

Selected Matter.

THE LIEN LAW.

The dullness of the building trade in Toronto, there is ground for believing, is due in great part to the additional stringency which was given to the law of mechanics' liens, last session of the Ontario Legislature. This measure designed to afford a sort of paternal protection to mechanics in the building trades, is having economically a very different effect, if it be true that its mere existence has largely diminished the amount of building in Toronto and other places. Should the mechanics become convinced of this, it is probable that they will ask to have the severity of the law mitigated. The extent of the danger to money lenders is probably magnified in their own imaginations; but the effect is the same as if the danger was greater. At least seventy-five per cent. of all the buildings erected in our cities is due to borrowed capital; and any thing which, checking the movement of this capital, greatly diminishes the amount of building must be injurious to mechanics as well as to others interested. Indeed, the blow must be felt more severely by the wage-receiving class than by any other; for enforced idleness means to it a drying up of the sources of existence, while to others it means only a suspension or at most a loss of profit. Any thing which diminishes the employment of capital, is injurious to the capitalist.

It is very desirable that mechanics should come to look upon this matter in its true light, and whenever instances occur of this law preventing the erection of buildings, the fact should be brought under their notice. The alterations of the law will probably depend very much upon the mechanics themselves; for neither political party is likely to take, unasked, any step that might cause the loss of the workingmen's vote.

The principle of a lien on the thing on which work is done is by no means new to the English law, though its operation is far from being universal. But between the old and the new lien there is a great difference. When a blacksmith claims a lien on a horse which he has shod, he simply uses an extraordinary remedy for collecting a debt from a man by whom it is owing. To such a lien as this—a lien which does not interfere with the rights of third parties—there can be no

objection. But it is different when a third party is called upon to pay a debt which he never contracted, and to meet the demands of men with whom he has had no transaction. If it be necessary to assert such an exceptionable principle, its operation should be confined to the narrowest limits, and it should never be invoked to prevent the natural consequences of the negligence of the parties making the demand. Mechanics' liens we suspect of American origin; but in the United States, owing to the salutary rule that no state can pass any law impairing the obligation of contracts, their operation is strictly limited. No law can be passed by any state of the American union which would take away, in any contingency the rights of a mortgagee. Everywhere contracts ought to be held sacred, where the means of carrying them out exists. We trust the Mechanics Lien law will not long be allowed to remain in its present unsatisfactory condition.—*Monetary Times.*

ALCHEMY.

[JEAN PFAFFRATH, *Journ. d. Goldsh.*]

By the name of alchemy is understood the art of changing baser metals into noble ones, such as, for instance, tin into silver, or copper into gold. The word alchemy comes from the Arabian *Cham*, the eye, this being the symbol of the secret, and chemistry penetrates into the hidden secrets of nature. *Al* is the article.

It may safely be assumed that gold is the oldest of all metals known to man, from the fact that it often occurs in a metallic state, and, stranger to say, is found in almost all parts of the globe. As gold is easily beaten and fashioned, not attacked by the common oxides, rust, verdigris, etc., it was from early stages adopted as standard for money. From this period forward, the cravings of man were directed upon its possession, as not alone purchasing the sustenance of life, but exchangeable as an equivalent for all its luxuries and enjoyments. Hence forward, the motto was, Gold; to obtain it was the sole object of all acts and deeds of man; gold was the enchantive rod, by the possession of which, every thing could be accomplished; gold was the powerful ruler, before whom humanity bowed; gold purchased all desires upon earth, and with gold, blessedness of the future state itself could be purchased; gold was the theme of the poet,

the preacher, the king, the beggar, and it is no wonder that the desire arose to produce it artificially.

It is probable that the conception first arose in the artisans of the races of antiquity, who observed that an alloy differing in color, texture, grain, etc., could be produced from two metals, say, for instance, copper and tin, from which arose a goldlike mass. According to the ancient and universally spread tradition, Hermis Trismegistos is said to have been the thrice greatest of all the founders of the Black Art. But doubt exists as to who he was. Some believe him identical with King Siphons (2,000 years B. C.), others assume him to have been a son of the god Anubis (equal to Mercury of the Greek and Roman mythology); he generally is set down as a sage and high priest, 2,500—2,700 B. C. He is said to have written more than 36,000 volumes on the alchemic and magic sciences, to have been the inventor of the gold test upon the touchstone, invented the alphabet, and several other useful sciences. His name has been preserved up to the present day, for instance, *hermetical*. Whether he was a tangible or merely an imaginary personage cannot now be decided, at any rate, all fables and traditions point to Egypt as the cradle of alchemy.

The alchemists, also called adepts, called all metals "sick gold." The further its properties were removed from those of gold, the "sicker" they were. Copper was not as sick as tin, and silver was almost well. For curing the infirmity they thought it necessary to have a material, a panacea, that must contain the primary substance of all things, whereby it had the power to dissolve all other metals into their primary components. If the metals could be decomposed at will, they might also be recomposed at will, and the missing ingredient, characteristically belonging to gold, either by melting or in any other manner, might be supplied to any other metal, in order to transmute it into the genuine gold. This primary substance of gold was called the "stone of the sages," "lapis philosophorum," "menstruum universale," the "Great Elixir," the "Great Magisterium," the "Red Lion," the "Red Tincture," the "Philosopher's Stone." It was imagined to be a preparation of a compact body and red color, and if only the smallest particle were added to another fluid metal, it cured its