

COUNTERCURRENT DECANTATION AT THE HOLLINGER

By Luther B. Eames.

The recovery of dissolved gold from slime pulp in the cyanide process was first accomplished by intermittent decantation. This simple process consists in mixing with the pulp containing the values in solution, a solution of lower gold content, settling the mixture in a tank and decanting the clear supernatant fluid. The thick pulp remaining in the tank is pumped to a second tank together with more barren solution and again settled and decanted. After several repetitions of this operation, values are so far reduced that further washing is not profitable. The gold recovery of this process is high, but the plant required is bulky, labor cost is high and the amount of solution to be precipitated is excessive.

As early as 1901, a plant was built in the Black Hills of South Dakota by John Randall, employing the same principles but attempting to make the process continuous by substituting for flat-bottomed tanks, cones which operated continuously, receiving a constant feed and discharging a steady stream of thickened pulp. These cones were operated in series, the thick underflow of the first one, forming, with a stream of diluting solution, the feed to the second cone of the series. Barren solution was added to the tank immediately preceding the discharge tank and, after being slightly enriched by the low-grade pulp in this tank, overflowed to form a diluting solution again for the richer feed entering the third tank from the end of the series, and so on back to the richest tank of the series. Clear water was used for the wash in the final tank. This is the principle on which all successful countercurrent decantation plants operate at the present time, but Randall's plant was not successful because of mechanical difficulties in getting a continuous thick discharge from his cone tanks. A similar plant was built in South Africa although there the washes were not repeatedly used, as in Randall's case, but were precipitated after each contact with the ore. This also was abandoned because of mechanical difficulties and the cost of precipitating the large quantities of solution that had to be used. For a number of years the process was not used, and it was not until the introduction of the Dorr thickener that the minds of metallurgists began to turn again to the continuous decantation principle.

In 1910, two decantation plants were built making use of flow sheets similar to that used by Randall 9 years before, but substituting Dorr thickeners for the cones. One of these was at Mocorito in Sinaloa, Mexico, and was installed under the direction of C. Dupre Smith, while the other was designed by J. V. N. Dorr, assisted by the writer, for the Vulture Mines Co. of Wickenburg, Ariz. While perhaps not perfect at first, both of these pioneer plants were so successful as to encourage further installations, few and scattering at first but in considerable numbers during the past three years.

The Hollinger Decantation Plant.

The Hollinger decantation plant consists at present of five rows of 40-ft. tanks, four tanks to a row, forming a plant of five units. The tanks are arranged with a difference in elevation of 2 ft. 6 in. between steps with the final tanks of the series the highest, so that all solutions gravitate through and out of the plant to precipitation. The Barret specification roof is supported on flat trusses, the lower chords of which pass

just above the tank and rims. These trusses also serve to support the thickener mechanisms and the walks between the tanks.

The diaphragm pumps used were designed by the Company's staff, and have been very reliable and economical. They are all three-throw or triple pumps so that in spite of the large tonnage handled the duty on each diaphragm is light. It is not uncommon for diaphragms to last 300 days while the life of the present type of valves and seats has yet to be determined.

The pumps are used not only for pulp transferral, but also for the final discharge. This makes regulation of the final discharge for moisture much easier, more reliable, keeps the work of the operator all on the upper floor and allows the tailing to be discharged at a considerably greater elevation than would otherwise be the case.

The barren solution and water wash added to each row are measured by separate float-reading weir boxes assuring uniform results from the various units.

The plant is operated by one man per shift who oils all machinery, watches and adjusts the pumps and records their performance. The solution man makes titrations and regulates the addition of water solution but has no other duties in the decantation plant. A repair man on day shift makes all repairs and has time for other work.

The power for each tank including motor and line-shaft losses is under 1 h.p., while each three-throw pump consumes about the same amount.

The costs for the 12 weeks from Jan. 28, to April 21, 1916, have been taken as typical of what is done by this plant at its present capacity. During this time 85,854 tons were decanted at a cost of \$599 for supplies, including power, and \$1,194 for labor, or \$0.007 per ton for power and supplies, and \$0.0139 for labor, making a total of \$0.0209 per ton for decantation. Labor is no doubt higher here than it will be in the future, as a greatly increased tonnage is to be treated while supplies and power should remain nearly the same. The cost as it stands is about 40 per cent. of the cost of filtering on leaf filters at about the same daily tonnage.

In the ores of the Porcupine district the recovery, by dilution seems to be almost the theoretical maximum. Adsorption does not seem to have any appreciable effect. There is a slight dissolving during decantation which, while it adds to the recovery, makes the soluble loss somewhat greater than it would otherwise be.

The figures quoted below on chemical consumption and recovery refer to only two units of the Hollinger plant. The figures of these units are given because the other units of the mill share their feed with the original Moore filter plant, and likewise their barren solution, while for commercial reasons the two units in question have been given a separate solution system and separate precipitation presses. These two units are therefore the only ones upon which all the figures are available.

In comparing the results quoted, however, it should be borne in mind that the flow sheet has been modified in this plant somewhat because of limitations of space, so that the overflow of T 2 instead of that of T 1 goes to precipitation. The effect of this is to raise the theo-

* Extract from a paper to be read at the New York Meeting, A. I. M. E., February, 1917.