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THE MONTH.

THE labour dispute in the Slocan is in a condition now in which its further continuation is a puzzle to those who look at the matter from a purely business point of view. The dispute has travelled far from the subject matter which engrossed the attention of the parties to it at its beginning. The eight-hour law was passed in this province at a time when such a sweeping change in the economic conditions of industry could ill be afforded. It was passed in response to a sentiment among working men in favour of reducing their hours of labour—a most praiseworthy sentiment, but one they would themselves be the last to put into practical effect, if it were clear that the result would be to greatly diminish the opportunity to work at all. It was passed without any due inquiry into the conditions of the mining industry which it affected and the lamentable result stands as a monument to ill-considered and hasty legislation. The law having been passed, however, and put in operation, it was early recognized by most people as irrevocable. It formed a new condition of affairs, a new environment to which the industry of mining must adapt itself without any hope of recurrence to the labour day of ten hours. Those who were injured by its passage sought relief in a reduction in the wages paid under the new system. The miners on the other

hand claimed that having received this boon by legislation they were entitled to the same wages as they had previously received, else the boon was of no real benefit to them. Had legislation the power to take away from capital a portion of its profits and present these to labour this argument of the miners would be reasonable enough. But legislation does not possess this power. So soon as capital suffers loss it withdraws from industry and permits it to stagnate in the particular locality or trade in which its interests have been touched. Nor is there, as many people seem to think, any personal malignity involved. Capital is an impersonal and mechanical force operating under natural laws. Neither the capitalist, nor the legislator, nor the workman can affect its operation in the least, nor change by one iota the laws by which it is governed. Can one imagine the principle of gravity shedding tears over the destructive terrors of an avalanche? Capital is as little subject as the principle of gravity to considerations of a personal nature. Wisdom and prudence increase a country's store of capital, waste and extravagance diminish it. Upon an adequate accumulation the welfare of a community depends. But in its operation it is not subject to caprice whether of individuals or of legislative bodies. Therefore if legislation was passed lessening the returns to capital and reducing them below the returns it demanded from a particular industry in a particular country, the infringement could only result in the stagnation of the industry in question and the stoppage of further capital from entering it. So that, except by a return to the old conditions or a proportionate reduction in the remuneration of labour under the new, no way out of the impasse was possible, nor was it any argument against the latter to say that because the change had been inaugurated by legislation, economic necessities should lose their binding force. The fact that the mines were closed down and remained closed is proof enough that the natural law governing capital's operation in the Slocan had been interfered with, and that the industry could not revive unless the old conditions were restored, or a reduction in wages effected. The men's contention regarding legislation was simply beside the point. It was neither right nor wrong. Legislation can alter the hours of labour but it cannot effect the proportion of the product of labour which goes to the labourer as against that going as a return to capital. So long as the dispute remained on that ground it could not be adjusted. It was not susceptible of adjustment. On the other hand, if the men were wrong in demanding the old scale of wages it must be admitted that the mine owners were equally wrong in demanding a reduction of 50 cents per day on account of the eight-hour law. This involved a larger proportional reduction in wages than the law had reduced the amount of