

## BRITISH COLUMBIA IRON AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF LOCAL MANUFACTURE.

THE deposits of iron ore in British Columbia are numerous, and some of them are of ascertained value. There is sufficient evidence that the supply is extensive enough to enable the province to take the leading place among iron producing countries in which respect it stands, as far as is known, alone in the Pacific Northwest. The companies, which now are or contemplate being engaged in iron smelting in the State of Washington, look to British Columbia for their chief supply of ore, and the consumption already amounts to a very considerable figure, and it will certainly increase. A not unnatural feeling has arisen in some quarters in favor of taking steps to complete the utilization of our ores at home by the erection of furnaces to manufacture pig iron at home and the establishment of plants for the production of steel. It is pointed out with much justice that extensive industries would certainly follow in the wake of the production of pig iron, and also that the markets of the Orient and Australasia are just as open to British Columbia products as to those of the United States. Necessarily the domestic consumption of iron would be smaller than that which furnaces in the United States would supply, but even allowing for this it is contended that British Columbia offers such facilities for the production of iron that the industry could be profitably carried on here.

While much that has been said and written on this subject is necessarily more or less speculative, there is probably a solid basis for this claim. It is an economic principle that a country, which is content to export raw material, makes the least of its natural wealth. The manufacture of finished products is what insures a full measure of industrial prosperity. Everyone will concede that it is not desirable that our iron ore deposits should pass into the hands of American companies, who will export the raw material and manufacture the finished products elsewhere. The policy, which stopped the export of pulp wood from Ontario and has prohibited the exportation of cedar cut on Crown lands in this province, is based upon a sound principle, and the time seems to have come when it should be applied to our iron ores. The question was brought up by Captain Cox in a letter written a short time ago to the Victoria Board of Trade. Captain Cox advocated an export duty on iron ore. The board did not see its way clear to take any action upon the matter, and the opinion was expressed by some of the members that the most which could properly be done just now is to let it be understood that such a policy might be put in force in the near future, thus giving notice to com-

panies, contemplating investment in iron and steel plants in Washington, to work up British Columbia ores, that they might find this source of supply cut off. There is no sentiment in trade, of course, and any person investing his money in such enterprises would do so with the full knowledge that such a contingency might arise. An American iron smelter would require no vested right to export our iron ores free of an export duty or to handle them on the same basis as a Canadian concern. Yet it, perhaps, is only neighbourly to let it be known that the demand for a policy, which will keep our iron ores at home, is likely to arise in the near future.

Whether or not an export duty is the best way to deal with the matter is another question. Possibly a better plan would be to impose a tax on all iron ore mined with a rebate upon that smelted in the province. There can be no doubt that the legislature has full power to deal with the subject in this way, and it would be as effectual a method as could be devised.

Under present arrangements we are getting very little out of our iron deposits. A mine is being worked on Barkley Sound, the ore being shipped to Irondale, Wash., and the most of the work is done by Chinamen, and everyone knows how very little their labour contributes to business prosperity. If they are objectionable when producing wealth in the country, they are doubly so when all they are doing is to enable foreigners to carry our native wealth out of the country. The statement is made on good authority that iron ore is mined on Texada for \$1.00 per ton. This is very cheap, and if it can be done elsewhere for the same price there would seem to be no substantial reason why the iron industry cannot be established in British Columbia on a profitable basis. The subject is one which the department of mines might very profitably investigate, so that at the next session of the Legislature some definite plan may be submitted for consideration. At present the great lack is of definite information bearing on the subject. One thing is clear, namely, that if it is possible to devise a policy which will ensure the smelting of British Columbia ores at home the public will hardly indorse it.

This subject has recently been discussed at meetings of the Victoria Board of Trade and the Voters' League, and the fact most clearly demonstrated was that intelligent treatment of it is impossible, from a public point of view, until more information is available than is at present within reach. Mr. Carmichael, the Provincial Assayer, properly pointed out that without data having official sanction it would be extremely difficult to interest outside capitalists. As he said, private information may be just as complete and just as trustworthy as that officially compiled, but it