

led to such interesting results, and which has furnished almost all the knowledge upon which a judicious regulation and government of society depends, was the work of Laplace, and was produced in an age and in a nation which seemed to have set at naught all ideas of order and method in human affairs, which defied all authority and all tradition, and trusted its fate to the most radical revolution which civilised society ever witnessed.¹

It is curious to read the criticism which the first Napoleon, that wayward child of the Revolution, passed on the author of the mechanics of the heavens and the theory of probability. Laplace, like so many other men of science, had been called by the Emperor to assist in the labours of administration, but, according to his judgment, proved himself a poor administrator, being unable

niz's 'Philosophische Schriften,' ed. Gerhardt, vol. i. p. 155), lectured about 1660 on subjects now comprised under the term "Statistics," and about the same time John Graunt of London published 'Natural and Political Annotations made upon the Bills of Mortality' (1666). Sir William Petty, one of the founders of the Royal Society, published in 1683 'Five Essays in Political Arithmetick.' The newly discovered calculus of probabilities induced mathematicians to take an interest in the subject, and to urge the desirability of gaining data for their calculations. Many of these turned upon questions of mortality and the ravages of diseases, such as the smallpox. But though undoubtedly the fact that during the French Revolution mathematicians for the first time had a great influence in administrative and governmental matters contributed enormously to the introduction of statistical methods, the great epoch

in this science is allied with the name of the Belgian Quetelet (1796-1874), of whom more later on.

¹ Cantor ('Historische Notizen über die Wahrscheinlichkeitsrechnung,' Halle, 1874, p. 6) says: "The tendency of thought which prepared the Revolution, and which is marked by an unsparing and destructive criticism of the conditions of society in state and family, could not dispense with an instrument which, more than any other, enables one to subject to general views the most different factors of civilisation. It belonged to the favourite ideas of that age, that the calculus of probabilities should be among the most important subjects of public instruction; for it was said to be the calculus of common-sense, through which alone the influence of hope, fear, and emotion on our judgment could be destroyed, and prejudice and superstition removed from the decisions of social life."