

# Counting Heads in the Nation

BY OLIVER MCKEE, JR.

*The Fifteenth Census blazes a new trail in methods of accumulating the greatest mass of facts a nation ever acquired*

OUR national passion for facts will build its greatest monument when, on April 1, an army of 100,000 enumerators begin to gather the data for the Fifteenth Census. The magnitude of the undertaking, the most colossal statistical enterprise in history, shows that the American people are endowed with a greater curiosity about themselves than are any other people. As the United States marshals, on foot and horseback, set out to count heads in our first census in 1790, George Washington and his contemporaries no doubt had their share of the curiosity which is common to mankind. Yet, compared with their descendants of today, they could gratify that passion but in part. Why? Because statistical science was virtually nonexistent, and because the marvellous tabulating machines of our time were not in their hands.

A few figures will suffice to indicate the extent of this fact-finding operation. Enumerators will collect data for a population of 120,000,000, and in doing so will ask the head of each household about twenty-five questions. They will interrogate

about 6,500,000 farmers, about the farm, its crops, and its equipment. Each of the 20,000 mines in America will undergo an examination no less searching. The Fifteenth Census will blaze a trail into two new fields of inquiry, distribution and unemployment. There are 2,500,000 mercantile establishments in the United States. The distribution census will give a classified count of merchants, the types and sizes of retailers and distributors, their sales, expenses, inventories and employees. Facts such as these have never been brought together for the country as a whole. The second new field of inquiry, unemployment, will tell us how many men and women are out of work at the time of the census, where they are, and in what industries or occupations. Over 20,000 individual questions find a place on the various schedules, covering the whole range of our national life.

THE American appetite for facts grows steadily keener. What would satisfy our forbears in the time of Abraham Lincoln, seems strangely inadequate today, as we compare the

census schedules of the two periods. When the enumerator knocks at the front door on April 1, he will ask twenty-five questions. At least, he has to get data on twenty-five separate items for the population schedule, and he will be lucky if he can get the information without a few supplementary queries. The value of the home, if owned, or the monthly rental, if rented, is a question to be asked this year for the first time. Promoters of sales and advertising campaigns have long urged the Government to collect such information. This time their request has been heeded. The returns will permit a classification of families according to economic status, or if you look at it from another point of view, according to buying power.

THE manufacturer and the merchant hope to use these data as a gauge of buying power for commodities in different localities, and for different classes of the population. The rent or purchase price of your home will not, of course, be made public, for census employees are sworn to secrecy. The Census Bureau, nevertheless, will later be able to say how many people in a given community, or how many doctors, lawyers, plumbers, etc., pay \$5,000, \$10,000 or \$50,000 for their homes. Sales managers will formulate their strategy accordingly.

"Age at first marriage, please?" This, too, is a question which will be on the tongue of the enumerator for the first time. Those who have taken on, and cast asunder, the bonds of marriage three or four times, may have to do a little calculating, but most persons will be

able to give a quick answer. Census officials want this information for two reasons. It will tell them, in the first place, something about the relative age of marriage of persons in different racial and economic groups. Do Harvard graduates in the Back Bay of Boston, with incomes of \$100,000 a year, marry earlier or later than their fellow Americans in the Black Belt of Chicago? Does a Vassar graduate get her first wedding ring five years ahead or behind the young and pretty cook she brought back with her on her trip to Sweden? Do wedding bells ring sooner in Peoria than in New York, and do chorus girls meet Hymen sooner than school teachers? The question will make possible, in the second place, the tabulation of important data on the size of families. Does a person who weds at twenty-one have more or fewer children than one who marries at thirty-five? Again, if you marry at twenty-five how many children may you expect, under the normal expectancy for your age?

TO SHOW that the Census Bureau marches with the times, the enumerator will make his first count of the radio sets in each household. One may then estimate, with a pretty close accuracy, the size of the potential radio audience of the country. Armed with these data, manufacturers and distributors of radio equipment will know where to put on sales pressure most effectively.

If women do housework in their homes, they will appear in the census returns as home-makers. The designation will be entered in the family relationship column, rather than in the occupation column. Since many

women now work outside the home, "home-maker" is not put under the occupation column. Men who help with dishes, and do odd jobs about the house, will not get any credit for their accommodating spirit, unless there is no other member of the family responsible for the home. The joy of the extra-curriculum for them is its own reward.

The Census Bureau will approach our foreign born population from five separate avenues. It will separate them by five different classifications: country of birth, mother tongue (often regarded a better index of nationality than country of birth), the year of immigration to the United States, citizenship (that is, whether naturalized, having first papers, or aliens), and ability to speak English. From these five questions, a composite picture of our large foreign population can be drawn.

How are the items in a particular schedule determined? The Director, Mr. Steuart, and his associates do not sit behind closed doors, and arbitrarily select the 20,000 questions which all, or some part of, the American people will be called upon to answer. Back of each item lies long study, often protracted debate and discussion. Census officials have for months been in conference with unofficial advisory committees outside the Bureau. Dr. Louis I. Dublin, for example, heads a committee of distinguished statisticians that has helped select the items to go on the population schedule. Chambers of Commerce and other kindred organizations have assisted in the formulation of items for the distribution schedule, and farm organiza-

tions have done the same for items on the agricultural schedule. Other groups have suggested items for one or more of the various schedules. In consultation with members of the advisory committees, Mr. Steuart and his experts examine the suggestions offered, and after weighing all the arguments, choose the items which are to go on the schedules which the enumerators will carry as they begin their rounds.

Each item must hold promise of some useful information. That, of course, is fundamental, for census taking is not a game of "ask me another." Yet utility is not the sole yardstick. The question must not be so involved that its answer will unnecessarily delay the enumerator. Furthermore, the male head of the house is apt to be away when the census man makes his call, so the questions must be such that a woman, or other member of the family, will readily be able to answer. Courtesy, too, is a prime consideration. The item "Do you beat your wife?" is one that would throw a world of light on the scope of domestic infelicity in America, and one which incidentally would be hugely interesting to the curious, but obviously the Census Bureau can put its enumerators to no such risk to life and limb as this. The restrictions therefore are real ones. "How much do you save a year?" "How much of your income goes for food, how much for shelter, etc.?" are items that would be of great value to social economics, and to the science of budget making. Human nature being what it is, such questions would cause so much resentment as to im-

peril the effectiveness of the whole undertaking. In the last analysis, the items must be those for which a voluntary answer may be looked. A treatise indeed might be written on the questions which the Bureau, in its quest for data on the American people, would like to ask, but can not. Radio sets can be counted, but the census man knows he can not measure human happiness.

POLITICAL parsons to the contrary, Church and State are separate under our theory of government. Religion, therefore, does not find a place in the questionnaire, the religious bodies, over 200 in all, themselves supplying for census purposes the number of their members, the value of church edifices, the amount of church expenditures, and data on Sunday schools. At least one sect in the past has told its members to close the door to the census man. As they gathered at a prayer meeting, the faithful learned from the Lord that it was His will they should not answer any of the questions. Confronted with blanket refusals to answer, the enumerators referred the matter to Washington, and after a short time the case was referred to the District Attorney. That official had the power to prosecute under the law, but he was also something of a diplomat. He tried diplomacy first, and visited the elders of the church, reminding them of the law with whose authority he was armed, and suggested that another meeting be called. The elders issued the necessary call for prayers, and this time the Voice from beyond told the faithful to answer the questions.

As a political entity, the American

farmer has never been so powerful as he is today. His grievances and financial troubles fill yearly thousands of pages of *The Congressional Record*. It is no surprise therefore to find that the agricultural schedule is by far the most elaborate and detailed of all. It contains about 350 separate items, as compared with 25 questions that will be asked the bank clerk, the lawyer, the journalist or teacher. The agricultural schedule will therefore throw more light on the farmers of America than upon any other class.

AN EXAMINATION in the Chinese classics in the old days would probably contain no more questions than will be asked of the American farmer; the number of cows, pigs and horses, with their sex; acreage of the farm in crop and pasture land; the farm debt; principal expenses; land drained, farm machinery and such facilities as automobiles, machinery, tractors, telephone, radio, etc. A student in quest of a Germanized Ph.D. could hardly ask for a greater range of fact material than that which will be gathered from the 350 questions put to the owners or tenants of each of the 6,500,000 farms in the United States. Several new items will appear in this year's questionnaire. These include the value of the farmer's dwelling house; such farm expenses as supplies and repairs for automobiles, electric current, seeds and plants, spraying and dusting materials, electric motors and gas engines; the number of days the farmer was gainfully employed in work not on his farm, and the daily production of milk and eggs. Even the baby ducks are to be counted.

The agricultural schedule may not measure for us the intellectual resources of the American farmer, or his happiness. It will, however, throw a searchlight on the economic conditions of this American farmer, whose purchases of tractors alone increased 138 per cent from 1920 to 1925.

**R**ULE-OF-THUMB methods by no means solve all of the Census Director's problems. What is a restaurant, for enumeration purposes? Neither the dictionary nor a decision of the Supreme Court can decide the knotty point for him. Is a hot-dog stand a restaurant? Yet it provides many a motorist with the equivalent of a mid-day meal, the basic function of any restaurant. And if the hot-dog vendor does not operate an eating house, into what classification shall he be put for enumeration purposes? Again, what is a hotel? What is the dividing line between a hotel and a boarding house? Does it take two, four or six roomers to turn your home into a rooming house?

Special groups in our population have given Mr. Steuart many a difficult hour. Do the soldiers at Governor's Island belong to New York City, or should they be credited to the towns or cities where the recruiting sergeant secured them? Are the students at Yale and Princeton to be considered as part of the population of New Haven and Princeton respectively, or are they to be added to the population of their home towns? How about prisoners at Sing Sing, and inmates of insane asylums and homes for the feeble-minded? Certain arbitrary rules have been laid down to cover these special groups. College students belong to

their home communities; but soldiers, criminals and the insane are counted where they are. Not a few Members of Congress, with large institutions in their districts, will find, on examination, that criminals and the insane figure heavily in the totals used as a basis for representation in Congress. Though counted, criminals and the insane have no vote, a fact which serves to reveal still another aspect in which Congress is not fully representative. For 90,000 voters in a district with 10,000 people in institutions have as much influence in Congress as 100,000 voters in a district unblest with institutions.

**C**ERTAIN groups lie beyond the regular beat of the census enumerator. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, for example, will make a count of Indians in Reservations. The State Department will list the American citizens employed in the foreign service of the Government. The Navy Department will check up those Americans on men-of-war afloat, and the Bureau of Light-houses will count the men who maintain a lonely and inaccessible vigil on lightships and lighthouses. If a whole family is temporarily abroad on April 1, it will probably escape the count altogether. If one member is at home, he or she will be expected to give the data concerning the itinerant members.

The Census Bureau will again offer a proof of the old adage that you can't accept a woman's own version of her age. Census statistics prove that the saying rests on something more substantial than the peevish generalization of a misogy-

nist. For both men and women, the age pyramid reveals a distinct bulge at such ages as 20, 25, 30, 35, and 40. People find it easier, or more convenient, it would appear, to give their ages in round numbers; easier, that is, to say 40 than 39, or 25 than 27. Note this, however: though a bulge exists on the male side, the bulge on the female side of the pyramid is far more pronounced. Certainly there can not be more women 40 years of age than 39, or 25 than 24, for death exacts each year its toll. Yet the bulges on the female side of the pyramid are perhaps its most striking feature. Men may prevaricate a bit about their ages, but women clearly have far less regard for the truth. The Census Bureau offers the mathematical proof of the fact, which we all knew, anyway.

**A**MERICAN women, it may be said, are not alone in this weakness. The age pyramids in the censuses in other countries reflect the same tendency. Here, in a word, the philosopher can find a universal trait in women! Curiously enough, there are fewer infants in the pyramid between birth and twelve months, than there are between one and two years. The heavy infant mortality rate tells us that here is an obvious misrepresentation of the facts. Census officials have no clear-cut explanation to suggest. It may take a year before a family really accepts a new arrival as a permanent entity. So when the census man comes round, the babe in arms fails to get in the picture. A child of two or three, however, is apt to be too lively to be ignored. "Remember the infants," therefore, is one of this year's admonitions.

Aside from serving as an inventory of our national resources, the census will shed light on some of the broader trends of our national life. It will reveal, for one thing, the relationship between urban and rural districts. In 1920, for the first time in our history, the urban population exceeded the rural. The same drift to the cities has continued, but a current in the opposite direction has likewise set in; namely, the exodus of city folks to country homes. How far has this latter tendency checkmated the former? The Fifteenth Census will give the answer. Politically, the census will have a real significance. For upon its findings will depend the reapportionment of the House of Representatives. Many States stand to lose a Representative or two, under the proposed reapportionment plan. A number of States, including California, stand to gain two or more members. The census will tell exactly where the gains and losses will be.

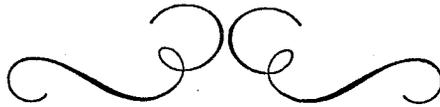
**T**HE results of the census may even have a bearing upon the present balance of the political equilibrium between the Democratic and Republican parties. A State that suffers a loss of a couple of members will lose correspondingly in political power, and *vice versa*. This explains why certain sections are so much interested in the census. California and Florida want to claim as large a part of their temporary visitors as possible. Cities, too, are in competition for relative ranking, for size is synonymous with prestige.

The census again will emphasize anew the unrepresentative character of the United States Senate. Populous States like New York, Pennsyl-

vania, Ohio and Illinois have but two Senators, in common with unpopulous Nevada and Wyoming. The big States are piling up population year after year, and the census is expected to point more sharply than ever to the extraordinary power wielded in the Senate by a group of smaller States whose combined population is hardly greater than New York or Pennsylvania.

Statistics are fallible, as the bulge in the age pyramid so well shows. The Director does not claim absolute exactness for his figures. Yet the Fifteenth Census taken in the aggregate will indicate to us trends in our

life both significant and interesting. It will be a great national stock-taking, telling us, as Mr. Steuart says, "How many of us there are; what we do and how we do it." There is a human side about the census, separate and apart from mere figures and statistics. To gratify our curiosity about ourselves, will cost about \$40,000,000, but this is only the price of a couple of cigars *per capita*. Facts are not free, but through the mass production methods of the Census Bureau we are going to get more facts than any other nation ever had, and as of any mass production article, the individual cost is small.



# “THEY”

BY ELIZABETH ROBINS PENNELL

*A cry of rebellion against the invisible powers of custom  
that hold America in thrall*

AFTER a long life and deep thought I have now come to the conclusion that today's much-vaunted love of liberty is sheer pose. We talk a great deal about it, sing of it in our national hymns, brag of ourselves as brave warriors in what Heine called the Battle of Freedom for Mankind. In the course of the centuries we have flung one crowned head after another into the rubbish heap, shattered the power of popes and prophets, made of government a plaything for the people. Therefore, we fondly believe that our old chains have been cast off and left us free as the air, our freedom a fine theme for after-dinner oratory at election time. But the truth is that the freer we unfortunate humans grow in name, the greater slaves we become in fact; the louder we boast of Liberty, the more strenuous are our struggles to avoid it, and to strengthen our fetters, to feel the yoke heavy on our shoulders.

It is not only that Democracy encourages new forms of tyranny until Nero and his kind seem amiable tyrants by comparison, not only that right arms fly up to hail a Mussolini, that the very ghost of the

individual's liberty fades away under Socialism and Soviet rule. But everywhere — and nowhere more than in this Sweet Land of Liberty — greater power has been entrusted to those invisible tyrants who have held humanity in their grip ever since their first *tabu* was set upon the savage in the jungle. They command and everybody obeys, though who They are no one knows, does not as much as seek to know. Their grip has tightened in my own lifetime.

WHEN I was young, the two great truths impressed upon me at school were my claim as a Christian to free will and my right as an American to independence. Nor was I allowed to forget them at home where my father, when my conduct displeased him, would amiably remind me that every man was free to go to Hell his own way. Today a father, were fatherly interference of any kind in fashion, would probably add a warning to his daughter that, if bent upon going to Hell, she should be careful to go the way They go. For, from the time we all get up in the morning until we all get into our beds at night, we accept