

THE THIRD VOLUME
—OF—
THE CENSUS OF 1881
—AND—
ITS CRITICS.
—

The third volume of the Census of 1881, which contains the result of the laborious and intricate inquest on the material conditions of Canada, is the subject of attacks from some newspapers. I have thought it my duty, both in the public interest and in justice to the officers connected with the work, especially the Chief Compiler, Mr. Layton, who have to my knowledge, honestly, diligently and intelligently accomplished their arduous task, to show the fallacies and the unfairness of these attacks.

It should not be necessary, but, it seems, nevertheless, opportuno to remark that absolute accuracy is never to be expected from such a labour as a census, no matter when, no matter where, and no matter by whom it is executed. It is a false notion to compare the operation of such inquiries to the work of book-keeping and of balancing commercial or financial accounts. To impugn the results of a census and question its immense usefulness, because errors of details are detected in it, is just as absurd and mischievous as would be an assault on the whole machinery of postal or customs service, because a certain number of letters get astray and certain inaccuracies are found in reports. Nothing human is unfailing, and errors will occur do what you may to guard against them: the more or less perfection is the more or less avoidance of such occurrences.

Men at all acquainted with the subject will not take notice of such errors, apparent or real, unless they materially affect the general results of the investigation; they know that when the returns give 32,350,269 bushels of wheat it means about 32,000,000, and that such errors or inaccuracies of details, whether they are of enumeration, of compilation, of posting or printing, some being overrating and others of under-rating, generally balance each other: the only question is to see if they are not such as to notably influence the grand result and its proportionate deductions.

With these few preliminary remarks, I shall at once take up the points which have been made the subject of the attacks I propose examining.