

Section 13.—Blind and Deaf-Mutes.

In the Census of 1931, as in previous censuses, particulars were obtained concerning the blind, the deaf-mutes and the blind deaf-mutes in Canada. Instructions to enumerators in 1931 were:

Blind.—Include as blind any person who cannot see to read the heading of this schedule at a distance of one foot, with or without the aid of glasses. The test in the case of children under ten years of age and for illiterate persons must be whether they can distinguish and recognize objects, such as an apple, at a distance of about two feet. *Do not include any person who is blind in one eye only.*

Deaf-Mutes.—Include as deaf-mutes any person who has been totally deaf from birth. In general persons who cannot hear nor talk.

The resulting information for 1931 is published by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics in the following bulletins of the Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Bulletin XLIII, dealing with the blind and blind deaf-mutes, and showing sex, age, age when vision was lost, literacy, conjugal condition, religion, racial origin, birthplace, cause of blindness, gainful occupation, etc.; Bulletin XLIV, dealing with deaf-mutes and showing analyses similar to those mentioned above for the blind. Summary statistics derived from these bulletins are presented below in Tables 30, 31 and 32.

Blind.—While 10·7 p.c. of the blind in 1931 were blind from birth, no less than 39·1 p.c. lost their sight at the age of 60 or over, and an additional 10·4 p.c. during the ages of 50 to 59 years. The age distribution of the population is, therefore, an important consideration in interpreting the prevalence of blindness.

Causes of Blindness.—Affections and diseases of the eye constitute the greatest cause of blindness, accounting in 1931 for 1,699 blind out of the total of 7,343 in the nine provinces and, of such affections, cataract was the most frequent, accounting for 983. Other leading causes with the number of blind in each case, recorded in the nine provinces in 1931, were: senility, 1,301; accidents, 1,283 (including explosions 184 and war wounds 97); congenital, 816, of whom 763 were blind since less than one year old; general infectious diseases, 414; diseases of the nervous system, 255; eye strain and overwork, 103; and ill defined, 1,050.

Gainfully Occupied.—In 1931 there were 6,971 blind 15 years of age and over in the nine provinces. Of these 1,271 were reported as gainfully occupied, including 1,115 males and 156 females. The gainfully occupied blind males represented about 28·6 p.c. of the total of 3,892 blind males 15 years of age and over. However, as already pointed out, blindness is largely an infirmity of advanced years when a large proportion of males afflicted would not be working anyway. Eliminating those over 65 years of age, there were only 2,085 blind males between 15 and 65. Unquestionably some of the 1,115 gainfully occupied blind males were over 65. Broadly speaking, it is probably safe to say that about 50 p.c. of the blind males between 15 and 65 years of age were gainfully occupied. Of the 1,271 of both sexes gainfully occupied, 699 were working on their own account and 572 were employees. The occupations in which the blind were most largely engaged were: agriculture 437, manufacturing 276, commercial occupations 179, and administration and professions 155.

Deaf-Mutes.—Deaf-mutism, unlike blindness, is preponderantly an infirmity originating at birth or an early age. There were 6,767 deaf-mutes reported in the nine provinces in 1931. For 60·48 p.c. the infirmity began at birth, for 28·18 p.c. between birth and 5 years and for 5·60 p.c. between 5 and 10 years of age. In view of this fact, it is interesting to note that of 5,969 deaf-mutes 10 years of age and over in 1931, 4,335 or 72·6 p.c. were returned as literate, which included in this case those who could read only. Of 1,624 deaf-mutes 50 years of age and over 67·7 p.c. were literate, while of 4,345 between the ages of 10 and 50 years