THE MEDICAL ASPECT OF INDUSTRIAL ACCIDENTS.

Preliminary Note.

By

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For some time back, there has been manifested an increasing tendency to call in question the simple conception hitherto accepted that machinery is the predominant cause of industrial accidents.

It is readily recognised that contributions to the subject deal in general with one particular aspect of the problem, and even in cases where authorities on the question treat of the problem as a whole, their studies, are nevertheless limited to one special branch of industry (metallurgical trades, Peri; railway shops, Pieraccini and Maffei; etc.).

It is true that a large number of authors dealing with industrial accidents have based their contributions to the question on a general comprehensive plan similar to that which it is intended to follow. It may, however, be stated that the framework of these studies presented in the form of a short article is somewhat narrow, and that, further, the examples presented are drawn exclusively from the literature of the country of the author. Even, however, should a work of international character, in accordance with the present intent, exist already, it is considered that the importance of the subject may well justify the publication of several studies of the problem. It is for this reason that it is intended to analyse the data concerning occupational accidents of the most varied origin, considered, if one may say so, from the biological standpoint.
It has been affirmed that this task does not come within the competence of the medical man; but this opinion cannot be admitted. It suffices to emphasize the fact that the intervention of the doctor in the campaign against accidents—a campaign which had for long remained the exclusive domain of the technical expert—has completely transformed the whole conception of the origin of accidents. Prior to this intervention, there was complete lack of recognition of the fact that the human being is not to be regarded as a machine, and that each individual reacts in a different manner to his environment—that in short—the psycho-physiological condition determines reactions to external agents. At present lack of recognition of this fact may be justly considered as belonging to the past. The human factor has from now onwards attained priority, and under these conditions the doctor may no longer be excluded from a field of activity in which ground has been broken thanks to his collaboration.

As regards the study of social environment, the doctor will here, it is believed, find himself quite in his own sphere, since industrial medicine, which represents 90% of the content of social medicine can not afford to overlook "extra medical" elements, so to speak, such as trying domestic circumstances, which in their turn may lead to accidents.

It will be recognised that the industrial physician is all the more entitled to study the problem under review when it is remembered that the human factor plays an important rôle in 60%, and even according to certain experts in 90%, of cases of accident! To enquire into individual susceptibility to accidents implies the statement of an exclusively biological problem,—highly complex and difficult, it is true,—but in regard to the solution of which all branches of medical science must contribute.

In the present study, which constitutes a preliminary note, there is presented the scheme to be followed, and each Section will be illustrated with cases chosen from amongst the most recent examples. The various points which are merely enumerated here will naturally be dealt with in more detail in a later and more extensive work, which will take account of the majority of contributions already existing on the subject.

It is undoubtedly difficult, and sometimes impossible, to fix the dividing line between the purely technical factor and the factor which may be designated as "human" or "personal". These two factors are at times so closely interwoven that they baffle all attempts at distinction. On the other hand, the social aspect of the question (injury

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1 To comply with editorial requirements it has been found necessary to abridge this article considerably, and this has had the effect of eliminating tables and data presented in support of the various theories advanced.