A census enumerator's experience (by one of them) From: "The Eccles Journal," Friday, April 10th, 1891.
Contributed by Mary Turner.

The district allotted to me contained samples of very different grades in the social scale — from the humble holder of only one room to the substantial tradesman with his house of six and seven rooms. It was also one of the oldest parts of the town, with its share of curious nooks and corners. It affords, therefore, a fair general idea of the experience of a town enumerator.

One of my first duties, after receiving precisely written instructions as to the boundaries of my district, was to spend two or three hours, memorandum book in hand, noting the names of streets, the exact order of numbers, the names of public houses, etc. I may best describe this part of the duty as taking the census of houses. This needs to be done carefully as the numbers of houses are anything but regular in some of the streets, owing to the demands of tenants and the march of sanitary improvement. Single houses have been converted into double ones, and other causes have considerably upset the original numbers. A shopkeeper has wanted a little more elbow room and he has absorbed the next house or the cottage at the back; or some householder tenaciously clinging to the old neighbourhood through growth of family has taken another house next to his own. Thus you deliver a census paper at No 25 and proceed to leave one at No. 23, when the same face re-appears and assures you it is all one house.

After making preliminary surveys as complete as possible the next duty is to address your census papers, from the memorandum book which you are supplied with when you receive your census papers. When this/these are completed it is your first actual contact with the householder begins. It is at this stage that the tact of the enumerator is most needed to meet the varying humour of the householder. Notwithstanding the large amount of preliminary information as to the purpose and method of taking the census while it

Has done splendid service

where the newspaper was a regular institution, there was much ignorance. Your staff, Mr. Editor, may derive satisfaction from the fact that more than one "The Journal" was quoted as an authority on some moot point. Still there were many houses where no such light had entered and the introductory remark "I've brought the census paper" brought nothing but a blank stare in many cases, followed by the question, "What's that"?
In all such houses it was necessary to disarm the suspicions the blue paper seemed to create. Most of the very poor and ignorant jumped to the conclusion that it was nothing to their advantage at any rate. In many cases there were suggestions of taxes, school attendance enquiries, voting, etc. One man said that it was no use leaving the paper, “it would not get filled up” “folks were getting too clever, they wanted to know too much, where they worked, what they did, they’d be wanting to know how much wage they had next.” He had evidently not been within the reach of the income tax.

After getting the difficult ones into a more amicable frame of mind, I proceeded to ask who was the head or master of the house. If the question happened to be used to a lady householder, the chirrup of self-satisfaction with which she replied “I am both master and mistress” should have been heard to be realised. One young fellow of 21 replied very neatly, “I don’t know yet, we’ve only been wed a fortnight”. Even when there was a general knowledge of the census, it was not very evident in the various titles applied to it such as “senty-paper”, “filling th’ censors”, and the old tie worn “takkin our senses” was used a hundred times.

There was a brief breathing space allowed between delivery and collection on Monday morning last. I had only received five papers when the sadness of human life came under my notice. The master of the house whose name was on the back of the paper was no longer head of the house, having died on the Sunday afternoon, and his weeping widow handed the paper with her name in his place. It was startling that out of less than 300 houses such a number of sad experiences could be gleaned in the course of a day. In one house an old woman lay gasping on a sofa which was her bed day and night, suffering from asthma, and I had to fill up the paper to her panting dictation. In another house I was requested to go upstairs to the bedside and write out the particulars given by a sick person suffering from inflammation of the lungs. A very touching case was that of a lad in a state of great exhaustion attended by a kind-hearted old woman neighbour, and his sister of 12 who had tried to fill in the schedule but had not finished it, and I was reluctantly compelled to torture him with a few questions that he alone could answer. One case even more pathetic than all these — a mother informed me that her son, about 15 years of age,

*Had been taken to prison*

and she wanted to know if his name would have to be written on her paper.
It was not easy to reply that he would be enumerated elsewhere, leaving her to fill up the answer with tears, "on the prison list".

While the pathetic is met with in so many cases there is also an abundance of health and spirits which cannot help bubbling forth, even on the orthodox blue paper. For instance, one man has an only son, John James, aged 5, whose profession is gravely described as "marble player". Another of a waggish turn filled up the paper of an elderly maiden lady and had evidently been teasing her by writing as a member of her family "Dick, the canary". In one case the paper was duly filled up and handed in when there was a hue and cry two or three hours later for the enumerator: they had forgotten to enrol the baby, 11 weeks old. Needless to say it was not the first.

Another case occurred of baby not being enrolled, but from a different cause. It was only a fortnight old and father and mother could not agree about the name. The father was out when the paper was duly collected and the mother's choice was duly written down. Another phase of human nature is exhibited by the case of one who filled up his occupation as that of "machine fitter and local preacher". In many cases a portly dame with a certain amount of pride dancing in her eye handed me her paper with 12 names, coupled with the remark "You'll not get many like that". The same feeling is shown in another way by the disappointed tone of those who are informed that their married sons and daughters who are living in St. Helens, Liverpool, etc., have not to go down on their paper. They seemed shorn of their glory. Others said "There's only two of us", i.e., the father and mother, the family being hither and thither. In one house the ages of three inmates made up a total of 224 years.

Your readers will be interested to know which was the most fruitful case of mistake in the papers as a whole. This was the little square for the number of rooms less than five. Nearly every other house with four rooms was described as only having two, and when this was pointed out each explained in turn that they thought it meant bedrooms only. One or two determined to remove all doubt described it as having two places below and two places above, whilst another wrote "four rooms and a yard".

Column 7; 8, 9 referring to whether they were employer employed or working on own account were posers to a goodly number. Many filled in that of 7 with their employers' name, many young lodgers were described as working on their account. Others did not mark column 8 because out of employment at present. Wives and mothers were also freely described as working on their own account, evidently owning no master but themselves in managing the homestead. The explicit instructions about filling up profession or occupation with a definiteness seems to have been largely lost sight of and insufficient in description.

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“Labourer, being the greatest sinner”,

“bill operative”, making a good second, with “fitter” the last, besides a host of individual cases such as “case-maker”, “stud-maker”, which would bother the authorities at the census office.

Finally, the legal phrases “witness my hand”, led a goodly number to secure a witness to their signature. This was particularly the case in one street as if there had been a district council. Having been an enumerator at the previous census, I must say there is a general improvement in the filling up of the papers, only one being really illegible, and that not through ignorance, but in consequence of the writer being full of liquid not drawn from Belmont or the reservoirs. In fact a certain amount of self-respect was felt to be involved in the papers being filled up creditably. Only one paper was handed in blank through indifference, and one other through confessed inability of the household to understand it; even the man who vowed he would not did fill it up. One tribute is due to the householders of my district for the

**Courtesy and general good nature**

shown on the day of collection. It considerably enlightened the otherwise laborious task. Great care had been taken in most places where they had gone out to leave them with a neighbour. But I must stop or I shall not have finished copying the particulars in the big book in time, and there will be trouble then with the Registrar.