

There are many other side-lines which might be discussed, but, when all is said and done, they remain side-lines subsidiary to the over-riding interest of the pictures as pictures; although some knowledge of them is often a help in coming to a proper understanding of the pictures themselves.

Lastly, a word of praise must be given to the Catalogue. In it are a brief history of the Royal Collections, biographical notes on the artists, and references to literature on which the student may draw for additional information. It will retain its value as a handy work of reference long after the Exhibition has ended.

THE SOCIAL SURVEY

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THE phrase 'social survey' now covers a multitude of activities which differ in aim and method. The aim of the earliest English surveys, such as Booth's "Life and Labour of the People of London" and Rowntree's "Poverty", were to discover in specific areas the extent and degrees of poverty in the sense of family income low in relation to the expenditure on food and other necessities. The aims of more recent social surveys, such as the Worcester Civic Survey¹ or the Herefordshire Survey², have been to lay a foundation for physical planning, and the location of industry; or, like the work of the War-time Social Survey, to obtain information for solving immediate *ad hoc* problems of fact and opinion confronting Government departments.

There can be little doubt of the usefulness of surveys to achieve many of these aims. In a paper to the Institute of Public Administration, Mr. Louis Moss mentions war-time surveys carried out to determine fair clothes rationing where work entailed extra wear and tear, and fair fat and sugar distribution between bakers and cake-making housewives. He adumbrates future surveys into the kinds of houses that will satisfy both human needs and technical possibilities, and into the obstacles in the way of full utilization of man-power. The planning surveys include among their aims the greater accessibility of work-places, schools and shops, and therefore map the existing sites of all these places in any given area in relation to homes of the population. Their recommendations for industrial location help to solve problems of unstable and maldistributed employment.

The differing aims of surveys past and present have been achieved by methods that differ quite as widely, though a common factor is the standardized schedule of questions that are usually put. Controversy about the scientific validity of these methods has tended to fasten on the sampling technique employed, if any. But something more fundamental must first be discussed, and that is the nature of the original data. If the source of the data is liable to distort the facts, no amount of juggling with sampling formulæ will make results reliable.

Data are usually distinguished as documentary or as observed—observation being of environment, of behaviour, or of written or verbal responses. But documentary evidence must itself have been observed at one time. Figures of output, for example, enumerated in the Census of Production, are now documentary; but originally they were observed by foremen, inspectors and managers in some factory,

who duly recorded what they observed. A more fundamental distinction thus seems to lie between data observed by competent persons and checked and counterchecked (the usual process in official statistics), and data less certainly observed. It is a matter of degree how certain the observation is. On the whole, observation will be more certain under three types of proviso.

(1) Where observations of facts are direct by the surveyor and not gathered from other people's verbal or written statements. The statements of other people may distort facts owing to bias, emotion or failure to be observant; or (if there is a time-lapse between fact and statement) by sheer failure of memory. This uncertainty does not apply where opinions and feelings are sought, or, at least, the *present* opinions and feelings of the persons making the statement.

(2) Where the observation of the surveyor can be checked by various tests, or several surveyors can be found to agree. Thus, in house-to-house visits there are a number of counter-checking tests of income, and poverty; and, more obviously, the sites or locations of homes, shops, factories, schools, etc., are there for all to see.

(3) This second proviso leads on to the further proviso that when people are asked for statements about facts they will be more accurate about recurrent and continuing facts than about passing events. Thus, a housewife can probably be trusted to be more correct about the number of rooms in her house, or the shops she frequents or the habitual place of work of her husband, than about past illnesses in her family or the precise nature of past purchases.

Social surveys of the type described by Mr. Moss have largely relied on verbal responses, and it is important to ask how far such data are likely to be sufficiently accurate for the type of knowledge required. They are probably not accurate enough for discovering past events; though accurate enough for opinions, provided the questions are not so worded (and intoned) as to be leading questions. Mr. Moss is right to stress the importance to democratic processes of a continuous knowledge of public opinion.

Yet we hope that opinion surveys will not dictate policy. In the listener survey conducted by the B.B.C., classical music came very low indeed on the priority list of the majority of listeners. Similarly, simply designed furniture would probably come very low, compared to the ornate, in the scale of popularity. The B.B.C. wisely neglected to attune its programmes to debased popular taste; let us hope a similar course will follow the surveys foreshadowed by Mr. Moss into the wishes and needs of consumers. English social surveys, if they are really to set the pattern of cultural life, will have to take a wider sweep and to integrate all phases of community and individual activity (whether reducible to statistics or not) as the anthropologist does when studying primitive societies. This application of anthropology has taken firm root in America, but we have yet to set about an English "Middletown"³ or an equivalent to "Yankee City"⁴.

¹ "County Town." By Glaisyer, Brennan, Ritchie and Florence. Department of Commerce, University of Birmingham. (John Murray.)

² "English County." By the West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning. (Faber and Faber.)

³ "Middletown" and "Middletown in Transition". By R. S. and H. M. Lynd. (Harcourt, Bruce and Co.)

⁴ "Yankee City." By W. L. Warner and P. S. Lunt. (Oxford University Press.)