

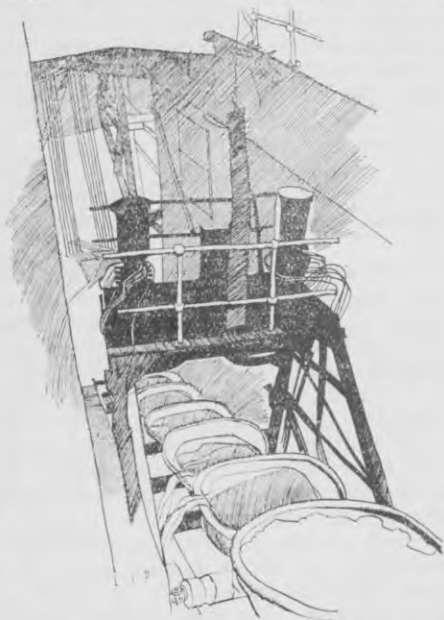
scorched and trembled into huge blisters of stone, but the tailings from the gold dredges which for years chewed and clawed into the river beds and banks, greedily grabbed the gold, and left behind an ugly ruination of what had been rich country. Now it's too late to ask the question whether it would have been better to have forgotten or ignored the intensity of wealth gained from gold for the continuity of return which could have been available from orchards and farms. The answer is obvious enough. Nor is the matter of no importance: everywhere in Otago Central is this scarred country, pitted and pocked; thousands and thousands of acres must have been ruined forever.

"'Gold is where it is, and where it is is not I': it's an old Cornish saying, but I reckon it can be used for my epitaph. If all the tunnels I've burrowed without finding a streak of colour were put into line they'd stretch from here to Dunedin and halfway back again. I've been trying for forty years, and maybe it'll be this time . . . but I try no more; it's the finish." Cromwell's carpenter, a gold-miner in his spare time, apparently an optimist all the time, grinned good-humouredly, put his change in his pocket, and asked us over to the plateau across the Kawarau, near the suspension bridge, to have a look at his latest enterprise. We crossed the gray, swirling river in a most imprudent looking cradle slung on cables attached to trees on either bank—it was the quickest way to the mine, the carpenter said; it was the quickest way into the river we thought. We slithered across safely. Down the vertical ladder we climbed to the bottom of the shaft; it was as dark as a black cat; above us, shining like a threepence on a church plate, was a small square of sunlight which penetrated the gloom for no more than a few feet. Straight ahead, leading into blackness, was the main shaft; and along this we crawled on hands and knees, the low, timbered roof even then pressing on our backs. It was damp, but not dripping wet like the coal-mine. Now it was eerily, startlingly black, impenetrable; darker than night ever could be. We took a sharp turn, through the distance was the faintest pinpoint of light: it

was the carpenter's mate working with a miner's carbide lamp. At the end of the tunnel the roof was higher, we were able to stand half-crouching.

All equipment and timbering had to be lowered down the shaft by windlass and dragged along the tunnel; the dirt to be panned for samples at the river's edge had to be taken up the same way. Later a main shaft would be tunnelled through the hillside to the river-bank, and a truck line laid down. It would quickly be decided then whether "where it was, were or were not" the carpenter and his mate. We came back across the river with our backs aching, but also with about a pennyweight of gold hidden in our tobacco pouches. Under instruction, we washed a sample pan of dirt in the river. Already a living could be made from panning alone. But the mates were after bigger things. Bran, shottie, or nuggets—they didn't mind as long as it was there and didn't "fizzle." Maybe they'd be lucky.

During the depression, when building, like most trades, was at a standstill, the carpenter had panned for gold under a



*These buckets, which scoop into the river-bed carry the spoil aboard to be screened.*