BOOK REVIEWS

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DONALD B. OWEN, *Handbook of Statistical Tables*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., Reading, Massachusetts, 1962. $12.75, £4.14.0. xii + 580 pp.

Review by E. S. PEARSON

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It is exactly 50 years since the publication of Karl Pearson's pioneer *Tables for Statisticians and Biometricians*, and the contrast between the problems faced by a table editor, then and now, is striking. In the early years of the century the difficulty was to find the human labour for hand computing and the funds required to support publication, so that starting in an almost virgin field the preparation of Pearson's volume was spread over some 15 years. In contrast, today's digital computer has made calculation so easy that tables of individual functions are being turned out almost indiscriminately, where and whenever there is free computer time. And so it happens that while in 1914, Pearson could just fill a volume by including all the tables which he and his collaborators had computed up to date, the present day editor of a book of general statistical tables is faced with an embarrassing problem of selection. As a result, his choice will inevitably be to some extent a personal one, depending partly on his own research interests and partly even on the particular rough and ready statistical techniques which he favours.

Dr. Owen's *Handbook* contains 114 tables or charts. While there would be considerable agreement among statisticians on the 20 or 30 most important functions to be tabled, it is clear that there would be far less agreement on the last 50 out of 100! There are a number of tables in this volume which the reviewer cannot imagine wanting to use, and others not included which he would like to use. His reaction, however, is not one of criticism, rather of gratitude because the compiler has brought so much together, sometimes carrying out pioneer computations and always it seems making a critical check on the accuracy of old figures.

The Preface states that the book is intended for three classes of reader: (a) "the student in statistics who needs some readily accessible tables to be used in conjunction with his courses in statistics; (b) the practicing statistician, quality control man, or industrial engineer who wants a set of tables from which he can obtain answers with a minimum of interpolation and other calculations; and (c) the research worker who will find in this collection many functions more extensively tabulated than ever before." The plan has been well fulfilled although it seems likely that the quality control man will need some guidance as to where