

A mistaken notion exists in some quarters that the Department refuses to allow claims to go before the Magistrate until documentary evidence of age is forthcoming. This is an entirely erroneous view. What is done when an applicant has no evidence of age when he lodges his claim is to have every known official source of information searched for any proof that may exist, and if this fails, the claim is submitted with any evidence that the applicant can produce, and the Magistrate has the power, if he so chooses, to accept this and dispense with corroborative evidence. If the Magistrate refuses the claim for want of proof of age, the decision is final, and the Department has no jurisdiction in the matter.

With reference to the question of what constitutes income for old-age pensions purposes, I feel constrained, in view of the opinion so persistently expressed that friendly society benefits are not exempted in the computation of income, to here repeat what I had to say in my last year's report on the subject. I then wrote as follows :—

“As some doubt seems still to exist as to the effect which the operation of the old-age pension scheme has on the membership of friendly societies, I should like to emphasize the statement made in my last year's report—namely, that any benefit derived from a friendly society by way of sick or funeral allowance is exempted, not only by law but in actual practice, from being applied to reduce the amount of pension payable to any claimant. This statement was fully borne out by the replies to my inquiry in the matter then published from the various Magistrates in the Dominion, every one of whom intimated that in no case had any deduction been made from a pension on account of benefits received from any friendly society.

“The law is very clear on the point, the definition of income in section 2 of the Old-Age Pensions Act of 1898 containing the following words : “Income” . . . shall be deemed to include personal earnings, but not any pension payable under this Act, nor any payment by way of sick-allowance or funeral benefit from any registered friendly society.’

“The meaning of this provision is that a member of a friendly society may be in receipt of a sick-allowance of £60 (or more) per annum, or may have received by way of funeral benefit a similar sum, sufficient in itself to disqualify an ordinary applicant, and yet be entitled to receive the full pension of £26, provided he is otherwise qualified in accordance with section 8 of the Act referred to.

“The Old-age Pensions Act, therefore, in my opinion, offers a special inducement to a person to become a member of a friendly society, inasmuch as he will in his old age be qualified to receive the old-age pension in addition to any benefit that may accrue to him as a member of such society.”

I may here add that any person of the required age who is in receipt from the Imperial, Indian, or any colonial Government of a military pension, can, provided his total income including such pension does not exceed £34, and provided also that he is otherwise qualified by law, draw a full old-age pension of £26. This applies also to any person who may be in receipt from any superannuation fund of a pension which, with other income, does not exceed £34.

J. EMAN SMITH, Registrar.