

News and Views

Population Statistics

SIR KINGSLEY WOOD, the Minister of Health, has taken to heart the criticisms of the schedule of the Population (Statistics) Bill which have been brought forward, both in and out of Parliament, since its publication. The revised schedule omits altogether the comprehensive Clause 3, which made it possible to demand information upon "any other matter", and was much disliked. The questions now to be asked are definite and simple. On registration of birth: the age of the mother; the date of marriage; the number of former children of the mother. On registration of death: whether the deceased was married; if a woman, the date and duration of marriage; the number of children; the age of the surviving spouse. The information so obtained will not be disclosed to the public. These are not provocative questions and it may be expected that they will be approved by Parliament. The history of this Bill shows our democratic institutions at their best. We have, first, a Bill with a vague and complex schedule, calculated to give rise to objections, and covering more ground than was really required; then an excellent, critical debate in the House of Commons, and a good, general discussion in the newspapers; and, finally, the revision and simplification of the Bill by a sensible Minister.

Air Raid Precautions

In his speech on the motion for the third reading of the Air Raid Precautions Bill in the House of Commons on December 7, Sir Samuel Hoare emphasized that air raid precautions, on however great a scale, cannot assure complete immunity to the population of Great Britain or any other highly industrialized European country. The most that can be done is to minimize the catastrophe and loss of life and to ensure the essential defence service. It is also impossible to concentrate on passive defence a disproportionate amount of money and man-power. Air raid precautions have their proper place in a general scheme of defence finance and preparation, and Sir Samuel expressed the opinion that the execution of the Government's plans would go far to prevent panic and ensure the continuance of the essential services. When the Bill reached the Statute Book the Government proposed to make much greater use of experiments in co-operation with local authorities and to strengthen the air raid precautions organization of the Home Office. In addition, very considerable steps are already being taken in Government Departments to organize air raid precautionary methods. About fifty instructors drawn from different departments have received training at the civilian anti-gas school and are giving instruction to the staffs of departments. About eighty instructors trained in the same manner have been supplied to the Post Office, and it is hoped by the end of the year that

there will be more than 150 instructors in the Post Office service alone. Seven gas chambers are being constructed in various Government buildings in the London area by the Office of Works, and the Office is also carrying out an extensive structural survey of existing Government buildings. The most suitable accommodation will be ear-marked for refuges to which the staff will be collected on receipt of an air raid warning.

STRUCTURAL precautions against air attack will be considered in all new Government buildings, and in the new Whitehall buildings it is proposed to construct a roof of solid concrete to resist small incendiary bombs and some resistance to penetration of high explosive bombs generally. The solid concrete floors would offer further resistance to bombs which penetrated the roof, while the second floor below the roof would be strongly reinforced to retain debris if the top floors collapsed. A strongly reinforced floor would also be provided on the ground floor level to provide protection for staff collected in the emergency refuge accommodation in the basement. Interesting to scientific workers as are these details of Government plans, they will equally welcome Sir Samuel Hoare's frank admission of the limitations of air raid precautions and his reminder that the very precautions proposed run counter to the ideals and chief movements developed in civilized life after generations of progress. In protective clothing, lighting, evacuation, we are setting the clock back for generations, and Sir Samuel Hoare averred the Government's determination to lose no opportunity of trying to reintroduce sanity into the world and remove the conditions which have made such provisions inevitable.

Administration and the Aborigines of Australia

CORROBORATION in part of recent criticism of the treatment of the Australian aborigines (see p. 1029 of this issue of NATURE) comes from a source carrying a weight that cannot be disputed. Dr. Donald Thomson, an anthropologist appointed by the Federal Government to act as a special patrol officer in Arnhem Land, now relinquishing his post to take up a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship at Cambridge, has made a statement, according to the Canberra correspondent of *The Times* in the issue of December 9, in which he comments severely on the policy in aboriginal administration being pursued in the Northern Territories. His criticism, as reported, is directed mainly against encroachment on native lands. In the selection of Groote Eylandt as a flying-boat base, he maintains, every interest but that of the aborigines has been considered. It seals the doom of a tribe of three hundred aborigines, "in many ways the pick of the surviving Australian tribes"—a view which anthropologists conversant