

This he effects by filling his pan with the earth, then squatting on the edge of the stream, he takes it by the rim, dipping it in the water, and giving it a kind of rotary motion stirring and kneading the contents occasionally until the whole is completely moistened. The larger stones are then thrown out, the edge of the pan canted upwards, and a continual flow of water made to pass through it until, the lighter portion of its contents being washed away, nothing but a few pebbles and specks of black metallic sand are left, among which the gold, if there is any, will be found. The rotary movement, by which the heavier pebbles and bits of gold are kept in the centre of the pan, and the lighter earth allowed to pass over its edge, requires considerable practice, and an unskillful prospector will perhaps pass by a place as not being worth working that an experienced hand will recognize as very rich. The specific gravity of the black sand being nearly equal to that of the gold, while wet, they cannot be at once separated, and the nuggets, if any, being taken out, the pan is laid in the sun or by a fire to dry. When dry the lighter particles of sand are blown away; or if the gold is very fine it is amalgamated with quicksilver. The miners know by practice how much gold in a pan will constitute a rich digging, and they usually express the value of the earth as "5," "10," or "15 cent dirt," meaning that each pan so washed will yield so much in money. Panning, it may be remarked, never gives the full value of the dirt, as may be imagined from the roughness of the process. If the gold should be in flakes, a good deal is likely to be lost in the process, as it will not then sink readily to the bottom of the pan, and is more likely to be washed away with the sand. In panning, as well as, indeed, in all the other primitive processes of washing gold, the superior specific gravity of this metal over others, except platinum, is the basis of operations; all depending upon its settling at the bottom of whatever vessel may chance to be used.

The "pan" is hardly ever used except for prospecting, so that the "rocker" or "cradle" may be described as the most primitive appliance used in gold-washing. In the winter of 1859, when I first went up the Fraser, the rocker was the general machine—the use of sluices not having then begun. It was used in California as early as 1848, being formed rudely of logs, or the trunk of a tree. And yet, ungainly as they were, they commanded, before saw-mills were established in the country, enormous prices.