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TOPICS OF THE TIME

Canada's Workingmen

AT the very basis of Canada's prosperity, present and future, is the workingman. It may not be quite true to say that the workingman is the most important man in Canada, because the man who labors and the man who directs labor are alike the builders of the nation; but whether we have great geniuses or not, we must have great workers. In a sense, the workingman is the index to the nation. If he prospers it may be taken as an evidence that the nation prospers; if he is poorly off or idle, something is plainly amiss with the business of the country. It is not the banker or the investment broker who is the best criterion of public prosperity, but the man who stands close to the wheel of industry.

It is of interest then to know how the workingman in Canada is faring just now. We are being told that good times will not last, and that there are evidences already of an approaching depression. It cannot, of course, be expected that a country's affairs can continue indefinitely without some ebb in the tide; but so far as the condition of the workingman is an evidence, it must be admitted that there is little sign at present of such an ebb. For years past the Canadian working classes have held a place among the best-paid, best-conditioned, and best-qualified in the world. Each year is now adding something to the opportunities placed before them, and greater facilities for

self-improvement, as well as for work, are raising the personal standing of our workers. But a still more tangible proof of prosperity is the gradual increasing of the workingman's wages. The new scales of payment put into effect in the early part of this past summer provided a total increase of nearly \$4,000 a week, affecting about 3,000 persons, and at the same time a reduction of some 5,500 hours a week was made in the working hours required by the employers. The largest single instance of increased weekly earnings was in a lumber factory in a Quebec town, where 250 men obtained an increase of twenty-five cents a day. Other notable instances occurred throughout Ontario, affecting a great variety of workmen.

There are two self-evident facts which somewhat reduce the value of these and similar figures as proofs of an improvement in the workingmen's conditions. One of these is that concurrent with an increase in wages is an increase in the cost of living. The earner of greater wages is, as compared with a few years ago, a spender of greater money for the same living expenses, and the net improvement in his condition is, therefore, not so great as might appear at first sight. Yet with increase in cost of living it should be remembered that he has increasingly greater advantages, and shares in the public benefits made possible by large expenditures; while at the same