

OFFICIAL STATISTICS.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA YEAR BOOK, 1901 to 1907,

With Corrected Statistics for Earlier Years.

SECTION I. INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. Development of State Statistics.

1. **Origin of Statistics in Australia.**—The earliest form of Government in each State of Australia was that of a "Crown Colony," in which the Governor, usually advised by a local Legislative Council, initially wholly nominee, but ordinarily partly nominee and partly elective, administered public affairs under direct instructions from the "Colonial Office" in London. For the information of this Office somewhat comprehensive annual returns were required. These were furnished in triplicate, on forms supplied by the Colonial Office itself, one being returned to that Office, a second being retained by the Governor, and the third remaining with the department responsible for the preparation of the return itself, or else with the Legislative Council referred to.

These returns, known as "Blue Books," were the forerunners of the present "Statistical Registers" of the Australian States, and it is in the work of preparing them that we find the germ of development of Statistics in Australia.

2. **Conditions of the Development of Statistics.**—As in almost every other country in the world,¹ the general situation did not primarily lend itself to the creation of a system having any pretension to uniformity. The limitations, from the standpoint of statistical technique, of the early records, arose from several causes. Not only was there no adequate machinery for the collection of data, and no professional control of the form of inquiry, but even the inquiries themselves were based upon a view directed rather to immediate administrative requirements, than to those arising from the developments likely to occur in the future. Again, the conditions of life in Australia were *toto cælo* different from those known to the officials who determined the form and extent of the statistical returns. While, therefore, one condition of a satisfactory statistic existed, viz., uniformity of statistical data, the other two did not exist, at any rate in their absolute integrity, viz.:—

- (i.) Uniformity of interpretation of the requirements, and
- (ii.) Uniform machinery for the collection of the desired particulars.

Again, no attempt was made to prepare, from time to time, a statistical survey of the affairs of this country as a whole. The "Blue Books" appear to have been regarded rather as documents for the guidance of the administrators in the Colonial Office than as contributions to a scheme of international statistic. Much the same view existed elsewhere.² And it is also to be remembered that, even as late as 1855, when the Crown

1. See "Geschichte, Theorie, und Technik der Statistik," August Meitzen.—Prof. d. Staatswissenschaft, Univ., Berlin, 1891.

2. In Austria and Russia, for example, in earlier days. "Il était ordonné que ce travail ne serait communiqué qu'aux personnes qui en avaient le droit pour les besoins des Services publics," writes Bertillon in reference to the statistical service created on 6th April, 1829, in Austria. Vide "Statistique Administrative," par Dr. J. Bertillon, 1895, p. 17.

Colony system was first varied by granting responsible government to the Colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania, the total population of what is now the Commonwealth of Australia was only about 800,000, and that the administrative facilities did not lend themselves to that perfecting of statistical information which might be expected of older countries.

3. The Granting of Responsible Government and its Effect.—During the decade 1851-1860 responsible government was granted to each State, Western Australia excepted, the actual years being :—

New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania, 1855; South Australia, 1856; Queensland, as part of New South Wales, 1855; as an independent colony, 1859. Western Australia remained a Crown Colony till 1890.

With the advent of such government the "Blue Book" requirement of the Colonial Office necessarily ceased, the duty of compiling statistical information devolving, of course, on the local Governments. This tended to individualise it. Statistical information, whether for the "Blue Book" or for its successor, the "Statistical Register," was ordinarily prepared by an officer without special training in the technique of statistic, as a well-organised and scientifically elaborated method of recording and analysing the facts. There is reason to believe that not infrequently the returns were regarded as an unnecessary and troublesome incubus, hindering the discharge of ordinary duty. Thus the new "Statistical Register" was substantially the old "Blue Book," 'writ large.'

4. Administrative Control of Statistical Compilation.—The work of statistical publication devolved upon the departments dealing with Internal or Home Affairs, the Ministerial head of which was variously known as the Colonial Secretary or Chief Secretary, but the actual collecting and compiling was usually carried out by the various administrative departments directly concerned, as, for example, "Finance" by the Treasuries, "Trade" by the Customs Departments, etc. The drift into divergence of method, as between State and State, was inevitable.

5. The Registrars-General and their Statistical Functions.—The work of compiling the statistics of the several colonies was early relegated to the Registrars-General of Births, Marriages, and Deaths. In four out of the six States the officer who administers the Registration Act is now also Government Statistician, although the statistical staff in each State is practically distinct from the registration staff. A more particular account of the development is given under the heading of each State.

§ 2. The Statistical Bureaux of the Several States.

1. New South Wales.—On the separation of the Port Phillip District in 1851, the "Statistical Returns" of "New South Wales proper, only" were ordered by the Legislative Council to be printed on 28th July, 1852. They are a mere grouping of a number of independent returns, 1837 to 1851, according to the title, though in some instances the data go back to 1832.

In 1858 the Registrar-General of the State (Mr. C. Rolleston, afterwards C.M.G.) formulated a better scheme, and in "presenting . . . the new 'Statistical Register' . . . for the year 1858" made an important announcement regarding its scope and significance. He gave also, in tabular form, a statistical view of the progress of the State from 1821 to 1858. The report, dated 29th August, 1858, may be taken as the initiation, under the Registrar-General, of a formal organisation of official statistical compilation in New South Wales.

After the separation of Queensland, in 1859, the statistical information began to be given in somewhat greater fulness. A statistical register appeared each year, and separately a record of Vital Statistics.

In July, 1886, a Statistical Bureau was created and placed in charge of Mr. T. A. Coghlan, now I.S.O., F.S.S., etc., and Agent-General of New South Wales, the "Register" for that year being the first compiled in the Statistician's office.

Considerable improvements in the field of statistics were immediately effected by Mr. Coghlan, and an annual with the title "The Wealth and Progress of New South Wales"