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## THE PASSING OF THE TAR HEEL

### North Carolina's Introduction to Society in the Early Days of School Geography

BY BION BUTLER



THE boys and girls who remember their school days of say fifty years ago recall North Carolina as a State that made tar, turpentine and rosin, those naval stores for which the Tar Heel State was famous in the days when Wilmington was a port from which they went out to all the world.

But the old day is gone forever, and at the present North Carolina hardly makes enough turpentine or rosin to deserve the name of Tar Heel State.

I do not know how the State got its name of tar heel, but if we do a little Hawkshaw, the detective business, we may patch up a theory that will be just as good as anybody's until it is shown to be weak.

The long leaf pine, which until recently was abundant over a large part of the low country of North Carolina, is the source whence comes the greater supply of turpentine and pine tar products that supply commerce.

Years ago this entire section of which Pinehurst is the center was a vast succession of turpentine camps. An immense forest of pine trees extended from a few miles north of Pinehurst clear down to the coast, and producing turpentine and its products was the chief occupation of the bulk of the population. To this day can be seen on a few of the trees here and there the long scars showing the process of procuring the crude turpentine, and occasionally a still remains in the more remote parts of the country. Once in a while a tar kiln is encountered, that factory for the product of the cruder pine crop, but as an industry tar, turpentine and rosin have vanished, the hands following the falling forest farther into the south and southwest. The Gulf States are now the tar heel states, even though the name sticks to North Carolina.

#### A PARADISE OF PINES

When this country was an unbroken pine forest it was a paradise. The tall pine trees were noble creations, standing so close together that the foliage pretty closely covered the ground, yet so far apart that a wagon might drive almost any place between the big trunks. Little undergrowth interfered with free movement back and forth through the woods, and a more ideal forest could hardly be imagined.

The surface of the ground was kept clean, the turpentine hands raking away the pine straw that fell year by year and burning it that the forest fires might not be spread from tree to tree and destroy the turpentine producers. For that reason a turpentine forest ranked well with the orchards in their neatness and attractiveness.

As the land was sandy it was always dry and the walking was of the best. That led the turpentine hands to go bare-footed most of the time except in the severe Winter days, and Winter saw little doing in turpentine.

Probably the man who roamed the turpentine forests with his feet unshod found it an easy matter to step into a bit of turpentine occasionally, or to set his heel into a bit of tar as it dripped from the pipe at the feet of the kiln where the barrels were filled. It is an easy guess that the man who did not have tar on his heel was as unusual as the fellow who had the North Carolina mark.

I don't know that you need to be sorry that the tar, turpentine and rosin industry is of the past. It is a whole lot more romantic to read about it than it is to mix up with the thing where it is active operation. Sure, if it did not have that clinging habit it would be sylvan in its motif, but I never could get around a turpentine outfit or a tar kiln, but that there was more or less of something sticking fast before the show was out.

A man who works in turpentine does not object to a few dabs of the stuff on his hands. To be afraid of soiling his hands would be looked on as aesthetic. Good turpentine never hurt anybody, the workers will tell you, and then to give you the benefit of the doubt and prove the claim they will help you to get a little on the most convenient places.

#### BOXING TREES

When the pine tree is first cut with an axe to permit the crude turpentine to exude the stuff flows freely. It is collected in a depression cut not far above the ground which is called a box. When the box is about full the "dip" is taken out with a big spoon, and friends, let me assure you that dipping turpentine is not a dainty job. A big bucket is carried from tree to tree into which the "dip" is poured, and before the bucket has gone more than a thousand miles it is smeared inside and outside with turpentine, and the man who does not bump against a sticky pot from time to time is too neat and careful to be in the woods.

No, Doris, you and Reginald, and Semiramis would not like to be around such places. It is idyllic and fragrant, and interesting. But it is sticky. You can wash it off your hands, but you can't get it off your clothes or shoes as far as I have been able to discover.

#### HOSPITABLE TAR

But the job is not done when the dip is gathered. The big buckets go to a still, and there the accumulated stickiness is turned into a big boiler, and it undergoes a process of distilling. From the still comes the spirit of turpentine, and the residum is rosin. Rosin is run out