

## THE GOLD-FIELDS OF GUIANA.

AN ARIZONA MINER'S ADVENTURES IN THE DISPUTED TERRITORY.



HAD been mining for gold and silver in Arizona, and having had indifferent success, decided to take a run through the mining regions of Mexico. In Culiacan I met a California prospector named Joseph

Beardsley. While we were in the State of Chiapa, Beardsley received a letter from an old mining partner in Nicaragua, stating that he had found a rich lode, and inviting Beardsley to join him. When Beardsley arrived at his friend's cabin he was just in time to bury him, he having been murdered by some Nicaraguans, presumedly for the gold in his possession. Beardsley, who was unable to find the lode, was virtually chased out of its vicinity. A letter giving me an account of this adventure stated that he was on his way to the States of Colombia. He went up the Magdalena River to the Andes, and from there wrote me that he had discovered a rich quartz ledge, and urged me to meet him at Bogota. I set out to join him; but at Colon I met some miners returning from that region, who told me that he had been drowned. That was the last I ever heard of him.

Instead of going to Colombia, where a paper dollar was worth only thirty cents and a silver dollar fifty cents, I took passage for Venezuela. At Porto Cabello the first man I met was the American consul, to whom I explained my plans, which included a prospecting tour in the district of Valencia, north of the Orinoco. He advised me strongly not to go into the interior of Venezuela, explaining that two men sent out by him to prospect were in jail, and he was having a hard time getting them out. This was in 1892.

Owing to the unsettled state of affairs in Venezuela, I departed for British Guiana, where life and property were secure. On arriving at Georgetown, the beautiful capital of the colony, with about sixty thousand inhabitants, I found a hundred California miners stranded and full of indignation. They had been lured to Guiana by a letter which had found wide circulation in the newspapers of the Pacific coast. A man who had served as cook in a California mining-camp had gone to Guiana, and had found a good position as

manager of a placer-mine on the Barima River. Elated by his good fortune, he wrote a glowing account of his prospects to his wife in California. She showed the letter to the editor of the local paper, who published it as an item of important mining news. This letter within a short time had the effect of starting groups of men from the coast mining-fields, some of them even from British Columbia. It was a time of depression in the mining industries of the Pacific coast, and a great many miners were out of employment. Though the writer of the letter had no intention of attracting others to his El Dorado, the Californians, who had assumed that it would be as easy to prospect for gold in Guiana as in California, regarded him as the author of their misadventure, and indulged freely in threats of vengeance. No harm came to him, however, because it is not a light matter to violate the laws in British Guiana. As these stranded miners had no money, they were unable to prospect, which requires a more or less expensive outfit; and they could not find employment in the diggings for the reason that white men are not employed on the placers, except as managers; and in fact nearly all the managers, like the laborers, are colored men. The Californians had great difficulty in getting away; some of them reached home as stowaways; a very few obtained situations. One of them was engaged for six months as manager of a placer-mine on the Potaro River, owned by a syndicate of colored men, which produced from three hundred to four hundred ounces of gold a month. He fell ill just as his time was up. When he recovered he invested his savings in an outfit, and started up the Cuyuni River, but found nothing. Another man secured a situation partly through the fact of his being a freemason.

When I discovered that the only way of obtaining employment on a placer was to own one, in the fall of 1894 I joined fortune with another miner, and started for the Barima River. We arranged to stay two or three months, and our provisions for that time cost two hundred and fifty dollars. Taking passage on a steamer, we entered the Barima through the Moro passage, and at Mount Everard were taken into a boat which, pro-



FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS DALGLEISH.

MAIN STREET IN GEORGETOWN, BRITISH GUIANA.

pelled by paddles, was carrying provisions and men to a placer-mine near Arakaka, the English government station eight or nine days up.

On the way up the river I noticed mud reefs crossing the Barima every few miles, and ranging in width from a few feet to forty. I prospected some of them, and found a few specks of fine gold, which miners called "eyes." I think these reefs indicate fissure veins. We passed by several placer-mines, but visited none until we came to the Warembea Syndicate, about four miles below Arakaka, and the same distance in from the river on the west bank. While prospecting inland we lost ourselves in one of the swamps which abound in that region. On our search for camp we crossed fully twenty times a creek running through the swamp, and finally came to a gigantic cypress-tree which served as a landmark. Each attempt that we made to get out of the swamp brought us back to the cypress-tree. Finally we succeeded in reaching higher ground, where we found an old line cut through the undergrowth in the manner of marking a mining-claim. By following this we succeeded in getting out. It is impossible to travel through the thick undergrowth of that region without a compass, and, as in this instance, even a compass proves to be almost useless.

At our camp near Arakaka we hewed a boat out of a tree, and paddled twenty-five miles up the stream to the first rapids. There

I was taken ill with dysentery, which was prevalent thereabouts, and was compelled to return to the hospital at Arakaka. While there I visited the Arakaka Development Company's mines, under the management of Mr. Owens, an American. This company was working both quartz- and placer-claims, which were very rich. The region is of volcanic formation. The quartz ledges are not so well defined as on the Cuyuni, but eventually, I think, the Barima will abound in quartz-mines. The ledges run invariably from northeast to southwest.

The Arakaka Development Company own sixty placer-claims, the operations in one of them being shown in the accompanying photograph. I may explain that placer-claims are located on watercourses, and are five hundred feet wide by fifteen hundred in length. The method of working them is simple. The ground is cleared of brush, and the first covering of clay is removed, until the gold-bearing gravel is exposed. This is called "stripping a pit" on the creek. Then a sluice is put in, to which the water of the creek is confined. Men are stationed on each side of the sluice to shovel in the gravel. This is washed by the water, and the gold is caught by the quicksilver in the riffles at the bottom of the sluice. A "clean-up" occurs every night, and therefore the miners know just what they are making from day to day. A section of the sluice is moved forward as they advance up the creek.



FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY MRS. FREDERICK WHITE.

A PLACER OF THE ARAKAKA IMPROVEMENT COMPANY NEAR THE BARIMA RIVER.

When I fell ill I turned my outfit over to my partner, who found another companion, and went still farther up the river. Afterward he reported that the Barima rose so rapidly one night that the boat was swamped and the provisions flooded. Still he claimed that he found some placers, but I have reason to believe, on the contrary, that his efforts were fruitless. To restore my health it was necessary to return to Georgetown, where I went to the hospital.

In the fall of 1895 I set forth again with another companion, this time going up the

Cuyuni River. We took a small outfit. A prospector's first duty at Georgetown is to obtain a license from the colonial government. He must engage his men for four months, and advance them from five to eight dollars per man. Their wages are two shillings a day (about half a dollar in our money), and their rations, like the wages, are regulated by the government. A prospector on the Cuyuni usually employs from five to ten colored laborers. By steamer he proceeds from Georgetown to the Essequibo River, and a few miles above the junction of that river

with the Cuyuni he arrives at Bartaca Grove, where a British gold station is situated. There he engages a boat, with a captain, who steers, a bowman, who stands at the bow to avoid rocks, and four boatmen, unless he has enough laborers in his party to dispense with the boatmen. It takes from fourteen to twenty men to man one of these open boats.

seven or eight houses, we saw no Indians. On our approach they had fled, for they are exceedingly timid. They had about forty or fifty acres planted with the cassava-bush, from which tapioca is made. On returning to camp for supper one of the black laborers kept the camp lively with songs and stories in English, a kind of entertainment for which he showed



FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY THOMAS DALGLEISH.

«STREAKING» A BOAT OVER THE TONOMO RAPIDS OF THE CUYUNI RIVER.

The government regulations compel a prospector to hire a captain and a bowman, the former's wages being fixed at three dollars a day, and the bowman's at a dollar and a half.

At Bartaca Grove, instead of hiring a boat for ourselves, we found passage with a Mr. Murray, a colored man who owned a placer on the Wayarima River, twenty miles back from the Cuyuni. When we left Bartaca Grove his boat was loaded to the government limit, leaving not more than six inches clear below the gunwale. It carried three or four tons of provisions, eighteen paddlers, and the same number of «tarpaulin men,» as they are called — laborers intended for the placers, who sit on the cargo, which is covered with tarpaulins. Setting out on a Saturday, we camped at the junction of the Mazaruni and Cuyuni Rivers. A few miles back there was an Indian village, which the captain of the boat, Murray, and I visited for the purpose of buying some cassava bread. Though we found

great talent. He would relate the «Arabian Nights» tales, slightly varied to give them the air of being his own adventures. Monday at noon we reached the rapids of the Little Ematu, at the head of tide-water, probably fifty miles above Bartaca Grove. There the boat was lightened by the «tarpaulin men,» who packed the greater part of the load on their heads, to a point above the rapids. The other men were two and a half days «streaking» with a rope the boat and the remainder of the provisions over the falls. On our return we shot the same rapids in one hour.

Above the next rapids, called the Big Ematu Falls, we took dinner at an old Dutch mine, where the stamp-mill and machinery were still to be seen, covered in their decay with creeping vines. On the top of the hill was a shaft about a hundred feet deep. I was told that at the bottom of the shaft there was a drift into the hill several hundred feet in length. Nobody could tell me when the mine



FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY MR. BROWN.

A PLACER OF THE BARNARD SYNDICATE NEAR THE POTARO RIVER.

was originally worked or why it was abandoned. A quartz reef crosses the river at that point, and in the river-bed I found rich indications of gold, where a cradle could be used to advantage. The origin of the mine was what is called a volcanic «blow-out,» and I think it was owing to the ignorance of geology of the original workers that they failed to find the ore-chute, or volcanic chimney. The present owners, who are among the most enterprising men in the colony, are now searching for it.

After ten days' paddling up the Cuyuni, with considerable difficulty in passing the Karamoo rapids, and afterward the Tonomo rapids, we reached a place called Quartzstone, near the mouth of the Wayarima River, where Mr. Murray's storehouse was situated. Then we traveled twenty miles up the Wayarima, where I prospected for a month. In the mean time my companion fell ill, and had to go back to Georgetown.

At this time I met C. C. Edwards, an old Arizona acquaintance. He and I joined outfits, and went five or six miles farther in, where we made camp. It rained nearly every day for two weeks, it being the autumn rainy season, and for that length of time we never

saw the sun. Everything in camp was covered with green mold. As we were in need of men and provisions, I made a journey back to Georgetown, where alone they could be obtained. I had barely got men and provisions together when Edwards appeared at Georgetown, elated at having found a fine placer. On applying at the gold commissioner's office we learned, to our chagrin, that it had been taken up by a syndicate years ago, and sold to another syndicate, although not entered on the government books. It is still in dispute between Edwards and the present claimants. The colonial laws with respect to claims are so stringently enforced that claim-jumping, where the English authorities are in control, is almost unheard of.

After this disappointment we purchased from a colored man three claims located fifteen miles from Quartzstone. We then got together a bigger outfit, and proceeded to our diggings in the manner previously described. This was in September, 1895. At the time we were at the Tonomo rapids (which are shown in the accompanying photograph) twenty-two men were drowned from one boat; only six escaped. Since then the government has prohibited captains from running those rapids,

and now oblige them to streak the boat down as well as up.

When we reached Quartzstone, Edwards took the men and went in from the river about fifteen miles to our placers on a tributary of the Wayarima. Being short of one hand, I stayed at the landing to supply the carrier with the provisions. Every placer has a man who does nothing else but pack provisions from the riverside to the placer. The government limit for the load is fifty pounds, but sometimes a hundred pounds, or even more is carried, but of course for extra pay. The colored boy Manuel whom I employed—not yet a grown man—on one occasion carried seventy pounds, while I, carrying two tents weighing about fifteen pounds, became very weary after traveling half the distance; thereupon he took one of the tents on top of his load. Probably he could have made the distance in four hours, but owing to my slowness it took us all day, and I arrived at our destination completely worn out. It is certainly impossible for a white man to labor in that swampy country.

I had been about three weeks at the river, forwarding our provisions, when I found that chills and fever were getting a hold on me; so I concluded to return to Georgetown. On arriving there I went out to pay some bills, and that night lay down on my cot feeling very tired. When I returned to consciousness I was in the hospital, and a colored man was standing beside my bed offering me some milk. A week elapsed before I could walk, and then the doctor told me I must have a change; so I took ship for New York.

The first fine placer on the Cuyuni was found in 1893 by a Frenchman named Jacobs. His outfit was furnished by two Portuguese named Carrara and Rosa. They took out from two hundred to three hundred pounds a month for two or three years, the gold being worth one hundred and ninety-five dollars a pound. When I reached there, in 1893, the placer was in full working order. Jacobs is said to have disposed of his gains at Monte Carlo; Carrara died insolvent; Rosa left a few thousands: that is, in brief, the history of the owners of one of the richest placer-mines in that country. The mine was sold in 1895 for fifteen hundred dollars, and Jacobs is now simply an employee in the placer.

The Barnard Syndicate has taken out a great deal of gold from placers situated on the Potaro River; but it is my impression that placer-mining is about over unless new

territory is opened up. Quartz-mining is still in its infancy. There are at present two quartz-mines in operation on the Barima River with a good showing; but they are in the disputed territory, and, I think, have been obliged to shut down. Quartz on the Cuyuni is finely defined, although there is not a quartz-mine on the river at present; but in all probability good quartz-mines will yet be worked in British Guiana.

At present it is impossible for a poor man to prospect to advantage in that country. He must purchase all his provisions at Georgetown; buy or hire a boat; pay big wages to his captain and bowman; and give security for the wages of his men, and pay for their food. I have known only one or two poor men who have made a stake out there.

After prospecting three or four months, which is very fatiguing and trying to the constitution of the strongest, a man may find nothing; but he will have learned a good deal. Then he may take a notion, if he has a few hundreds left, to buy another outfit. This time he may find a creek that will pay him one or two ounces a day in the tom. When that much is got in the tom sluices are soon put in, which yield two or three times as much gold. If he has the good fortune to keep his health and to find gold, he has to carry his yield to Bartaca Grove, where he passes through the gold station. Here every man, both laborer and master, is searched. Some think this very disagreeable, but I see nothing objectionable in the law, which is a great protection to the placer owner, the object being to prevent laborers and others from stealing gold. At Georgetown he must carry his gold to the commissioner's office, where he gets a permit to pay the royalty at another government office, after which he may sell it to the banks. Miners are not allowed to sell gold in the bush or in Georgetown. Each day a miner must enter his find in his gold-book, and if an inspector should come along and find gold that was not entered he might confiscate it. This is why a miner must buy his entire outfit in Georgetown, and have money enough to see himself through before he starts. All the British colonial officials, at least all that I came in contact with, are polite and gentlemanly. I have met foreigners who think their laws are very stringent, but I would rather be where there is some law than on the other side of the Yuruan, where there is none.

*Thomas Dalgleish.*