

VIII.—LABOUR, WAGES AND PRICES.

I.—LABOUR.

1.—Occupations of the People.

The occupations of the people of a country are at any given time mainly determined by its natural resources and the stage which has been reached in their development. The outstanding characteristics of Canada are its enormous extent, its immense natural resources and the comparatively slight development of these, only the southern portions of the country being as yet at all exploited. The developed areas fall into four economic units with quite distinct physical characteristics: first, the Maritime Provinces, where lands, forests, mines and fisheries are the chief natural resources; secondly, Ontario and Quebec, with lands, forests, mines and abundant water-power for manufacturing purposes; thirdly, the Prairie Provinces, where the land is the chief natural resource except in Alberta, which contains immense coal deposits; lastly, British Columbia, with fisheries, forests and mines, where agriculture plays a comparatively minor part. Though, when the country as a whole is considered, the immense fertile areas of arable land must be considered as its chief natural resource, in different parts of its vast expanse other resources predominate, and give the key to the chief occupations of the people.

In Canada, as in other new countries, the labouring population (using the term in its widest sense) bears a larger proportion to the total than is the case in older civilizations where there exists more realized wealth.

In addition to our native-born workers, great numbers of young males and smaller numbers of females, who have nothing to sell but their personal services, immigrate from older countries to Canada to find here a better market for their labour. Thus both the sex distribution and the age distribution of the population of Canada is rendered somewhat abnormal, an unusually large percentage of that population being of working age and of the male sex—that is, of the sex which is most generally gainfully employed.

These statements may be illustrated from the Canadian census of 1911. (See Table 1). In that year out of a total population 10 years old and over of 5,514,388 in the nine provinces, 2,723,634 were returned as gainfully employed, being 49·39 p.c. of such population, or 37·93 p.c. of 7,179,650, the total ascertained population of the nine provinces. Thus, three out of every eight persons in the Dominion were gainfully employed, or four out of every eight persons 10 years old and upwards.

Male Labour.—Considering the male population of 10 years old and upwards, it was found at the census of 1911 that no less than 79·54 p.c., or nearly four-fifths, were gainfully employed. Further, if we take out those under 15 as being more properly at school training for the future than gainfully employed in the present, and those over 65 as having earned the right to rest, we find that of the total male population between 15 and 65 no less than 92·73 p.c. was gainfully employed, a percentage which is increased to 96·28 p.c., if we consider only those in the main productive 40-year period between 25 and 64 years old inclusive. Thus, Canada is shown by its statistics to be emphatically, in so far as the males are concerned, a worker's country.