

Section 4.—The Indians and Eskimos of Canada.

Subsection 1.—The Indians of Canada.*

The Indians of Canada, whose affairs are administered by the Indian Affairs Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, number about 118,406 (according to a departmental census taken in 1939). The popular notion that the race is disappearing is not in accordance with facts. Before they were subjected to the degenerating effects of European civilization and the devastating results of the many colonial wars, the numbers of the Indians were undoubtedly larger, but any reliable information as to the aboriginal population, during either the French or the early British régimes, is non-existent, and there is no adequate basis for a comparison between the past and present aboriginal populations. An interesting sketch of the progress of the Indians of Canada since Confederation will be found in the Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1927.

Administration. †—Reserves have been set aside for the various bands of Indians throughout the Dominion and the Indians located thereon are under the supervision of the local agents of the Department. The activities of the Department, as guardian of the Indians, include the control of Indian education and health, the development of agriculture and other pursuits among them, the administration of their lands, community funds, estates, and the general supervision of their welfare.

The local administration of the Indian bands on the reserves scattered throughout the Dominion is conducted through the Department's agencies, of which there are in all 114. The number of bands supervised by an agency varies from one to more than 30. The staff of an agency usually includes, in addition to the agent, various officers such as medical officer, clerk, farm instructor, field matron, constable, stockman, etc., according to the special requirements of the agency in question. The work of the agencies is supervised by the Department's inspectors, each inspector having charge of a certain number of agencies. Expenditures upon destitute Indians are made by the Dominion Government, either from public funds or from tribal funds of the Indians themselves.

The Indian Act provides for the enfranchisement of Indians. When an Indian is enfranchised he ceases to be an Indian under the law and acquires the full status of citizenship. In the older provinces, where the Indians have been longer in contact with civilization, many are becoming enfranchised. Great discretion, however, is exercised by the Government in dealing with this problem, as Indians who become enfranchised lose the special protection attached to their wardship, so that it is necessary to guard against premature enfranchisement.

Treaties.—In the older eastern provinces, the history of the Indians has been one of slow development with that of the community. In western Ontario, the Prairie Provinces, and the Territories the situation has been different. There, the rapid spread of civilization made it necessary to take prompt and effective measures to protect the moral claims of the Indians, which are recognized by the Government. Accordingly, treaties were entered into with the Indians whereby the latter ceded to the Crown their aboriginal title and interest in the country. In consideration of such cession the Crown agreed to: set aside adequate reserves;

* Revised by T. R. L. MacInnes, Secretary, Indian Affairs Branch, Department of Mines and Resources.

† For an outline of the early administration, see p. 937 of the 1932 Year Book.