

Improvement of statistical methods.

A branch of progress in Canada deserving mention as of special interest to this Society is the improvement lately effected in the methods of collecting official statistics. The earlier history and development of statistics in Canada I have described in a Memoir contributed to the Commemorative Volume of the American Statistical Association,¹ but, since that Paper was written, further very definite progress in Canadian statistical reform has been effected. The movement starts from 1912 when Sir George Foster, the present Minister of Trade and Commerce, appointed a Departmental Commission whose report laid down the lines of future statistical development. The practical measures since taken include the constitution of the Dominion Bureau of Statistics under the Statistics Act, 1918, not only as the authority for the taking of the periodical censuses, but also as a central statistical laboratory and general directing and co-ordinating medium for all classes of official statistics, the appointment of a Dominion Statistician with extended functions and powers and the adoption, after intensive study, of improved methods for the collection of annual vital, agricultural, and industrial statistics. An important principle underlying the reforms thus effected is that of statistical co-operation between the various Departments of the Dominion Government and between the Dominion Government, as represented by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, and the Governments of the nine provinces. For vital statistics, a working agreement, as embodied in a Model Bill for provincial legislative enactment, has been virtually agreed to as the outcome of a Conference of Vital Statisticians held on June 19-20, 1918; and a Census of Industry embracing agriculture, dairying, fisheries, forestry, mines, power plants, and general manufactures, has been taken with great completeness for the year 1917, and is to be followed by similar inquiries annually.

With regard to statistics of agriculture, which before the present century were limited to the returns of the decennial census, considerable improvement has recently been effected. It is not necessary to labour the point that decennial or even quinquennial censuses of agricultural production are of little immediate practical value. The more complete these inquiries are the later do the results appear, and the rapidity of changes, especially in a new country, renders the data valueless almost as soon as published; whilst for comparative purposes census data at long intervals are of small practical value because of seasonal inequality. These considerations

¹ *The History of Statistics: Their Development and Progress in Many Countries*, pp. 179 to 198. Macmillan Company of New York, 1918.