

Intellectual Activities in France.

Statistique intellectuelle de la France: tableaux relatifs à l'enseignement public, aux bibliothèques, aux spectacles, aux publications, préparés sous les auspices de l'Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle et de l'Institut de Statistique de l'Université de Paris. Par Tatiana Beresovski-Chestov. Année 1923-24. Pp. vii + 124. (Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France, 1926.) 35 francs.

USUALLY, if one wants to discover detailed and comprehensive statistics concerning all kinds of educational machinery from primary, secondary, technical, and art schools to libraries, and even theatres, they must be sought in many (and often elusive) publications. Here they appear in one volume—a recommendation in itself.

It would be easy, of course, to succumb to the usual temptation presented by such a volume, namely, to compare its figures with those available in Great Britain. That is, however, a temptation we shall resist for three reasons. First, it is very difficult to make trustworthy comparisons where various parts of the machinery and their several objectives do not exactly correspond to those in Britain. Secondly, considerations of space would force us to select only those parts of the machinery in which we are specially interested; and, lacking the exact correspondence already mentioned, we would merely confirm the haters of statistics in their sweeping assertion that figures can be made to prove anything. The third reason, however, is the most important. It is that the idea behind this volume is not merely the presentation of many figures which uncontrolled enthusiasts may use to show how much more should be done in the fields which interest them most, or which railers against taxes may use to show in what manner public money is wasted. Nor is it, in the slightest degree, a defence of administration. It is a definite recognition that departmental statistics afford no real evidence of the intellectual progress of a country.

Not yet is it sufficiently realised that education is a process by no means confined to the school. There are libraries and pictures; theatres and cinemas; churches and museums; books and companions: there are also thoughtless parents and heedless employers; and who will doubt the enormous influence of the Press? All these, and countless other important and often unnoticed influences, go to make up the forces which determine intellectual progress. Only when their inter-lacing and interdependent qualities become more

clearly perceived will the waste and sprawling disorder of the methods by which we try to advance become capable of scientific handling and direction.

To the question of how is this perception to be achieved, there are doubtless as many answers as there are difficulties to be overcome; and one of the many difficulties arises out of our inevitable drive towards specialisation—in education no less than in other fields. As the specialist becomes more immersed in his own developing activities, he often becomes less inclined to do more towards co-operation than to utter phrases of pious generalisation in public, while in private he is apt to become contemptuous of what he regards as intrusion. To criticise this attitude too severely is futile. It is, after all, quite comprehensible and is based upon a sound enthusiasm which is of vital importance to the swift destruction of the varied barriers against man's completer knowledge of his environment. Nevertheless, it must never be forgotten that specialisation achieves its highest value only by reason of its relationship to the great unity of knowledge which serves mankind.

In Great Britain the tendency to draw together activities in order to obviate lonely and superfluous endeavour has recently found practical expression—particularly in the direction of securing a clearing-house for all kinds of specialised information—in the formation of the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux. On the statistical side, it is in the category of such movements that we would place the present volume. It does not pretend to be so complete as might be desired. It is, indeed, frankly admitted that the lack of certain information makes the work fall short of the ideal which has inspired it. Its value, however, cannot be over-estimated, and we shall look forward to the next volume (1924-25) which is already promised. In the meantime we cannot do better than conclude by quoting a passage from the introduction:

“Une publication comme celle-ci fait comprendre à quel point nous sommes loin de donner au public les renseignements qui serviraient à évaluer la grandeur et la nature de la production française dans les sciences, les arts, les lettres et l'enseignement et en général l'importance de l'activité intellectuelle de la France. L'Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle a fait savoir qu'il demanderait à tous les États de bien vouloir examiner les moyens de multiplier les relevés statistiques relatifs à la vie intellectuelle, suivant un plan qu'il leur proposera. Il est certain que l'apparition simultanée de statistiques bien faites sur l'activité intellectuelle de chaque pays pourrait singulièrement servir au progrès général.”