HISTORY OF FRENCH MATHEMATICS

Histoire de la Nation Française. Tome XIV, *Histoire des Sciences en France; première partie, Histoire des Mathématiques, de la Mécanique et de l'Astronomie.* Henri Andoyer and Pierre Humbert. Paris, 1924. xx+620 pp., of which 163 are devoted to the part under review.

This treatise is one of fifteen volumes on the history of the French nation from prehistoric times to the year 1920. The entire work is under the editorship of the distinguished scholar M. Gabriel Hanotaux of the Académie Française. This particular volume is edited by M. Émile Picard, a mathematician and general savant of very high rank, secrétaire perpétuel of the Académie des Sciences. The authors of the part devoted to the history of mathematics, mechanics, and astronomy are M. Andoyer, a member of the Académie des Sciences, and M. Pierre Humbert, professor in the university at Montpellier. Such personal mention is desirable as showing without argument the scholarly standing of those engaged in the work.

The dignity of the subject and the standing of those engaged in the undertaking are adequately paralleled by the dignity of the publication itself. Appearing in folio form, printed from type representing the modern trend toward a colorful page and release from eye strain, and upon paper of a dull finish, the book is reminiscent of the older format and the days of the best French presses.

As to the style in which the work is written there will naturally be various opinions, depending upon the bent of mind of the reader. The French are artists rather than mere mechanics, architects rather than mere structural engineers, poets rather than mere compilers of statistics. The work under review is frankly a work of literature as well as a scientific résumé; it has the charm that only the French language or the French training seems able to impart to a scientific study. Whether this is to be preferred to a lexiconic and laconic style is a matter that each reader must decide for himself. As for this reviewer, he envies it, and with an honest envy.

As to the scope and completeness of the work, it must not be expected that there can be adequately covered in 163 pages all the contributions made in more than a thousand years to the development of mathematics, mechanics, and astronomy in France. The entire volume would not suffice for this purpose if the aim were anything like completeness. What is set forth in essay form in the four chapters devoted to the subject may be summarized as follows:

Chapter I, from earliest time to Descartes,—only twenty-one pages, devoted chiefly to the middle ages and the renaissance.

Chapter II, pure mathematics from Descartes to Cauchy, with special attention to (1) the scientific academies and journals; (2) Descartes and