

WANT A MINING DEPARTMENT

Opportune Time to Push the Project is the Present.

"Our Present Need—A Department of Mining," was the subject of an address delivered before the Butte mining congress by Pauline L. Holland, of Chicago. It follows in part:

In the comparatively brief period of time that the department of agriculture has existed it has built for itself a monument of its own utility, in the truly tremendous impetus that it has given the agricultural industry throughout the country.

In the face of such splendid results, accomplished wholly through the centralized and direct efforts of a national department, can there be any doubt of the magnificent return we could expect if we were similarly favored? I do not hesitate to say that the establishment of a department of mining would prove a rich investment to the country at large. It would make direct returns by gathering facts and spreading information that would add millions to the wealth of the country. A scientific and systematic exploration of the mineral domain would undoubtedly disclose large and varied mineral deposits that otherwise would continue undiscovered for many years. Careful geological research would blaze the pathway of the hardy prospector, whose means and time are now oftentimes frittered away in useless labor, ending only in bitter disappointment. From the first creation of the department we could look for an immediate and constantly increasing development in our knowledge of the science and practice of mining and in all that appertains to metallurgy, metal manufacture and the profitable marketing of their products.

The various data gathered by the researchers of the department would go out to the world bearing the official stamp of government and would be calculated to attract attention and command belief, thereby inviting the confidence of capital, without which our western country might otherwise linger many years only partially developed. Governmental activity would quicken inventive genius to devise cheaper and more scientific methods of mining, to improve our present methods of extracting ores, to enlarge still more the use of electricity in connection with mining machinery, to increase the facilities for transportation, to invent better means of drainage and pumping, and so on. The direct result thereof would be that capital would find it profitable to take hold of hundreds of low grade properties, which at the present time are a source of profit to no one.

The study of economic conditions as far as they affect the mining and kindred industries would naturally form an important function of the department, and one from which we might hope for immense good. In the domain of mining legislation, both industrial and remedial, we could look for great betterment through the instrumentality of a department of mining. Incalculable good would accrue to the industry from a bureau devoted to the study of markets. The capacity of our mines is significantly greater than our ability to market the product. The ever-flowing abundance of our natural resources and the skill, business energy and mechanical aptitude of our people make foreign markets essential. The department could point out the way and means of disposing of a great variety of minerals and manufactured products which otherwise might

not find sale abroad.

Last, but by no means least, a separate department is the only medium through which we can ever hope to get the liberal appropriations which we require. A request coming from the official head of a great department carries weight. It at once disarms all suspicion of ulterior purpose and is recognized as the voice of authority speaking for the needs of the whole nation. It is the history of the various departments that any requisition, within reason, which they make upon the national legislature for appropriations passes unchallenged and receives prompt attention. Congress has come to consider these things, not as attempts to loot the treasury, but as investments, which, in fact, they are.

In taking leave of this subject, I wish to sound a note of warning. The opportune time to push this project is at present. We are near the top wave of industrial eminence. The thirst for conquest is upon us. The last few years have been years of almost unexampled prosperity and progress for ours as well as every other industry. The country is in a frame of mind to consider measures calculated to equip us still better in the universal race for supremacy. Conditions, however, which we cannot foresee may arise at any time to break the spell. Past experience teaches us to expect it. And when the reverse does come the financial sails are close-hauled, neither politicians nor people will be in need to consider a project, of which, in such times, they can see only the expense. Certainly, if the fat years are suffered to go by without results and the lean years are once more upon us, we have nothing to expect for at least another decade.

Congress has become familiarized with the subject by the introduction of a bill in both the senate and house last winter for the establishment of a department of mining, with full jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to mines and the mining industries. Of course, it was hardly to be expected that it would receive an immediate passage. Congress must be educated up to the proper mark and familiarized with the idea first. But another opportunity will present itself at the coming session. Between now and then we ought to try to build up a still more powerful sentiment and a popular demand for a department of mining. The great states of the west and middle west, where mining constitutes the leading, or at least one of the leading industries, are in a position to make a strong demand that will be heeded by their representatives in the upper and lower houses of congress. And the mining industry has many staunch friends among the senators and congressmen of the east, who will rally to its support.

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