

Proceedings of the deputation to the Local Government Board advocating a quinquennial census of the United Kingdom.

Contributors

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE DEPUTATION

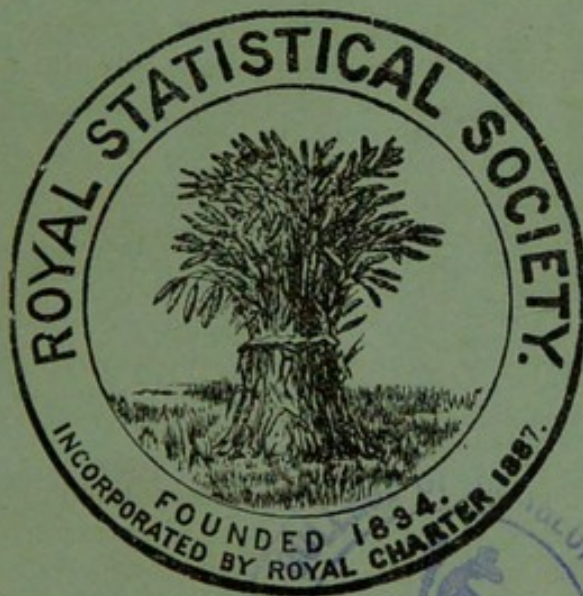
TO THE

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD

ADVOCATING A

QUINQUENNIAL CENSUS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.



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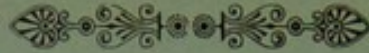
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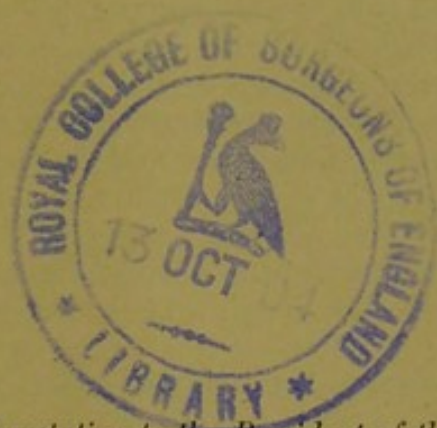
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*Proceedings of the Deputation to the President of the Local
Government Board, Friday, 13th May, 1904.*

SIR FRANCIS SHARP POWELL, M.P., Bart., in introducing the deputation said: "I have the high honour and privilege of introducing to you a deputation in support of the principle, and I hope the practice, of having a quinquennial census of a limited character, namely, dealing with numbers, sex, and age. The deputation, as you will see by the list which I have handed you, is eminently representative in character. It was initiated by the Royal Statistical Society, a society which deals chiefly with figures, and we have been fortunate enough to conciliate a large body of learned opinion represented by Societies highly competent to express with authority an opinion on this subject. It is eminently a non-party question. Mr. Ritchie and Mr. Chaplin both expressed in the House of Commons their opinion that a quinquennial census would be of great advantage. Mr. Shaw-Lefevre has spoken in the same sense, and hoped to have been here to-day to advocate his views. As regards the two remaining Presidents, your predecessors Sir Charles Dilke and Sir Henry Fowler, I have distinct authority from them to state their regret at not being able to be present and their desire to support the views of this deputation. As regards the places represented, we have representatives of England, Wales, and some from Scotland. As regards the Metropolis, I need not say a single word, because here we have a quinquennial census, and so far our principle has been adopted. I need not enlarge on the importance of the subject, but I just wish to make one remark, and that is to show the necessity of a quinquennial census. We find in the report of the last census, 1901, that there was a discrepancy between the estimated and enumerated population of England and Wales of no less than 701,843 in 1891, and of 142,000, an error in the opposite direction, in 1901. Then when we come to deal with towns I find that in West Ham the estimated population for 1901 was in excess by 58,278, entailing an error in the estimated death-rate of 3.5 per 1,000. Taking Burnley, in

Lancashire, we find the estimate in excess by 22,500, and the estimated death-rate in consequence 3·8 per 1,000 below its actual figure. Bradford, in Yorkshire, again, was assigned an estimated population lower than the actual number of its inhabitants, and that justly proud town was somewhat mortified as a result.

“On the other hand, we find Liverpool with an enumerated population 49,741 in excess of the estimate, and a consequent error in the death-rate of 1·9 per 1,000; and, coupled with Liverpool, I may mention Southampton with an enumerated population 12,508 in excess of the estimate, and an error in its death-rate of 2·4 per 1,000.

“These are very disturbing figures. They deal with large populations, and the figures are of considerable magnitude. Mr. Gray, the member for West Ham, is here to-day, but in order to save time is content to leave his case in your hands, as amply made out by the figures.

“I think those figures are really quite sufficient to show that there is a need of reform. Sir John Tuke was to have been here, and he is very emphatically in favour of this deputation. He says that the calculations are pretty sound for the first two or three years after the census is taken, but towards the end of that time they are wholly unreliable, and there is no better authority than Sir John Tuke, and no town in Great Britain where more is known of the subject than it is in Edinburgh.

“I need not go into details, I think I may simply say that this is a matter affecting the welfare of the population as regards industry, as regards education, and as regards health. Each of these subjects would, for adequate treatment, occupy considerable time, but I will confine myself to saying that on every one of these points we feel the very great importance of the reform we seek. I will now call on Major Craigie, the President of the Royal Statistical Society.”

Major CRAIGIE, C.B., said: “Mr. Long, I have to ask you to be good enough to note that I appear to-day solely in my capacity of President of the Royal Statistical Society for the current year. In that capacity it is my duty to represent to you the strong view which the Society has for a long time held as to the necessity of a more frequent enumeration of the population of this country. Committees of the Society have given their careful attention to successive census measures in 1880, 1887, 1894, and again in 1899, in anticipation of the last census, have all in turn successively pressed forward the arguments for this administrative change. They have held a profound conviction of the absolute necessity of co-ordinating all the other statistics of the country by the great levelling and governing measure which the existing population at any given date provides for the correct appreciation of any or all of the figures we collect, with a view to determine with accuracy our national position. We, as you know, collect the most minute statistics of trade, not only year by year, but even month by month. We collect

statistics of mineral output, statistics of railway traffic, the ascertained numbers of our cattle and other live stock, the acres of our crops, and the estimates of agricultural produce. But we do not ascertain by anything more than a loose estimate, except once in ten years, the actual numbers of the population, the dominant factor which governs every statistical investigation into the condition of national health, wealth, and well-being. I also desire to call your attention to the point that the Society itself has frequently pressed on this Department the great advantage of securing a continuity of administration, now absent from our official methods, as one of the immediate consequences of a quinquennial enumeration of this kind, for which we ask the Government to make provision. The change will necessitate a small nucleus of permanent census officials who will bring to the aid of the Registrar-General and his able staff the valuable assistance of regular continuity of administration. At the present time our census work is dislocated by the length of the break between one census and another, involving the getting together a scratch staff once in ten years. I believe that even from the point of view of economy, considerable saving might be secured by maintaining a nucleus such as would be sufficient for the intermediate census, restricted as that is proposed to be to the age, sex, and the distribution of the people. Economy, both of time and of money, in the long run in the cost of the actual census-taking at each decennial period, may not unreasonably be expected to follow such arrangements as the Deputation now desire to have made. It is scarcely necessary for me to refer to the number of foreign countries, such as Germany and France, who have long ago recognised this position and taken the steps which we press on our own Government, but I should like to call special attention to the new departure which the United States of America have taken within the last few months in the setting up a permanent Census Bureau in one of their official departments.

“ I think I have made clear the strong interest which the Royal Statistical Society, as the guardians of the interests of Statistical Science in this country, feels in urging on the Government to take a quinquennial enumeration, limited to the particulars I have named.”

Sir ROBERT GIFFEN, K.C.B., said: “ I appear here on behalf of the Statistical Society, as Chairman of the Committee which has specially to do with the census, and, of course, I have had some acquaintance with these matters in other capacities for a good many years. If you will refer to the evidence which I gave before the Departmental Committee, which sat in advance of the census of 1891, you will see that I was by no means desirous of involving the country in the great expense of quinquennial censuses, and that I made various suggestions for taking censuses of particular localities and things of that kind, so as, if possible, to do something for the end in view without involving the country in great expense, but I am now satisfied that a quinquennial census is the best way

out of the difficulty. There has been a great deal of evidence since 1891 to show the expediency of having the quinquennial census. There is no doubt, as Major Craigie has stated, that if you go to the expense of having the annual statistics of cattle, sheep, and other animals, there is very good reason indeed why you should also provide for a proper enumeration of the population of the country, which is far more important. I should like to say one word in favour of the latter part of Major Craigie's remarks with reference to the advisability of having the quinquennial census, on the ground that it would necessitate the establishment of a permanent census office. Such an office would really be a great advantage. One defect of our present census arrangement is that we have not sufficient means of studying officially the figures which the census gives us. There ought to be a continuous study of the matter going on in the Government Department which has charge of the census, to find out in what way all these particulars, which are obtained at so much expense, can be made useful. There is also this advantage, that if all the arrangements for a census are kept in working order, you can take a new census with greater ease, with an official establishment in existence, than you can by making it only every ten years, and then going to Parliament to have a new Act passed and setting fresh machinery in motion. There ought to be a permanent office, and a permanent Act of Parliament to carry on the investigations which are required."

Sir MICHAEL FOSTER, K.C.B., M.P., said: "Appearing, Mr. Long, as I do on behalf of no Society, I will limit myself to speaking, not on the general question, but on two or three facts drawn from my own personal experience.

"I served some years ago on the Vaccination Commission, and the recommendations of that Commission were based very largely on statistical evidence. Having the question of population coming before us in that form, we had to deal frequently with comparatively small numbers, and I remember very distinctly that again and again we had to rely, not on actual ascertained results, but on calculations as to the estimated population towards the end of the decennial period. I myself felt again and again that there was want of strength in some of the conclusions (I am speaking of some of the minor conclusions) from the problematical character of the data upon which they were founded. I may perhaps go a little further, and say that the Commission sat for a long time, extending from one decennial period into another, and, though I only speak from memory, I think I am correct in saying that we had the opportunity on several occasions of using the census returns to verify some of the minor conclusions which had been arrived at by calculation in the previous decennial period, and we were able to see that the conclusions which we arrived at were based upon evidence which was not exact."

Mr. G. H. RYAN, F.I.A., said: "Sir, I appear with the President and Honorary Secretary of the Institute of Actuaries as representing

that Institute, and I have been asked to address you to-day, on behalf of the Institute, as one who has given some attention to the subject of census reform, and has read a paper before that body on the matter.

"We, as Actuaries, have to deal with problems depending on birth-rates, death-rates, and marriage-rates. If the Statistical Society may be likened to a general physician we are specialists dealing with this branch of the subject in particular. We therefore feel it is of the greatest importance that the population statistics upon which we often have to depend, in the last resort, shall be as accurate as circumstances permit. It is true that actuaries have their sectional tables of mortality prepared from other sources under their own control; but, after all, the population statistics, which we obtain from the decennial census, represent the national mortality, and to these must often be referred all the sectional experience which we prepare from our own observation. For these reasons, I desire to associate myself with the arguments and the appeal which Sir Francis Sharp Powell and Major Craigie have to-day addressed to you. I will not repeat what they have so forcibly said, but I have not heard any objection made to the quinquennial census, except on the ground of expense. The people who are to be enumerated have never appealed against it, or applied to Parliament that they should not be enumerated more than once in ten years; and it therefore seems to me that the sole objections are internal and rest upon official convenience and national expense. As regards the advantages of a revised census, it is surely not unreasonable that the system which was introduced in 1801, when the population of England and Wales was 8,000,000 and the decennial increment 1,250,000, should have become clumsy and ineffective after a hundred years, when the population has risen to 32,000,000 and the decennial increment to 3,500,000. We think it not unreasonable to ask you to bear in mind these greatly increased figures in considering this change which we recommend.

"On one point, to which no speaker has hitherto referred, I would ask permission to say a word. We are of opinion that greater frequency in census enumerations would lead to greater accuracy in the results. We believe that if there were quinquennial censuses, people who, for illustration, may be in the habit of returning their ages at the same figure—no matter whether they are giving them in 1840, or 1850, or 1860—would perhaps depart from that practice, and would get into the habit of returning their particulars with greater accuracy. If I may use a homely illustration, just as to get a shy horse past a formidable obstacle, you have to lead him frequently by it, so we think the population of this country would, by quinquennial censuses, become more used to the process, and be induced to give to the population statistics a greater accuracy than they now possess.

"This question has been agitated by the Royal Statistical Society and other bodies for more than fifty years, and we, of the Institute of Actuaries, do earnestly beg that you will use your great influence in favour of this modest and much needed reform."

Mr. A. WYNTER BLYTH, M.R.C.S. (Registrar of the Sanitary Institute), said: "I appear on behalf of the Sanitary Institute. That Institute represents no special class connected with the public health, but may be considered to represent all classes, and the Council of that Institute very strongly desire to support the views that have been expressed. Arguments have been employed which are based upon the usefulness of a quinquennial census for imperial, for educational, and for municipal purposes, but, as a Medical Officer of Health, I would also urge the great importance of accurate statistics as supplying the only true indication of the state of health of the population. The only arguments that have been stated against such a measure are (1) the expense involved, and (2) that the people as a whole object to be enumerated.

"With regard to the expense it should not be forgotten that while a more frequent census will, no doubt, require the organisation of a permanent census department, yet the gradual adoption of various small details of reform suggested by experience will ultimately go far to reduce the expenditure—despite a more frequent enumeration of the people. With regard to the possible objection on the part of the population, I have had, in my twenty-five years' experience as health officer, rather frequently to take small local censuses—censuses of streets and of artizans' dwellings—and I can confidently say that in no case has any difficulty been experienced, or objection made. Of course, the census that I allude to has not been on the scale of the elaborate census which successive Governments have taken every ten years, but of the nature of the very simple census that this deputation is asking you to adopt. I would once again say that the Council of the Sanitary Institute feel very strongly the importance of this proposal."

Dr. EDWARD W. HOPE said: "I appear as a representative of the Society of Medical Officers of Health. This Society is the oldest public health society in existence. It numbers about a thousand members, and I may say the feeling amongst them is absolutely unanimous as to the necessity of a quinquennial census to meet the requirements of health purposes. Further, I would mention that resolutions have been passed by the various branches of this Society, as well as by the Society itself, in favour of such an undertaking. The real reason, Sir, however, for which I have been asked to address you is that I am able to point to one of the most striking examples of the wide margin of error which arises from limiting the census to a decennial period. It is by no means the most striking, but it is sufficiently striking. In the census of the City of Liverpool, taken in 1891, it was found that the margin of error in the Registrar-General's estimate of the population which had been gradually expanding, had reached the enormous total of 100,000 people in a city of the size of Liverpool. This had a very marked and a very practical effect upon the health-rate and the prosperity of the inhabitants. It will be apparent to you that if, in the year 1886, we were assured upon the returns of the Registrar-General that the mortality of

Liverpool, which at that time comprised only the central portions of the great sea-port, was 23 per thousand, we should feel there was no great urgency to proceed with the sanitary measures which common observation suggested were necessary; and, as a consequence, from 1886 to 1890, there was a slacking off in measures which were needed in the interests of the health of the people, because the necessity for them was obscured altogether by the totally erroneous returns which were issued under the Government imprimatur year after year. In 1891, when the actual facts were established, of course there was a greater impetus given to sanitary undertakings, but, towards the end of the last decade, again an error crept in. But on this occasion the error was in the opposite direction. It was an under estimate of about 50,000 people. The consequence was that those who were not, perhaps, specially keen on sanitary measures, were able to point to the fact that certain districts of the City, with which you may be familiar, which were formerly slums, pent-up courts and alleys, but which had been opened up and had given place to artisans' dwellings, to baths and wash-houses, to open spaces, and so on,—that all these things were shown by the Registrar-General to be useless, inasmuch as they were associated not with a decline but with an actual increase in the rate of mortality. I mention that instance merely as one out of many to show what an extremely serious effect is produced upon the health of the people by the protracted periods allowed to elapse between the taking of the census, and with regard to Liverpool, I should like to add that, although we can hardly claim it as a health resort, it is, like many health resorts, deeply interested in the returns of sickness and mortality. We have a very important foreign connection. We have a larger consular representation in Liverpool than in any city of the world. There are the representatives of forty Foreign Governments located in Liverpool, and these gentlemen are interested in the condition of the health of the City. Questions of quarantine and many others may arise, and many of the Consuls require, week by week, the returns from the Health Department showing the state of health of the City. They have been quick to perceive when there has been a discrepancy between the returns issued from London and the returns issued locally; and what is their explanation? They naturally assume that we are putting a better face upon the matter than is really warranted. Here again is a most awkward fact, that the Health Authorities of a great municipality like Liverpool should be brought into absolute antagonism on this question with the Registrar-General's Department! Regrettable as it may appear, we can hardly avoid the impression that it would be better to refrain from publishing any statistics, unless we can be sure that they are founded upon an accurate basis.

“These are the reasons, Sir, which commend themselves to the Society of Medical Officers of Health, the Authorities of the Health Committee of Liverpool, and other places, and which I beg most respectfully to place before you.”

Dr. JOSEPH GROVES (British Medical Association) said: "The British Medical Association has a membership of 20,000 medical men, who in their corporate capacity interest themselves in all affairs which have to do with the public health.

"We beg to point out to you the great discrepancy between the official estimates and the census returns, and the consequent errors in the estimated rates of deaths, births, and sickness. That in other countries, not so rich as ours, quinquennial censuses are found practicable. Further, we desire to urge the desirability of a permanent census authority, and to bring before you what you already know, how important it is that Medical Officers of Health should have at their disposal, as quickly as possible, any change in the returns, and we think that would be greatly facilitated by the establishment of a permanent census staff."

The Right Hon. W. H. LONG said: "I am much obliged to you, Sir Francis, and to the gentlemen who have spoken, for the brevity with which they have put their case, and I should like at once to acknowledge the importance of the deputation which I have the honour to receive, an importance which is made perfectly clear when one studies the names of those who have addressed us, and the names of the others who have been content to let themselves be represented by the few who have spoken.

"As far as I know, my predecessors have all of them concurred in the views which have been expressed here to-day, as to the desirability, from our point of view as a public health department, of having a more frequent census taken than is at present the case. I should like to add, with reference to a remark which fell from Mr. Ryan, that I do not think there is any justification for it. He told us that the only opposition to this proposal arises from two causes: official convenience, or national expenditure. I really do not think there is any question of official convenience in it, for, as far as I know, all the officials who are connected with the census work would welcome the alteration. The opposition has rested, and if it still exists, rests at present, purely on the question of expenditure. We have been told to-day that there are many cases in which grave inaccuracies have been discovered in the census. I confess myself that having been in my present position when the last census was taken, and having had the opportunity of visiting the census office and watching the work in progress under the late Registrar-General Sir Reginald McLeod, I am surprised, not that inaccuracies should be discovered, but that greater inaccuracies were not found than those which actually came to light. Because it is obvious that work of so important a character as the taking of the census of the United Kingdom, when it is entrusted to a staff got together from all parts of the world for the occasion, and located in premises which can hardly be called of a permanent character, that there must be grave risks of inaccuracies and of mistakes, and I think it is wonderful, and reflects the greatest possible credit on those who have been responsible for the census work, that it has been done as well as it has been, having regard to the circumstances and

conditions under which it has been carried on. You have put the case to-day in the clearest possible manner, and I have had one or two points cleared up with regard to which I was in doubt. For instance, I was aware of the fact that when the Commission sat in 1900 there was a report by the members of the Commission, but there was also a minority report, or an addition, by Sir Reginald Welby (the present Lord Welby), and he then suggested that the proposals which had been made by Sir Robert Giffen, in his evidence, might form an alternative which would be worthy of consideration, and, possibly, of adoption. I understand Sir Robert Giffen to-day wishes to make it clear that the evidence and facts which have come before him since have led him to believe that the proposals which he then made would not meet the case, and, therefore, we must regard it as being the larger scheme that is before us, and not the smaller one. I agree with Sir Robert Giffen, but, as you are aware, the matter does not rest solely with me in this Department. I have to communicate with the Scotch and Irish Departments, and to ascertain what their views would be. I have not yet been able to satisfy myself what would be the precise financial effect of making the census quinquennial, and establishing a permanent staff in place of the present system. I cannot help thinking that if some portion of the staff were to be made permanent in its character that there ought to be, and would be, a considerable reduction in the actual numbers required. It is obvious that men who are continuously engaged upon a particular kind of work must be able to deal with it with at least equal accuracy and with much greater rapidity than those who are comparatively fresh to it, and who are called upon to do it at a racing speed, and find themselves very often—as many of them must find themselves—quite unable to realise at first how the work is to be done. Therefore I cannot help hoping that any estimate based upon the cost of the census as taken now is one which must be to some extent misleading. What I am anxious to do is to ascertain whether I can carry this proposal further by arriving at some calculation which will show that the hope indulged in by Mr. Ryan and others, that this might result not only in more statistical information, but also in economy of public money, will be fulfilled. I am not quite sure that that is not rather a rosy view to take of the case, but I am not certain that it is altogether without foundation. I hope it may be possible to reduce the cost of taking the census by the establishment of a permanent department, if that be decided upon, and of course it will strengthen my hands very much, in going to the Treasury, if I am able to show them that the additional cost will not be what it has hitherto been expected to be, namely a sum of about 150,000*l.*, without allowing anything for the establishment of a permanent branch. 150,000*l.* does not sound very much when it is compared with our national expenditure of many millions, but my colleagues in the House of Commons who are here know that, while they are here to-day to recommend the additional expenditure of 150,000*l.*, in all human probability they will be in this or some other office, in the course of the next few

months, recommending other increases of national expenditure which are regarded as being quite as important by those proposing them as is this expenditure by the gentlemen present to-day. Therefore, of course, this cannot be regarded as if it were the only proposal to be made to the Treasury for an increase of expenditure. The Treasury are bound, as I am sure you will admit, to weigh the claims of all who come to them with demands for public money. All that we can do is to make our case as clear and strong as we can, and to do everything we possibly can ourselves, before we go to the Treasury, to see that the necessary expenditure is brought down to the lowest possible limits. This deputation will be, of course, a great advantage, because it will bring the question before the country and before the Treasury with added importance. The facts that have been disclosed here will in due course be laid before the Treasury by me. They have been very clear, and, I venture to say, very striking. We have been told by Major Craigie that this improved statistical information is necessary in the interests of the wealth and the health of the country; and when we have such gentlemen as Sir Robert Giffen and Sir Michael Foster speaking—one from his eminent statistical experience, and Sir Michael Foster telling us that in the very important Royal Commission on which he sat for so long many of their conclusions were arrived at on calculations of figures which ultimately turned out to be inaccurate and misleading—when facts of that striking character are brought before us, I think it shows that the question has advanced, and has reached a very important stage. All I can do to-day is to promise you to bring these facts, with such additions as I can make to them on the lines I have indicated to you, before the Treasury, and I hope that I may find them in a generous mood, and that they will be able to give favourable consideration to what I hope will be a practicable proposal.”

Sir FRANCIS SHARP POWELL said: “I have only to thank you, on behalf of the deputation, for the great patience with which you have listened to our statement, and for the highly sympathetic manner in which you have received it.”

The deputation then withdrew.

ROYAL STATISTICAL SOCIETY.

AN OUTLINE OF ITS OBJECTS.

THE *Royal Statistical Society* was founded in pursuance of a recommendation of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, on the 15th of March, 1834; its objects being, the careful collection, arrangement, discussion and publication, of facts bearing on and illustrating the complex relations of modern society in its social, economical, and political aspects,—especially facts which can be stated numerically and arranged in tables;—and also, to form a Statistical Library as rapidly as its funds would permit.

The Society from its inception has steadily progressed. It now possesses a valuable Library of about 40,000 volumes, and a Reading Room. Monthly meetings are held from November to June, which are well attended, and cultivate among its Fellows an active spirit of investigation; the Papers read before the Society are, with an abstract of the discussions thereon, published in its *Journal*, which now consists of sixty-six annual volumes, and forms of itself a valuable library of reference.

The Society has originated and statistically conducted many special inquiries on subjects of economic or social interest, of which the results have been published in the *Journal*, or issued separately.

To enable the Society to extend its sphere of useful activity, and accomplish in a yet greater degree the various ends indicated, an increase in its numbers and revenue is desirable. With the desired increase in the number of Fellows, the Society will be enabled to publish standard works on Economic Science and Statistics, especially such as are out of print or scarce, and also greatly extend its collection of Foreign works. Such a well-arranged Library for reference as would result does not at present exist in England, and is obviously a great *desideratum*.

The Society is cosmopolitan, and consists of Fellows and Honorary Fellows, forming together a body, at the present time, of about *one thousand* Members.

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