided over an attendance of about 100.

A Committee of London Hospitals.

The CHAIRMAN at the outset read a letter from Charing Cross Hospital stating that, in view of the very different lines on which that hospital worked, its authorities had decided, though not in any truculent spirit, to preserve an independent attitude, and accordingly would not seek representation on the inter-hospital committee which it was proposed to form.

Sir Arthur Stanley went on to say that the difficulty of getting hospital representatives from all over the country to come to London frequently had led to the formation of regional committees in various parts of the country on which all the hospitals in each area should be represented. The formation of these committees had been taking place during the past year, and after a committee had been set up for London the only considerable gap remaining would be in South-West England. The committees were to consist, not necessarily of particular individuals specially appointed for a certain period, but of a certain established number of representatives for each hospital or hospital group, so that the hospitals could send on a particular occasion the persons most fitted to deal with the question for which the committee was summoned.