CANADA'S NICKEL INDUSTRY*

By Alexander Gray.

The nickel industry of Canada, centred in Ontario, was pre-natally endowed with the mineral-bearing rocks essential to it, and unparalleled in their extent and characteristically contained worth.

That much is conceded by those who have scientifically investigated the norite of the Sudbury District and by those who tediously nurtured the industry with capital and all the metallurgical, mining and metal market sciences afforded.

Nickel and copper in intricate association confounded the issues and caused pioneer capitalists and their metallurgists ruefully to confess they would be happier "with either were t'other dear charmer away." Moreover, the metallurgy of the ores had been economically solved, nickel had to await its adaptation to multifarious uses—and abuses, in the estimation of those who frown upon naval armaments.

It took so many millions to separate and popularize nickel, so many years to introduce it into the manufacture of armour plate and innumerable art—those familiar with the inner details of that paroxysmal period cannot begrudge honours and emoluments to those who made nectar with a "lemon," so to speak. Nor is it surprising in the circumstances, that most of those who jauntily undertook to engage in or participate in the nickel industry, usually came to grief.

Notwithstanding the undisputed magnitude of the natural resources of the Sudbury District in respect to these ores, the difficulties attending the refining of nickel—and marketing of the metal in large and continuous quantities sufficient to bring adequate return upon capital invested—were painfully prolonged and deterred others than those who had to furnish money in bulk to the International Nickel Company and the Mond Nickel Company. Repeated attempts by ill-equipped concerns, ended in ignominious failure, emphasizing the futility of mere promoters entertaining what exacted the unceasingly expensive energies of wealthy and skilled technical chiefs, who had devoted so much time and money to their problems they could not abandon the field.

Opportunity for competitive enterprise and a somewhat envious environment could not induce other than the Mond Company and the International Nickel Company to do little more than acquire nickel-copper-bearing areas. Occasionally mining has been pursued. The Dominion Nickel-Copper Company organized by influential Canadians; the Lake Superior Corporation; the Montreal owners of the Worthington property, all knew they had ore and devoted themselves to explorations by diamond drilling. Plants and a railroad to what is defined as the North Nickel Range, sustained by representations as to the feasibility of certain separating and refining processes, did not get beyond the contemplative. Speculators holding properties of real or problematic merit could not enthuse financiers and steel-makers into the erection of smelters. Repeatedly inquiry for properties failed to get beyond preliminaries.

Not until quite recently when expansion brought to the two producing companies named, the profits they had earned as their reward for constructive capital outlays, has it appeared at all possible to enlist anyone competent to effect the economical separation of the metals and market the same. Even now—and in spite of the support given by noted personalities—there is a halt in the programme of those who took over the holdings of the Dominion Nickel-Copper properties, along with the Murray Mine and other areas amalgamated as the Canadian Nickel Corporation with a nominal capital of $30,000,000. Whatever the inducement presented in these outstanding nickel properties—and, however, ambitious individuals may be to contest nickel markets with the International and Mond Companies—those best informed appreciate what the rivalry will entail.

Had the Messrs. Guggenheim, with their metallurgical staffs and mastery of metals markets, succeeded in obtaining the properties massed under the aegis of the Canadian Nickel Corporation, a battle royal might have ensued. The Guggenheims were willing. Somehow there was a misdeal. While certain of the Canadian owners favoured the American Mining and Smelting Masters, Messrs. J. R. Booth and Clifford Sifton closed with Dr. F. S. Pearson, E. R. Wood, Z. A. Lash, Sir William Mackenzie and others, for a round four or five million dollars in cash and script. Mr. J. E. McAllister, managing director of the Canadian Nickel Corporation, and adviser in the matter to Dr. Pearson, was alert. He took the trick—and it remains to get the $10,000,000 as proposed by a debenture issue and a bonus of 125 per cent. of common stock, leaving $7,500,000 of the $20,000,000 of common stock to be otherwise disposed of. When that is accomplished, possibly there will be a third formidable nickel corporation, bringing the capitalization of the entire Ontario nickel country to over $80,000,000, exclusive of what is in the Micawber class of holders and including the Alexo Company, operating near Kelso and shipping their ore to the Mond smelter.

Yet it is almost thirty years since Dr. Howie discovered the pyrrhotite and chalcopyrite on the surveyed line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, on the site of the Murray Mine which the Vivians subsequently operated and abandoned twenty years ago, now said to contain more ore of higher grade than those original nickel refiners at Swansea dreamed of. Had the Vivians retained the Murray and proved its worth, they would have become larger factors in nickel markets. It bespeaks the perplexity permeating Nickeldom that the very property which the Vivians declined to longer operate in 1894, was the 1913 basis of the transaction now in process of consummation with the Pearson interest. It would add to the ironies if the Mond English Company contracted for a considerable tonnage of newly discovered Murray ore.

Ordinarily a mineral industry requiring a quarter of a century to mature to the profit-distribution stage, would be regarded as a glorified "wild cat." Assuredly the nickel industry had a career that was precarious and vicarious simultaneously. Most of the "mystery" attached to it was due to the fact, for years, that nickel-making was unspeakably hazardous. There were no beplumed Chanticleers around Copper Cliff and Sudbury; because those preoccupied with their work had to strut softly so as not to arouse those who subscribed their millions and existed on a slim diet of hope deferred.

That the fixed capital of Ontario's Nickel Company is approaching the $100,000,000 mark, does not warrant the assumption that the production of the metal is to be accomplished any easier, further than that there are

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