

MARITIME MINING RECORD.

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SPEECH OF THE HON. COMMISSIONER OF MINES ON COAL, SHALE AND SALT

The Hon. Commissioner of Mines excelled himself in a speech in the House of Assembly on the 31st March, the text being the Annual Mines Report, and the subjects, principally, the three minerals above cited. He not only excelled himself but, so far as the length of his speech and the manner in which he handled his subjects are concerned, all of his predecessors in the Mines Department. While saying so it is not to be taken for granted that the Record sees eye to eye with the Commissioner on every point touched upon. If attention may be directed to sins of omission and commission it will be done in a spirit of gentle and kindly criticism. The optimism which runs through his references to our basic minerals precludes censoriousness and of itself covers a multitude of minor sins. We will content ourselves by making extracts here and there from his lengthy remarks:—

"The most important mineral we have to do with in Nova Scotia is coal, and I suppose in all the history of coal mining in the province we have not passed through a year of more serious depression."

(The reporter made a lapse here. What the Commissioner said, or intended to say, is that never during his administration of affairs in the Mines Dept. had the times been so depressed, for it is known to old timers that the year 1919, with all its leanness was a fat year, when compared with some of the years in the past. Last year in a part of C. B. the cry went out for assistance, but the cry was not for bread from the government, but that the government should send along orders for coal. There were times, or a time, when a real cry went forth for food to sustain the workmen at the mines. That of course was before C. B. had rail connection with the mainland. If one is to judge of depression by comparison with a preceding year then there were worse depressions than that of last year. The year 1866 showed a depression of say twelve per cent as compared with 1865 and the year 1867 a similar rate of depression as compared with 1866; the year 1893 showed a depression of say 15 p. c. as compared with 1892; and 1909 sixteen per cent, as compared with its predecessor, while 1919 showed a depression of only three and a half per cent as compared with 1918.)

After referring to the demoralization of indus-

tries all over the world due to the war the Commissioner proceeds:—

"It is most gratifying, so far as Nova Scotia's coal industry is concerned to testify to the fact that the coal mining fraternity of the province, I think, showed very commendable wisdom and discretion and loyalty, when they did not adopt the same methods of redressing some of their grievances as were adopted in other countries. I think it stands to their credit that they did not take what is known as direct action, when perhaps there was some justification why they might have done so; but they stood by the industry and did not adopt these measures, which were adopted in other jurisdictions, and the coal industry of Nova Scotia notwithstanding it has come through great depression, has come through in a very good condition. This, I think in some respects is due to the coal miners themselves for satisfactorily dealing with this matter between themselves and the operators."

(In the foregoing we have an arresting example of obedience to the scriptural injunction to heap coals of fire on the heads of enemies. One of the leaders of the mining "fraternity" applied a name to the Commissioner of Mines which could not by any stretch of imagination be termed eulogistic, and instead of taking umbrage the commissioner returns good words for evil. But why applaud the "fraternity" for not doing that which if they had done would entitle them to be accorded the title of veritable asses? Let it be admitted—but only for argument's sake—that there was resort to direct action in other countries. What of that, there may have been a show of necessity for it, while here in Nova Scotia there was none, absolutely. If there was direct action in other countries it was because the demands of the workers were not conceded to. Here their every demand was assented to and the public were called upon to pay the piper. There would be no direct action in any country if the demands of the workers were as readily complied with as they have been in Nova Scotia during the past two years.)

"One of the things that has been developed as a result of the war is this: the attention of the entire British Empire has been directed towards the matter of investigating the future possibilities for many of those natural resources with which the province of Nova Scotia is richly endowed. It has become apparent as a result of the war that, as regards coal or fuel—that nation which is not self-contained, which has not fuel for heat, light and power, is in very straitened circumstances, and the ambition of those interested in natural resources is to discover where these resources are which will make a nation self-contained not only in the matter of fuel and coal necessary for power, heat and light but for other national resources, which in many respects we regard as essential for "carrying on" in such great conflicts as that through which the world has just come . . . One of the things that has been directed to our attention the last year is the matter of fuel oil. It may be known to most members of the House that we have, in Nova Scotia, in more than one locality, very rich deposits of oil shales, and one of the things which is engaging the attention of scientists and

Oil Shales