

FIRST REPORT

OF THE

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MINES.

Mr. Speaker :

Your Select Standing Committee on Mines beg leave to submit their First Report, with the following evidence of delegates from the Nanaimo and Wellington Collieries, with remarks of the Mining Inspector on proposed amendments to the "Coal Mines Regulation Act, 1877," together with the suggestions of the Owner and Superintendent of the Wellington Collieries.

GEORGE COWAN,
Chairman.

March 13th, 1888.

EVIDENCE.

ARTHUR SPENCER, a practical miner from Nanaimo, deposed as follows:—In reference to the dangers of Chinese being employed underground, I have had seven years' experience—three and a half years' experience in British Columbia. Can give instances of their carelessness: Previous to the fire in No. 4 shaft, 1885, had found a little gas in a pot-hole. The Chinaman got ahead of me. He took his naked light up to the gas to try it, but not sufficient to burn him. Had there been more gas, an accident would have occurred. Dozens of times I have noticed that Chinamen took their old stubs of wicks from their lamps, throw it down burning while exchanging for a new one, and then leave it burning. Wherever they set down, this is done. It is a very dangerous practice. White men do not do this; they always stamp it out. In 1887, a Chinaman lost his life through ignorance. He had been putting in false sets, along with a white man. The man noticed the sets moving. He told this Chinaman to get out of the way; the Chinaman looked up at him. My Chinaman jumped back and escaped; the other Chinaman was crushed to death. A white man would have escaped. I have had occasion to fix curtains; a Chinaman would leave them aside, which took the air from my face.

ARTHUR SPENCER.

ARCHIBALD COWIE—I have had thirty-five years' experience, twelve years being in Nanaimo. In Wellington a furnace was fired by a Chinaman by putting too much coal on the furnace. This was in 1876, I think. The Company lost considerable. Had a white man been in charge, he would not have run and left it. The explosion in No. 10 level, in 1877, was caused by a Chinaman going through a curtain into the place where the gas was and firing it. His body was found ten months after in that place, showing that the accident was caused by him. Eleven lives were lost. The curtain was marked "Danger!" in chalk. He was ordered to another place in the mine; he went into the place marked danger and caused the accident. Have seen Chinese prop curtains back, which should not have been done. They don't seem to understand the evil of doing this. This is done by Chinamen working all over the mines. There is no use for safety-lamps if gunpowder is used. If gas is around, would

not consider so dangerous if safeties were used. Would not trust a Chinaman with a safety-lamp. More powder is used now than formerly. Accidents happen by shots throwing pieces into the level. Lately, I was working in No. 4 level, Southfield, preparing a place for a trap-door. During the shift a Chinaman came down to pass me, to go into the face of workings for a shovel. I stopped him. I had orders from the fireman to allow no one to go in, as there was gas in the face. Had I not been there, the result would have been an explosion,—and no one would have known the cause of it.

ARCHIBALD COWIE.

JOHN GEMMELL—I have had thirty-six years' experience, sixteen years being in British Columbia; the rest was in Scotland and the United States. In Wellington, 1877, a Chinaman drew red coal from a furnace and left it there. This live coal fired the solid coal and caused destruction of property. No doubt the Chinaman done this, as he had charge of the furnace. In 1877, a Chinaman was sent in by a boss to a certain place. He went into the wrong place, which was full of gas. The fireman was informed that the Chinaman had gone into this place. The fireman, it was supposed, went to bring him back; but he was too late; the gas was fired, and seven men and three Chinamen lost their lives. In No. 4 shaft, Chinamen, it is supposed, kindled a fire near the bottom of the shaft. Had it not been for a white boy named Drew, who went in to the men and told them what had happened, the men would have been suffocated. The Chinamen ran away as soon as they saw what they had done. In No. 1 shaft, Nanaimo, a Chinaman went on top of some timbers near where men were working; he fired the gas and burned himself. Had there been a body of gas, all would have been burned. Some Indians are working in the mines at Nanaimo. They are very timid; they won't go into danger if told. In No. 4 level, Nanaimo, before last explosion, two Chinamen were working. Near this level a curtain had been torn down; a white man replaced it, on account of gas accumulating. He told the Chinamen not to go below the curtain. They went through a place, fired the gas, and burned themselves. My experience in regard to Chinamen, they are careless about doors and curtains. When passing through them, they invariably prop the curtains back and leave them there. If a miner tells them the danger of doing this, they take little notice of what is told. I was appointed as one of a committee by the miners to examine No. 5 shaft, Wellington, after the explosion. I believe that the explosion was caused by a door being left open in Horne's heading. Chinamen are the only ones using those doors, as all the miners are employed at the face. I believe that the explosion was caused by gas, in the first place. In Southfield, Nanaimo, last year, Chinamen set fire to a curtain, when they were supposed to have been passing under it. They ran away, and had it not been for two white boys who went in to inform the miners, they would have been suffocated. The mine was drowned out afterwards to put out the fire.

JOHN GEMMELL.

WILLIAM HANNA—I have had twenty-four years' experience, five years here, and the rest in the Old Country and America. I worked three years in Wellington in No. 4 shaft, driving a level, about thirty or forty yards ahead of the air. A China brattice-man, through ignorance, pulled down the brattice and cut the air off completely. I felt the place getting warm, then I knew something was wrong. I met the fireman coming in; I informed him. He then told us to get out as quick as possible; we went. Had we stopped there, an explosion would have occurred. The Chinaman blamed the fireman for telling him to do so. Nearly all the explosions happen through the use of naked lights. A safety lamp is dangerous in the hands of an inexperienced man. In No. 4 level, same shaft, a fire occurred there, about thirty yards from the bottom, on the north side. I don't know whether Chinamen caused the fire or not. A lot of dry stuff was filled in between stoppings, and as Chinamen are in the habit of throwing down stubs of burning wick, the fire is supposed to have happened from this cause. A boy named Drew saw the fire; he immediately went in and informed the miners about it. They all came out, except one white man and the Chinaman; they had lost their way, and were suffocated. I worked in Southfield, Nanaimo, last November, in the counter slope, west side. The Chinese pushers were pushing boxes in No. 4 east level. They set fire to a curtain. Nobody else went through this curtain, as the miners were all at the face. A white boy went in on one side of the level; another boy went in on the other, to call the men out. The Chinese ran away, and did not inform any person about the fire.

WILLIAM HANNA.

THOMAS WILLIAMS—Have had twenty-five years' experience, about eight years in British Columbia. My experience is that the Chinese are a very dangerous element in the mines. In the No. 3 shaft, South Wellington, 1883, in driving a level, Chinamen came in to push boxes for me. The level was making considerable gas. I repeatedly warned the Chinamen to get out. One day a Chinaman seemed vexed; he was swearing when he came in. I told him to look out, as there was lots of gas. He said he did not care; he knew about it. My Chinaman saw him come in, and saw he would cause mischief, so he fell on the ground. I tried to turn back the Chinaman who was coming in, but he got too close. I fell on my knees. The Chinaman fired the gas at that moment; he singed me and himself. Another case, similar, afterwards happened. They would not have occurred with a safety-lamp in experienced hands; they are dangerous in inexperienced hands. In 1884, in No. 2 level, Wellington, No. 3 shaft, D. Hardy and myself struck a blower of gas. We sent all the men out on that side. We informed the boss, and took stations to stop anyone coming in. Mr. Haggart came down to look at it, and found it very serious. He concluded to stop that part of the mine for a week, to see if the gas would slack off any; it slacked off some. We were then asked to go in again with safety-lamps, on condition that no man should come in to us except the bosses. One morning Thos. Hardy was at work, he heard a Chinaman coming up the level to the curtain. He knew if the Chinaman got through the curtain there would be a serious accident. He picked up coal and threw it at the Chinaman as he was lifting the curtain, and drove the Chinaman out of the level. He had a naked light coming in. The Chinaman told Haggart a man had been abusing him. Haggart came in, using abusive language. He told the man he had no right to abuse the Chinaman. Haggart further said he had a lot of men under him who blowed about having worked in gas all their lives, and now, when there was a little, they were scared to work in it. Hardy replied that he was used to working among Christians, and not Chinamen. I was not present when this occurred.

THOMAS WILLIAMS.

NANAIMO, 8th March, 1888.

To Mr. Thomas Williams, Victoria:

SIR,—In regard to the statement I made to you of the time I worked in No. 3 shaft, South Wellington: In the year 1883 I worked at mining coal in No. 2 level, north side, where William Pearson and David Hardy tapped a large feeder of gas, which prevented that side of the mine from working for some days. When we resumed work again we had to use safety-lamps. Mr. Haggart promised to keep a man stationed out by a canvas door on the level, to prevent anyone coming in with a naked light to where we worked with safety-lamps. The second day after resuming work with the safety-lamps, a Chinaman came through the door with a naked light. With some trouble, I got him to return. When I reported the case to Mr. Haggart I said to him I did not like that kind of work. He said it beat his time how men were so scared of gas that had been brought up in fiery mines. I said that if it was me he referred to, there was civilized men in the mines I worked in, and not Chinamen that cannot understand you when you speak to them.

THOMAS HARDY.

Sworn to before me at Nanaimo, British Columbia, }
this eighth day of March, A. D. 1888.

DONALD SMITH, J. P. }

MR. HAGGART said, in reference to the Chinaman killed in No. 3 shaft, the timberman in charge was nearer the face of the coal than the Chinaman. The Chinaman, who was in front of the false sets, had no chance to get away. A white man would have met the same fate. Can refer to the same accident in Inspector's report. Chinamen when changing stubs of burning wick stamp it out like white men as far as I know. There is no record of accidents occurring from that practice, as to my knowledge. Chinamen know the meaning and use of curtains; have never known a case of propping them back. I consider them careful in this respect. In reference to the explosion in No. 10 level, 1877 (see Inspector's report), had the man carried a safety lamp the accident would not have occurred. The fire in No. 4 shaft, Wellington, in 1883 or 1884, originated near the bottom of the shaft, close to an engine. A white man had charge of the engine. Two white boys were working close by. There is no evidence that there were Chinamen working near the place at the time. When the fire took

place the engineer went up the shaft at once. One of the boys went around the mine and told the men to come out. The engineer was discharged for not doing his duty. There is no record in the Inspector's report of a Chinaman being burned in No. 1 shaft, Nanaimo, when climbing the timbers. A Chinaman does take notice of what a miner tells him in regard to propping curtains back. There would be more accidents if they did not. The explosion at No. 5 shaft, Wellington, there is no evidence to show that a door was left open. In Southfield Mine, where a fire occurred, there is also no evidence to show that a Chinaman fired it. In reference to the Chinaman pulling down brattice in Hanna's place, it is not reasonable to think this would have been done. The story of Williams in reference to Chinamen pushing boxes, No. 3 shaft, South Wellington, where there was a body of gas, as he says, does not seem reasonable, as naked lights are used in that kind of work; it would not have been allowed had there been gas. I remember the case of Hardy and the Chinaman when gas was in his place. There were five or six men in stalls outside of his level when Hardy and Williams struck the feeder of gas. They sent those men home, then sent for me. I secured the place and sent Hardy and Williams home. I had no authority to stop the place for a week. I reported to Mr. Bryden; he concluded to stop the place for the time being. As regards to the Chinaman coming into their place with a naked light when they were using safety-lamps, the Chinaman was allowed to go in as far as the curtain, as it was safe, to see if the box was ready to be taken out. The Chinaman complained to me about being abused. I went in and checked them for doing so. I consider Chinamen safer in the mines than Indians.

JAS. HAGGART.

REPORT OF THE INSPECTOR OF MINES

NANAIMO, B. C., March 5th, 1888.

SIR,—I have the honour to forward herewith my remarks on the proposed amendments to the "Coal Mines Regulation Act, 1877," as requested.

At the same time I beg leave to suggest that the following amendments should be made to the Act:—

In section 46, General Rule 2, after the word "through," on the tenth line, insert "excepting in levels and headings which may be driven as far as practicable." I have not been able to find, either in the old English Mining Act, or in the new Act, any provisions for driving cross-cuts at every twenty yards. I believe that the Provincial Act was an innovation in this respect, and although it may be serviceable to the coal-getter to have cross-cuts on his "stall" at such intervals, they are of questionable utility on levels or headings at such short distances, and are decidedly detrimental in case of an explosion from being liable to be blown out, as well as causing leakage to the ventilation.

In section 63 after the word "January," on the second line, insert "April, July and October," and on the last line of the section strike out the word "four" and insert the word "three."

This will provide for quarterly returns from the collieries in accordance with schedule "three" of the Act. There never was any schedule "four," and owing to that lapse in the Act the section has been a dead letter.

Schedule three will also require to be altered as follows:—

In second line insert the word "coal" before "mines." Strike out "and inspection" and insert "Act, 1877." In third line strike out "annual" and insert "quarterly." In sixth line strike out "year" and insert "quarterly."

Leaving the above suggestions for your consideration,

I have, &c.,

Hon. Jno. Robson,
Minister of Mines,
Victoria, B. C.

(Signed) ARCHIBALD DICK,
Government Inspector of Mines.

NANAIMO, B. C, March 5th, 1888.

Remarks on proposed amendments to the "Coal Mines Regulation Act, 1877," as requested by the Hon. Minister of Mines:—

PART I.

1. An addition to section 3 as follows: That hereafter no Chinese shall be allowed to work underground in any mine to which this Act applies.

2. An addition to section 22 as follows: That an addition shall be made to Examining Board of two practical coal miners working in this district, who are not owners, agents, or managers of mines, and such Board shall examine and grant certificates of competency as firemen to those found qualified by such examination; and any person shall not be qualified to be a fireman of a mine to which this Act applies, unless he is for the time being registered as the holder of a certificate under this Act; provided, however, that persons who have acted in the capacity of firemen for at least twelve months immediately preceding the adoption of this amendment shall be granted a certificate of servitude enabling them to act as such.

1. As this proposed amendment is worded it contains only a bare proposition that no Chinese should be allowed to work underground in any mine subject to the Act, which is a matter that does not seem to call for any remark from me as Inspector.

2. Section 22 already provides for the appointment on the Board of "two persons, agents, or managers of mines, not being owners in British Columbia, but being practical coal miners," and up to the present time this section has been so liberally construed as to admit of the appointment of two practical coal miners on the Board who did not possess the additional qualifications of being "agents or managers, &c.," as above quoted, and the men who were so appointed are still members of the Board, although one of them (Mr. Robert Scott) has since obtained a certificate as manager of mines. I, therefore, think that if the section be amended by the words after "persons" in the 9th line of section 22 being struck out, viz.: "Agents or managers of mines, not being owners, in British Columbia, but," and the insertion of the words "working in the District of _____," after the words "coal miners" would meet the case fully without really in the least interfering with the present course of procedure.

As to the number of the members of the Board, I would respectfully suggest that if you consider that an addition of a few more persons to the Board would increase its efficiency for the transaction of its business, then another colliery agent or manager, and an additional practical coal miner, might be added to the present Board under the existing powers of the Act.

With regard to the proposed examination of "firemen," there are quite a number of men in this district who could fill the position of firemen satisfactorily, both to the manager and workman, but who would not come forward to undergo an examination. Therefore, the managers would be debarred from employing any of those otherwise practically competent men, if the amendment should be enacted; at the same time, there may be some good men that would present themselves for examination. If I thought that the proposed examination of firemen was likely to increase the practical competency and efficiency of firemen, I should like to see it become law. But I cannot see

3. In section 23, where the words "qualification of applicants" appear, the following shall be inserted, viz.: "All such applicants must have had at least five years' practical experience in coal mines previous to such application for a certificate." Then resume remainder of section

4. In section 40, rule 5, shall read, "at least once every month," in place of "at least once every three months."

GENERAL RULES, PART II.

5. In section 46, rule 2, the following shall be added: "On all main roads where a door is required two doors shall be placed," in order that while boxes are being taken through the one the other shall remain closed, and no air shall be lost.

6. An addition shall be made to rule 8 in section 46, viz.: "That where it is necessary to work coal in any part of a ventilating district with safety-lamps, it shall not be allowable to work with a naked light in another part of the same ventilating district, situated between the place where such safety-lamps are being used and the return airway.

7. In section 46, rule 9, the following shall be substituted in lieu of sub-section (e): "No explosive shall be forcibly pressed into a hole of insufficient size, and when a hole has been charged the explosive shall not be unrammed, and no hole shall be bored for a charge at a distance of less than six inches from any hole where the charge has missed fire."

8. In section 46, rule 9, sub-section 1, referring to the appointment of shot-firers, the following additions shall be made, viz.: Where the words "contiguous thereto" occur it shall be made to read, "all places contiguous thereto within a radius of twenty-five yards," and resume the remainder of sub-section.

9. If the place where the shot is to be fired is dry and dusty, then the shot shall not be fired unless one of the following conditions is observed, that is to say:—

1. Unless the place of firing, and all contiguous and accessible places within a radius of twenty yards, are at the time of firing in a wet state from a thorough watering, or

how the mere examination will secure that result. Nor can I see, in the light of long experience, how the examination of firemen is going to be of any practical benefit, as all men have to work in the collieries for a considerable time before the managers are able to judge as to whether they are capable of being good firemen.

3 to 11. I do not know of any objection to the passing of the amendments. Although it may be well that there should be a more exact and limited definition in the proposed amendment 9 than "If the place where the shot is to be fired is dry and dusty," such as "so dry and dusty as in the opinion of miners working in the place, and of the overman and firemen, to be dangerous to shot firing," or some such qualification, as many places are dry and slightly dusty without being dangerous, or requiring the contiguous and accessible to be wet, &c.

other treatment equivalent to watering, in all parts where dust is lodged, whether roof, floor, or sides; or

2. In the case of places in which watering would injure the roof or floor, unless the explosive is so used with water, or other contrivance, as to prevent it from inflaming gas or dust, or is of such a nature that it cannot inflame gas or dust.

10. All hauling or other roads that are dry and dusty shall be watered sufficiently often to allay the dust.

11. In section 46, rule 31, the following shall be added, viz.: "And if the report state the existence, or apprehended existence, of any danger, the owner, agent, or manager shall forthwith cause a true copy of the report to be sent to the Inspector of the district.

12. In section 46, rule 33, the following shall be inserted after the words, "sinking shaft": "No person not now employed as a coal-getter shall be allowed to work alone as a coal-getter in the face of the workings until he has had two years' experience of such work under the supervision of skilled workmen, or unless he shall have been previously employed for two years in or about the face of the workings of a mine."

12. Owing to the isolated position of the mines of this Province, it will be difficult to carry out the provisions of this proposed amendment, and it would work great hardship upon many first-class miners who come from distant parts (in some instances with families), as it is well known that miners do not get or carry certificates that they are miners, and if the amendment were law, any such miners coming to our coal mines would have to have a certificate that they were miners of two years' experience, or go into the mines as apprentices.

I have, &c.,

(Signed) ARCHIBALD DICK,
Government Inspector of Mines.

Hon. Jno. Robson,
Minister of Mines,
Victoria, B. C.

And in reference to section 2, Bill 35, your Committee derive the following information from the Superintendent and Owner of the Wellington Mines:—That there would be no objection to the appointment by the miners themselves of two representative miners on the Board; but as to the firemen, it is to the interest of both miner and manager to have the most efficient men as firemen, and as the manager has the best knowledge of the capacity of the men, the responsibility of the appointment of firemen should rest with him. There is no objection to the miners appointing firemen from their own body, in addition to the Manager's firemen, provided the miners pay the men they have appointed.