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Population Problems.

IT would seem that the daily press is beginning to regard the facts and figures issued periodically by the Registrar-General as good copy. In any event, increasing prominence is given to them, and headlines direct our attention to a further fall in the birth-rate. But comment is withheld; the fall is not applauded. Presumably it is supposed that national prestige and numbers are somehow linked together, and that therefore a diminution in the number of Englishmen in the next generation cannot be a matter for congratulation. On the other hand, the fall is not bemoaned. We all know that there are more than a million unemployed. It is worth remarking that in pre-War days we knew only the percentage of the unemployed among a very small proportion of the wage earners. For a short time in 1857, 1879, and 1886, more than 10 per cent of them were unemployed, while the normal figure was nearer 5 per cent. But 10 per cent may not sound alarming. There are at present more than 11 per cent unemployed, and, if we still thought in percentages instead of in totals, the employment position would not seem so bad and the fall in the birth-rate might be a matter for unfavourable comment. (This should not be read as implying that the seriousness of the unemployment phenomenon is exaggerated; but it is its chronic nature rather than its amount which is unexampled.) We are now growing accustomed even to these huge figures, and there is perhaps some reason to think that we are on the verge of plunging into a population panic and are held back only by our realisation of the magnitude of unemployment. One day a further fall in the birth-rate may be greeted by panic headlines in the press. Meanwhile, the position seems to be that unemployment is functioning as an anæsthetic while birth control gains firmer hold.

Alarm is likely to be aroused when it is realised that the natural increase, or annual increment to the population by excess of births over deaths, will, things remaining as they are, rapidly diminish in the near future. Assuming things to remain as they were a few years ago, Prof. Bowley made certain estimates which, while well known to students, have not as yet become very familiar to the public. Assuming the annual number of births to remain as in 1921-23, the death-rate to remain as in 1910-12, and that there was no migration, he calculated that the population of Great Britain, which was about  $42\frac{3}{4}$  millions in 1921, would reach about  $45\frac{1}{8}$  millions in 1931,  $47\frac{1}{4}$  in 1941, and  $48\frac{1}{2}$  in

1951, after which it would remain approximately stable. But things are not remaining as they were. The number of births in Great Britain was 895,209 in 1922, 870,033 in 1923, 836,833 in 1924, 814,719 in 1925, 797,347 in 1926, and 751,638 in 1927. The birth-rate, in fact, falls year by year. It was 16.6 per 1000 living at all ages in 1927, this being the lowest rate ever recorded. It is a remarkable fact that the number of births registered in 1927 was the lowest registered since 1855, although at the earlier date the population was less than half its present size.

During the same years there has been a considerable loss by emigration. The net loss by emigration to countries out of Europe from Great Britain and Northern Ireland was 91,262 in 1924, 84,259 in 1925, 115,538 in 1926, and 75,444 in 1927. The inference is obvious. Stabilisation of population will come sooner than was to be anticipated a few years ago. It might even be the case that, if Prof. Bowley's calculation were repeated, and the estimate of the annual number of births amended to compare with the present position, the result might show that a decline in the population is to be expected before many years have passed, even if the effect of migration is left out of account. Such a calculation, it may be remarked, is possible only with a census year as a basis, because it is only for a census year that we have the necessary information regarding the age distribution of the population.

The natural increase of the population is thus becoming less year by year. The excess of births over deaths in England and Wales was about 242,000 in 1926 and about 169,000 in 1927. At the same time migration is removing many thousands every year. However much our exporting industries may languish, we remain great exporters of men. A list of European countries arranged according to intensity of loss of population consequent upon overseas migration per 100,000 inhabitants from 1920 to 1924 shows the first five countries to be as follows: Irish Free State 425, Great Britain and Northern Ireland 327, Italy 274, Portugal 227, and Spain 206. We are in this respect associated with a group of countries with whom we do not commonly class ourselves. Owing to the combined effects of diminishing natural increase and loss by migration, the estimated populations of Scotland, Ireland, and the Irish Free State fell by some thousands each between mid-1926 and mid-1927. In England and Wales alone out of the four constituent areas of these islands did the estimated total in mid-1927 show an advance upon

that for mid-1926. But it will not be long before the position in England and Wales approximates to that in the other three areas.

However much opinions may differ in other respects, there will be universal agreement about one factor in the situation—the death-rate. We shall continue to agree to attempt to reduce it. It is migration and the birth-rate which present problems. Should we encourage migration? Should we welcome a further fall in the birth-rate? Migration is a troublesome problem. It is advocated for two somewhat different objects. At times the primary object is said to be the relief of congestion at home. At other times emphasis is laid on the fact that, while population is dense in England, it is sparse in the dominions, and that migration would bring about a desirable redistribution of population within the Empire.

The facts themselves are none too clear. We know something about movement to non-European countries from Great Britain and Northern Ireland and from the Irish Free State respectively, but we know little about movement within these islands. Figures compiled by the Irish Free State Department of Industry and Commerce show that in 1927 there was an outward balance from the Free State of 20,688 persons in the traffic between that country and the remainder of the British Isles. Of this total, about 30 per cent was accounted for by migrants from the Irish Free State who travelled to non-European countries via British ports. It seems to follow that an addition of some 14,000 was made to the population of Great Britain and Northern Ireland during 1927 by emigrants from the Free State.

During the same period some 63,000 persons were assisted to emigrate from Great Britain under the Empire Settlement Act of 1922. Emigration is costly. Under this Act, up to three millions may be spent annually from national funds in support of approved emigration schemes, provided that at least half the cost of each scheme is met by some other authority, public or private. But this is by no means all, or even the greater part of the expense. There are government schemes for training men for emigration under the Ministry of Labour; there are numerous private agencies at work. Looking further back, there is all the expense of bringing up and educating men who, when of age to produce, are shipped off to another country.

One aspect of the present policy seems indefensible. If the object is to relieve congestion in Great Britain, it is foolish to allow the places of those assisted to depart to be filled by immigrants

from Ireland. Why not, it might be said, also raise a cry against the influx of Scotsmen into England? Is this not pure prejudice? The answer is that it is not a question of race at all but a question of finance. Scotland shares with England the expense of emigration. The Irish Free State does not. If it is said that the object is not primarily the relief of congestion at home, but the redistribution of population throughout the British Empire, then with equal force it may be urged that the financial burden is unfairly distributed, and that direct emigration of the Irish to the Dominions would be a less circuitous method than sending Englishmen from home and replacing them in part by Irishmen.

This matter, though not unimportant, is a side issue. A discussion of the main issue, however, raises so many matters of such complexity and obscurity that it is not possible to do more than indulge in vague generalisations. It must be remembered that a further decline in the birth-rate in Great Britain will not affect the employment position until fourteen years have passed. With the birth-rate at its present level, it is possible that the population will be stable, or at least not increasing, fourteen years from now. It does not seem unreasonable to hope that within that period we can get our population employed up to the pre-War level. With such facts and anticipations in mind, it would seem that the fall in the birth-rate of Great Britain has gone far enough. A restricted policy of assisted emigration for the next few years, provided that reasonable safeguards are provided to meet the difficulties mentioned above, seems reasonable, both because we are still faced with an annual increment of population in Great Britain for a few years, which we can scarcely be said to require, and because the sparsely populated Dominions are apparently capable of absorbing these emigrants at the present rate.

This does not mean, however, that it would be satisfactory if the birth-rate remained as it is in all respects. The birth-rate is an average figure for the population. The rate is lower than this figure among the comfortably situated, and highest among the least comfortably situated—the miners, for example. It is a curious fact that anyone who deplores this well-known phenomenon is assumed to do so wholly on the grounds that the stocks, with the most valuable biological endowments, are not reproducing themselves as they should. But whether this is so or not, we might surely all join in deploring it on the obvious grounds that those parents who by reason of their financial position

are best able to provide children with a good upbringing and a decent education have the smallest families. Such information as we possess for Great Britain—and it is very scanty—does not tend to show that the contrast between the well-off and the badly-off in respect to size of family is growing less. There is evidence, however, from Sweden, and also from Holland and Germany, that in late years this gap has been closing. In Stockholm it is now apparently the case that the better-off parents have the most children, whereas not many years ago the situation was much as in Great Britain. There could scarcely be any investigation more profitable than one which would throw light upon the causes of so remarkable a change. It might then be possible to attempt to bring influences to bear which would lead to a similar change in Great Britain.

A. M. C.-S.

#### Natural History and Literature.

- (1) *Birds and Beasts of the Greek Anthology*. By Norman Douglas. Pp. vii + 215. (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1928.) 7s. 6d. net.
- (2) *Nature in the Age of Louis XIV*. By Phyllis E. Crump. Pp. xv + 224. (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1928.) 10s. 6d. net.
- (3) *Tableau de Lilliput ou Essai sur les Infusoires*. Par Marcel Roland. (Collection de *La Grande Revue*.) Pp. 51. (Paris: Les éditions Rieder, 1928.) 6 francs.

(1) **M**R. NORMAN DOUGLAS has found in the famous collection of poems known as the Greek Anthology about six hundred references to wild animals, and to about a hundred and fifty different kinds. He discusses many examples in his scholarly way and with a pleasant wit; and his book is of interest in its disclosure of the mood in which many different minds looked at familiar animals through the long stretch of time which the Anthology covers. There are references to lions and lynxes, bears and boars, wolves and goats, but most of them are so trivial that we welcome the long-standing puzzle of the unicorn. Birds are happily represented by the eagle, the raven, the crow, and many others, but rarely with any insight, so far as we can discover from the quotations; and we are glad to come to the long-lived phoenix and the elusive halcyon. The interest is often not so much that of natural history or of poetry, but the 'akanthologous' fascination of thorny questions. Reptiles are represented by adders and asps, geckos and crocodiles; and amphibians by the vocal tree-toad or ololygon