

result to spring from them? Had they been conducted under the influence of no useful general idea, our answer would indeed have to be in the negative. But if, as practice shows, they have been of use, if, in fact, they prove to be in many cases quite indispensable, we may ask, What is the idea, the abstract thought, which dominates them? I will give the answer at once and then fix the aspect with which the present chapter has to deal. It is the conception and doctrine of averages.

8.
General idea
underlying
enumera-
tion.

Although to the general reader nothing may seem to be simpler than a process of counting and of registration, the science of statistics, the systematic collection of large numbers, and the fixing of averages, is comparatively young: it dates from the beginning of the seventeenth century, when Sully in France, followed by Richelieu and Colbert, had organised what may be called the first statistical bureau.¹ It emanated from the same spirit which called into existence the Paris Academy of Sciences. Characteristically for the two other nations with which we are mainly concerned in this history, the

9.
Doctrine of
averages.

¹ M. Block (*loc. cit.*, p. 25) says: "En France Sully avait déjà organisé, vers 1602, un *cabinet complet de politique et de finances*, qui peut être considéré comme le premier bureau de statistique. Les rapports que Sully demandait embrassaient l'armée, la marine, les finances et un grand nombre de branches de l'administration, et le résultat de ses investigations se trouve exposé dans l'ouvrage qui a été souvent réimprimé sous le titre de 'Mémoires de Sully.' Richelieu et Colbert se sont également fait adresser des rapports, auxquels on a puisé, dans ces

derniers temps, bien des éléments utiles à l'histoire et que la statistique pourrait également utiliser." The Romans, who in antiquity may be regarded as the forerunners of the French in administrative ability and business-like conduct of State affairs, seem also to have developed an extensive system of registration. The question has been fully treated by the late Prof. Hildebrand of Jena in the 'Jahrbuch für Nationale Ökonomie und Statistik' (1866), in an article entitled "Die Amtliche Bevölkerungs-statistik im alten Rom."