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SUGGESTIONS *for* RECORDING *the* LIFE HISTORY *and* FAMILY
CONNECTIONS *of* EVERY INDIVIDUAL.

By WALTER HAZELL.

[Read before the Royal Statistical Society, May 19, 1914,
the President, Professor F. Y. EDGEWORTH, M.A., F.B.A., in the Chair.]

THE work of the Registrar-General for England and Wales and his officers throughout the country is one with which we are all more or less familiar from the outside. His annual report shows the condition of the people as to births, marriages and deaths in wonderful statistical detail. So far as people in the mass are concerned, the information thus given has reached a high degree of efficiency. The diminishing birth and death-rates; the causes of death; the disappearance of certain fatal diseases; and the steady decrease of others, and numberless other data, all give information of the highest importance as to the condition of the people.

When, however, we come to deal with the individual and his life history, and his relation to other members of his family, it appears that our present system is capable of development on cautious lines, which, without in any way disturbing the present methods, would make the records infinitely more useful.

By the courtesy of the Registrar-General, I have been enabled to see something of the internal methods of the General Registry at Somerset House, London, where certified copies are kept of all the records made by registrars throughout England and Wales. The system was established by an Act of Parliament passed in 1836, and coming into operation in June, 1837. In 73½ years to the end of 1910 there have been accumulated at Somerset House

an alphabetical index of births, marriages and deaths, containing no less than 120,611,255 names. The full records from which the index is compiled are also permanently preserved.

The system of recording an entry is roughly as follows. The country is mapped out into 11 divisions, and again divided into 635 registration districts, each under a local superintendent registrar. Each district comprises from 1 to 7 or 8 sub-districts. Upon a birth occurring, it is the duty of one of the parents to record the fact within 42 days with the local registrar, for which entry no charge is made. It may incidentally be mentioned that under the Notification of Births Act, the local medical officer of health in localities where this Act has been adopted has to be informed of the birth within 48 hours of its occurrence, but this has nothing to do with the Somerset House system, though it suggests that a double registration of births is going on which might be consolidated. This duplication involves much extra clerical labour and confuses ill-informed people, who sometimes imagine that the first notification is all that is required. The registrar records the child's full name, date and place of birth, the name, address and occupation of the father, and the mother's maiden name, and nothing more. The local registrars retain their original books, but re-write reduced particulars of the birth on sheets, and take two carbon copies of them, sending them to Somerset House, to be followed at the end of the quarter by a certified copy of the full original record, with which the carbon is carefully compared. These carbons are sorted and re-sorted, and sorted again, until they are brought into absolute alphabetical order regardless of locality. They are then typewritten in this order on sheets, each entry merely giving the full name of the child, and the date and place of birth, and the number and page of the volume where full particulars are recorded. These sheets are bound into quarterly volumes, each containing about eight thousand names, and these indexed volumes are open to the inspection of callers. A similar process is gone through with marriages and deaths. If anyone desiring a copy of a certificate of a birth, marriage or death, knows accurately the name, date and place of the occurrence, these certificates are easily found, and a copy is furnished to any applicant at a charge of 3s. 7d. Many applicants, however, have not sufficient particulars and, therefore, there are daily from 100 to 200 personal searches of these indices by people who desire information, which to them is of the greatest importance, but which is often difficult or impossible to trace, owing to the similarity of names and the want

of details. A pathetic side of the case is that a considerable number of women who are about to marry try to trace whether the intended husband has already a wife living. Remembering the great number of common names, the wide area of the country, and also the fact that a marriage is valid even though the parties may have given false names and wrong ages, such marriages may be sometimes untraceable.

The growing personal interest in these records is shown by the fact that whereas in the year 1866 the total searches were 12,135, resulting in 10,017 certificates, for which 1,860*l.* was received in fees, in 1911 75,005 searches produced 56,364 certificates, and an income to the department of 10,875*l.* The searches in 1911, it will be observed, exceeded the certificates by 18,641. How much anxiety, confusion and loss were brought to these thousands of seekers in vain cannot be tabulated, but it must have been serious, and one of the objects of this Paper is to propose a method of lessening this evil.

These records are quite accurate so far as they go, but they might be made infinitely more useful by a simple development which would in no way interfere with the present system, and could be carried out at a small cost compared with the benefits that would accrue. The records lack a connecting link between various members of a family, and even between the several events of an individual life. Each entry stands by itself, and as to all that has gone before or may follow after it, the entry gives no guide as to where any information may be found.

My proposal is that each birth entry should have two distinctive numbers—the number of the registration district, and below it the number of the individual entry. There is no special virtue in two series of numbers especially as the registration districts may later on be merged into the administrative districts. These two numbers should be produced by the person in question through life whenever a record of a birth, marriage or death is made, and on such other occasions as Parliament or custom may from time to time require. It is singular that each birth-registration book as kept by the local registrar contains 500 forms numbered 1 to 500 and yet no use appears to be made of these numbers. All that is needed is that these distinctive numbers should be continued indefinitely, as is done with Bank notes. To help people, "lest they forget," a brief summary of the birth entry, including the child's number, should be given to the parent when the birth is registered. When the entry reaches Somerset House from the local registrar, a separate Life Card should be made out for each

child, giving his full name and number, and the number of his father and mother. As the scheme could not be retrospective, it would be a generation before the parents' numbers appeared on the child's card; but a new generation soon grows up. Also the card must give the reference to the full entry of birth, as is done in the index-volumes above mentioned. When the child becomes an adult and marries, a similar brief reference of his or her marriage will be entered on the card; the only essential detail required beyond the index number being that he, John Smith, had married Mary Jones, number so-and-so. It would be convenient to add the occupation of both partners at the time of marriage, though this fact can be learned by a reference to the original entry. The wife would have an entry on her card that she married a John Smith of such a number. Each of the children would provide one brief entry on the father's card. It need not be on both cards. In the case of illegitimate births, which in 1911 numbered 37,633, the entry would have to be upon the mother's card only. The death or divorce of either party will be duly entered on both cards, and any remarriage on the card of the person affected. The final entry would be the death of the individual and the cause of death. The place of burial might also be added. The card would then be removed to a "dead" receptacle. The cards of both living and dead would, of course, be permanently kept in exact numerical order.

The proposal is very simple, and makes no attempt to emulate the elaborate scheme set forth by Mr. H. G. Wells in his *Modern Utopia*. Simple though it is, it opens the door to many obvious advantages. I will call attention to a few of them.

First, it would tend to raise the life records of men to the level already attained by pedigree animals. This is not sarcasm, as I observe with some shame that we seem to care less for the family history of a man than that of a beast. As one who bred pedigree shorthorns for many years, I write with some small experience of herd books. The ancestry of my animals and their family connections generally could be traced in all directions as far back as the year 1824, giving a pedigree equal in length to, say, 500 years of a human family. The entries are published annually in two volumes, called *Coates's Herd Book*, one for bulls with consecutive numbers, the other for cows and their produce in alphabetical order. The result is that these animals are sold, not only upon their merits as individuals, but upon the position their kindred have held in the shorthorn aristocracy. Reference to another book shows the prizes they have obtained, and the prices

they have realised when sold by auction. When animals are sold for exportation, the buyer is furnished with a copy of the pedigree certified by the Shorthorn Society, and this gives the animal a status in the new country, and enables him in certain cases to be entered in the herd book there. So thoroughly is this system worked, that falsifying a record in order to enhance the value of an animal is a punishable offence. All this care in selection for breeding has resulted in a steady improvement of our domestic animals, and a great benefit to the human community. I mention shorthorns merely as an example. There are breed societies issuing stud, herd and flock books for domestic animals of many kinds. Holy Writ says: "How much better is a man than a sheep." In our care for family antecedents we appear to think that a man is of much less concern than a sheep. The owner of pedigree stock, who would not dream of adding to his herd without most careful inquiry as to the character of the family whence the new comer sprang, will approve of his daughter marrying a man who is personally passable, without knowing that he may inherit the tendency to insanity and other transmissible diseases. I am not assuming that marriages can be based chiefly upon the value of inherited characteristics, but at any rate it is possible, if the family history be known, to discourage the marriage of those whose family record is bad, and to encourage the union of people whose ancestry were sound in body, mind and morals. It follows that if the records can be traced for such purposes, they can with equal ease be used for compiling family pedigrees for purely genealogical purposes: an interesting subject which appears to be considered of growing importance, especially in America. The difficulty and litigation about the heirship to intestate estates would disappear, an heir, however distant, being found by turning from card to card until the next-of-kin was disclosed. A minor advantage would accrue by making a legal change of name depend upon an entry upon the Life Card of the person concerned. In this connection it is worth considering whether it would not be wise to make a secret unregistered change of name a punishable offence. No one who makes such a change for reputable reasons would object to making such a record. The Life Card would be an effectual check upon irregular marriages. At present the public notice required before marriages can be solemnized is given in various ways. The most familiar is the publishing of the banns in the parish churches where the respective parties live. For those who are to be married in a Nonconformist church or before a registrar, a notice is put up in the registrar's office for

21 days before the marriage can take place; this notice being visible to any who happen to enter the office. Other methods affect only a small minority. These notices, while needless for the overwhelming majority whose proposed marriages are in order, are no absolute safeguard against the marriage of the intending bigamist, or the immature minors, who wish to wed without their parents' sanction. A technical "residence" and publication of banns in another parish where the parties are unknown is easily arranged. The banns having been published without objection being raised, a clergyman has no power to insist upon the parents' consent to the union of persons who are obviously minors. In the case, however, of a civil marriage before a registrar such consent must be obtained. How many bigamous marriages take place no one can tell, but we do know that a considerable number come to light accompanied by much family misery. As a matter of fact, no one knows certainly that even his closest "bachelor" friend is not already secretly married, and if both the parties to the marriage keep silence, no one need find out the truth. The production of an official copy of the Life Card before a marriage could take place would be a clear safeguard against all such irregularities, and might, if it were thought desirable, render the publication of banns or the notice to the registrar unnecessary.

The accurate conduct of life insurance would be facilitated. At present the would-be insurer answers in writing minute questions as to the cause of death of his parents and near relations. He answers them often accurately, very often wrongly; it may be through ignorance, or with the intent to suppress the truth. It is always difficult, and often impossible, for insurance companies to verify such statements. Under a Life Card system the applicant for insurance would have to state his number. He would then know that the company could, if they thought fit, verify his statements, as to age and family antecedents in all directions as far back as the card system extended, by a reference to Somerset House.

It would be practicable to trace individuals who had been lost to sight for many years. How many deserted wives there are who know not whether they are wives or widows. If the missing man had died in this country, his death would be entered on his Life Card, provided his number were known. Presuming that it had to be called for on various occasions during life, it would probably be ascertainable when his death was registered. Let us assume a very difficult case, and follow out the tracing of a man who had absolutely disappeared for more than a generation. A

is involved in a lawsuit about ancient lights. He remembers that a certain clerk, whom he has lost sight of for forty years, would be an invaluable witness (if he could be traced) as to a certain window in the premises in question near which he sat at work. If A had the clerk's life number it would be easy to find his record; but his number is unknown. All A can call to mind after so many years is that the man's name was William Robinson, that he came from Bristol, was then aged about 30, and lived in Holloway, London, with a wife and some small children. Under existing circumstances a search after so many years for an inconspicuous person with such a common name, would be absolutely useless, if no connecting link with old friends remained. But under the Life Card system a search is made, and it begins by examining at Somerset House the alphabetical list of births, which are at present, as already stated, open to public inspection. These lists would then have the birth number attached to each entry. As forty years ago Robinson's age was about 30, his birth must be sought for about seventy years ago, and presumably in Bristol. But Bristol was a large place even then, and several William Robinsons appear as born there about the same time. Reference to their Life Cards show that one died as a child, another married and died in Cardiff childless, others are traced in the same way fruitlessly, until William Robinson is found among the "live" cards, whose card states that he married, had a son and daughter, and that his wife is dead. The daughter's Life Card shows that she was born forty-two years before at 14, Rotunda Road, Holloway, and there being no further entry on her card, she appears to be still living and unmarried. A at once remembers the name of the road, and knows he has found his man. Diligent local enquiry reveals no such name in Rotunda Road or the neighbourhood. The daughter's card gives no light as to her present abode, and the son's card shows that he died unmarried. So far there is no clue, but William Robinson's father's card shows that William had brothers and sisters, whose cards are all among the "dead," save one sister who has recently become a widow. Her husband's card enables an easy reference to the address where he died, which proves to be still her home. The widow being applied to explains that William Robinson is living in a remote part of Devonshire, that his sight is so bad that he reads no newspapers and, therefore, that a fortune spent in advertising would hardly have found him. Robinson appears as a witness in the case, his memory is perfectly clear, his evidence is just what is wanted, and A wins his case. My story of the search for William Robinson was intentionally made complicated, as the point which I wish to

emphasize is that any person living in this country could be traced unless he had intentionally cut himself entirely adrift from everyone with whom he was connected, however distantly, by blood or by marriage.

I limited the benefits of the Life Card system to persons living in this country, but it is obvious that by arrangement with the Colonies, or even with foreign countries, the death of persons born here might be reported, and duly entered upon their Life Cards at Somerset House. This would solve many perplexing problems of relations who have disappeared abroad, and may or may not still be living.

The Life Cards would greatly facilitate the study of eugenics. Occasionally attempts at family histories are published, showing the persistence of certain peculiarities in individual families, but such histories, very meagre in scope, are greatly liable to err. The records reporting inherited disease would naturally be suppressed as far as possible. The Life Card would be a permanent truthful witness, whose evidence would be limited only by the amount of information recorded. Supposing no details were entered beyond the particulars now required by law, there would be materials for learning how far large or small families, shorter or longer lives, and death from certain causes, persisted from generation to generation, or in certain localities, or occupations.

Persons when filling up the Census papers would, of course, be obliged to give the Life Card number against each entry. As the Census requires particulars as to blindness, lunacy, and so on, these details might be transferred to the Life Card, thus giving the exact family history as to these afflictions. The "live" cards would be an ever-ready census, because, by counting and examining them, the number and ages of the people could be at any time ascertained. To this total there would need to be added or deducted the difference between the number of emigrants or immigrants from the returns now ascertained of these movements of the population, but such movements might be gathered as to the individual if it were thought desirable. Certain particulars are now required of people taking ocean voyages. These travellers might be called upon to give their Life Card number, and to state their intention of being permanent emigrants, or of returning to this country. This information might be entered on the Life Card, and thus the domicile of the person in question would be settled.

It might be made a condition of naturalisation in this country that the persons obtaining it should start a Life Card for himself and his family.

Many more uses of the system could be suggested, but I do not wish to over-burden the scheme, as it might be developed later on as its usefulness became more apparent. It is obvious that the more complete and detailed the records, the greater encouragement there would be for more searches at Somerset House, for which a moderate though remunerative fee should be charged, which would bring added revenue to the department.

After pointing out the advantages of the Life Card system, it remains only to consider any objections which may be raised on the cost of the system. It would be urged that the person's number when wanted would be forgotten. This would happen in some cases, but it would be found by reference to the birth certificate, which would be kept as at present, with only the addition of the consecutive number. When people found it was to their interest to keep the numbers, few would neglect to do so. There remains the question of cost. In the year 1911, 881,138 births were recorded at Somerset House. Each birth would require its Life Card, even if the child died in infancy. The birth would also be entered on the father's card. The marriages were 274,943. Each would be entered both on the bride and the bridegroom's cards. The divorces were 1,160, and these would be entered on both the husband's and the wife's cards. The last phase would be the entry of the deaths of 527,810 persons, each on his or her own card only, and the transference of the card to the "dead" receptacle. Summing up the yearly clerical work, it would be as follows:—

	881,138	cards to be made out for the births.
	881,138	birth entries on the fathers' cards.
	274,943	} marriages on both cards.
	274,943	
	1,160	} divorces on both cards.
	1,160	
	527,810	deaths on individuals' cards.
Total	<u>2,842,292</u>	

Thus nearly 3,000,000 cards yearly, or, say, 10,000 every working-day, would have to be taken out of their receptacles, entered and replaced. The entries would be very brief, merely an index to the full record, so as to economize labour and the space required for storage. The cards would be so arranged under registration districts that they would be easily handled. At a very approximate calculation it may be assumed that the cost of the clerical work only would be about 15,000*l.* a year. This is an approximate estimate based upon the employment of clerks at an average salary

of 150*l.* a year each, and it exceeds the cost anticipated by a chartered accountant whose advice I sought. Even if this were a net addition to the cost of registration, the benefits would justify the outlay, but it is probable that the Life Card system would economize work in other directions.

I commend this proposal to public attention, in the belief that it will add to the efficiency of life registration, with benefits far in excess of the moderate cost it will involve. Among other advantages it will help every thoughtful individual to feel that his life is linked with the past, as well as with the future of the race, and so will add to his sense of personal responsibility.

DISCUSSION *on* MR. WALTER HAZELL'S PAPER.

SIR TIMOTHY A. COGHLAN, in proposing a vote of thanks to the reader of the Paper, said it was understood that Mr. Hazell did not claim for his proposal strict originality; in fact, his idea was an adaptation of systems existing elsewhere. Mr. Wells, in *Modern Utopia*, advocated a system on a more extensive scale. But he (Sir Timothy) thought Mr. Hazell might have added, as showing the practicability of the system, that it existed to a very full extent at the present time in Belgium. The Belgian system provides for the opening of a register for every child born, and, in addition to recording the names of the parents and the registration numbers of the parents, provides for a record of the movements of the child throughout its life. Each district in Belgium has a distinguishing number, and upon the registration of an infant the registrar of that district gives the infant's number, and the two numbers, that of the infant and that of the district, appear together on the child's card. Upon that foundation the history and movements of the individual were built. Movements from one town to another in Belgium had to be recorded; military service, marriage, &c., were noted, and if any individual on demand failed to produce his card he got into trouble. By the distinguishing number against the names of the parents of any individual his family could be traced, as could be hereditary disease, to a certain extent, by the record of the cause of death entered in the register. Before marriage took place the parties could search for a copy of the card of each other, and thus they might verify the assertions made to them. The system was more elaborate than the proposal made by Mr. Hazell, and he mentioned it in detail to show there was no impracticability at all in carrying out the system proposed. All proposals for amending registration in England were always opposed, on the ground that it was an interference with the liberty of the subject. He must admit that

Mr. Hazell's proposal did involve such interference, because every man must carry his card about with him wherever he went. It was against the instinct of the English people that they should be hampered in the way suggested, and if anything happened that they should be required to produce their card of identity. But the time might come, he said, when even they might feel that, for the advantage of the whole community, it would not be a bad thing to put up with some inconvenience, and that on important occasions in life these cards could be referred to. He thought the idea Mr. Hazell had broached, namely, that the system might be extended to their Colonies, was not at all a bad one. The most lamentable thing that came under his observation in regard to emigration was the enormous amount of desertion that took place. People deliberately emigrated to get rid of their wives and families, and it seemed to him that it would be an excellent thing if an emigrant from this country or any other country going to Australia should be compelled to produce his life card so that they would know all about him. They might be sure that, if a man deserted his wife and family here, he would not mind taking another wife on the other side, and the number of bigamous marriages which probably took place in all the Colonies would astound them if they knew the facts. He gave that as a practical illustration of the use to which the cards could be put. He said he also advocated the system advanced by Mr. Hazell, because it would enable their vital statistics to be advanced very much in utility. He thought the Registrar-General had done a great deal with the material at hand, but if they had more information about themselves the interest attaching to his records could be widened very extensively. Mr. Hazell did not tell them that the proper study of mankind was man, as probably the quotation was very much too trite; but whether it was trite or not, he thought the more they knew about themselves, the more they could connect their individual history with the history of those who had gone before them and of those who came after them, the better it would be for the world at large.

Dr. DUDFIELD, in seconding the vote of thanks, said that before considering the proposals submitted for discussion, he desired to direct the author's attention to one sentence near the beginning of the Paper. The sentence he referred to might imply that the Notification of Births Act was in force throughout England and Wales, whereas, in fact, the Act was an adoptive measure and in force only in those districts where it had been adopted by the sanitary authority or the county council or put in force by Order of the Local Government Board. The universal application of the Act had been recently urged in the daily press, but personally he hoped that the Act would be repealed and not extended in its application. His opinion was founded on the objection mentioned by the author, namely, that it imposed on the public a double duty which could be obviated by an amendment of the Registration of Births and Deaths Act to shorten the period allowed for the registration of births.

That amendment would secure the objects of notification. When he read the Paper he was favourably impressed with the proposals, which appeared to promise a wide field for statistical investigation. There were, however, several difficulties in giving effect to the proposals, and although Sir Timothy Coghlan had told them that the system suggested was in operation in Belgium, he (the speaker) feared that there was little or no prospect of the proposals being adopted in this country. Their adoption would involve the dossier system in vogue on the Continent, a system which he felt sure would never be tolerated here. The facilities which such a system would afford for tracing people who had disappeared would render it highly unpopular with a section of the public. The whole system depended on the adoption of a code number assigned to each child at the registration of its birth and the referring of all subsequent acts of registration touching such child to the card bearing the code number. The individual must therefore have in his possession documentary evidence of his code number. He feared that there was practically no chance of the average individual safeguarding the document referred to and being able to produce it when required. It had to be remembered that in this country demands for evidence of registration were rare as compared with the practice in Switzerland and Germany where the certificate of registration was demanded on entry into school, the army, and on many other occasions. The author had suggested that were the document lost it could be replaced by the individual giving information as to place and date of his birth. It was common experience that many people were decidedly hazy on the latter and even more so about the former. He feared that the only method by which the proposals could be put into effect would be to record the code number, in an indelible manner, on the body of the individual. It was to be presumed that the author's reference to the family histories which would be possible with his system, referred to the "trees" which were commonly constructed to show the inheritance of special characteristics, such as deformities and diseases. Unless very considerable changes were made in the practice of registration the proposed system would be useless for this purpose, as the records would contain information of fatal diseases or accidents only. Even then the information would be incomplete and even misleading, since it was common knowledge that medical practitioners refrained in very many instances from including in the certificates of death all reference to such causes as syphilis, alcohol, cancer and many other diseases. The latter defect would, in all probability, be remedied by making the certification of the cause of death confidential, an amendment of the present practice which had long been urged. To obtain the information necessary to render the proposed system available in settling questions of eugenics in connection with marriage there would need to be a very great extension of the practice of notification, and the information thus obtained would have to be recorded at the General Register Office. At present that Office took no cognisance of notification beyond publishing figures supplied by

the Local Government Board and the Medical Officer of Health of the County of London. Supposing the required changes were introduced to get over the difficulties referred to, there would remain the question of expense. The author had submitted certain estimates which he (the speaker) did not feel competent to dispute at the moment. He would, however, say that judging from his own experience (a small one, he admitted) he thought the annual cost had been very much underestimated. The author had not said much about the accommodation required for storage of the cards, but that was a very material question and would have to be very carefully considered if the suggestions were to be brought into practice. There would ultimately be some forty million cards to be stored—stored in such a way as to be readily accessible. He would not venture to picture the size of the building required or the time necessary for journeying to and fro to find and replace cards.

Mr. BERNARD MALLET said he was quite in sympathy with the object of Mr. Hazell's proposals, as he fully realized the defects of our present system of registration. For some months he had been engaged with his colleagues in looking into the various points on which they would like reform, and he had had some interviews with Mr. Hazell. He thought that if they could get what they wanted out of the Local Government Board and the Treasury they might do something to meet Mr. Hazell's wishes, although he went a great deal further than anything they had been able to contemplate. He thought the difficulties of storage—to take one point only—would be very considerable. On their present system of storage they had only room for four or five years, and the question of space was one of the great difficulties. 15,000*l.* a year for merely clerical work sounded a good deal to them. It was an enormous proportional increase on their total expenditure, and they did not find the Treasury generous of expenditure for any statistical purposes. There were other purposes that they would prefer to apply it to before they came to this. Although he could not go so far as Mr. Hazell, he nevertheless sympathized with Mr. Hazell's general idea of co-ordinating the records preserved in his Department.

Mr. SHEPPARD asked how far Mr. Hazell was satisfied as to the possibility of getting people to quote their numbers correctly. His own experience was that it was difficult for some people not merely to quote large numbers correctly from memory but even to transcribe them correctly. If this difficulty could be overcome, and people became reconciled to being numbered, it might then be possible to get the more detailed information as to migrations, &c., by means of which they could determine the distribution of the population at any time. At present this information was only supplied by the census; under the new system the census, except in so far as it provided additional information on such matters as occupation, would be rather in the nature of a periodical check. There would not be the same need of a quinquennial census; a census was in any case a cumbrous process.

Mr. HOWARD HAZELL said, in applying the card system to the prevention of bigamous marriages, if one assumed that there were two John Smiths, both about 30 years of age, one leading a blameless life as a bachelor, and the other leading anything but a blameless life, and one supposed that the latter had deserted his wife and wished to commit a bigamous marriage, it was only necessary for him to refer to the cards to find another John Smith about the same age in order to get a certificate that he had not been married. He would then produce his card proving he was a bachelor, and he would be married; and later on when the first and blameless John Smith wished to marry, he would have considerable difficulty in proving that he had not been previously married.

Mr. A. W. FLUX said the point that had been raised by the last speaker was similar to one that occurred to him in the course of the reading of the Paper, namely, that the access to a card register of this kind would be an extremely delicate question, and would have to be handled with much discretion, and hedged about with many conditions and qualifications in part to deal with such a case as had been suggested. In fact, any register of that kind would have to be treated as a record of confidential information, and only persons duly qualified to have access to it should consult it. The kind of information proposed to be put on these cards would be the kind of information which it would be extremely undesirable that all and sundry should have access to without question. How were they to determine whether A or B who applied to examine certain cards was in reality interested in such a way in the matters concerned that his examination was innocent, and that access to that information should properly be granted to him? That was a question that arose in reference to other public records, such as the passenger lists. It was not all and sundry who had access to those lists without question, and quite properly so. He thought a record of this kind would have to be guarded even more than the information on the passenger list. Mr. Hazell, apparently, was not aware that, for two years past, passengers leaving this country have been asked to declare whether it was their intention to emigrate or to come back to an established residence in this country, and the accuracy of the information supplied on that head would be a point of peculiar importance if it were to form part of a permanent record for later investigation on which acts of very considerable importance might turn. If a system of card registration would tend towards greater accuracy in records of that kind, it would be welcome; but it would encounter some of the difficulties that were at present encountered in the matter of accuracy of these particulars. The proposition did not strike him as novel. It came back with a savour of what he could remember being talked about by Professor Marshall 25 years ago when the desirability of such personal records and the difficulty of establishing them had been discussed. So long as the relations between public authorities such as the police and the people were not those of that mutual intimate confidence which

would exist in an ideal state, the difficulties were very considerable. The trouble, in fact, of establishing a card register of this kind was that the people would not have it. They objected to having particulars about their personal history placed on record unless they were surrounded with even a taller hedge of official secrecy than he had previously suggested. That was the sum and substance of the principal thought that remained with him after going through the Paper; that if the thing were to be done, the records must be kept secret to a degree which would very seriously qualify the beneficial use of them that had been dwelt upon so largely by Mr. Hazell. He was inclined to agree with Dr. Dudfield that 15,000*l.* a year would be considerably short of what would be necessary to meet the total expenditure which would be requisite in handling such a mass of material.

Mr. DE JASTRZEBSKI, speaking as one who spent practically the whole of his official life in the work of registration, said that Mr. Hazell had laid his finger at once on the great blot of their system, viz., that an entry of death or birth was in the main a thing entirely apart, and pointed neither backward nor forward as it should do. It was an essential of a really sound entry recording one of the vital facts of life that it should enable them to give the next step in the life history. If they could do that, they had already accomplished much. That could be secured, of course, by an apparatus far less costly and far less complicated than the system of cards which had been put before them. The objections to that system had been very ably pointed out, and he need not emphasize them; but he reminded the last speaker that there was no need in an ideal state for mutual confidence between the police and the public because there would be no police. Dr. Dudfield had referred to the Notification of Births Act, which only applied to about 60 per cent. of the present population of the country. He agreed with what Mr. Hazell said, that it would be a most desirable reform if that duplication of notification and registration could be done away with. What one should have was a sufficiently early registration of birth to do away with the need of notification. In the original proposals for establishing civil registration in 1836 (and in the Bill of 1834, drafted by Brougham), which failed to pass the House of Lords, three days was the period in which registration had to be effected, or at any rate notification for registration had to be given. Registration within three days would do away with any necessity for the Notification of Births Act, and he for one would strongly deprecate the compulsory extension of the Notification of Births Act, because it would interfere with a much more desirable reform, namely, speeding up the registration of births. With regard to divorce, although they in the General Register Office knew a certain number of people were divorced every year, there was no provision whatever for recording what people had been divorced, and they had no official knowledge that a marriage had been dissolved. The record remained permanently untouched without

note of any kind. The Registrar-General had no power whatever to record that a marriage had been dissolved or set aside. They would not therefore be able to supply the particulars on the card which Mr. Hazell thought would be desirable. Mr. Hazell suggested it would tend to raise the life level of men to that of pedigree animals. He (the speaker) did not know how they would find out whether there was a transmissible disease or insanity. It would not appear on the card unless the person died from general paralysis of the insane or something of that sort. Outside that they would not know from what the individual had suffered, and he was altogether at a loss to see how it would encourage the union of people whose ancestry was sound in mind, body and morals. If they were going to confine marriage to persons who could show a blameless ancestry in body, mind and morals, then the Registrar-General and he were fortunate in their day and generation, because that would reduce the marriage rate to nil. The marriage law of this country offered every facility for clandestinity and put every obstacle, in the shape of pettifogging restrictions, in the way of people who wanted to be married. Mr. Hazell was wrong when he said they could be married only in two ways; there were in fact five. They could obtain a special licence from the Primate without any restrictions, moral or otherwise, which would enable them to be married at any place and at any time without any further formality, or they could obtain a Surrogate's or Superintendent Registrar's licence, which only involved the declaration that there was an absence of legal impediment and that one party had resided fifteen days in the diocese in question. There was no absolute safeguard. On the contrary, in England they went out of their way to allow a bigamist to get married as often as he pleased without any publicity whatever. If by a system of compulsory dossier they could ensure a safeguard there would be a great deal to be said for it, but the production would not give perfection. He could say he was John Smith and he could get John Smith's dossier and marry in that name, and one month later he could get a dossier for John Jones. It would not give any real security. The security they had at present consisted of the bona fides of the parties, and under this system it would equally consist of the bona fides of the parties. The person who wanted to evade the dossier system would evade it.

Mr. Rew said the Paper was one of the most interesting that the Society had had before it for some time. It certainly opened up new ground and had given rise to a most interesting discussion. Attractive as Mr. Hazell's proposal was from many points of view, what struck one more particularly in listening to the Paper and the discussion were the difficulties that arose in carrying it out. Personally he did not think if the thing was worth doing the question of cost should be greatly considered. The question was—was it sufficiently important from a national point of view for those in authority to take action? But what were the precise objects to be secured by the institution of such a system? Mr. Hazell started with an attractive analogy from Shorthorn breeding. The

Shorthorns had a very long and most distinguished ancestry in the animal world, and their pedigree could usually be traced back to the great "Hubback," the father of the breed; but even these pedigrees, carefully as they were kept, were not always exact at every stage. It might be that in one generation the nineteenth Duchess was put down whereas in fact it was the eighteenth Duchess. That did not really matter to the purchaser or to the animal itself, but it would be of considerable importance in the record of a human being if the wrong lady's number was put on a man's card; and however carefully they conducted their operations one must make allowances for human fallibility. It was difficult for him to imagine how the thing would work without compelling every person to keep a card, or as one of the speakers suggested without an indelible mark on the body of every person born into the world. It was conceivable it might be worked, assuming that the possibility of error of description or error of transmission of the numbers could be eliminated. It might be said that, although such a carrying about of a record of his life by the individual was exceedingly unlikely to appeal at the present time to the average Englishman, yet they might gradually educate him to that point; and he was rather surprised that no reference had been made in the discussion to the first step which had been taken in that direction under the National Insurance Act. A very considerable number of people were now getting accustomed to keep a card, though the inducement would not be altogether as great in the case of a card which recorded their birth number. He thanked Mr. Hazell for introducing to the Society a subject which he thought was well worth serious discussion, and might in time, in some form or another, have practical results.

Dr. M. GREENWOOD said that the question of the accuracy of death certificates was an important one in this connection. So long as death certificates were not confidential communications made by the certifying practitioners to the registration authority they must tend to be incomplete. There was a clear motive for a medical man earning his living in practice to refrain from introducing particulars which might be painful or offensive to surviving relatives, if he could honourably do so. As a matter of fact, it was frequently possible, without any violation of truth, to confine oneself to the statement that the immediate cause of death was such and such a condition, and not to pass beyond this proximate cause, although, from the scientific point of view, inferences as to remoter causes might be desirable. It seemed to him (the speaker) that medical information likely to be of value in constructing pedigrees, or in deciding as to the expediency of marriage in any case, was never to be expected if relatives and other interested members of the public had access to the cards of Mr. Hazell's system. On the other hand, it was easy to see the apparent hardship of refusing relatives access to information respecting members of their families. The difficulties of this question might seem trivial to the general public, but in reality they were very great, and would have to be considered very

seriously before Mr. Hazell's scheme could be brought within the field of practice.

Mr. YULE said the Paper was an exceedingly interesting one, but he agreed with previous speakers in thinking that if the system suggested were to be made of practical effect as regards not merely searches for records of births, deaths and marriages, but as regards, for example, eugenic marriages, it would have to be made so much more complicated and complete that there would be very grave objections against it from many points of view. If the record were to be of service on the question of marriage, the card required would have to cover not only the cause of death but also certain diseases and defects. Mr. Hazell had suggested that the record of defects should be taken from the census record. Already these census records of defects were in the highest degree untrustworthy, and would tend to become more so if published individually; but it would surely be a gross breach of the present law if the records of these defects and census schedules were entered on cards available for the inspection of the public. If, on the other hand, more trustworthy, non-censal returns were required as to such defects, he asked how such returns were to be obtained. There was further the very grave question that was raised by Mr. Flux, namely, if by some means a more or less complete record of defects and diseases were obtained, were the cards to be opened for the inspection of everybody who chose to ask? If so, it opened somewhat unpleasant possibilities. If not, but if, for example, the cards were to be open to the inspection of people who intended to marry, what was to be the evidence of the intention to marry? The possibility of inspection after betrothal would be rather late, unless the law of breach of promise of marriage were altered, so that, say, insanity of the fiancée's grandfather was a defence to an action for breach. If such an alteration of the law were not made, Mr. Smith would have to come and say he thought of proposing to Mary Jones, and might he search her card? and Miss Jones would have to come along at a rather early stage of the walking out and say she thought that Mr. Smith was likely to propose within the next few weeks, and might she search his card? Were they going to get evidence by this process? The scheme was very interesting, but certainly afforded many opportunities of abuse and many difficulties in the way of getting a sufficiently trustworthy record to be of service. With regard to the cost, the number of entries as regards deaths to be entered in a year might be greater than stated on p. 713. Were there not two entries to be made in the case of married people: that is, the death of the wife on the two cards, or was it only intended to enter it on the man's card?

Mr. HAZELL, in reply, said he admitted that the Paper in various ways was crude, and he thanked those who had called attention to oversights. He happened to live in a district where the Notification of Births Act was adopted, and he had overlooked the fact that it was only an optional Act at present. He was aware that there

were other methods of giving notice of marriage besides the two to which he had referred, but he thought that the number of persons who pay 3*ol.* for a special licence was very small indeed, and that he was correct in saying that the overwhelming majority of people gave notice of marriage in one of the two ways mentioned. Sir Timothy Coghlan had referred to the great advantages that would accrue by the system, especially in relation to the tracing of husbands who had deserted their wives, either in the Colonies or at home. All who had any acquaintance with emigration work knew how many deserted wives there were. The number of people who would object to being traced was surely a small minority, and the State could not adapt its arrangements to please a very small percentage who were either crotchety or irregular in their lives and wanted to be lost sight of. The Registrar-General's report, as they all knew, gave most minute and valuable statistics as to the causes of death. Even a layman like himself knew that during a long period of years the number of deaths from cancer had increased. If, as one speaker had stated, deaths from cancer were often certified under some other name it made the Registrar-General's report on this important question of no effect. He could see the difficulty from the doctor's point of view, but he thought that could be surmounted by a confidential notification not open to the public. In regard to Mr. Howard Hazell's point, that a John Smith who intended bigamy might fraudulently produce the record of an innocent John Smith who was a bachelor, it would appear that such a fraud could not be easily perpetrated. The innocent John Smith's card would have to agree in so many particulars with the guilty one's that it was very unlikely that such a misuse of the card would pass through. Though in theory this might be done, in practice he thought it would scarcely ever occur. He believed that the number of persons who would object to their records at Somerset House being focused on to a card would be very small, as all his proposal was that the information now scattered about on individual entries at Somerset House should be accumulated to make reference easy. Parliament might or might not later on prescribe the addition of certain information, but this did not affect the immediate question. Whether the birth was to be registered on the mother's or the father's card was a question of detail and not of principle. It would be more convenient to put it on both, but as each card was connected with other cards the reference from the wife's to the husband's record would be easy. If William Robinson's sister was dead or could not be traced, still William Robinson had other relations who could be found out by reference to their respective cards. In spite of all that had been said in kindly criticism he thought the idea would take root sooner or later. He was very glad indeed that the Registrar-General had given the proposal his blessing, but with proper official caution.

The following Candidates were elected Fellows of the Society :—

H. Bellman.
H. J. Grisewood.

D. T. Jones.

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