

FORGOTTEN LODE MINES OF THE LOWER FRASER RIVER VALLEY.

(By V. J. St. George.)

WITH the comparative exhaustion of the auriferous bars on the lower reaches of the Fraser River coincident with the discovery of the deep placers of Cariboo large numbers of prospectors were set at liberty to shoulder their packs and move on. While the majority continued their way to the higher stretches of the river intent on striking still richer ground in the newly discovered diggings, some returned to California or settled on the Coast, and still others wandered off into the great Southern interior regions of British Columbia in search of richer still undiscovered fields. They left the evidences of their presence at many a spot where the prospector or hunter of a later day now sometimes comes across a rotting moss-grown flume or stumbles into what was once a ditch.

To what almost inaccessible fastnesses of that jungle of mountains the more adventurous of those unrecorded pioneers penetrated we shall never know, but Pen d'Oreille, Rock Creek, the Big Bend and Wild Horse with many another long forgotten creek will always remain silent signal stations in the early history of the province. Still, however, there were a few of the successful or those weary of wandering who remained with their claims, and as these became gradually worked out they took up pre-emptions on the rich alluvial bottoms of the Fraser.

They married, usually natives, planted their shade trees and generally took life easily and when in need of a dollar or two often knew of a bit of gravel which would still pay something when properly applied to.

Of this class of settlers were the two Murphy brothers. They were the chief owners in the once well-known "Union Bar" gravel claim. It is situated about a mile east of the railway station of Hope and opposite the small island on which the little Roman Catholic church of the Union Bar Reservation stands. The area of the island is fast diminishing, owing to the action of the river, and not long ago it was found necessary on that account to remove the remains of those Indians who had been buried there to a securer place, but the church may still be plainly seen from across the river by the railway passenger, resembling amidst its surroundings, more some old-world scene in miniature on painted china than a reality of the new West.

The Murphy brothers settled on a homestead running back from their placer claim towards the summit of the hills and it was on this land that they discovered in 1859 the ledge which has since been generally known in that locality as the "Murphy Mine." The outcrop is of considerable size and presents the appearance of being the showing of a vein of some magnitude.

The vein matter is quartz containing pyrites and chalcopryite which in addition to the copper contents carry value in gold and silver. Explorations under the present management will probably show the ore bodies as a whole to be of comparatively low grade and susceptible to considerable concentration.

The first work done by the Murphys consisted of the sinking of two prospect shafts within a short distance of each other, and on the ledge. The depths were respectively 30 and 16 feet. In the light of

subsequent events it seems a great pity that they did not stick for the time being to the shafts instead of pursuing that which so often proves an *ignis fatuus*—the long crosscut tunnel of the early development day of a prospect. After doing as much work as they could on their own account they sought financial assistance from their friends on the Coast and a company was got together to work the claim.

It is almost impossible at this date to obtain exact particulars as to the ups and downs of the company and incidentally of the progress in different years of the workings and how finally the claim was closed down, as the old timers still living in those parts seem only able to agree in disagreeing or Lama like to be too intently engaged in profound inward contemplation of the glories of the epoch of '49 to be able to give any intelligent information to the inquirer of the twentieth century. However, it seems that among the principal owners in the company were the Rev. Mr. Pringle, William Sutton, Gus Herrman, Doc. Chisholm, Judge Smith, Joseph William McKay and others whose names are not available. The results of assays given were from memory or hearsay only and are not vouched for. They went from \$12.00 to \$56.00 in silver and at the upper shaft returns of \$15.00 to \$18.00 in gold were obtained.

Beyond the bare mention of the name of the mine the Geological Reports contain nothing concerning it with the exception of the following: "Report on the geology of the country near the forty-ninth parallel of north latitude west of the Rocky Mountains from observations made 1859-1861 by H. Bauerman, F.G.S., Geologist to the North American Boundary Commission," which is reprinted in the Report of Progress, 1882-83-84, p. 38 B. He says: "At Fort Hope a large quartz vein has been found on the right bank of the Fraser River. It contains at the outcrop a small quantity of iron and copper pyrites associated with an earthy black copper ore (probably resulting from the decomposition of an argentiferous fahlerz) some of which yields about 40 ounces of silver to the ton. A level was commenced on this lode in September, 1861, but was subsequently abandoned, owing, I believe, to the high price of driving, from the hardness of the ground."

A couple of years ago, prior to the resumption of work, the main workings consisted of a tunnel projected to crosscut the ledge at a depth of 275 feet. The mouth of this tunnel is immediately above the high water mark of the Fraser. Whether they had ever anything in the way of a survey in order to enlighten themselves as to the probable distance it would be necessary to drive the tunnel before cutting the ore body the writer is unable to state, but if such they had it is impossible not to admire the pluck with which that company set out to run their tunnel through the hard crystalline schists a distance of 500 feet. This was the length attained when after the usual squabbles, the inevitable shortage of funds and the accompanying disillusion the whole matter was allowed to drop without having reached their goal—the ledge.

While a search through the files of Victoria papers of 1859 and following years will show that some quartz mining was done in the Goldstream district and elsewhere on Vancouver Island, and in fact the Beacon Hill "discovery" of 1898 was made in the first mentioned year and created, according to the printed accounts, much excitement, still it must not