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PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION.

BY DR. ROBERT J. MCFALL.*

Druggists have long realized the need for basic and comprehensive information concerning the various agencies and channels through which merchandise travels from producers to the final sale to consumers. The lack of such knowledge has placed wholesalers and retailers generally at a great disadvantage in the planning of their business. Production in both manufacturing and agriculture has been greatly benefited for many years by the availability of statistical information concerning production. There seems to be little or no question but that distribution will also receive enormous benefit as soon as more comprehensive statistical facts are available concerning marketing.

The average output per workers in production has increased 85 per cent since the beginning of the century and 34 per cent since the termination of the World War. No comparable figures are available to show the changes in efficiency in distribution, but the fact that production is taking a smaller and distribution an increasingly larger share of the consumer's dollar than before the war would make it appear that distribution has not increased in efficiency so rapidly as production.

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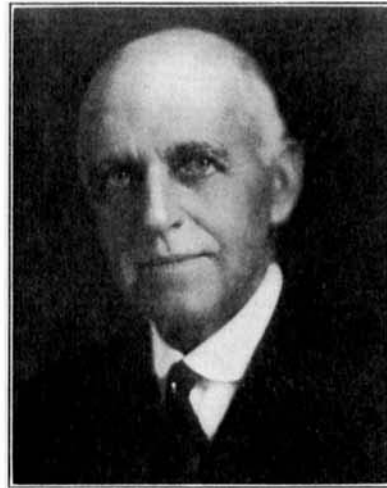
In justice to our distribution system, it must be stated, however, that in many cases the increased cost of distribution may be attributed to better service which is now being rendered. Nevertheless there must be some relation between this situation and the fact that, while abundant data are available regarding production, there are few dependable statistics covering the field of distribution. Thus the big question confronting the business man is how the supplies in all lines of merchandising can be speedily and economically distributed to the consumers, eliminating waste and unnecessary expense.

Until adequate information is available it is wholly impossible to know the many diverse elements of distribution, their operations and deficiencies. There have been some data gathered by governmental and private agencies on distribution, but the work has been restricted in scope with the result that there never has been a complete picture presented.

For these reasons and many others the first nation-wide Census of Distribution, now being taken, has created wide-spread interest in the business world through whose demand Congress has provided for this study by the Bureau of the Census, which already has arrayed an army of workers to gather the basic facts concerning the vast field of distribution.



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WILLIAM M. STEUART.
Director of the Census.

The work is confidently expected to develop important and useful knowledge affecting the economic life of the country. Rough guesses concerning such elements as the number of merchants in operation, and their total volume of business, will be supplanted by "cold figures." Since the survey is being conducted by the Bureau of the Census, druggists need have no hesitancy in answering the questions, because there is not the slightest chance that the confidential information they give will be disclosed. They are protected thoroughly in this particular by the law, which requires that such information shall never be revealed by the Bureau of the Census, not even to any other Government bureau or department. All employees are sworn to keep secret the figures on the individual returns.

Since the census is being taken at the behest of the business world, and every individual organization is merely a unit in the whole structure which is being measured, the Bureau of the Census is confident that generous cooperation will be accorded it in the work, and hopes the 1930 census of distribution will present a thorough picture of the subject and its many parts. It is realized that one difficulty may lie in the fact that the information possessed by retailers, wholesalers and others may be scant. However, it is certain that the census will compile valuable information and, moreover, will prove a dependable basis for getting additional and comparative material which will prove helpful in the solving of the distribution problems.

To indicate the scope of the work, it may be pointed out that the census of distribution will cover all distributing organizations and their business activities as well as all druggists. It will give account of the various types and sizes of retailers, wholesalers and all other merchandising concerns in the entire country, their sales, expenses, inventories and employees. So far as possible it will provide information relating to goods sold by these various distributors, the limiting factor being the inadequacy of records kept by the rank and file of merchants. Not only will this information be summarized whenever available for each city and county as well as for each state and the nation as a whole, but it also will be published promptly so as to be as timely and valuable as possible.

Every druggist, as well as merchants in other lines, will be in a position to compare his business with that of groups of others in his general locality and in the nation as a whole. Comparisons may be made regarding the amount of sales, proportion of business done on credit, amount of goods returned, inventory, expenses, number of employees, wages and various other items. Information will be sought as to the number of establishments an organization operates or owns in a given line of business in different cities, the character of the organization, whether operated by an individual, partnership, incorporated company or coöperative association. Sales by commodities, such as drugs, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, patent medicines, confectionery, bottled beverages, toilet articles, cigars, cigarettes and other articles will be tabulated.

Every business firm in the country will be canvassed. Each dealer will be asked a number of questions which will supply essential facts. No attempt, however, will be made to discover the amount of profit. All questions to be asked are designed for the purpose of obtaining data to eliminate some of the blindness from competition, to strike out waste, and, in general, to help the druggists and other merchants, to know themselves and their businesses to a point never known previously. The Census of Distribution reports can be compared to a trade convention on a large scale in which merchants exchange among themselves and for mutual benefit many lessons drawn from their practical experience.

The Census of Distribution is designed to give retailers information concerning the number of establishments of each type and size in their community and the average situation of each group as to such matters as sales, inventory, expenses, employees, services, and so forth. Moreover, it will acquaint retailers with the proportion of business done by chain stores as against independents, the degree to which stores of various types sell goods more generally supposed to be sold by stores of another type, and the proportion of retail sales in their region made on credit, and what proportion of sales is offset by returned goods. The census also will help manufacturers and farmers in their field of production, and finally it will help the consuming public which will benefit by lower prices or better service supplied through more efficient distribution.

BRITISH REGULATION OF SALE OF DRUGS AND POISONS.

The report has been issued of the British departmental committee appointed in July 1926, to consider whether any modification in the poisons and pharmacy acts are desirable. The committee has made a number of important recommendations: 1. That the profession of pharmacy and the control of poisons be kept distinct and dealt with in separate parts of the act. 2. That it shall be unlawful for any person not a registered pharmacist to use any title or description calculated to suggest that he possesses any qualification with respect to the selling, dispensing or compounding of drugs. 3. That the central authority for poisons be the home secretary, assisted by an advisory committee to be called the "Poisons Board," whose functions shall be to prepare a "poisons list" and to assist in making rules with respect to the sale of poisons. 4. That power be given to prohibit the sale of certain poisons except on the prescription of a physician, dentist or veterinary surgeon.

There will be held in Lima from July 4 to 11, 1930, the Second Exposition of Hygiene, together with the Sixth Pan American Child Congress. Dr. Alfredo Delgado, Lima, has been appointed General Commissary of the Exposition, under the direction of the Bureau of Health. The exposition will have the following sections: Medicinal, chemical, biological and dietetic products; children's meals, infants' hygienic articles, models of children's welfare institutions, medicinal foods, hygienic foods and beverages, X-ray, medicinal and surgical and dental instruments, orthopedic apparatus, sanitation works, etc.