

ANNOTATIONS

POPULATION PROBLEMS¹

FOR many years Professor Thompson's *POPULATION PROBLEMS* has been the leading textbook on demography. The reason, as those of us know who have used it in teaching, is that no other population text is so comprehensive and thorough. Based on the author's wide experience as Director of the Scripps Foundation for Research in Population Problems, it touches every aspect of the subject except the statistical techniques. It devotes most of its space to the American population, but also deals with human numbers throughout the world, especially in the Orient. The publication of a third edition, which brings the material up to date (though some 1940 data were still unavailable), represents therefore a major event in the diffusion of demographic knowledge.

In addition to bringing the 1935 edition up to date, the present volume introduces numerous changes of content. The discussion of factors in the declining birth rate, for example, has been considerably expanded. The treatment of the modern city, which formerly took four chapters, has been advantageously cut to less than half that length. The old chapter on migration has been expanded to two chapters, one on external and the other on internal migration. The old chapter on optimum population has been dropped, and a new one added on the economy of a stationary or declining population. Finally, a new section on the effects of war on population has been added. These changes, on the whole, have improved the book.

The point of view has been changed less than the content. Professor Thompson, after examining Malthusian and post-Malthusian doctrines, remains an eclectic skeptic with reference to population theory. He sees some value in most of the theories of population, but he himself makes no attempt to develop a complete theory. He thinks, indeed, that this

¹ Thompson, Warren S.: *POPULATION PROBLEMS*. New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 3rd edition, 1942, 471 pp. \$4.00.

cannot be done, on the ground that conditions vary too greatly. Yet he states his views with relation to population policy so definitely that one may perceive in the background an implicit theory of population—a theory which gives population a very important place in national and international affairs.

Devoting three chapters to population growth as related to agriculture, industry, and trade, the author holds the view that industry and commerce may advance more rapidly than a fast-growing population and thus constitute, for a time, a solution to the problem of numbers, but in the end fertility must be reduced or the nation will be driven to nationalistic expansion (by war if necessary). Similarly, in the three chapters on the birth rate he makes the point that the class differences in fertility will probably diminish in the future as the lower classes adopt birth control, but that the differential birth rate between nations may prove to be a growing problem. The nations which still have a high fertility, especially those of Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America, will probably reduce their death rates and thus experience, in the next few decades, a much faster growth than the countries of Western Europe, North America, and Australia. This, according to the author, will probably bring about additional wars, unless we cede to the expanding countries—notably Japan, Germany, and Italy—new territories. He admits, however, that this could be only a temporary solution, for within fifty years, if the world's population continues to grow at the present rate, the new territories will be filled up. Behind his Chamberlainesque point of view there lies an exceedingly complex but unexpressed theory of the relation of population changes to political institutions, a theory which, in the reviewer's opinion, he should explore more fully and consciously. Many students of population will agree with Professor Thompson on the demographic facts and humanitarian values, but not on the matter of policy, because their theory of the relation of population to politics differs from his.

Population research has gone ahead so fast in recent years that a staggering amount of factual material must be brought together in a book of this sort. It is not surprising that few individuals have lately written texts covering the entire population field. Though many specialists will disagree with various parts and with the general point of view of the book, Professor Thompson deserves credit for the challenging and comprehensive manner in which he has accomplished his task.

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