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Why the Price of Lumber ?

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A Statement of Fact Concerning Changed Conditions in Lumber Manufacture Since 1913

To many a prospective lumber purchaser there seems a disheartening discrepancy between what looks like an abundance of trees in the forest and the amount of money demanded of him for 5,000 feet of serviceable boards. If logs were lumber, the price might indeed be sliced off many per cent., but trees and logs are merely one factor in production. The conversion of trees into merchantable products requires a very unusual application of expensive manual labor, and this factor alone is capable of accounting for the greater part of the lumberman's troubles and greatly increased expenses of producing his goods.

5,000 Men Missing.

Perhaps the fact that may impress the lumber consumer most emphatically is that since the declaration of war and the heavy enlistment from the ranks of Canadian woodsmen, more than 5,000 skilled workers in Eastern Canada alone, highly essential to the conduct of the lumber industry in this section, have been lost to their former employment, mostly through seeking easier and more congenial jobs in towns and cities. The deterioration of man power in Canadian woods operations has been most marked. Years ago a gang commonly accounted for eight to ten thousand feet, board measure, in a day's work. Today a gang of the same numerical strength will not average half that production. There

is a series of costly discrepancies also in the accuracy with which they do their work, so that the old-time skill and economy in turning a stand of timber into the maximum number of merchantable units is not today commonly in evidence. This depreciation in personnel is a development that the Canadian lumberman would go far to remedy, for it adds immeasurably to his worries, and, of course, reacts upon the market price of lumber products.

Inefficient Workers.

It has become a common saying today that timber cutting has changed from a one-gang system, to a three-gang system, the latter referring to the consequences of industrial unrest whereby quite frequently, while one gang is at work producing logs, another gang is going in to take its place and a third gang of disgruntled men is coming out. As a general figure, it is probably safe to say that coupling quality and quantity of work per day, the bulk of shantymen (in Ontario and Western Quebec at all events) are not above 50 per cent. efficient as compared with the standards of, say 1913.

The shiftlessness of such a large proportion of present-day lumberjacks is perhaps not very difficult to account for when one considers that 5,000 of the veteran workmen, who previously gave stability to the labor market, have quit their old employment and have left the jobs to a like