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To the solid ground.

Of Nature trusts the mind which builds for aye. —WORDSWORTH.

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The Census of 1921.

JUST twelve months ago (NATURE, August 26, 1920, p. 797) we directed attention to the effect of the Census Act of last year in facilitating the work of the Registrar General and his colleagues on the census, which was then appointed to be made in April of the present year, and to the value of the information that the census might be expected to afford. Effect was duly given to the provisions of the Act by an Order in Council made on December 21, 1920, fixing the date of the census for April 24; but when that day arrived the coal dispute and the strikes which were then threatened in the railway and transport industries gave rise to doubts whether

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the work could be successfully carried out as intended, and a further Order in Council was obtained fixing it for June 19, when the enumeration accordingly was made. It reflects great credit on the officers responsible for the work that they have been able so soon to publish a preliminary Report (Cd. 1485) containing in adequate detail the broad features that are presented by the figures. We must await the future Reports for much of the information that we referred to in our previous article as desirable, but in the meantime this preliminary Report may be consulted with interest and profit.

For obvious reasons this Report does not contain any particulars relating to Ireland. For Great Britain the total population is given as 42,767,530; an increase of 4.7 per cent. on that of the census of 1911. The total population of Great Britain at the census of 1821 was enumerated at 14,091,757, so that the population appears to have multiplied threefold in a hundred years. In the light of this fact it is not unsatisfactory to find that the increase shown by the present census is less in actual number and in percentage than that of any previous intercensal period during the centennium. A continuance of the previous rate of increase would have resulted in over-population.

The next step in the comparison, that of the relative numbers of the sexes, introduces a new element. In England and Wales, in 1921, the males are 18,082,220 and the females 19,803,022, 1095 females to 1000 males. In 1821 there were

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5,850,319 males and 6,149,617 females, or 1036 to 1000 males. There has been during the hundred years an almost unvarying increase in the proportion of females to males, and at the present census it has nearly reached eleven to ten. It is interesting to observe, however, that in Scotland, on the contrary, there has been a diminution, the proportion in 1821 having been as high as 1127 to 1000, while that in 1921 is as low as 1079 to 1000, or less than that of England and Wales.

This superiority in number of the female sex does not alarm us. Too much has been made by the Press of what are somewhat discourteously called the "surplus women." The numerical preponderance of women over men was 1,322,502 in 1911, and 1,906,284 in 1921, showing an increase of 583,782; but that is not equal to the losses by death in the war, which are estimated at 627,870. Meantime the desire of women to acquire independence, to "live their own life" in industry, in the arts, and even in science, has been greatly developed, and with it has come a marked increase in the facilities for obtaining a training to fit them for it. When the results of the returns as to age and occupation have been co-ordinated and digested, much valuable information as to the social changes which have accompanied the events of the decennium under review may be expected to be derived.

We stated last year that an increase in the number of items of information demanded in a census was likely to lead to a diminution of the probability that the returns obtained would be accurate. It is satisfactory to find that the census authorities have to some extent adopted this view, and have left out of the schedule for 1921 the inquiry as to infirmities and the inquiry as to duration of existing marriages and the number of children born of such marriages, which were both included in the schedule for 1911. The first is scarcely a fair question, and the wealth of material obtained from the second has not been completely exhausted, so that it became unnecessary to add to it.

The Registrar General appears to cast a lingering, lingering look behind on his two lost columns, for he directs attention to the fact that "this is the first time in the modern history of census-taking in this country that an inquiry once introduced into the schedule has been omitted therefrom on a subsequent occasion." However, he has supplied their place by two new columns, one as to

the number and ages of children under sixteen, including an inquiry as to orphans, and another as to the place of work. He thinks, and we agree with him, that the limits of expansion have now been approximately reached, and we hope that in future the principle that information should be valued, not for its quantity, but for its trustworthiness, will be borne in mind.

This leads to the consideration of the important provision of section 5 of the Act of 1920 by which the Registrar General is authorised to enter into relations with other Government Departments so as to further the supply of statistical information and provide for its better co-ordination. Much appears to have been done by him already with that view, and now that the Act has established the work of taking the census upon a permanent footing, more may still be expected to be done. By this means the Census Office may face the problem presented to it of so presenting the information it acquires as to give the maximum of useful service to the nation at the minimum risk of annoyance to the individual.

In pursuance of the steps taken to procure concerted action in making the separate censuses of the Dominions and other Colonies, this preliminary Report contains a table of the population in 1921 of Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, the Indian Empire, and the Union of South Africa, amounting in the aggregate to 370 millions.

In addition to the general results, of which we have briefly specified some of the more outstanding features, the details are given for each county, county borough, municipal borough, and urban and rural district of its population in 1911 and 1921, and of the acreage, affording material for ascertaining instructive facts relating to density of population and the changes that have taken place in the decade.

For Greater London an increase is shown during the ten years from 7,251,358 to 7,476,168, or 3 per cent., which is much less than the increase recorded at the five previous censuses. Indeed, in that portion of Greater London which comprises the Administrative County of London and the City of London, which showed a decrease of 0.3 per cent. in the census of 1911, there is a further decrease of 0.9 per cent. in that of 1921, falling from 4,521,685 to 4,483,249.

The perfection of the numerous mechanical contrivances used for the first time on the present occasion has no doubt been of much service in the preparation of the Report.