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Proceedings of the Census Committee of the Statistical Society of London, 1850

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Whatever may be the legal provisions made for a public service in this country, philanthropy and private enterprise will still find something unprovided for, or ill accomplished; and in the department of police, the Mendicity Society, the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and others, exercise functions which it would be very instructive to investigate, in connexion with the Charities of the Metropolis, but which are beyond the scope of our present inquiry.

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*Proceedings of the Census Committee of the Statistical Society of London, 1850.*

"A SUBJECT which will demand the immediate attention of the Council now to be appointed," states the Annual Report, read to the Society on the 15th of March, "is the Census of the Population to be taken in 1851. In the year previous to the last Census, in 1841, a committee of this Society was appointed to collect and digest the experience of every civilized country in such labours, and its report (contained in the third volume of your Journal, p. 72) is of a character to form even yet a consistent basis for the suggestion of further improvements. The immediate effect of its production was to cause the Government to withdraw the bill actually before the House of Commons for taking the Census in the old methods, by the agency of the overseers, each acting according to his own best and very imperfect discretion, in the production of a gross result, to the accuracy of which he had to swear, without the skill to ensure it. A bill drawn up on the plan contained in your Committee's report was then substituted, and became law. Under this statute, the materials of the last census were collected through the agency of the Registrars of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, in schedules somewhat diminished from those proposed in our Committee's report, and transferred for abstraction to a central office. The general scheme of the labour will not admit of any such fundamental change as was suggested ten years ago; but the items to be collected in the schedule, and yet more, the extent and construction of the abstracts to be deduced from them, and published for public use, are subjects of a solicitude which the experience of the last Census has only tended to augment. Already this matter has been the subject of an interesting paper by the Rev. E. W. Edgell, read before the Society in its monthly meeting of the 20th of November, 1848; and a second paper by the same gentleman, containing an important suggestion for the preservation and consolidation of the existing parish register records, is of kindred interest, and formed the subject of an interesting discussion in the ordinary meeting of the 19th of November last."

Accordingly, a Committee was appointed by a resolution of the Council on the 13th of April, 1850, to the effect that *a Census Committee* be appointed to consist of the following:—

The Right Honourable The Earl of Harrowby	Mr. Farr
Sir J. P. Boileau, Bart.	Mr. Neison
Lieut.-Col. W. H. Sykes	Mr. Danson
Mr. Slaney, M.P.	Mr. Porter
Mr. Tooke	Mr. Fletcher
The Rev. E. W. Edgell	Dr. Guy
	Mr. Oswald.

This Committee, at various meetings held between the 25th of April and the 19th of June inclusive, discussed the various recommendations of individual members for extending the scope of the Census, improving its methods, and enhancing the value of its results by improved abstracts, to be presented to Parliament and the public; and at the latter date finally agreed to the following report to the Council of the recommendations which they should desire to be respectfully submitted to the Home Office, as the department having the preparation of the bill for taking the next census, and that which would necessarily have the superintendence, directly or indirectly, of its operations.

"As respects the general plan, your Committee can suggest nothing better than that which was adopted for the Census of 1841, viz., a *descriptive list of the persons who slept in each house on a given night*, formed chiefly from the verbal inquiries of an 'enumerator,' but partly also from the answers given in the 'householder's schedule' left at each dwelling previous to the night of the census.

"Whilst, however, your Committee approve of this general plan as the best upon the *whole* which can be adopted, they would suggest the following alterations and additions in matters of *detail*:—

"I. That there be in connection with the Census a classification of houses, similar to that made in the Irish Census of 1841, by adding, as to houses inhabited, *the number of rooms in each*, and the same as to houses uninhabited; and that wherever the names of streets or the numbers of houses may be wanting, it would be desirable to have names and numbers affixed for future reference.

"II. Your Committee recommend that the *verbal questions of the enumerators should be universally the same*, and should not be more than six in number; moreover, that they should be worded so as to require no qualification or explanation, as follow:—

"What is your name?

"What is your age?

"Where were you born?

"Are you married, single, widow or widower?

"What is your situation in this house; master, mistress, son, daughter, servant, lodger, or visitor?

"What is your occupation?

"III. Whereas, hitherto one and the same form of householders' schedules has been left with every class of the community, your Committee recommend that there should be one adapted for a lodging-house, another for a farm, another for a large establishment, &c., &c., while they all contain the six universal questions mentioned in the last resolution.

"IV. Whereas, heretofore it has been found that half (or perhaps more than half) of the families with whom householders' schedules have been left, have taken no notice whatever of them; your Committee think that this neglect was in some degree owing to the dry, not to say offensive, manner in which they were worded; they were, in fact, a notice to fill up a subjoined table under a penalty of 50*l.*; your Committee therefore recommend that the wording should partake less of a legal character; that it should rather be a *very simple address*, explaining the object of the inquiry being made by Government.

“ V. That one of the ‘ householder’s schedules ’ be prepared for the masters and mistresses of schools that it state shortly the public uses contemplated in collecting the following information, and require answers to the following questions, viz.:—The average number of scholars in weekly attendance at their several schools in the interval between the 25th of March 1851 and the day of the census, with a statement of the age and sex of those on their books at the latter date.

“ It is also desirable that the ‘ enumerator ’ should specify in regard to each of these returns, the class to which it belongs, whether that of

“ 1. Private schools, including all that are supported by the mere payment of the scholars, without endowment, gift, grant, charitable contributions, or other extraneous aid.

“ 2. Proprietors’ schools, including all that are charitably supported by single individuals or firms, without other assistance than the children’s pence.

“ 3. Public schools, including all that are supported by endowments or joint contributions of subscribers.

“ VI. That it might prove useful to require from the enumerators a careful return to the central office of ALL the forms issued to be filled up in writing, that they may be subsequently examined and an abstract be made, showing the number intelligibly filled in each place and district.

“ VII. That it be recommended that a sufficient remuneration be given to ensure qualified persons.

“ VIII. Your Committee, though they fully estimate the importance of agricultural statistics, do not think it advisable to encumber the operations of the next Census with their collection; but they venture to suggest that if some intelligent persons were sent through the country to make inquiries and report upon the best method of collecting agricultural statistics (as commissioners were appointed in 1832, previous to the alteration of the Poor Law), it would tend to prepare the public mind to assist in their collection, and render it more acceptable and more easy of accomplishment when undertaken as an independent object.”

The late Under Secretary of State for the Home Department, G. C. Lewis, Esq., M.P., having kindly consented to receive the Committee as a deputation from the Society, its members accordingly waited upon him on the 20th of June, and that gentleman, with great care, investigated the grounds of each recommendation, and promised to give his best consideration to them in framing the act and the instructions upon it. The Committee having availed themselves of his permission to leave with him a copy of these recommendations, withdrew, in the conviction that no effort will be wanting on the part of the executive government, thus represented, to make the next Census a record worthy of the country and of the present advanced state of statistical investigation.

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