

STATISTICS OF LABOUR.

As preparations will shortly be entered upon for taking the decennial Census of Canada, we would suggest to the Government the desirability of extending the field of observation so as to embrace statistical information as to the wages paid for all classes of labour, and of the main items of the expenditures of wage-earners in this country. We have very elaborate data on those heads, showing the wages of artisans, domestics, seamen, and other workers in Great Britain, France, Belgium, and the United States, with details as to rents, cost of food, clothing, etc., which together give a most valuable exhibit of the economic condition of what are usually styled "the working classes" in those countries; so far there has been no systematic compilation of this class of information in Canada, although it is known to us that the late Sir John A. Macdonald had thought over a scheme for acquiring it. The wage-earners in an industrial community constitute a large percentage of the total population. In them is rested a large extent of political power. Upon their efficiency, fruitfulness and steadiness as workers depends the industrial capacity of the country. All these conditions render their economic condition a matter of vital importance, not only on social and moral grounds, but as indicating whether and to what extent the capital which sustains our industrial enterprises is advancing the general welfare of those classes whose wages it provides. The timidity of capital is proverbial. Its free investment is seriously obstructed wherever and whenever the labour market is disturbed by discontent, and a free supply of labour is kept back by unfavourable conditions. The enormous fluctuations in the relative wages paid and the cost of living may be judged by documents in York Minster which show that in 1415 masons were paid \$42 per year, and carpenters, \$36. The cost of a workman's board was 18 cents per week, or about \$10 a year. Wheat was then \$1.60 per quarter; beef, \$1.10 per cwt.; geese 8 cents each; fowls 3 cents; cheese and butter 1-2 cent per pound; eggs 10 cents per 100; shirting 12 cents a yard; and cloth 35 cents.

In 1562, artisans' wages averaged \$1.25 per week, and the cost of living had increased in a much higher proportion. In 1682, the same class earned about \$2.25 per week. In 1782, skilled labour was paid an average of \$4 per week, and a century later the average was \$7 to \$8. While wages in the old country for carpenters, masons, plumbers and other skilled workmen have advanced in this century by an average of 50 per cent., the prices of food have fallen as follows: flour, 50 per cent.; sugar, 3 to 400 per cent.; tea over 60 per cent.

So inadequate were the wages of laborers a century ago to keep the workers in food and clothes that in 1795 the Speed Lomland Act was passed which allowed an assessment to be levied on all ratepayers towards supplementing wages by an allowance of a percentage from the rates. So much for the "good old

times" before this century. The following tables gives the average daily wages paid to those who comprise the great bulk of the skilled members of the working classes in Great Britain and the United States in a series of years from 1870 to 1898 with the percentage of increase in each case over 1870:—

Year.	Great Britain. \$	Increase in Wages per cent. over 1870.	United States. \$	Increase of Wages per cent. over 1870.
1870.....	1.30	....	2.20½	....
1875.....	1.38	6.2	2.24½	1.7
1880.....	1.37½	5.6	2.34	6.1
1885.....	1.39½	7.5	2.47½	12.1
1890.....	1.41½	9.0	2.52½	14.6
1892.....	1.43½	10.6	2.56	16.1
1893.....	1.44½	11.2	2.54½	15.3
1894.....	1.44½	11.3	2.49½	13.0
1895.....	1.45	11.5	2.47½	12.1
1896.....	1.49	14.6	2.45½	11.5
1897.....	1.50	14.6	2.44½	10.9
1898.....	1.50	14.6	2.43½	10.3

The above averages are drawn from returns of the wages of 25 trades, as given by the United States Labor Bureau, and of 21 trades from English official documents. In both countries the wages and cost of living question is watched with the greatest interest, and some of the most eminent statisticians are constantly engaged in compiling the data for public returns, while writers of eminence, as, Newmarch, Senior, Tooke, Leoni Levi, Thornton, Rogers and others with Boards of Trade and Industrial Commissions, have investigated the wages' question and presented it in all its aspects. A recent report by the Government of Belgium gives the average earnings of labour in that country as one-half those in Great Britain, and less than one-third those in the States. The coarsest kind of unskilled labour in this city commands 25 per cent. higher wages than skilled labour is paid in Belgium. Returns of the number of skilled workmen unemployed in the United Kingdom during the ten years from 1887 to 1896 show that the average of those out of work was 5.1 per cent. The maximum is reached in January, much as it is in Canada, owing to the same cause, the stagnation caused by severe frost. The year 1897 was an especially favourable one for British workmen, as there was an average weekly increase in the rate of wages, and a decrease in the weekly number of the hours of labour, the average decrease being 4 hours for the week. The following shows the number of persons whose wages were increased or decreased in the old land last year, in those of the leading industries:—

Industries.	Wages increased.	Wages decreased	No charge.	Total.
Building.....	83,219	.....	.....	83,219
Mining &c.....	249,270	1,319	.....	250,589
Metal.....	176,918	7,768	21,576	206,262
Textile.....	3,894	4,115	1,306	9,315
Clothing.....	1,939	.....	.....	1,939
Miscellaneous..	24,490	648	.....	25,138
Public servants.	20,977	5	.....	20,982
Totals....	\$560,707	\$13,855	\$22,882	\$597,444

In 1897 there was an increase in the average wages in all trades above classified. An advance of wages