

changes affecting the mining industry are finally decided upon. As Lord Bacon puts it very admirably: "I knew a wise man that had it for a by-word, when he saw men hasten to a conclusion, 'Stay a little that we may make an end the sooner.'" It is possible for any set of men tolerably well informed, and above all gifted with a proper appreciation of their own limitations to discharge the negative functions of government satisfactorily, but the positive functions of government require organization genius peculiar and special where the upbuilding of a country or an industry is concerned. Hallam, one of the driest of our political moralists, remarks that there is no reason for the non-appearance of great men at any particular epoch except that nature does not see fit to produce them. South Africa has Rhodes, British Columbia has Mr. Joseph Martin. The difference is well illustrated by the fact that the omission of "Mister" before the latter's name would be an evidence of contempt, while in reference to the former it is the due prerogative of his genius. But lest we lay too much blame upon nature it must also be confessed that the circumstances of the province are not favourable for the evolution of commanding men. The population is widely scattered; the interests of the different centres are diverse; and each of these centres is animated by an intense parochialism as humiliating as it is natural. To unify these warring elements and bend them to the great industrial destiny of the province would require the genius of a Pitt, the audacity of Napoleon and the patience of Job. And yet there exists at the present time in British Columbia a magnificent opportunity. The progress of half a century could be compressed into a decade were the genius of imitation and direction procurable. The main hope at present is that in the general flux of affairs political some one with a policy adapted to these ends may emerge. The time is ripe.

The reason for the stoppage of work in the Le Roi, War Eagle and Centre Star mines is now made abundantly clear. These companies have long been subject to dictation on the part of union labour. So long as this was only manifested in petty details it was vexatious and disagreeable but nothing more. But when an issue was taken which affected the whole

mechanism of the mines it became necessary either to submit for good and all or to resist. The history of the question is interesting and a striking commentary upon the futility of labour legislation to accomplish its intended objects. The mine owners looked to a system of contract labour or piece work to mitigate the worst effects of the eight-hour law. It need not be supposed that under contract they expected more work to be done or cheaper work to be done than could properly be accomplished in eight hours. But when men are working on time the parings come out of the employers' pockets; when on contract out of their own. And there is a continual tendency in time work for these parings to become longer and longer. Under a ten-hours system they did not matter so much, there was plenty of time to accomplish a day's honest work, which, after all, is practically an invariable amount, whether it be compressed into eight hours or spread over ten. But under an eight-hours system this paring of time makes a material difference and a very sensible diminution of the actual amount of work done

in a day. On the contract basis the time thus lost is the men's, not the employers'. It may be noted in passing that if the assertion made by the supporters of the eight-hours law, that a day's work could be compressed into eight hours' labour, were true, no possible exception could be taken to the contract system at similar rates of payment to those paid before the law came into force. The truth is that the real, if unavowed, perhaps unconscious or subconscious, intention of the unions is to diminish the actual amount of work done in a day and at the same time to retain the same rate of pay. On no other basis could the objection to the contract system be understood. It must be remembered that the contract system can only be applied successfully upon the dead work of a mine. It has been the custom even in the extraction of ore for centuries in the copper and tin mines of Cornwall but it could not be economically applied to stoping in mines worked under modern conditions and with modern machinery. It is precisely in dead work that the greatest economy of time and labour is necessary. So that while the eight-hours law may be a boon to working miners the application of the contract system would only be a particular, a partial exemption; where such an exemption is most required in economical mining. The union in Rosslund, however, finding that the mine owners wished to mitigate the effects of the law by a general application of the contract system to the dead work in the mines, determined to combat the contract system root and branch. It is upon that issue that the fight has been brought on. First the men engaged in stoping ore were dismissed, then the mines were entirely closed for short periods. Finally the men were given the option of returning to work on the contract system or not at all. For the present they have chosen the latter alternative. The action of the mine owners has been carefully planned and is entirely reasonable. Further, it will be successful. The Miners' Union of Rosslund has set itself against a custom which is as old as mining itself, and in its practical workings is eminently satisfactory. It was done so for a purely arbitrary reason. It is said that when a man tells a lie, in order to make it successful he must envelop his whole subsequent life in falsehood. It is equally true when legislation interferes with natural conditions, that further action, at each stage becoming more and more arbitrary, is necessary to postpone the re-assertion of the natural laws violated. Finally the whole edifice tumbles to the ground. In order to make the eight-hours law as valid as it was intended to be beneficent another law should have been passed for the Slocan to make it illegal to diminish wages and a third for Rosslund making it illegal to offer and work on contracts, and so on, until the finale was reached in the measure openly advocated by the present Minister of Mines, in his capacity of agitator, vote-hunter and panderer to the delusions of the many, to wit, an act to compel mine owners to work their mines under penalty of the control being reft from them by the State. There is yet another reason why the union will be badly beaten. It is not denied that under the contract system a miner can make top wages without working harder than he is willing and accustomed to work. But the struggle may occupy a much longer time than those who are optimistic are willing to allow. The direct dependence of this lamentable condition of affairs of the violent transition from the ten to the eight-hours system should be carefully borne in mind. The enormous loss