British Columbia's Blunder.

A press despatch dated March 7th states that the Government of British Columbia announced its intention of imposing a royalty or tax of 2 per cent. upon the gross value of the output of its mines, but that, owing to the outcry against such a measure, has amended its proposition to a royalty o' 2 per cent. upon *net* values, making the arbitrary allowance of $3.00 a ton for expense of obtaining or "winning" a ton of ore.

This, so far as the Government is concerned, is out of the frying pan into the fire. The discussion of the feasibility of attempting to levy royalty upon net values is found in the proceedings of the Quebec Mining Association, and if such a measure is adopted by British Columbia, that province will find it has sown a very pretty crop of thistles.

The arbitrary sum of $3.00 per ton may approximate actual costs of mining and laying down at the shaft's mouth at some of the larger properties, but it is far too low a figure for many of the shipping mines, and for some of the favored ones is too high. In the case of the gold mines of the province, particularly the hydraulic and drift mines, it is simply ridiculous: as for example, by the published reports of the Cariboo and Horse Fly companies, the total costs of mining, washing, management etc., was only 20 cents per cubic yard for the former and 16½ cents per cubic yard for the latter.

Moreover, if the Government is going to allow a deduction of $3.00 per ton from the gross value what becomes of the tax, for example, on the output of these two companies mentioned, which is estimated for 1896 at $390,000? As the value of the gravel is shown to have been (last year) only 28c. and 12½c. per cubic yard, and assuming that a yard weighs no more than one ton, if an allowance for costs of $3.00 per ton be made, where is the Government's tax?

The facts are, that no one at all familiar with the widely different costs in different localities, would attempt to fix upon any given figure as an average for the province—no such average can be assumed without great and manifest injustice, and what is more, without giving a serious set-back to the mining industry of British Columbia.

We had hoped that our western statesmen would have been far-seeing enough to have deviated from the narrow track of the older provinces in this matter of royalty, and that the Government would have declared, once for all, that no royalty tax would ever be imposed in British Columbia.

Nothing will more surely, speedily and effectively shut out both American and British capital than the announcement that hereafter, a royalty tax *in any guise*, is to be imposed upon the profitable mines of British Columbia.

Nova Scotia Gypsum.

The extraction of gypsum in Nova Scotia attracts little attention, but this mineral forms an important item in her resources. It occurs, associated with the carboniferous limestones, and is equally wide spread. It is reported from all the counties, except those bordering on the Atlantic, and is especially abundant in Hants, Colchester, Antigonish, Cape Breton, and Inverness counties. Its mode of formation by some union of lime and sulphuric acid in the immediate vicinity of the readily decomposed beds of limestone has been a bone of contention among scientists and is not yet settled.

The gypsum may be divided into hydrous and anhydrous, or as they are locally known, into hard and soft plaster.

The soft or hydrated variety contains,

	Per cent.
Lime	32.55
Sulphuric acid	46.51
Water	20.94
	100.00

The hard or anhydrite plaster contains no water of crystallisation. These two minerals and intermediate mixtures, probably making steps toward a state of total hydration, occur together in alternating beds or masses, forming enormous deposits of great commercial value, and readily accessible for the cheapest quarry methods owing to their frequent outcrops.

In places the run of the plaster deposits may be traced for miles, and they show a corresponding development in thickness. Maitland, Ogdenslake, Port Hastings and other localities present cliffs upwards of 200 feet in height.

Hard plaster has not received much attention, and waits the work of the experimentalist to take its place among our useful minerals. The soft plaster is again sub-divided into blue and white. The blue plaster, which is abundant at Windsor, is valued chiefly for agricultural purposes, it is shipped as "rock" to New York, Jersey City, etc., and there ground and used as a dressing for cotton, peas, etc.

White plaster, while equally adapted for agricultural purposes, is specially valued for yielding, when heated, a soft white powder, the water being driven off. This, when mixed with water, "sets" and becomes hard. This property makes it valuable for "plastering," making casts, cornices, ornaments, etc. The crystalline variety known as selenite or "mica," is often found in the quarries in masses or irregular veins, and is in demand as a filler for paper.

Among the uses to which the ground plaster is put may be mentioned that of manufacturers of fertilizers, who find it adds weight to their products, and by its absorbent qualities, improves the mechanical condition of the fertilizer. It is also largely used for adulterating the cheaper grades of flour in the United States, for coloring material under the name of "Terra Alba," etc., and for various chemical preparations.

Among the numerous uses of Plaster of Paris may be mentioned fire-proof filling, moulds for terra cotta and porcelain ware, for sewer pipe elbows, etc., casts of lay figures; in surgery, to confine broken limbs, in alabastine and other coloring and finishing materials, crayons as a cement, absorbent, to retard fermentation in wines and to increase the proportion of alcohol. Continually new employments are found for this cheap and useful mineral.

The export trade to the United States is chiefly supplied from Windsor, Cheverie, Walton and Hantsport on the Basin of Minas, and a little is sent from the Victoria gypsum quarries, near Baddeck. The last named quarries supply the trade of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. As the uses of this mineral increase numerous other points may be relied on to furnish it cheaply and of good quality. A small amount is burned for local uses in architectural work, or ground for use in fertilizers, etc., but the bulk of the plaster is shipped as "rock" to the States, where large factories work it up. Did the duty on this article allow the manufactured product to enter the States, it would be ground here and the value of the export would be over $500,000 per annum.