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Books of Special Interest

Revolution

SECRET SOCIETIES AND SUBVERSIVE
MOVEMENTS. By NESTA H. WEB-
STER. New York: E. B. Dutton & Co.
1924. \$7.00.

Reviewed by WILBUR C. ABBOTT
Harvard University

THERE is no person now engaged in writing history concerning whose work there is such sharp divergence of opinion as there is in regard to that of Mrs. Webster. Since the appearance of her first volume on the Chevalier de Boufflers and the French Revolution, continued with her study of World Revolution, she has been the object of more praise and of much more attack than almost any one since Macaulay. That circumstance is due alike to her choice of subject, her point of view, and her method of approach. Revolution is always an extraordinarily difficult topic for historical treatment. Its passions long outlive its events, the schools of thought and practice which produce or are produced by it are peculiarly vigorous, even at times virulent, in their expression; and the literary results of study in that field are too often the victims of the same passions which gave rise to the movements which they chronicle. It is not without truth that the publisher who warned Mrs. Webster of the probable result of her labors observed to her, "Remember that if you take an anti-revolutionary line you will have the whole literary world against you."

There is, she has discovered, much in that observation, though to the anathemas of the *littérateurs* may be added the animadversions of a good many historians. These latter, indeed, however much they may be unconsciously inspired by their political opinions, are based rather on what they are apt to regard as overstressing her point of view than on mere objection to an anti-revolutionary thesis. It is to be feared that many who have most bitterly denounced her have done so not as historical experts but as "advanced" thinkers who, tolerably ignorant of the subject of which she treats, are prepossessed toward revolution of whatever kind, under the curious impression that revolution is somehow a good thing, and a constructive force. Yet it is probable that the greatest opposition she has aroused has come from those who resent the idea that revolutionary movements arise from organizations opposed to the existing order, in particular from those on which she lays the chief onus of revolutionary movements, the Freemasons, with their offshoot the Illuminati, and the Jewish Cabalists. And it is not without significance that she puts in the forefront of her present study a quotation from Disraeli—to which she might well have added others of even greater significance—to prove the existence and importance of the secret societies, and the relation of the subversive movements to these elements—to which, it is fair to say, he was openly opposed.

In particular what Mrs. Webster has done is to bring to light the doctrines and the activities of Weisshaupt and his school, which were long overlaid and concealed by the revolutionary oratory which confined itself to noble sentiments and was judiciously silent as to the means by which the power of their party was recruited and exercised. It is perfectly natural that as she has become more and more involved and interested in her thesis she has, without doubt, overemphasized certain aspects of the movement with which she is concerned. There was more in the French Revolution and its successors during the nineteenth century than Orleanist conspiracy and secret societies. They were not wholly due to a combination of Jews and Freemasons. Yet no one who is at all conversant with their history is

ignorant of the fact that secret societies played a great part in these developments, however little attention has been paid to them in "formal" history. Entirely apart from Mrs. Webster's work there is considerable literature on the subject; and one need go no farther than Trotsky's account of the origin of the soviets in his essays on working class and international revolution as translated by Olgin to perceive that the secret society was so recently an active agent of revolution. The animus does not lie against Mrs. Webster's work on that ground, but on the ground that she has identified it so closely with race and organization, that she is frankly anti-revolutionary, and no less frankly anti-Jewish-revolutionary. She believes, and she does not hesitate to say, that there have been, and still are, "forces which for centuries have been deliberately gathering strength for an onslaught on Christianity and on all social and moral order," in the words of her publisher. Naturally she has produced explosive material, and naturally there has been an explosion, indeed a succession of them. And if one may not accept her explanation of the French Revolution entire, or admit all her interpretation of succeeding events, it will not be possible for the future, to ignore the material which she has collected nor write history of revolution as once was done in the mere light of "spontaneous combustion".

Data of Education

EDUCATIONAL STATISTICS. By C. W. ODELL. New York: The Century Co. 1925.

Reviewed by MARION C. TRABUE
University of North Carolina

TECHNICAL books in a professional field are seldom of sufficient general interest to attract the attention of lay readers. To say that Odell's new volume is an exception might be an exaggeration, but the book deserves attention from all who are interested in the development of better educational work, and it should be kept constantly on the work-shelf of those who are directly engaged in the improvement of instruction.

Modern education is surprisingly different from the process which was called education a half century ago, and the most significant changes have taken place during the past twenty-five years. It is doubtful whether any other movement has ever had such far-reaching influence on the methods and devices of instruction as the movement toward precise statistical measurements has recently begun to exert. To determine the relative values of two methods of instruction or of two instructors by obtaining the personal opinions of those who observe them at work is no longer acceptable. The teaching method which can be shown to produce the greatest and most desirable changes in the pupils is now coming to be recognized promptly as best. Objective measurements of results and statistical interpretations of these measurements are being used in determining the relative worth of every phase of educational procedure.

Odell's book does not contribute new and original statistical methods but it brings together in one convenient volume which can be readily consulted and understood as the essential statistical processes that have proved most useful in the interpretation of educational data. Other writers have attempted to perform this same service, but no one of them has thus far been able to do it so well as this young research worker at the University of Illinois. Several brilliant statisticians have recently published books in this field, but their treatments of statistical processes lack the balance, the range, the clearness, and the scholarly outlook which characterize Odell's "Educational Statistics."

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