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Napier Tercentenary Memorial Volume by C. G. Knott

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REVIEWS OF STATISTICAL AND ECONOMIC BOOKS.

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1.—*Napier Tercentenary Memorial Volume*. Edited by C. G. Knott. xi + 441 pp., 4to. London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1916. Price 21s. net.

This handsome book is valuable, not merely as a record of the celebration of the Napier Tercentenary at Edinburgh shortly before the outbreak of the war, but also as a collection of papers, written by the highest authorities, on many topics connected with Napier and methods of calculation. For three centuries, logarithms have been an essential aid to calculation; the time is coming when calculating machines may take their place in certain types of computations. But calculating machines are necessarily expensive, and for many years to come the ordinary mathematician or statistician will, it may be supposed, find it necessary to use logarithms. How was the great discovery made? Lord Moulton's masterly inaugural address answers this question. The answer is not what the modern mathematician familiar with algebra would naturally suppose. Lord Moulton, judging by the great experience of inventions which he obtained from his practice as a patent lawyer, says that pioneer

inventions are rarely made in the way in which we should have supposed they had been ; and traces out the three stages in Napier's discovery in a most fascinating way. The Congress were most fortunate in having an inaugural address of such very high merit.

The remaining papers are of a miscellaneous character—biographical, topographical, historical, and mathematical. All are interesting.

Napier's life, so far as it is known, was strangely unlike that of the modern mathematician. He was suspected of dealings with the black art ; he did, in fact, make a strange contract with an outlaw about the finding of hidden treasure ; like Newton he wrote a book on Revelation. His friendship with Briggs was a charming episode, and Professor Gibson still shows that it was Napier and not Briggs who made the important improvement of taking 0 as the logarithm of 1.

Want of space forbids an account, or even a list of the different papers. Statisticians will be interested by M. Quiquet's paper on Dr. Goldziher's criterion to test the applicability of the Gompertz-Makeham Law, and by Dr. Sheppard's paper on the extension of accuracy of Mathematical Tables by the Improvement of Differences. Archæologists will read Mr. George Smith's paper on Merchiston Castle. Historians of mathematics will learn from Lieutenant Salih Mourad's paper how logarithms were introduced into Turkey ; and will derive profit from the papers by Professor Vacca and others dealing with the history of logarithms. Other papers are for the pure mathematician ; even crystallographers are not overlooked. The celebration was a great success : this permanent record of it demonstrates the greatness of Napier, who will for ever be one of the glories of Scotland.

C.P.S.

2.—*Les Bases Théoriques de la Statistique Agricole Internationale*. By Umberto Ricci. 314 pp., 8vo. Rome : Imprimerie de l'Institut d'Agriculture. 8vo. 1915. Price 5 francs.

The author, who is " chef du service de la Statistique Générale " at the International Institute at Rome, deals comprehensively with the difficulties of putting together the data furnished by the various countries of the world. The first part of the book deals with the more obvious difficulties such as varying weights and measures, the varying exactitude of the estimates of areas under cultivation and of production in different countries. In chapter xiv, he sums up the principal requirements for systems of statistics which would, if universally adopted, best enable the Institute to deal with world figures. Areas, for instances, should exclude the space occupied by ditches, roads, canals, &c. The nomenclature of crops should be clear and detailed—distinguishing, for instance, between spring wheat and winter wheat, &c.

The second part of the volume is mainly concerned with the difficulties of putting together the estimates of crop yields antecedent to the harvests. The author very rightly argues that the mere fact that such figures are estimates only, is no reason why they should