

# CHAPTER VI.—VITAL STATISTICS\*

## CONSPECTUS

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### Section 1.—Historical Sketch of the Collection of Vital Statistics in Canada

The collection of vital statistics began in Canada, as in England, with the registration of baptisms, marriages, and burials by the ecclesiastical authorities. These registers, maintained by the priests from the first settlement of the country, have made it possible for the vital statistics of the French colony to be compiled from the year 1610†. The system of registration by the Roman Catholic clergy was continued after the cession of the country to the British, and was extended to the newly-formed Protestant congregations of Lower Canada by an Act of 1795, but the registration, particularly of births, among these latter remained seriously defective, both in Lower Canada and in the new Province of Upper Canada, the pioneers often settling far from the authority of government and the ministrations of religion.

In English-speaking Canada, the earlier scheme of registration of baptisms, burials, and marriages by the clergy was later succeeded by Acts for the enforcement of registration of births, marriages, and deaths with the civil authorities. Such Acts were passed in Nova Scotia in 1864, Ontario in 1869, British Columbia in 1872, Manitoba in 1881, New Brunswick in 1887, and Prince Edward Island in 1906. The Provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta were not established until 1905 and, until provincial Acts were passed after this date, civil registration in these Provinces was governed by ordinances for the Northwest Territories, the first of which was passed in 1888. Registration, particularly of births, was at first very defective in the various provinces.

Prior to 1920 it was impossible to compile satisfactory series of vital statistics figures for Canada as a whole. Obstacles to such a national compilation were: variations in the Vital Statistics legislation as between provinces, incompleteness of registration, lack of uniformity in classification and method of presentation, omission of important data, choice of the fiscal instead of the calendar year as the time unit, and the fact that, for some of the provinces within comparatively recent years, the series of publications is incomplete. In New Brunswick no vital statistics were published from 1895 until 1920.

\* This Chapter has been revised by J. T. Marshall, Acting Director, Vital Statistics Division, Dominion Bureau of Statistics.

† For a summary of the vital statistics of the Roman Catholic population from 1610 to 1883, see the Statistical Year Book of Quebec, 1921, English or French edition, p. 51. For details, by years, of this movement of population, see Vol. V of the Census of Canada, 1871, pp. 160-265, and Vol. IV of the Census of Canada, 1881, pp. 134-145.