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AS TO STATISTICS GENERALLY

The growth of life assurance within the recollection of the present generation is a circumstance to be reckoned in discussing statistics. Indeed, the recent development of insurance of all kinds has made, and is making, great demands upon statistical studies and conclusions. Statistics have been called the science of counting, but this definition is too narrow. An author, Mr. Bowley, thinks it may be rightly called the science of averages. But the definition given by Mr. W. I. King, M.A., declares it to be: "The method of judging collective, natural or social phenomena from the results obtained by the analysis of an enumeration or collection of estimates."

The growth of the science of accounting and the demand for uniform systems of accounts for all municipalities emphasizes the need of correct statistical methods. Again, numerous commissions have lately sprung into being, whose duties vary from the government of cities to the regulation or investigation of all private or governmental activity. The decrees of these commissions must rest largely upon statistical information. Every insurance company must base its rates upon computations derived through the study of large masses of data, and new statistics and new calculations must continually be made, for conditions of life are ever changing. An example of this is the novel subject of the insurance of working men against unemployment. It is truly said that "practical statesmen and men of affairs are not the only ones who find in statistics a most valuable ally. . . . The biologist thereby

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verifies the laws of variation and heredity. The economist seeks to establish laws of population, of wages, of prices, or to show the connection between financial crises and unemployment. The sociologist would demonstrate the relationship of sales of alcoholic liquor to crime, poverty, suicide." As one author puts it: The proper function of statistics, indeed, is to enlarge individual experience.

It is a common thing to find, even in these days, people distrustful or contemptuous of statistics. The writer recalls an instance where, calling upon a merchant in the province of Quebec not many years ago to ask for some trade figures for use in a compilation then being made, the merchant asked: "What good is it? Do I get any benefit?" The reply was that the benefit would be rather that of the community than of the individual. The opinion of the merchant was that such figures would be useless—"Mais, quelle sottise, c'est tout-à-fait inutile."

One class of people is disposed to think, when confronted with a mass of tables designed to prove so-and-so, that "figures will not lie"; another class, a little more learned, are prone to call all statistics tissues of falsehood. There are true and false statistics. An amusing example of failure to observe intelligently, appears in the book of a recent writer on Socialism, the main thesis of which is based on an erroneous table taken from a government report, the errors in the table being so glaring as to be at once evident to any one in the least familiar with statistical data.

The importance of accuracy in statistics is steadily becoming more apparent in many directions. In manufactures, in engineering, in commerce, in transportation, as well as in scientific pursuits, statistical information