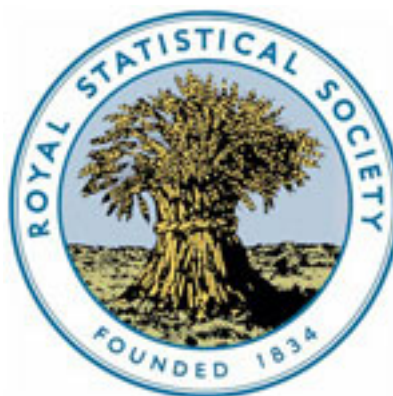


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Démographie, Salaires, Corporations et Syndicats, Assistance, Mutualité, Épargne, Prévoyance,
Impôts by Edmond Michel

Review by: A. D. W.

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6.—*Études statistiques, économiques, sociales, financières et agricoles. Les Habitants. Démographie, salaires, corporations et syndicats, assistance, mutualité, épargne, prévoyance, impôts.* Par Edmond Michel. viii + 480 pp., 8vo. Paris et Nancy : Berger-Levrault et Cie., 1910. Price 13 frs.

Monographs on small communities within a large State are becoming common. They are extremely valuable in the wealth of first-hand knowledge which they contain, and, within proper limits, in the light they throw on the life and activities of the whole State. The present volume, in which M. Michel describes the canton and town of Bayeux, in Normandy, its communal life, organisation, and activity, partakes of this character. Bayeux is taken as a typical French canton possessing an intense and personal local life. The writer, however, does not confine himself to the canton, but frequently discusses questions and examines facts from the national point of view. The canton appears to be often used as a particular illustration of general or national conditions. The volume is the second of three statistical studies. The first, not yet published, deals with the topography, geology, manners and customs, and social classes of a "canton-type," presumably Bayeux; the third, dealing with property and wealth, was reviewed in the *Journal* in March, 1909 (vol. lxxii, p. 137). In the volume under notice the following groups of subjects are dealt with: (i) the demography of Bayeux and incidentally of France; (ii) wages, cost of living, unions and corporations in Bayeux; (iii) public assistance, mutual help, and savings banks; and (iv) taxation. It is impossible in a brief review to follow M. Michel in detail, and we therefore content ourselves with noticing one or two of the general questions which are discussed.

Like other French writers who deal with the demographical facts of France, M. Michel laments the low birth-rate and almost stationary population which characterise his country. He is satisfied that the causes are, in general, moral and economic rather than physiological. The transformation of industry and commerce in recent times has divorced labour from the soil and concentrated it in huge towns. Independence, of a sort, and class solidarity have replaced the old practical serfdom on the land. On the part of women there is an increasing aversion to the "servitude of maternity," and a desire for "woman's rights," or, as the author puts it, a growth of "feminism." The result of these and other causes which he mentions is a decreased birth-rate. The vanishing excess of births over deaths in France is doubtless serious, yet the restriction of births, so far as the causes thereof are to be found in aspirations towards a more comfortable and independent life on the part of women and the working classes generally, cannot be unreservedly condemned.

M. Michel refers to a "League for depopulation" which has invaded Bayeux and exhorted the people to have few children, and quotes this placard:—

"Dieu (?) bénit
les nombreuses familles,
mais ne les nourrit pas.
Avons peu d'enfants."

M. Michel's anxiety for births is so great that, although on p. 3 he refers to the "alarming" growth of irregular alliances, on pp. 128, 129 he appears to condone illegitimacy, and even to declare an unmarried mother preferable to a sterile wife.

Calvados, the department in which Bayeux is situated, ranks unenviably high in the scale of illegitimate birth-rates. This is partly attributed to alcoholism, which is also made jointly responsible with other causes for the low birth-rate in this region. The particular table of figures on p. 127, used to illustrate the relationship of alcoholism and illegitimacy, does not, however, confirm the theory. The correlation between consumption of alcohol and the ratio of illegitimates per 1,000 births is insignificant and negative—that is, so far as it goes, it means that illegitimacy tends to decrease, and not to increase, as consumption of alcohol increases. There is, in fact, high alcoholism in this particular region and high illegitimacy, but this may be a coincidence.

M. Michel is a strong individualist. He believes in association or union of labour in order to maximise its power, but also to secure to each worker the greatest possible share of "individual rights," and to prevent him becoming a victim of State collectivism. He will, therefore, have nothing to do with socialism. He appears, however, to give too much weight to the disruptive tendencies of socialism in its more violent forms, as well as of "feminism" as indicated earlier, and too little, if any, to their more or less evolutionary character, and the part they seem destined to play in modifying the existing organisation of society.

Although we have dealt with some of the general questions discussed in this book, rather than with the descriptive material of which it is full, the reader must not forget the latter, or think it is overweighted by the former. Every section contains much that is interesting and valuable, and the whole work bears evidence of painstaking research. The student of economic history will find considerable information concerning the old trade corporations or guilds existing in Bayeux before the Revolution of 1789, and something of wages and prices in those times. The social worker will learn much respecting existing corporations and associations, present wages and cost of living, illustrated by working-class budgets, and the institutions for public assistance and mutual help. Finally, the student of finance will find in the last section a synoptical account of the taxes imposed before the Revolution, as well as a description of existing financial arrangements. While depicting things as he found them, M. Michel never hesitates to point out where and how they might be improved.

There are a few minor faults in the book which might be remedied in any later edition. On pp. 4, 54, and 58 the term "démographie statistique et dynamique" is used. "Statistique" should doubtless read "statique." Many of the diagrams and tables are apparently reproductions of the original manuscript, and are not very clear. It would have been much better to have had them printed in the ordinary way.

A.D.W.