

6. There is no form provided for Regulation No. 9?—No. I find that the best way is to take a little deposition. Then I make a note referring it to the police for report as to character, &c. [Form explained.] Here is a form of application filled up, and the police report obtained thereon. I believe I can get no better evidence, and I grant the pension. In another case which was investigated by the police it was reported that the applicant had a house worth 13s. a week, and I sent the particulars to the Government Valuation of Land Office, and the information came back that the applicant was owner and occupier of a house of the total value of £600. We have sent word to the applicant in reference to this, and he has replied that he has only a life-interest in the property. That is a case which requires to be inquired into. Sometimes the applicant may only have a life-interest in the property; but the question really is whether he is the registered owner of a larger estate under the Land Transfer Act or the Property Law Consolidation Act, and whether, therefore, he is entitled to a pension. In another case the applicant has property worth £900 standing in his name in the Land Transfer Office. These are cases where the applicants have not properly disclosed their position. In another case a woman had £118 in the Savings-Bank. I beg to suggest that the time has arrived when the roll of pensioners can be revised with the assistance of the police and other Government officers.

7. *Mr. Herries.*] Are they not revised every year?—The roll is supposed to be, but it is not possible to do it thoroughly under the present system. I would suggest that a roll should be specially compiled by the Registrar. He has, of course, the roll and books; but the roll should be printed and split up into districts, and sent to the Deputy Registrars of the various districts, and again split up amongst the police. Instructions should be given to the police that their reports should be thorough, and not confined to a mere repetition of what the applicants may tell them. The reports when returned should be all noted in the roll, and the result would be that in at least 90 per cent. of the cases—probably more—there would be no doubt whatever as to the propriety of the pension being granted, and the work of the Magistrate in granting the renewal of the certificate would be confined to merely certifying that the pensioner was alive.

8. *Mr. Field.*] That would reduce the Magistrate's work in that respect materially?—Yes; to a mere form.

9. But you would have to go through all the papers?—The Registrar should do all that work. He should send to the Magistrates a copy of the roll, which should be marked off—"No exception." "(?) Property. (?) Character. (?) Dead or alive." At the present time pensioners have to send in their applications prior to the end of every pension-year, and the Act and regulations contemplate just as thorough an investigation into the matter at the end of each year as when the original pension was granted. That is an impossibility, and there is no necessity for it. Many of these old people suffer very much in having to come down to the Court, and in 90 per cent. of the cases I think it would be a reasonable concession to them to send them notice that their pensions are renewed without the necessity of bringing them to Court. I believe it would be found best in practice to end all the pensions at one period. The pension-year should end, say, on the 31st March. At the present time the pension-year ends twelve months after it was originally granted, and this practice keeps the Magistrate constantly embarrassed. This is especially the case in country districts, where Magistrates only have a meeting of their Court once a month. It would be much better to have one field-day, so that the Magistrate could go round and finish up all the pension-work for the year. If this suggestion with regard to the yearly reports through the police were adopted, it would be much more convenient to the police to know that they had to send in their reports at a particular time. For instance, I have a report made to me up to a certain date, but since that has been put into my hands several other claims have come in. Every Saturday I sit to do this work, and one, two, or three claims come in, and it would be more convenient to all concerned if the pension-year ended at a certain period. Some objection is sure to be taken to the police being employed in this work. Honest people, though poor, do not like the police to inquire about them; but policemen in this country do all sorts of civil work. They collect all kinds of returns, and it is not necessary to make the inquiries in uniform. The police can do this work in plain clothes, and I know from my own experience here that the police are the most useful persons to make inquiries of very many different kinds; and I can also say that they do the work very well. The police should be told by their own officers that not only are they expected to make their reports thorough, but that it is specially good work to give to probationers or young constables, and that it should be taken as a test of their tact and efficiency. Another argument in favour of the police doing the work is that there are really no other means of getting it done. I can imagine no other person at our disposal who can assist us in the same way. Wherever there is a query put against any person's name in the roll as to property the list can be sent over to the Valuation Department, and a return can be sent in showing what property is registered in the name of the applicant. There is a difficulty about claimants having money in the bank. There is a strong feeling on the part of the Post-Office Savings-Bank people against disclosing any information with regard to their depositors, but it seems to me necessary that this information should be obtainable. I asked a lady the other day why she did not tell me she had money in the Savings-Bank. She replied that she was not asked. I said, "You were asked if you had any property of any description whatever." She replied that she did not understand that money was property. Of course, we must allow that there is some desire to obtain a pension on the part of people who are not strictly entitled to it, and if there is any apparent way of evading an awkward question they take it. I have mentioned that I think it would be a convenience to Magistrates if a form were supplied to them with model questions in the margin, and spaces for the answers, and I think, if possible, the Registrars should be represented in all cases; but I hardly see how that can be done. Section 9 of the Act of 1900 provides, "If in any case the Registrar has reason to believe that any pension-certificate has been improperly obtained, it shall be his duty to cause special inquiry to be made before a Stipendiary Magistrate,