

La Population Française: Histoire de la Population avant 1789 et Démographie de la France comparée a celle des autres nations au XIX^e siècle, précédée d'une Introduction sur la Statistique. Par E. LEVASSEUR. Tome I. Paris, Arthur Rousseau, 1889. — Large octavo, 468 pp.

The distinguished French statistician has combined in this book the results of his profound researches in history and his thorough knowledge of statistics. It may fairly be said to be exhaustive of the subject, and it will at once occupy the position of the authoritative work on the population of France. It differs from similar works for other countries, in being not a mere compilation or handbook of statistics, but a complete body of demographical facts, illumined by all the light which history and science can throw upon them. French lucidity displays itself in most attractive form, while in exhaustiveness the book is almost German. In the second volume, the author proposes to study "*Les lois de la population et l'équilibre des nations.*" This will doubtless be a valuable contribution to political and social science.

The greater part of the first volume is taken up with the history of the population of France from the earliest times to the present. It divides itself into three periods, of which the first (primitive) has left us no knowledge of the population, the second (mediæval) yields only inexact statements, while the third (contemporaneous) alone gives real, statistical (census) data. It would be presumptuous to criticize the elaborate array of historical facts from which M. Levasseur attempts to conjecture the number and condition of the French people during the early and mediæval periods. None but a special student of the history of the middle ages could do that. But it is extremely interesting to the statistical student to see by what ingenious expedients isolated historical facts are made to yield some indication of the number of the population. For instance, the basis for an estimate of the population of Gaul at the time of Cæsar is found in the mention of one hundred tribes numbering from fifty to one hundred thousand people each. M. Levasseur conjectures 6,700,000 as a probable number for that period. During the next eight hundred years, history speaks constantly of wars and devastations of the land; so that the population probably decreased. We find a confirmation of this conjecture in a calculation based on a record of the number of people on one of the great demesne estates. The ratio of people to territory in this case, if extended to the whole kingdom, gives a population of 5,284,000 on the present territory of France at the time of Charlemagne. The following centuries were prosperous, and in 1328 we have a record showing the number of hearths. From this, allowing four persons to the family, we get a population of 19,300,000; or, allowing four and a half, a population of 21,712,000 for all France. Then followed the Black Death, carrying off one-third of the population, according to the more reasonable authorities, and the Hundred Years' War; so that the population decreased. After the conclusion of that war, population recovered; and at the beginning of the sixteenth century we have contemporary authors with enough scientific interest to make estimates of the number of inhabitants. These estimates vary, however, from thirteen to twenty millions, — a fact which shows how little knowledge there was on the subject. The wars of Louis XIV and the expulsion of the Protestants again caused such a decrease as to excite alarm, and in 1697 the government ordered the intendants of the provinces to ascertain the number of inhabitants in their divisions. This first official estimate, although far from being exact, makes it probable that the population of France in 1700 was a round twenty millions. During the eighteenth century we have a great variety of estimates, the best of which places the population, on the eve of the Revolution, at twenty-six millions. Beginning with 1801, an official census has been taken every five years. The whole investigation forms an exceedingly

interesting social history of France, and is additionally instructive in showing how the skill of the statistician comes to the aid of historical erudition in the attempt to construct a picture of past social conditions.

Of greater interest to the general reader is the first part of the book, the *Introduction sur la Statistique*. It is extremely moderate in tone, the author not claiming for statistics even the name of a science, except for that part dealing with population, which he desires to call "*démographie*." At the same time it contains capital observations on the purpose of statistical inquiry, the value of the results, statistical method and graphic illustrations, with a concise history of statistics. I commend it to those who desire an intelligible and lucid statement of the scientific criteria by which we are to direct statistical inquiry and measure the value of the results. It will temper the zeal of those over-ardent statisticians who stand ready to take the statistics of anything, from the morality of a community down to the condition of its city sewers; while it will perhaps open the eyes of those scoffers who assert that as good statistics can be obtained for one side of any question as for the other. Statistical inquiry is a method of scientific investigation adapted to certain purposes. To apply the method to unsuitable purposes is as absurd as to call in the jeweller to mend your iron gate, or to send your watch to the blacksmith for repair. The true value of statistics will appear only when we comprehend their limitations.

M. Levasseur points out how necessary it is to arrange inquiries so as not to excite the passions or offend the prejudices of the people from whom information is desired. So late as 1841 there were riots in the city of Toulouse on the taking of the census, the report having got abroad that it was to be used for fiscal purposes. In France, questions in regard to religious belief are apt to arouse sectarian passions, where the old religious differences have not yet been forgotten. Again, a census may easily be led into inquiries which are not worth the expense of making; as for instance in regard to the color of the hair and eyes, which, although sometimes of ethnological interest, is generally valueless on account of the uncertainty of the classification and the mixture of races. Again, some statistical facts are so purely administrative in character that they gather themselves, so to speak; as the convictions for crime, or the imports and exports. Others are not administrative, but can easily be gathered by administrative officers, such as births, deaths and marriages. Still others are neither administrative nor readily gathered by administrative officers, as special facts in regard to agriculture, factories, wages, indebtedness. It is much easier to bring the results of the first two classes to some degree of perfection than those of the last, and the statistics of the former are correspondingly more trustworthy. Finally, M. Levasseur points out how by skilful arrangement and com-

**bination a few inquiries may lead to a great variety of information.
These few illustrations will suffice to show the knowledge and acumen of
the author.**

R. M. S.

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