

Section 5.—Racial Origins

A population composed of divers racial stocks gives rise to political, economic and social problems quite different in nature from those of one with a small admixture of foreign elements, although, to the extent that certain racial stocks are more readily assimilated than others, the problems are mitigated. It is equally true that the different educational, moral, economic, religious and political backgrounds of a people of mixed origins lend variety and diversity to the national life.

The two basic stocks of the Canadian people are the French and the English: historically the French is much the older (see under "Growth of Population", p. 92) and, excepting for the Census of 1921, has exceeded in numbers any one of the basic British Isles stocks.

It will be seen from Table 12 that, at the time of Confederation, the largest of the groups comprising the British Isles races was the Irish and that the Irish and the Scottish together outnumbered the English by almost two to one. The English, however, exceeded the Irish after 1881, while the Scottish took second place after 1911. From 1881 to 1901, those of Irish origin increased only 3·3 p.c.: the smaller proportion of Irish to English and Scottish was due not alone to a decline in immigration but to their emigration from Canada. The relative gains from 1911 to 1921 of the British Isles races as a group brought them to over one-half (55·4 p.c.) of the total population. The English (with 28·96 p.c.) ranked first in 1921 of all races in Canada, the French were second (27·9 p.c.), the Scottish were third (13·35 p.c.), and the Irish fourth (12·61 p.c.). In 1931 the French again assumed the premier position and the English ranked second, outnumbered by 187,000, yet there were only 54 French to every 100 persons of English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh descent combined. There was a relative reduction in the British Isles races from 57·03 p.c. of the total population in 1901 to 49·7 p.c. in 1941. The causes for this relative decrease were mainly: declining immigration from the British Isles, emigration to the United States of the Anglo-Saxons, repatriation of large numbers of French Canadians from the United States, and the generally higher rate of increase on the part of the French as compared with the various Anglo-Saxon peoples. The factors of immigration and emigration are transitory and change rapidly but the rate of increase has been persistently favourable to the French.

For the British Isles races the inter-decennial increases have fallen consistently from 1911 to 1941. Between 1911 and 1921 the increase was 869,657; for the following decade it was 512,333; and from 1931 to 1941, 334,833.

The British Isles and French groups taken together constituted 80 p.c. of the population in 1941, as was the case in 1931; this compares with 83 p.c. in 1921, 84 p.c. in 1911, 88 p.c. in 1901, 89 p.c. in 1881 and no less than 92 p.c. in 1871. This pronounced decline has been due, in the main, to immigration of Continental Europeans to Canada during the past 40 years.

From the beginning of the present century the proportion of the European races (other than the French) increased from 8·53 p.c. in 1901 to 17·76 p.c. in 1941. The rate was such as to more than double the numbers of the European stocks in one decade (1901-11) and was much higher for specific origins: for instance the Belgians and Scandinavians trebled; the Jews and Italians increased more than fourfold; the Poles and Finns, respectively, were numerically five and six times stronger in 1911 than in 1901.