

STATISTICAL AND SOCIAL INQUIRY SOCIETY OF IRELAND.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS FROM THE CENSUS OF DISTRIBUTION, 1933.

To be Read on Friday, 18th December, 1936, by J. C. M. Eason.

The Society welcomes the pioneer work which has been done by the Government Statistical Department in ascertaining facts regarding the volume of distribution, retail and wholesale, within the Saorstát. Retailers and wholesalers perform a definite function; they are essential to the manufacturer and to the public; the increased variety and volume of goods to be distributed has made them more important now than formerly. Knowledge of what takes place is socially of value, and the census which was taken in 1933 deserves, and I am sure will receive, very close examination. The comments which I make upon it to-night must be regarded as preliminary, but I think the subject matter is so important that there should be an examination of it by the Society at an early date, and since the work is of a pioneer character, comment upon it must embrace a criticism of the form as well as an interpretation which may be placed upon the matter.

The greatest circumspection was observed in the steps taken to secure practical results. The execution of the task has been well done, and is worthy of the Department which has produced it. There is now available a large mass of information which calls for scrutiny by the traders who are directly interested, and my remarks are framed so as to assess the value of certain data and fall short of complete detailed examination. A study by business men of the pattern which their activities have quite unconsciously produced must be of interest to them and to others.

No reference is made in the body of this Report to the figures submitted by the Prices Commission showing the distribution of shops throughout the country; it will be remembered that the total of shops reported was 42,565; it is now 45,888—an increase of 7·8 per cent. One of the difficulties in forming a judgment upon this comparison arises from the fact that we do not know what is the definition taken of a shop adopted by the “Tribunal on Prices.” I would expect that the more recent Census has covered the ground more completely. It is possible to tabulate the figures, and in fact Mr. J. R. Clark submitted a table to me, which shows some very surprising differences for the separate areas, varying from an increase of 19·7 for Leix and Offaly to an actual reduction in the number in Co. Roscommon. I am not, however, introducing these figures into this paper; I do not regard the ratio of shops to the population as being of any practical significance, owing to the extreme variation in size between one shop and another.

On page 8 the Director of Statistics points out that the results will increase in value when it is possible to compare a series of investigations and to get a clear view of trends which they may be expected to reveal.

I am assuming that the majority of those here will have scrutinised the census and read the informative introduction which occupies the earlier pages. The inquiry was limited to an ascertainment of the bare essentials (see page 9). It is important as supplementing the Report of the Commission on the registration of shops—upon which I will make some comment later—and one of the main objects which it is hoped to attain is that “both employers and employees in trading concerns should find the figures in this volume instructive for the purpose of comparing their individual experience of their type of business in the town or county in which they trade.” Returns are collected and analysed in connection with 82 per cent. of the number of shops recorded by the *Gárda* as being in business in 1933. The total estimate of sales is put at from £65,000,000 to £70,000,000.

The Report claims to provide exact statistical facts concerned with the business of distribution, and to give reliable statistical information regarding: (a) total sales; (b) number of employed; (c) wages paid; (d) value of stocks carried; (e) duration of ownership, classified according to the description of business and the localities where the business is carried on. It is hoped that by these facts “a broad picture of the situation may be presented, and that there is some indication conveyed as to the purchasing power of the public.” It is noted, however, in the Report that expenditure on amusements, boot and shoe repairs and hairdressing is not included, to which I would add transport, travel and education.

I now submit some remarks upon individual tables.

GENERAL SURVEY.

Table 3, page 15—Paper, stationery and books show the highest percentages of wages and salaries—20·8; jewellery and watches come next at 19·3; hotel and restaurants next at 16·1; after that the percentages are all under 15·0, with sweets, tobacco and news at the bottom at 6·1, due no doubt to the employment of messengers and juniors in a group which is the highest in Table 6 (excepting hucksters) for proprietors working in the business. The first-named groups suggest the inclusion of repairing and manufacturing costs, for the profit margin in a retail business would hardly provide so high a figure.

TOTAL PERSONS ENGAGED.

Table 6, page 22—Persons engaged other than proprietors reveal high percentages in the case of coal, and the group described as paper, stationery and books; one is 81 per cent., the other 80 per cent. Sweets, tobacco and newspapers show a total of 30·5 per cent., which is a complementary figure to the one commented upon in connection with Table 3; this group also shows—apart from hucksters and hotels and restaurants—the highest number of females engaged, the percentage being 64·6. As between the various provinces, the distribution of sexes between the total persons engaged does not vary much. As might be expected, the lowest percentage for proprietors working in business is in Dublin Co. Borough; the figures are: 10·6 per cent. for males, and 7·1 per cent. for females—a rather surprising result, but the total for the *Saorstát* as a whole is 18·2 males and 11·3 per cent females. This is a higher number of proprietors of the female sex than might be expected, but owing to the absence of figures for other countries we cannot say if it is significant.

SIZE OF BUSINESS (TURNOVER).

Table 7, page 23—50 per cent. of the turnover is done in shops with £5,000 and upwards, and these represent 6·8 per cent. of the total number of shops ; 48·6 per cent. of the shops are under £500 ; no group in Table 3 (except hucksters £101) shows as low an average of sales per shop, the lowest being £738 for sweets, tobacco and news, so that the column in Table 3 hides a very large deviation from the average and cannot be taken as typical.

The location of these small shops may be significant, and can be partly derived from other tables (*e.g.* 4*b*) ; a widespread service in rural areas is indicated. Commonsense suggests a downward trend of turnover since business will move to larger centres as transport improves ; this probably means better service to consumers. Can we visualise a development of transport of goods to the public in rural areas ? May not the opposition of traders in the towns to the travelling shop accelerate such a trend ? A quick survey of Table 2*b* (shops over £5,000 in 15 groups) suggests that a large percentage of small shops is a feature of all business. I suggest the following forces are at work, not placing them in any causal order for they interact : The shift of population which tends to divide turnover ; the desire of assistants to become proprietors—one of the strongest reasons ; the urge to make a living or supplement an income (strongest during a depression) ; at all times the opportunity to compete in service (more than in price) which is created by inefficiency of proprietors (it is usual for applicants to claim poor service to the public) ; the frequent changes in ownership and the slow process of deterioration.

Competition between wholesalers provides credit if savings are not available ; sub-wholesalers compete, and occasionally retailers, anxious to enlarge their purchasing power, join in the game of encouraging the would-be trader.

It does not necessarily imply increased charges to the public. It is a feature shown largely in business offering fixed price articles. It is a convenience to a public or, as some might say, it ministers to thoughtlessness, laziness, and disorderly buying.

On the manufacturers' side there is a general belief that goods must be shown if they are to be sold ; that widespread distribution ensures attraction through window and counter display, since a basic feature is the element of competition between consumable goods for the public purchasing power. Further, the belief of manufacturers in fixed price policy is based on the experience that in the long run it pays better than having a low price in a shop buying in large quantities and high prices elsewhere.

There is a wide variety of policy between various types of business and within each type, mainly determined by the price of the article. It is a process of trial and error, each maker adopting what is deemed suitable.

Within each range of turnover shown in this table there exist varying degrees of efficiency and profit-ability : turnover is no sure indication of service. The intelligent proprietor is found at each level, and marginal traders are not always confined to the lower ends of the scale. In this table, above all others, the absence of comparative records is most to be regretted.

Table 9, page 26—For the purpose of this table the grouping has been reduced to five classes ; it is not clear why sweets, tobacco and newspapers were treated as one of the five ; the turnover, which is only

some 3 per cent. of the total, hardly calls for separate treatment, and (as can be seen by comment made elsewhere) the group is far from representing the trade in these particular commodities. This comment is somewhat superficial, for if a further examination would show that the group is representative of small shops generally, then it has a more precise value. Perhaps some one will have dug deeper than I have had time to do in this mine of detail and arrived at conclusions on this point.

Table 10, page 28, Table 11, page 29—The value of these tables is discounted by my later comments on the unsuitability of any classification basis, but different views may be taken by others.

I am not dealing with the duration of ownership figures, or with the reference to multiple shops, except to include in this paper the comment from the Report that one-fifth of the total retail sales are made by multiple shops, and of that 5.6 per cent. pertains to shops not owned in the Saorstát. Also, that the phrase "multiple shop" may have a denotation in this Report which is not commonly attributed to it. There are some businesses of considerable size which happen to have, as auxiliaries, single branches, and in accordance with Question 1d (reproduced on page 32 of the Report) they would all be drawn into the description "multiple shops." I think this classification should be re-examined if what I say is correct.

The Report positively indicates the size of shop; the distribution of the size between the various provinces; the retail sales in the provinces, urban areas, etc., related to population; the value of the stocks carried; figures regarding wages paid, and the numbers employed in the shops. All this is valuable and will require much more careful consideration than I have been able to give it, but it would have made this paper too long if I tried to cover the whole ground. Generally, I regard the figures giving the regional distribution as of much more value than those which are derived from the commodity descriptions.

CLASSIFICATION BY COMMODITIES.

The Report in its text emphasises the inherent defects of the commodity grouping: it is undoubtedly exasperating to the statistical expert that business firms are so wanting in appreciation of the usefulness of such figures. My comment would be that the inadequacy of the figures admitted by the compilers is not clearly set forth in the tables. On every occasion where a group classification is used, the heading should indicate that the figures are "approximate figures based on a classification used by those making the return." I think it would have been desirable to have marked all these tables with some red line indicating caution—"danger."

It will be noted that the compilers of the Report commenced with 34 groups, reduced the classification for practical purposes to 20, and for certain purposes have brought these down again to 15, while in one table the classification is reduced to 5. The problem of grouping is a new one, and no doubt requires further exploration. The desire to get an effective classification is understandable—I would not go so far as to say it is impossible to achieve this, but it seems to depend too much upon the records which business people make of their transactions for their own convenience, which may be unsuitable to use for a census. Indeed, I would urge that such problems as arise in retail trading involve

a consideration of the size of the shop rather than the type of commodity which is being sold. That the description "General" would apply to the majority of shops in this country is stated in the Report, and while the presentation of commodity figures is justified, they must be very carefully studied and used.

Table 4, page 20—The Report states on page 21 that "very little can be deduced from the figures in this Report as to the value of retail sales of specific commodities." In fact I believe nothing can be derived from the figures. An analysis of six principal groups reveals the following percentages in relation to the total sales in each area :—

PERCENTAGES OF GROUPS IN RELATION TO TOTAL SALES FOR EACH AREA.

GROUP	Saorstát Eireann	Dublin City	Rest of Leinster	Munster	Connacht	Ulster (part of)
Grocery, etc. ...	44	30	52	45	60	61
Drapers ...	16	21	12	16	14½	12
Miscellaneous ...	13	14½	11½	15	11	11
Fresh Meat ...	3.75	5	4	3	1.6	1.4
Sweets, etc. ...	3	4.75	3	3	1.4	2
Druggists ...	2	2	2	2	1.6	2

The figures prove, to my mind, that in connection with the provinces of Munster, Connacht and part of Ulster a very substantial percentage of the turnover in the classified goods is merged in the figures for stores or "general" shops.

I draw your attention to the figure for sweets, tobacco and news. The total is £2,074,000, that being the value of the turnover for shops described by their occupiers under one or other of these headings. I have tried to make a comparison of this turnover (which seemed low) with what figures are available from other sources indicating the consumption in these articles in the Irish Free State. From the Census of Production I take the figure for newspapers and magazines: namely, £1,125,163, and from the Import Statistics a figure of £220,000 for newspapers and periodicals. Allowance must be made for export and unsolds (which are a characteristic feature of this trade), and transactions, mainly street sales, carried out direct with the public which do not pass through the books of the retail trade. I think a retail value of approximately £1,700,000 is indicated.

The output of the tobacco firms is £5,595,750, while the output of the sweet manufacturers has to be estimated from a total of £1,477,825, which is the precise output of manufacture of jams and confectionery. These are 39,000 tobacco licences (in other words, a commodity much in demand is available at a maximum number of places—efficient distribution, surely, at no enhanced cost to the public) but the report covers 2,812 shops selling tobacco.

It would appear, therefore, that the classification does not show more than perhaps one-fourth or one-fifth of the turnover, and the rest is merged in some of the other classifications and a limited meaning must be placed upon the figures.

In connection with paper, stationery and books—which show a turnover of £455,000—it will be seen in other sections of the Report that 58 per cent. of the business is done in shops with a turnover of over £10,000 per annum, that the shops with a turnover of over £10,000 per annum cover 4·9 per cent. of the total examined, and since the total number of shops is 141, it means that we have in this group 7 shops showing a turnover of £260,000, and 134 shops showing a turnover of £195,000.

The classification of stationery, I am satisfied, must cover a very large variety of fancy goods and leather goods, and cut very closely across the drapery classification; books are sold by newsagents, by drapers and by stores. I cannot believe that 73·4 per cent. of total paper, stationery and books is sold in Dublin city.

The point of my criticism of this table depends a good deal upon how the figures are used, but I think it is probable that the figures will be wrongly used, and details will be detached from the total and looked at separately.

I stress the point because it discloses the mixed character of trade, and to emphasise what the Report clearly states on page 11: “In one sense the description ‘General’ would apply to the majority of shops in this country.” “Retail concerns trading in single, well-defined lines of goods are quite exceptional.”

If it is still desired to segregate some items, then one could aim at larger groups, say in foodstuffs, apparel, and specific items as coal, motors, while leaving the miscellaneous in one group.

COMMISSION ON REGISTRATION.

I have referred already to the fact that in the Report of the Commission on Registration of Shops there are references to the Census of Distribution which had at that time been taken and was in process of compilation. I quote those which I have traced:—

- p. 9—The State has taken in hands the problem of the industrial organisation of the country, and, if the scheme is to be complete and include within its scope the organisation of retail distribution, as the Census of Distribution would imply, the approval which the British Committee on “Restraint of Trade” gives to the “Distance Limit” policy suggests one important line of advance, and confirms the view we have taken.
- p. 34—A Census of Distribution has been in course of preparation during the past year. If all shops had to be registered the information recorded in the general register, or local register, would enable the census to be readily compiled and periodically revised with little trouble or expense.
- p. 36—The description of the premises should be precisely given. The class of business for which the premises in actual use as a shop are being used should also be accurately stated. The classification should conform to that adopted in the Census of Distribution.

p. 45—The licensing system proposed does not demand the solution of any difficulty as regards classification and particularity of description that has not already been faced in the Census of Distribution. Consequently, the classification adopted from time to time for the Census of Distribution and for the licensing system would be one and the same.

It is clear from the remarks already passed that the compilers of the census have been unable to overcome the difficulty referred to in the last quotation ; particularity of description baffled their efforts and escaped solution.

In urban areas where there is a high degree of density, specialisation does lead to some high degree of particularity, but the general scheme of distribution adopted by manufacturers and wholesalers indicate that the shopkeeper's demand is largely in the direction of general requirements.

The Report refers to the fact that wholesale houses find in their experience that as between various departments it is only possible to use a rough and ready classification. Now, it does not make any difference in the business world if Wholesaler A choose to sell one class of goods through a different department from that used by his Competitor B, but it does affect a Government Department dealing in licences.

This difficulty of classification for any trade is in inverse ratio to the volume of turnover ; the higher the volume, the simpler the classification and the greater the specialisation ; nevertheless, there is no clear marginal line dividing the groups ; I might mention particularly the case of books which are sold by booksellers, by newsagents and by stores ; or stationery which is sold by newsagents, by drapers and by stores, as well as by stationers ; newspapers sold in country stores by drapers, stationers and tobacconists.

If, however, there were a system of licensing, the definitions would have to be very broadly drawn, and even then a problem like that which at present arises at the Customs barriers would have to be faced and solved. I am sure it would not be impossible, but I can see it would lead to an immediate increase in costs of handling in some cases, loss of turnover in others, and general inconvenience. Where it is a question of Customs revenue, one can accept that with a certain degree of resignation, but I think the business world is apprehensive lest internal trading be subject to a similar amount of interference.

The objects of licensing would have to be made clear, particularly since it has never been explicitly shown that any part of the profit margins which might be saved as a result of a different form of distribution, would ever pass over to the public.

It would be a mistake to omit some reference to the fact that the ordinary play of economic forces has led towards control by the manufacturer in distribution, and possibly this tendency will continue to develop. It is established that, in certain businesses, manufacturers impose conditions as to where their goods may be sold : this is done to counteract the process which divides the gross turnover of a certain number of articles between a larger number of shops than is considered necessary to secure maximum sales. They obtain support from retail trading groups. The object is to increase business and certainly in some of the more important instances, to ensure competent service to the public. Action is taken individually, or in groups ; what suits one type of business does not suit all.

In effect, this is a development of a licensing system, but it is one which can be linked up with a system of "General" shops: it does not necessarily require the segregation into separate trading units. Above all, it retains for the manufacturer a free choice of his outlets, and provides a flexibility which can never be achieved by any arrangement which is subject to legislation. The business world is fully accustomed to anomalies and compromises, and finds them consistent with the pursuit of some particular policy.

WHOLESALE TRADE.

The Report states clearly the inadequacy of the figures, due to the omission of transactions through manufacturers' agents. This, undoubtedly, creates a serious deficiency, but, at the same time, I think the figures were worth including in the Report, and that they should be supplemented on a later occasion.

I think attention should be called to the fact that a large volume of business passes direct from manufacturers to retailers. The result of these operations appears in the total of the retail sales, but will not be collected through enquiries directed to wholesalers. This, I would think, applies most extensively to manufacturers of beer, biscuits, cigarettes and newspapers.

On the other hand, there are many establishments where the retail and wholesale trading is mixed. It is probable that the figures are not kept separately by the firms who do this mixed type of business.

It is unlikely, therefore, that even if figures were somewhat more completely collected, we could derive, from a comparison of the totals, any idea of what is the gross trading profit.

The 40 per cent. figure—which is the precise difference between the retail and wholesale totals shown in the Report—must not be taken as an indication of the gross profit, and this, I think, should have been clearly and positively stated, for there otherwise appears to be an implication which might lead to wrong conclusions.

How far, one asks, does the census disclose the pattern of our economic activity in retail trading? Obviously, it reveals a great deal which up to the present has been veiled from public knowledge. I have indicated at the commencement of the paper that it provides a large amount of valuable information regarding the volume of business dealt with and the regional distribution: these represent what I would call the horizontal, or geographical, lines of the pattern. The commodity figures—that is the vertical pattern—do not stand out clearly. The figures do not reveal the types of commodities sold, but the types which were capable of being segregated by shopkeepers; that must be regarded as a somewhat artificial grouping and subject to a considerable amount of subjectivity where the figures were either not available or were not actually disclosed, and it was left to the person making the return to describe himself as he thought he should be described. Nevertheless, all the information is capable of being of value when comparative figures are available at a later date, and this, I presume, we may reasonably count upon as certain.

I end the paper as I began, with a word of congratulation to the Department on their execution of this important statistical work.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. Dockrell, proposing a vote of thanks, said that he thought the Census of Distribution could be studied from many angles and a lot of different conclusions drawn from it. It might be approached from the angle of considering the necessity for the small shop ; whether it discharged its functions successfully ; whether labour conditions in small shops were anything like those in the bigger ones ; and how far multiple shops ought to be encouraged. Others would be anxious to find out if the Census disclosed anything about the travelling shop. He took it himself that the activities of the travelling shop were not included in the Census, except in so far as its head branch establishment would show returns. Even the question "What is a Shop?" might form the subject of a paper.

He did not know whether this return would set forward or back the registration of shops. Mr. Eason had mentioned that, in the event of registration, care would be required for the accurate description of shops. Probably some such person as Mr. Eason, glancing at what was on the front of a shop and noting the commodities displayed, would be better able to describe it, and arrive at some idea of its turnover, than would the proprietor, if he were asked to describe the commodities he was trading in and to assess his turnover.

Mr. Clark, seconding the vote of thanks, said that a great deal had been heard, often from manufacturers and producers, about the high cost of distribution. There was an argument employed in this country that, for the purpose of putting people into employment, prices might be increased by means of tariffs, bounties, etc. It was surely illogical to object to the same principle carried out in distribution. What the public demanded in distribution must be classed as a service willingly paid for and its cost should not be regarded as waste. A shop round the corner is one of these services.

Mr. Eason had drawn attention to the danger of table 3. It had occurred to him that the returned turnover in shops in the country had only been the money turnover, but he had been told that a great deal of business was done in these shops by barter.

Ever since the ratio of people to shops had got so much notice after the 1926 Census, people had been saying that the ratio was a ridiculous one. But if they were asked what criterion they used for saying that there were too many shops, it generally turned out that they had not investigated the matter at all. The position differed in the different provinces. Leinster, Connaught and Ulster all had more than 70 persons per shop ; Munster having 54 brought down the average. If it were accepted that 55 per cent. or 65 per cent. of the national income was spent on retail purchases, then with a ratio of 1 to 65, taking five persons to a family, the turnover of a shopkeeper would be equal to (but not made up of) 55 per cent. to 65 per cent. of the income of thirteen families, equal to the income of seven or eight families. If he made 12 per cent. to 14 per cent. on his turnover, his income would be equal to that of his customers. He did not know that the shopkeeper should have an income greater than that of his average customer.

He had been making a little exploration into the Census of Distribution with a view to discovering the distributive structure. He

had taken out some figures with regard to shops in certain areas of Munster, excluding the shops in towns with over 5,000 population, and his figures showed the percentage of shops in really agricultural districts. They were enough to show something of the distributive structure. The figures were fairly regular. Groceries and public houses, taken as a group, showed a rising percentage in the poorer districts; the poorer the district the higher the percentage of grocers' shops.

Professor Shields said that the Census of Distribution would be of value to the student of current economic conditions as well as to the economic historian of the future.

Certain facts issued clearly from any analysis of the figures; such as the scarcity of employment in the retail trade for those not proprietors or members of proprietors' households; the bearing of this fact on migration to Dublin and abroad; the much higher proportion of female members of proprietors' households engaged in retail trade than male; the position of Dublin in respect of sales, wages paid and persons employed; and, as a result of the large number of shops doing a mixed trade, the absence of any commodity classification.

In the Introductory Report of the Census of Distribution, a comparison was made between stocks and sales. Stock, as was known, was calculated on cost price or replacement value and sales on sale price. The tendency was for any percentage on stock turned over to be a little larger than the comparison between units of stock and sales. He had worked out for several types of businesses the figures of the average time in which stocks were turned over. In the drapery trade it was roughly about once in three months; in grocery and provisions once in $1\frac{1}{2}$ months; fresh meat, once every five days (probably an under-statement). These figures were for all classes of shops. On looking through the tables on pp. 28 and 29, he had noticed that fruit and vegetables had an unenviable place as regarded their importance as a class of business. They came in the same category as hucksters. This was a point of some importance in view of the growing realisation of the part played by these foods in the prevention of disease.

Professor O'Brien said that he was glad of the opportunity to congratulate Mr. Lyon and Mr. Geary on the Census of Distribution, a Census of a type that had often been talked about in other countries without anything being achieved. He thought that if Mr. Lyon had been present he would not have resented the type of criticism which Mr. Eason had made, because it had been constructive criticism—not carping—and had been designed to assist.

There were one or two considerations of a general character brought out in this Report. If there was one thing more than another which it brought out, it was the importance of the small shop. In recent years, it seemed to have been assumed fairly generally that the small shopkeeper should be an object of hostility. On the contrary the small shopkeeper was a valuable member of the community. Though he might not appear in the employment figures, he gave employment to himself and he gave employment through his trading. The only difference between him and the people he employed was that he was working for a lower rate of wages. It had been assumed that a large number of small shops was a menace to the community. He considered that a large number of small shops were a menace to the people who ran them, and that the spectacle of people giving services at less than the cost of production should be welcomed. The farmer was a person

who, owing to great immobility, was doing work of production, feeding the world, at a lower level of remuneration than industry. The small shopkeeper was very much like the farmer in that he was rendering a valuable service to the community at under cost of production, and was pleased to do it.

The whole tendency of trade generally was to facilitate the entry of people into this completely unsheltered trade. The skilled trades were sheltered by trade unions, the farmer by shortage of land. The utterly unqualified, incompetent and untrained could enter without discouragement, and indeed with encouragement from manufacturers and wholesalers, the ranks of the small retailers.

Dr. Jacobsson said that he had been glad to find a copy of the Census of Distribution recently in the hands of an economic adviser of the Bank of England. It had already attracted a great deal of attention in such circles, because, especially in central banking, it was necessary to know how money was spent. In dealing with the quantitative theory of money, the notes in circulation had an influence on prices. Very little was known about the volume of notes and every attempt to find out where they were had failed. If studies like the Census of Distribution could be related to note circulation they would give an insight into the actual working of the monetary system. This Census showed that less than one-half of the national income was spent in retail shops. It was given as a haphazard figure in England that half the national income was spent in retail shops. Probably the figure in England was higher than in the Saorstát, since there was more agriculture in the Saorstát, but the guess figure of British expenditure seemed to be confirmed.

The Statistics Branch had performed a valuable service and he was glad that its pioneer efforts had received recognition from the Statistical Society.

Mr. Geary said that he would like to make some general comments in his personal capacity. His views were not necessarily those of the Department. First of all, the Census of Distribution had been very cheap. The American Census had cost £900,000, and the Saorstát Eireann Census proportionately would have cost £20,000 to £30,000. Actually, including printing costs, it had cost little more than £1,000. Secondly, the general public did not quite realise the amount of labour entailed in making an inquiry of this kind. It was necessary, first of all, to steer an even course between asking too little and asking too much and not getting a sufficient number of returns. On this occasion on the first issue of the forms they had got by the statutory date 60 per cent. returns. The business community had realised that here was something that might be of value. After the first follow-up they had got 82 per cent. returns. A few years before the Census was undertaken, the activities of the Prices Tribunal had attracted wide notice and just at the time it was undertaken the report of the Commission on the Registration of Shops appeared. These two factors had helped. Further, they had had the services of the Gárda Síochána—one of the finest statistical field forces in the world. He would like also to mention the help given by the Press in the creditable presentation of the results of the census.

He agreed, and thought that most people would agree, that regional distribution of figures would be more valuable than distribution according to types of businesses.

He differed from Mr. Eason in that he thought the figures about types of businesses had a real interest. The descriptions of businesses returned on the forms had been found to be very similar to those returned by the Gárdai, and there had been no difficulty in describing generally the types of shops. Relative figures of turnover per person engaged, average wages paid, and so on, must have an interest for persons engaged in similar types of business.

He endorsed Mr. Eason's suggestion that the next Census should try to get figures of total turnover by types of commodities sold, and even of principal specific commodities. He would like Mr. Eason's reaction to the suggestion that it should try to ascertain the gross costs of distribution; and on the next occasion ask for the purchase price of goods sold, and so get an idea of the percentage of value added by the process of distribution.

The Chairman said that the comments made might be of some value to those who would have to consider the steps to be taken in regard to the taking of future Censuses of this kind.

Dr. Jacobsson had mentioned the estimate that half the income of the United Kingdom was applied to the purchase of consumption goods. As in the Saorstát a large section of the population was engaged in agriculture and produced a large proportion of their own commodities, a smaller figure applied to retail trade could be expected here, and the figure of 62 millions accounted for in the Report seemed to suggest a reasonably complete coverage of the field on the transactions brought into the Report. The producer who produced a special commodity wanted to understand conditions as they affected that commodity, and it was doubtful if the information given in the Report would be of value in this connection; though generally speaking the analysis of the process of distribution was of ultimate interest, and it was valuable to get even such information as was available here about general outlines.