CUBAN GOLD MINES

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VALUABLE DEPOSITS IN ORIENTE PROVINCE NOT YET DISCOVERED—THE GOLD BELT NEAR HOLGUIN

Santiago Province, Cuba, is undoubtedly the mineral spot on the island, for it contains workable deposits of copper, iron, manganese and gold, not all of which by any means have been developed. About twenty miles south of Gibara, in the vicinity of Holguin, gold is said to have been mined off and on since the island was discovered, mostly by washing, although there are four places where shafts indicate more progressive mining. Tradition states that royal grafters took tolls from the miners which were excessive, and that between buccaneers, wars and official grafters there was no incentive to mine. It appears, however, that a French apothecary living at Holguin found a vein-like deposit of magnesium carbonate at Agua Claras, which was about 18 inches wide, between serpentine walls. To manufacture some kind of product he calcined the material, slacked and floated it. In the residue he found considerable gold.

About four miles south of Agua Claras, J. S. Black, who had prospected from the Yukon to Panama and Cuba, by systematic research discovered a rich deposit at what is now termed the Santiago Mine. According to the mineral laws of Cuba, when one finds minerals he may denounce a claim, even though it be on another’s land, and as no work is demanded, the ownership trails along from generation to generation and then some, when an outsider from the states, starts to work. The Santiago land was held by well-to-do Cuban people who readily agreed that Black could mine on a 20 per cent gross royalty basis. Black thought his place was so rich he could afford this, and, taking a quart fruit jar of coarse gold under his arm, he sought capitalists that would help him develop. He found a young New Yorker who agreed to furnish $75,000 for a mill and for development, provided Black would give him about four-fifths of the company stock. The young man had a friend in the mining machinery business who knew just what was needed, and the mill was equipped as follows: Crusher, Chilean mill, shaking plates and tables, all of a kind which a practical metallurgist would not have ordered, and, with the exception of possibly the tables, unsuited to the ore. The mill, which would not have cost $20,000 in New Jersey, cost $60,000 in Cuba; and with the waterworks, pumps, hoists and developed work, absorbed all the money and more, so that when the mill did start there was a big debt to overcome. No arrangements were made to embound the tailing, consequently the people on the next lower properties were able to make good wages by washing the waste; in fact, far better returns than the stockholders.

The rock carrying the gold has been leached beyond any semblance to the original, which, judging from adjacent properties, approximates a quartz-felsite porphyry. This gray rock has been intruded between walls of serpentine wherever in the vicinity the rock had been shattered. Although subsequent movements have faulted the felsite dyke locally, the line along which the gold is found for several miles is practically northeast and southwest.

In the gold belt in the vicinity of the gold-bearing outcrops and in ditches after each rainstorm, gold colors can be obtained. The soil is sharp, and wide areas of talus cover the fields, so that beyond grass and shrubs vegetation does not flourish. If the ground in this vicinity was colored reddish brown the formation could be termed “laterite.” Mining men have undoubtedly noticed that near gold deposits there is a gritty feeling on the shoe soles, and in the Santiago gold field this geological peculiarity is properly developed. While $250,000 has been taken from the Santiago Mine in a short time, the combination of debt, royalty, dry weather, high-priced fuel, mine timber, supplies and labor, absorbed the proposed dividends. There are those who believe that with suitable machinery and systematic mining, the gold deposits in this vicinity could be worked at an exceedingly good profit. The locality is healthy, Holguin being about 500 feet above sea level and one of the oldest towns on the island. Asbestos of the variety known as chrysotile was found near the mines. The life of the material had been sapped from it by the climate and solutions so that it was reconverted into brittle rock at the outcrop, although it retained the fibrous appearance.