continue ostentatiously to disport themselves in the livery of the sect of which he was the founder.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,
Harley-street, W., Dec. 26th, 1910. C. O. HAWTHORNE.

RE MEDICAL REFEREES UNDER THE WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION ACT.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Having received from the Home Office a printed circular addressed to medical referees, containing, *inter alia*, the attached quotation, I had no alternative but to resign at once my appointments to Circuits 40 and 42, including the Bow, Shoreditch, Bloomsbury, and Whitechapel county courts.

The matter is of great interest to the profession and others, as it is clear that no medical referee appointed by the Secretary of State under the Workmen's Compensation Act can in future examine any workman on behalf of either employer or employed. The position can therefore be only held by those having no practice in accident examination.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,
ALBERT BENTHALL.

Fellows-road, S. Hampstead, N.W., Dec. 30th, 1910.

Extract from Home Office Circular to Medical Referees.

It is particularly undesirable that they should act on behalf either of the employer or insurance company, or of the workman in cases in which weekly payments are actually being made; and apart from any emergency, or other quite exceptional circumstances, they should decline to act in such cases.

The Secretary of State desires to impress on referees the necessity of their paying particular attention to these directions.

THE "WHOLE-TIME" MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—May I venture to point out the slightly ambiguous use of the descriptive term "whole-time," as applied to medical officers of health, which occurs in your most valuable review of the *Annus Medicus 1910*? A medical officer of health who is debarred from private practice is not necessarily a whole-time officer, and if he holds other public appointments he most certainly is a part-time officer. The recent Order of the Local Government Board hardly encourages whole-time appointments; it gives security to the whole-timer and the part-timer alike, but it discourages the part-timer from private practice, and offers him instead certain clinical public appointments such as those alluded to in your retrospect. The real effect of the Order will be to establish the part-timer on an impregnable basis of official pluralism.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,
Barnes, S.W., Dec. 30th, 1910. F. G. CROOKSHANK.

A LATIN TREATISE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In examining the Irish medical MSS. in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, I find three copies (more or less imperfect) of a translation of a Latin treatise which begins: "Cum humane vite brevitatem, teste Hippocrate, ad immensam (sic) artis longitudinem vix sufficiat." If any of your readers could help me to identify this treatise I should be very grateful. It deals largely with eruptive diseases, boils, &c., and, to judge from the number of copies, was probably a standard work in, say, the sixteenth century.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,
Dublin, Dec. 30th, 1910. T. K. ABBOTT.

THE ASSOCIATION OF FELLOWS OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS IN IRELAND.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The report of the inaugural dinner of this association appears in your issue of Dec. 17th last. We would be much obliged if you will correct the erroneous statements therein contained—viz., "Irish hospitals, excluding the F.R.C.S.I.," and "that Fellows only of the College should be examiners."

The protestation which the association made was against the system adopted by certain English hospitals of excluding from their staff those possessing the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland. The resolution passed at the special meeting on Dec. 10th of the Fellows of the College of Surgeons, Ireland, was:—

That the Examiners shall be selected from amongst the Fellows and the Professors of the College

We are, Sir, yours faithfully,
ANDREW CHARLES } Hon. Secretaries.
R. P. McDONNELL }

A SPECULATION ON THE ORIGIN OF CANCER.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I read with great interest and pleasure the Bradshaw lecture on cancer by Sir Alfred Pearce Gould. He gives all facts known at present about cancer and these are well arranged. All I will say about them is—all honour to the workers and more power to their elbows, Sir Alfred Pearce Gould himself included. If I understood him right, he concludes that certain organs (such as the uterus and the breast), on account of frequently repeated periods of great cellular activity, followed by periods of decline and atrophy, get prematurely old ("before the rest of the woman ages") and therefore are specially prone to cancer.

Now, throughout the whole animal world we find that the older the tissue the less is its cellular activity. Cancer is increased cellular activity. If Sir Alfred Pearce Gould is right, this increased cellular activity takes place in tissue that has grown prematurely old ("before the rest of the woman ages"). It is admitted at once that this increased cellular activity results in disorderly growth; but that is a matter of secondary importance. Thus Sir Alfred Pearce Gould has (1) not stated how cancer originates; and (2) has brought in the field a still more difficult problem—viz., increased cellular activity in tissues prematurely old (thus going against the universal law stated above). But taking the facts thus far known and putting aside for the time being the parasitic theory (and appearances are against it) I humbly beg to state that another explanation is possible.

To begin with, then, the statement often made—that the human body is a machine, timed to go for a certain number of years, after which it gets worn out and thus dies—is not in accordance with facts. Arrangements are made in the body for a constant supply of nutrition to all parts, more than making up for any wear and tear that might take place. Arrangements also are made for immediate removal of all waste materials. Now, if wear and tear had anything to do with old age and death, we ought to have some signs of this during the period of greatest activity. The child is always on the go; the youth is always about and active; but they show no signs of wear and tear. The heart and respiratory muscles do more work than any other part of the body, but we find no signs of extra wear and tear in them. Conclusion: There is nothing to show that old age is brought on by wear and tear of tissues.

Wear and tear of tissues not being able to account for old age, we are obliged to fall back on nutrition. Failure of suitable nutrition can be the only other cause. Now, it appears that the tissues, very soon after first coming into existence, begin slowly to change (proteins are unstable). All the time the tissue is changing the nutrition is, comparatively speaking, at a standstill. Thus, what was perfect nutrition at one time becomes less and less perfect as time goes on; and thus is brought about the gradual failure of nutrition. The make of the body is perfect, but no arrangement exists to modify the nutrition in accordance with the changing tissues. Under normal conditions all the tissues march together (change) in regular order. But under certain circumstances this regularity of the march is broken, and certain tissues fall back (particularly the epithelial tissue). Now, this retarded tissue finds the nutrition provided more suitable than the rest of the tissues, and thus comes into activity. Conclusion: It is the tissue which has aged less than the rest of the body which is specially prone to cancer.

Sir Alfred Pearce Gould has very ably pointed out the difference between the orderly growth of the embryo and the