1-10-1880


John Muir

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ALASKA GOLD FIELDS.


The Cassiar and Other Mines—Mining Prospects—Geological Changes.

SITKA, December 23, 1879.

The gold of Alaska is still in the ground, all save a few thousand ounces gathered here and there from the mine shafts and gulches of the small gold belts of the islands and the mountains along the coast. But the cause of the seeming barrenness of the rocks of this northern region is not far to seek, for in the first place, even the coast mountains have not been explored to any appreciable extent. Probably not one vein or placer in a thousand has been found by the prospector's pick, while the interior region is still a virgin wilderness—all its mineral wealth having been hidden as it was covered by the loess-matted of the glacial period. But it was sooner or later to come. Thousands of sturdy miners, graduating from the ledges and gulches of California and Nevada, would push their way over the whole territory and make it tell its wealth. What the developments may be in our present state of knowledge of the ways of gold, the quantity contained in any formation, however large, and the geological and topographical relations that may be necessary to the gold deposit, can never be, or is likely to be. We have reason, however, to believe that Alaska will be found at least moderately rich in the precious metals, and that gold-mining, not gold hunting, will attract large numbers of adventurers.

This is off the beaten track, but the new country has many attractions. It is a country of lakes and gulches, of larch and spruce and alder, and those sheets of water which have been washed off of the mountain tops and collected in the valleys of the streams make the finest fishing ground in the whole world. The streams of the Cassiar country are, from late June to late September, the angler's paradise.

New discoveries.

On my return voyage I made a trip to a quartz ledge on Baranoff Island, about nine miles from the village I left, and from one to two fathoms deep in cold, clear, deep tide water. It is being vigorously tested by the owners, the Alaska Gold and Silver Mining Company, and is attracting a good deal of attention. A polygon mill has been running for a few weeks, and the returns thus far, though not very exciting, are decidedly good. The vein is from about three to four feet wide, exposed on a steep hillside, and will be easily worked all the year. The rock taken out from three different levels on the ledge is sold at the regular gold vein from $30 to $40 a ton. The supply of rock seems practically inexhaustible. The mine is particularly interesting as being the northmost of its kind on the gold belt, and, for what I know, the only one. We hear also of promising quartz from other portions of Baranoff Island, and near Togiak, Prince of Wales Island, and several points along the Coast Mountains.

THE CASSIAR MINES.

The Chilicat Indians have bitterness been hostile to miners entering their country, but last summer one of their chiefs made a formal contract with parties in Wrangell to conduct them on a prospecting tour next spring to the reputed gold mines at the head of the Chilicat River. This outline sketch will, I think, give a fair idea of the present condition of mining prospects in the vicinity. The outlook seems to me neither bright nor dark. Many good gold mines will undoubtedly be discovered here, but nothing in the near future will be likely to lead to the conclusion that the richest portion of our gold belt lies in the territory that is now occupied. In the meantime, Montana, Idaho, Montana, and Dakors, are more promising fields for the present. There is generally more favorable, the deposits of gold and other minerals, perhaps, richer, and more at the rocks are not so high. In my judgment, I do not seek to discourage enterprise in this direction. I could not even do so disposed. For Nature, who puts wings on seeds and sends them abroad, also controls the right course. In the face of the conditions as I go, one looks at the tendency toward a wrong love of the marvelous and the mysterious, which leads to the belief that whatever is remote must be better than what is near.

GEOLOGICAL CHANGES.

The same notion that urges people into the most inaccessible wilderness as the best for fortune-making, causes them to look for the richest rocks far below the surface. But throughout the entire gold belt, what is now the surface of the ground, was a short geological time ago from one mile to a mile below the surface. The mechanical action of the decay of the ancient and ancient mountains has made the surface. There are a few places, such as the granite and the laves, that have been the seat of greater or lesser volcanic activity, but the main has been the appearance of the surface. The present is the seat of the present activity of the forces that have produced the surface.

The calderas of Lynn Canal and Cross Sound last November, I met a party of twelve miners in Hakalax, on the edge of the outlet of one of the glaciers, and were building a cabin. Intending to remain there during the winter, but how long the prospects were they were unwilling to tell. Small quantities have been washed from the Nooks, Stikine, Takao and Chilicat rivers, and the "color" of gold may be found in every stream of considerable size in the Territory, as far as they have been examined.