

VII.—*Two Old Mining Patents.*—By R. N. WORTH, Plymouth,
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A LIMITED acquaintance with the history of Cornish mining is sufficient to enable us to recognise the fact that at a very early period it was deemed a most important industry, to be fostered heedfully by those who had the power. Undoubtedly the means taken to promote its success were not always those which would approve themselves to our modern ideas, but the object was mostly unexceptionable. During the sixteenth century a great advance took place in the practice of the arts and sciences in this country, due in the main to an impulse from the Continent, given by the scholars and artificers of France and the Low Countries, who fled therefrom and took asylum in England to escape religious persecution. To this date, then, there is no reason to doubt, many improvements in our mining and metallurgical processes are traceable. As a rule, our monarchs were quite alive to the expediency of encouraging skilful foreigners to settle in this country, and Elizabeth was not one whit behind any of her predecessors. There are extant a number of patents granted by her to miners from the Continent, giving them powers, under certain conditions, to search for metalliferous ores in various parts of the kingdom, generally exclusive of the Stannaries. Of the incorporations thus created, the most important appears to have been one known as the Battery Company, which seems to have worked with a certain degree of success.

Recently, in searching the MSS. in the British Museum for matters relating to Cornish mining, I lighted upon one of these patents (in the Lansdowne MS.) which has reference to Cornwall, an abstract whereof will, I hope, not prove unacceptable to this Institution. It is dated 1575, and entitled "Articles for the Mining Corporation."

It sets out by authorising Thomas Shurland and his company and Sebastian Spedel and his company to "bryng into this realm at divers tymes so many Dutch arts (artificers) and workmen for mynes, not exceeding in all the number of 300" as they may require; and with them and English workmen to "serch and dig all maner of myndes as they shall find" in the several counties of the kingdom, including Cornwall. Authority was also given to them to take as many English apprentices as they might desire, with the consent of their parents; and to make "ordenances" to keep their workmen in subjection, so that these "ordenances" be not against the laws of the realm. It was likewise agreed that Shurland and Spedel might have all manner of tools, necessities, and victuals, at fair and reasonable prices, and that they should bring into the country what they required, and their workmen, without paying custom or subsidy. They were further to have liberty to take such wood as they needed for building and like purposes from the Queen's woods free of charge. Wood for "melting and burning" they were to buy, paying for the same at a price fixed by four honest men, such price not exceeding the ordinary figure. Surface damage was provided for by declaring that land which belonged to private lords should be "praysed by foure honeste men, two appointed by the tenaunte, and two by the myners, not being of their company or straungers, and to paye out of hand only so much as they shall say, conditionally that none shall be valued double price that corn, meadow, or wood ground be worth about the same place."

In return for these concessions the miners agreed to pay the twentieth dish of ore to the Queen, but not before the expiration of three years from the commencement of the works, in order to give time for their development. To this there was a qualification, which curiously illustrates at once the shrewdness and what we may call the scientific innocence of the Queen's advisers and the equal innocence of the miners themselves. "But yf," say the

latter, "we fynde any myne of precyous stones, perle, golde, and silver, to begin to pay presently after finding the same." The Queen's share of these matters was to be a tenth, and the remaining nine-tenths of the precious stones and perles—when they got them—the Queen was either to buy at a fair valuation, or let them carry away. The nine-tenths of the gold and silver were to be bought by her Majesty at mint prices.

The Queen's dish of the ordinary metals was to be "molten and purged for her Majestie by our workmen at our charges and travaille, on condition that her Majesty finds the wode and coles and heade, as moche as we shall nede the same, and all that we may compound with her Majestie to bye the same at a reasonable price." As to the rest of the copper the Queen was to have as much as she wanted at the price any other person would give, and to let the patentees carry away the remainder at a reasonable custom. All other metals they were to be at liberty to carry away on paying only the ordinary custom.

The concluding clauses of the articles are strictly in the nature of an ordinary patent of modern days, and show what importance Shurland and Spedel attached to their technical knowledge. The Queen agrees with them "that within 20 years after date hereof no man or person of this realm shall make or cause to be made in any country such instrument" as they should devise for the use of the corporation "if the like have not beforehand been made in this realm," on penalty of a fine of £200, of which half was to go to the Queen and half to the corporation. For imitating any of their smelting or roasting processes, the fine was to be £500.

There is another MS. relating to Cornish mining, of nearly the same date, contained in the Cottonian collection [Titus, B. III.], to which I may also briefly direct attention. It is headed "Order with regard to Blok Tinne;" but might, with stricter propriety, be called "Caution to Smelters." The occasion of the order was the prevalent adulteration of the white tin; "for that there was oftentimes putt into the same many pece of iron, with cinders, stone, and such like, to the great slaunder and discredit of the said realme, and to the manifeste deceipte of straungers beyond the seas." In order to avoid this, it was first suggested that the blocks should be re-melted into "strake or barres." However, it was found that this led to "a far greater decept." "The merchaunts

do melt the same, supposing thereby to avoid the slaunder and to blind the world; and to every hundredweight of tin put 30 lbs. of lead—sometimes more.” Therefore it was ordered that Sir Francis Walsingham should have a twenty-one years’ lease for trying, melting, and casting, in order that either kind of fraud might be prevented. It is but fair to the Elizabethan smelters, however, to state that they were not the only black sheep in the tin trade in those days. Another of the Cottonian MSS. [Julius, F. 6], on the “Pre-emption of tin,” bitterly assails the tin farmers, declaring that they themselves became merchants “and pretend a scarcity of tinn, and themselves stopp the vent of purpose to keep up the price in forraine countries.” So much for interfering with the natural course of trade.