

## THE SNAKE RIVER PLACERS.

THE April number of THE WEST SHORE contained an entertaining legend of the origin of the lava beds of Snake river. In connection with that the opinion of a practical miner upon the source of the fine placer gold found along that stream for a distance of five hundred miles, will be specially interesting. Mr. James Gunn recently contributed the following to the columns of the *Wood River Times*:

As there is an unusual interest manifested at the present time in the Snake river placers, and as there appears to be a wide diversity of opinion as to the source of this gold, some maintaining that it comes from the adjoining lava beds, I thought it would not be uninteresting to many of your readers to give my own views on this deeply interesting subject. As the Snake river placers are, and will continue to be for many future years, a source of revenue to the people of Idaho Territory, anything that will lead to an intelligent discussion, and from that to an intelligent understanding, of the problem, can not fail to be of more or less value to a great many of our people.

During the spring and summer of 1885 I prospected the headwaters of Snake river, leaving Eagle Rock early in May, and not returning until the fall snow-storms drove me out. At that time I was a believer in the theory entertained by a great many people—that this gold came from quartz ledges situated far up in the mountains, near the fountain-head of the river. I prospected the gravel bars for hundreds of miles, and made numerous incursions into neighboring mountains. So far as I am concerned I have definitely settled the Snake river gold problem. It may be possible that no other person now views the subject in the same light, but I am satisfied that in time my position will be generally accepted as correct.

Twenty miles above Eagle Rock, Snake river branches into two large channels, one known as the North Fork (sometimes called Henry's Fork), and the other known as the South Fork. I followed the latter fork above Jackson's lake, and found placer ground at intervals along its banks and on many of its tributaries, until I reached the upper extremity of the lake, and then lost trace of the Snake river fine gold. I went from the South Fork northward, crossing the Teton mountains at Trail creek pass, and descending the North Fork to my initial point, viz: Eagle Rock. On the latter stream I found no gold, from which it is quite evident that the gold has its origin on the South Fork or its tributaries. The principal branches on which colors were found were the Gros Ventre, Buffalo Fork, Ocean creek, and a small stream above Ocean creek, the name of which I was unable to find out.

The formation of the country is volcanic from Eagle Rock to Coonard valley, a distance of about forty miles, and then the country rock is lime, granite, porphyry and sandstone, lime predominating, except in the Tetons, which are granite. From Coonard valley up all trace of

volcanic action is lost sight of, though the placers continue, as before stated, to the upper end of Jackson's lake. I submit that this effectually disposes of the theory that the gold emanates from the lava, for the prospector can travel over one hundred miles above where the lava ceases to exist and the gold will still continue; while when you cross the Tetons and strike the North Fork, which is still bounded by lava, and continues to be well up to its source, there is not to be found a solitary color.

If we next turn to the theory that it is the product of quartz we are beset by difficulties, for all prospecting that has been done in that quarter, and it is not a little, has failed to discover a single paying mine. So we are of necessity driven to other expedients to account for the presence of auriferous gravel scattered over such a vast extent of country. It requires no savant to tell that the country now drained by the upper tributaries of the Snake, and bounded on the north by the Tetons, and on the south by the Wind river mountains, was at one time the bed of an inland sea. Nature has left its work as plainly stamped upon the surrounding country as though the records of the past were handed down to us in plainly-written characters. Water-worn gravel covers the summits of the highest mountains, lines their sides and chokes up the gulches, while the remains of shellfish can be found in the outcropping sandstone. Without any very great stretch of the imagination, one can picture to himself the time when the lofty peaks of the Tetons and the Wind river range were but islands standing sentinel o'er the wide expanse of waters. Toward the center of this region there is a range of gravel mountains, in altitude about as high as the hills that line Wood river. This range is composed entirely of gravel of varying sizes, such as one can find in the beds or on the banks of any of our streams, by some process of nature cemented together with a dark gray sand. The Gros Ventre and Buffalo Fork, together with all their tributaries, cut through these mountains, in many places channeling out almost perpendicular canyons, and as the winter snow and summer rain descend upon them, little by little they are worn down, the wash finding its way into the small streams, then into the larger ones, finally into the Snake, and in the course of the ages deposited on its banks for hundreds of miles to the south and west. Colors can be easily found in this wash and high up on the hillsides. I found fine gold five hundred feet above the valley on the mountain slopes. To my mind it is clear that here we have the source of the Snake river fine gold. If you follow the river above this gravel range gold can not be found. It can not be found on the North Fork. From where the wash of this region enters the Snake gold commences, and continues on down.

The country around these gravel mountains is full of interest to the intelligent prospector. It is possible that at no distant day important discoveries may be made in this vicinity. That is where we should look for the source of the Snake river placers—not in the lava