

FINANCIAL AND LABOR CONDITIONS

Financial prospects and labor conditions in Canada at the present moment are not the brightest. Many there are who predict that a protracted period of depression is before us and that we are to experience a decided reaction from the period of prosperity and good wages which has favored this country during the past ten years. The Observer does not wish to join the ranks of the pessimists, but at the same time it must be admitted that the indications at present are not any too bright. Pembroke as yet has not felt the pinch, and from the amount of building operations proposed for this season, everything points to continued activity and expansion here. The fact that wages will be low will probably give further incentive to the building boom. A couple of new industries are in sight and the merchants are quite satisfied with business conditions, while commercial travelers say that Pembroke is in a healthier condition than any other towns on their ground. All signs therefore point to continued activity locally, but the condition of the workingman is not so promising. Laborers, hearing abroad that work is plentiful in Pembroke, have been flocking to town, while many others are drifting in from the railway construction camps and the operation of the law of supply and demand is having its effect. It is now announced that the local sawmills will reduce wages this season, making a cut of ten to twenty per cent., which will bring the wages of the ordinary laborer down to about \$1.60 per day. It is said that at Braeside Gillies Bros. are paying only from \$1.30 to \$1.50 per day, and it is likely that other lumbermen are doing likewise.

No fault can be found with those who are operating the mills, but how a man with a family, who probably has to pay house rent, and also provide food and clothing for his family, can do so in these times of high prices on such wages will puzzle most people. In fact it may be admitted at the outset that he cannot do it. The man who pays rent and buys meat and milk, and bread, butter and clothing, as well as other incidental necessities will have at the end of the week only a memory of his \$9.60 wages, and will probably be in debt besides. Such conditions are not satisfactory and are bound to bring social unrest, though it is difficult to prescribe a remedy. Things will have to adjust themselves eventually, no doubt, but in the meantime the prospects for the laboring man are anything but bright, and to him it will be quite unnecessary to speak a warning against "the cost of high living." It is "the high cost of living" instead that is bothering him, and it is likely to continue for some time to come, if indeed any substantial reduction may be looked for at all in the future. Locally there are those who profess to see in the Pembroke market one of the reasons for high prices here, claiming that it works in the nature of a combine and that the prices thereon are fixed by those who can afford the luxuries and who do not mind paying excessive prices for the products which are offered. There is no doubt a measure of truth in this. Certainly the market is a good thing and a popular institution here, affording the farmers a convenient place to dispose of their products and a convenient place for householders to obtain their supplies. But at the same time there is little doubt that it works for considerably enhanced prices locally and there are not wanting those who would have it abolished.

Against this, however, there is the argument of the same law of supply and demand which governs the labor market, though it may be admitted that the market is an institution established and maintained by the town, and as such can be abolished at any time, while on the other hand the labor market is regulated entirely by the conditions throughout the country.

The question of the market is one on which we would like to have the opinion of people who could speak with authority on all sides—the business man, the householder and the farmer, and we will be glad to give space to any reasonable expressions of opinion which may be submitted.

If anything can be done to solve the difficulties confronting the workingman, it should be done, and The Observer will be glad to give any assistance it may be able to give towards this end.

What the outcome of the situation which seems to be developing will be, it is hard to say. A good crop this season, might have good effect, and work for a revival of healthy business conditions. A poor crop would have the opposite effect, and a great deal will depend upon the next harvest.