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La Théorie de l'Homme Moyen: Essai Sur Quetelet et la Statistique Morale by Maurice Halbwachs

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REVIEWS OF STATISTICAL AND ECONOMIC BOOKS.

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1.—*La théorie de l'homme moyen : essai sur Quetelet et la statistique morale*. Par Maurice Halbwachs. 180 pp., 8vo. Paris: Félix Alcan. 1913. Price 2 fr. 50 c.

In this small volume M. Halbwachs has undertaken a critical study of Quetelet's conception of the "Mean Man"—a mean more or less unalterable, and representing an ideal type from which deviations may be regarded as accidental. The criticisms to be made depend naturally, in part at least, on the field in which the conception is applied: the author deals therefore in the first place with the physical characters typified by stature, next with such physical phenomena as natality and mortality, and finally with "l'homme moyen moral" and Quetelet's discussion of the data respecting marriages, crimes and suicides, summarising his conclusions at the end of the volume.

The fact, argues M. Halbwachs, that the frequencies of a physical character on either side of the mean decrease according to a regular law "peut être l'expression du fait que les modes de conformation des organes, dans l'espèce, et que leurs habitudes, se groupent régulièrement autour d'une moyenne, mais cela ne préjuge pas du tout des causes de cette répartition. Loin d'invoquer le hasard et le désordre, pourquoi ne point y reconnaître une loi de l'espèce, dont les membres ne sont certainement pas indépendants les uns des autres, qui peut être ne peut subsister . . . dans des conditions physiques et sociales définies, que parce qu'elle comprenait en même temps . . . des types individuels opposés, et en nombre tel de chaque côté de la moyenne qu'ils s'équilibrent?" Why, he asks, should we conceive the species as a type from which the individuals only deviate by accident (pp. 60-61)? Further, the causes that lead to deviations from the mean cannot all be termed accidental causes. Mortality, for example, conditions the formation of the frequency distribution of statures of adults, and mortality is a definite factor that can be influenced by social action. The distribution is also affected by the free intermarriage of persons of different statures and while this

introduces "an apparent disorder," it also introduces another factor that depends on a definite social organisation. If we turn to such phenomena as natality and mortality, we again find great scope for the action of definite causes and for the influence of the social organisation: constant social causes intervene, and their influence explains the regularities observed (p. 99). When we pass further to moral phenomena, such as crimes, the influence of the environment is of more importance still. Crime does not result solely, nor perhaps principally, from physiological causes, as Quetelet himself recognised. The constancy of the criminality in a given society depends on the constancy of the conditions in that society. Quetelet further held that the mean represented the best, the ideal: but there seems no reason for conceding this. Societies evolve, and may be resolved into groups which themselves evolve. There is a perpetual effort to reach adaptation, and the mean at any time is not necessarily an ideal.

This is, of course, a very inadequate summary of the arguments put forward by M. Halbwachs, and the reader who is interested should study the original carefully. With the general conclusions that the mean cannot be held to be fixed, that it is to a greater or less degree a function of the environment (including the social organisation), and that it is by no means necessarily the ideal, most readers would now be in agreement with the author. Some of his arguments are, however, difficult to follow and a few statements rather difficult to accept. To assimilate the frequency distributions of organic characters to chance distributions is not necessarily equivalent, for example, to asserting that the elements from which the characters result are absolutely independent of one another: the elements may be more or less interdependent, as Edgeworth has shown, without destroying the form of the normal law. Again, is it *sufficient* to say, as Mr. Halbwachs argues, if we rightly understand him, that the constancy, *e.g.*, of the suicide rate is evidence chiefly of the constancy of the social environment? Surely this can only account in a rough and general way for the constancy of the mean rate: the magnitude of the deviations from year to year, given constant population and a fixed environment, are matters that must be considered in the light of the theory of probabilities and with which that theory is adequate to deal. And the same remark applies in other cases: constancy of the environment, social organisation, &c., is necessary to account for the absence of any secular movement in the mean, but the theory of probability is necessary to indicate the limits of casual fluctuations. G.U.Y.

2.—*Income taxation—methods and results in various countries.* By Kossuth Kent Kennan. 350 pp., 8vo. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Burdick and Allen, 1910. London: P. S. King and Son. Price \$3.50.

This valuable work made a timely appearance just at the beginning of that revival of interest in income taxation which is now fully manifest in the United States. Negligible as a contribution to economic theory or abstract speculation, it aims at presenting a