

VIII.—LABOUR AND WAGES.

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.¹

Information regarding the occupation of gainfully employed persons in Canada was obtained at the census of 1921 under the following heads:—(1) "Chief occupation or trade," defined as being the description which would most accurately indicate the particular kind of work done by which a living was earned; (2) Whether "employer," "employee," or "working on own account," these latter including "persons who are gainfully employed but who are neither employers nor employees," *i.e.*, independent workers who receive neither salary nor wages nor are subject to direction or control in their work; (3) In the case of employers, the name of the principal product; in the case of employees, where employed; in the case of workers on their own account, the nature of the work.

The Labour Force of Canada in 1921.—In 1921, out of a total population in the nine provinces of 6,671,721 (including 21,277 of unstated ages), 10 years old and over, 3,173,169 or 47·5 p.c. were gainfully employed, as compared with 2,723,634 or 49·4 p.c. in 1911, 43·9 p.c. in 1901 and 44·5 p.c. in 1891. How far the decline in the percentage of gainfully employed in 1921 as compared with 1911 is due to the lesser proportion of males to total population, how far to a later age at leaving school and how far to the rise of a leisured class in Canada is a matter which requires to be further investigated, but unquestionably the first two causes largely account for the phenomenon.

¹ On the sex distribution of the population, see pp. 96-98; on the age distribution, see pp. 103-104.