PART III.—POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY AND STATISTICS.

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Population.

The population of the English colonies in North America was at no time definitely ascertained. In his *History of the Constitution,* Mr G. T. Curtis presents a table showing the estimated numbers in the several States as that used by the “Federal Convention” of 1787. By this the aggregate population is put at 2,781,000. By the first census of the United States, however, taken in 1790, the population was ascertained to be then 3,929,214. The second census, in 1800, showed a population of 5,308,483 ; and the third, that of 1810, showed another prodigious advance, the register reading 7,239,881. An important prediction in the history of population is that of Elkanah Watson, of New York, who in 1815 under­took to project the population of the United States from 1820 to 1900. The following are his figures for the period 1820 to 1850 (Table I.), in comparison with the actual results of the successive enumerations :—

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1820. | 1830. | 1840. | 1850. |
| Watson | 9,625,734 | 12,833,645 | 17,116,526 | 23,185,368 |
| The census | 9,633,822 | 12,866,020 | 17,069,453 | 23,191,876 |
| Watson’s error | -8,088 | -32,375 | +47,073 | -6,508 |

No similar series of statistical predictions ever attained such a degree of verification, or commanded equal interest or admiration. But quite as remarkable as the fulfilments of the earlier estimates have been the failures in the later ones, as shown by the corre­sponding figures for 1860 to 1900 (Table IL):—

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1860. | 1870. | 1880. | 1890. | 1900 |
| Watson | 31,753,824 | 42,328,432 | 56,450,241 | 77,266,989 | 100,355,985 |
| Census | 31,443,321 | 38,558,371 | 50,155,783 |  |  |
| Watson's error. | +310,503 | +3,770,061 | +6,294,458 |  |  |

Watson’s estimates came so true during the earlier decades be­cause of the remarkable steadiness of the conditions then controlling population. In 1790 there were about 600,000 white families in the United States. Speaking broadly, there were few very rich, and, except from the effects of intemperance or the premature death of the breadwinner, there were few very poor. Food was abundant. Both social traditions and the religious beliefs of the people en­couraged fecundity. The country enjoyed domestic tranquillity. All this while, too, the land was but partially settled. Mechanical labour was scarce, and even upon the farm it was difficult to com­mand hired service, almost the only farm labourers down to 1850, in the north, being young men who went out to work for a few years to get a little ready money to marry upon. The conditions recited are such as would allow population to expand without re­striction. The change that was inevitable came between 1840 and 1850. That the reduction in the birth-rate coincided with a cause which was regarded as certain to quicken the increase of population, namely, the introduction of a vast body of fresh peasant blood from Europe, affords another instance in proof that, even in this matter of population, moral are far more potent than physical causes.

The accessions between 1840 and 1850 from Ireland and Germany were enormous, the total immigration rising to 1,713,251 against 599,125 during the decade preceding, and against only 143,439 from 1820 to 1830. And these people came in condition to breed with unprecedented rapidity, under the stimulus of an abundance, in regard to food, shelter, and clothing, such as the most fortunate of them had never known. Yet, in spite of these accessions, the population of the country realized a slightly smaller proportion of gain than when the foreign arrivals were almost insignificant.

The change which produced this falling off from the traditional rate of increase, namely, about 3 per cent. per annum, was that from the simplicity of the early times to comparative luxury, involving a rise in the standard of living, the multiplication of artificial neces­sities, the extension of a paid domestic service, the introduction of women into factory labour. For a time the retardation of the normal rate of increase among the native population was concealed from view by the extraordinary immigration. During the decade 1850 to 1860 the foreign arrivals rose to the enormous total of 2,579,580, till it came about that almost one-seventh of the popula­tion of the country consisted of persons born abroad. And among this class no influence was yet exerted in restriction of population. Yet in spite of the arrival of 4,292,831 foreigners between 1840 and 1860, of whom 3,500,000 survived at the latter date, having had three (perhaps four) million children born to them on the soil, the census returns of 1860 showed a falling off from Watson’s predic­tion of 310,503. At the time that prediction was made (1815) the arrivals at ports of the United States had averaged about 5000 per annum. Had the reinforcement from the outside been enhanced

only proportionally to the increase within, the figures for 1860 would have found Watson’s estimate wrong by several millions.

The ten years from 1860 to 1870 witnessed the introduction of a new force operating to bring down the rate of national increase, namely, the war of secession. The superintendent of the ninth census, 1870, presented a computation of the effects of this cause,— first, through direct losses, by wounds or disease, either in actual service of the army or navy, or in a brief term following discharge ; secondly, through the retardation of the rate of increase in the coloured element, due to the privations, exposures, and excesses attendant upon emancipation ; thirdly, through the check given to immigration by the existence of war, the fear of conscription, and the apprehension abroad of results prejudicial to the national welfare. The aggregate effect of all these causes was estimated as a loss to the population of 1870 of 1,765,000. Finally, the tem­porary reduction of the birth-rate, consequent upon the withdrawal of perhaps one-fourth of the natural militia (males of 18 to 44 years) during two-fifths of the decade, may be estimated at perhaps three- quarters of a million. From these computations it would appear that, had the war of 1861-65 not broken out, the population of 1870 would still, in spite of accessions from abroad and of the quickened fecundity of the newly arrived elements, have shown a large de­ficiency from the numbers estimated by Watson.

The tenth census put it beyond doubt that economic and social forces had been at work, reducing the rate of multiplication. The ascertained population of 1880 was 50,155,783, against the estimated 56,450,241. Yet no war had intervened; the industries of the land had flourished ; the advance in accumulated wealth had been beyond all precedent ; immigration had increased to 2,944,695 for the decade. It is hazardous to speak of the future ; but the most reasonable computation which can at present be made fixes the population of 1900 at about eighty millions, or twenty millions less than the estimate of Watson.

The achievement of independence found the people of the United States owning the entire country between the Gulf and the Great Lakes, excepting only Florida, as far to the west as the Mississippi ; but the actual settlements were, with a few minor exceptions, con­fined to a narrow strip of territory along the Atlantic shore. The depth of settlement, from the coast inland, varied greatly, ranging from what would be involved in the mere occupation of the shore for fishing purposes to a body of agricultural occupation extending back to the base of the great Atlantic chain.

If we trace the western boundary of the body of continuous settlement at that time, we find, beginning at the north-east, sparse settlements extending along the entire seaboard to the New Hampshire line. The southern two-thirds of New Hampshire and nearly all Vermont were thinly covered by population. Reaching New York, the line of population branched off from the Hudson, north of the Mohawk, the westward tide flowing through a broad gap between the Adirondacks and the Catskills, which constitutes the northernmost of four main paths along which migration has historically taken place. Spreading over central New York, population had already covered the valley of the Mohawk and the region of the interior lakes. In Pennsylvania population had spread north-westward, occupying not only the Atlantic plain but also, with sparse settlements, the region traversed by the numerous parallel ridges of the eastern portion of the Appalachians. We omit, for the moment, consideration of the settlements around the junction of the Allegheny and the Monongahela rivers, represent­ing an overflow through the second of the four great channels of population,—that, namely, which crosses southern Pennsylvania, western Maryland, and northern Virginia, parallel to and along the course of the upper Potomac. Omitting then this, which we may term the Pittsburgh group, we find, in Virginia, that sparse settle­ments had in 1790 extended westward beyond the Blue Ridge, and into what is now West Virginia, on the western slope of the Alle­ghany Mountains, while another narrow tongue of population had penetrated south-westwards, down to the head of the Tennessee river, in the great Appalachian valley, having found out the third of the four main channels alluded to. In New Carolina settlement was still limited by the base of the Appalachians. Georgia was as yet, owing to the presence of Indian tribes, only occupied to the depth of about two counties along the Savannah river. The re­servations of the Red Men still prevented population from moving westward along the fourth of the great natural paths alluded to,— namely, that around the southern end of the Appalachian chain.

In the preceding rapid survey of the new nation four groups have been omitted,—the first, the Pittsburgh group, in south­western Pennsylvania ; the second, the smallest, in West Virginia, upon the Ohio and Kanawha rivers ; the third, and by far the largest, in northern Kentucky, upon the Ohio river, comprising about 11,000 square miles ; and. the fourth upon the Cumberland river, in Tennessee. The existence of these outlying groups of