

AMONG TAR-HEELS.

DEVELOPMENT OF A LEADING INDUSTRY.

A Primitive Class Who Live Happy and Contented Lives in the Isolation of the Great Forests.

In ante-bellum days the production of the three valuable constituents—tar, pitch and turpentine—that enter so largely into the manufacture of naval stores, was in a crude state of development, and at the breaking out of the war the great turpentine producing districts of North Carolina were comparatively deserted, as most of the men had either enlisted or were impressed into the Confederate service. The process of manufacture was so slow and tedious that at times the demand was far in excess of the supply, and the cost of transportation of one of the important elements, rosin, was so extravagant that it was permitted to run to waste from the stills, covering the ground for acres in extent, and from three to four feet in thickness, which, mixing with the sand, became extremely hard, presenting a smooth, flat surface, and greatly resembling solid rock in appearance.

When peace was declared the demand was greatly multiplied, and the introduction of better railroad facilities and the erection of modern mechanical and scientific appliances gave the industry an impetus that was wonderful, and to-day one can hardly comprehend the magnitude of the business or believe the immense proportions into which it has expanded during two decades. Indeed, the people who are employed in the manufacture of these three commodities are really unconscious of the part they are performing in the development of one of the greatest industries in the United States. They rarely wander beyond the confines of the tall pines; a newspaper seldom finds its way into their midst; they know little concerning events transpiring in the busy outside world, isolated as they are from intelligent and progressive civilization.

Here they live in their rude huts, hidden away in the depths of these great forest, in ignorance and solitude, gathering the crude material from nature's laboratory and preparing it for market in the stills. This is their only occupation, for a remarkable feature of the country in juxtaposition to these forests is the sterility of the soil—so barren, in fact, but little grass is found in some sections.

The life of a pine tree for producing purposes is computed at about at about eleven years, and the several stages through which it passes ere it is cast aside as a "dummy," to us a technical phrase, is curious indeed. First come the scapifers, men with half moon-shaped knives, who make an incision in the trunk near the roots about three inches deep. This cut is termed a "box," each of which contains from two to three quarts of sap, and the average number of these boxes to an acre of trees is 1600.

Then follow the "sappers," who examine the gum to see that it is "ripe," and closely upon their heels come the "dippers," men who carry long, curiously-shaped iron or wooden spoons and an ordinary water bucket. The bucket is placed against the "box," the spoon inserted in the cavity, and the sap scooped out. By a dexterous twist of the wrist, acquired by long and constant practice these "dippers" will "clean" the box at one scoop. Then there is a process known as cornering, which requires a brigade of "hackers." If the season is good and the yield prolific, a piece is cut out from the top and bottom of the "box" by the "hacker," with his gouge, and the tree is again "tapped."

For a time the largest distillery was located near Wilmington, N. C., with a capacity of producing 1,000 barrels of gum turpentine per day, but distilleries on a more modern plan and of still greater capacity have been erected at intervals in the districts. Look where you may the country seems one vast area of barrels piled one upon the other. Wagons and cars are loaded with them, vessels and lighters on the rivers and creeks have their full complement, and docks and warehouses are filled to repletion.

One of the most interesting, as well as the most amusing sights, is the construction and burning of the tar kilns, which is attended with scenes of the greatest jollification and hilarity by the inhabitants. A rudely

constructed one-story frame building, located in the corner of a road, marks the entrance to the mighty forest. This unique structure is long and narrow, void of paint, and is environed by a rough porch. In every direction through this mighty wilderness of trees lights twinkle like thousands of stars and dense columns of black smoke rise slowly above the tree tops, filling the air with fumes of burning tar, while men and boys sit silently about like grim specters, the whole presenting a peculiarly wild and weird scene.

The tar kilns are constructed from the stumps and cast-off trees. Nothing appears to be wasted, for even here the refuse material is utilized advantageously. Even after these cast-off trees have been "worked" for the gum turpentine several times the sap still maintains a vigorous vitality, and in the old stumps also, and it adheres to the refuse limbs lying about, which it coats with a thick gummy substance highly combustible, and as quickly ignited as powder. The stumps and trees are cut into lengths of from four to five feet.

An excavation about two feet deep is made in the ground, in the middle of which is placed the mouth of an iron pipe, which extends for some distance underground beyond the excavation. Dirt and refuse matter are then filled in about the split pieces until the pile assumes the size and shape of an immense cone. The whole is then covered with earth and the fire lighted. This is termed the "smother," and as the intense heat softens the tar it runs down into the center of the earthy basin and drops into the pipe, through which it is conveyed to the outer edge of the excavation. Men and boys are constantly on guard, armed with shovels, to prevent an outburst of flames. They are required to be vigilant and unceasing in their attention to this important part, or disastrous results may follow.

There are two sets of watchers, night and day. Occasionally a great sheet of flame bursts suddenly forth, illuminating the gloomy surroundings and cracking and hissing terrifically. With wild shouts the watchers hastily scoop up shovelfuls of earth and quickly "smother" it. Some of these kilns will yield from two to three hundred barrels of tar. Fifteen days is the limit of the burning out of kilns, and when the cone has settled to a flat surface and the last ember died out then it is that the watchers throw down their shovels with a loud huzza, and the women and children come issuing forth from their forest homes, and the festivities begin.

All conventionalities are thrown aside. The whole community is a bewildering chaos of fun and excitement. Here is the kiln-burner in his red shirt, tow-linen trousers, and perhaps barefooted; here is the maid and matron dressed in the primitive calico "frock," and the dirty, healthy, cunning looking scions of the tar heelers in medley of colors, all mixed up in inextricable confusion. A venerable negro or two plays the violin, and the inevitable black jug plays a conspicuous part in this general hilarious occasion.

A loyal North Carolinian, who served in the Union army, tells a very amusing story in connection with the rosin beds mentioned above. During General Sherman's famous march to the sea a part of the Twentieth Army Corps was halted in a section of this forest, and prepared to camp for the night. The soldiers were somewhat mystified at finding so large a stretch of smooth, solid rock, but congratulated themselves that they would not have to bivouac in the mud.

Knapsacks were unslung, guards were mounted and fires were kindled at different points, and the tired and weary veterans were preparing to settle down for a comfortable rest. The heat of the fires softened the rosin. First it began to sputter, then great black clouds of smoke began to ascend, and suddenly huge columns of fire shot up seemingly from the very bowels of the earth.

The whole camp was in commotion, the men beat a precipitate retreat, and soon the whole space was a seething, roaring mass of flame. One of the soldiers, as he grabbed his gun and started, shouted a warning to his comrades: "Run, boys! We've struck hell!"—Philadelphia Times.

Alligator Hunters' Profits.

The demand for full grown alligators for Northern museums and aquariums begins with the warm days of the spring, and many an alligator's retreat has been carefully marked by the alligator catchers, who, when the signs are ripe, will dig the saurians out and sell them at from \$1 to \$2 per foot, according to the length of the animals. The negroes loop ropes around the big animals and drag them out in triumph. The alligators are said to be getting fewer in the waters of this section, as they are continually being hunted and killed from the time they come out until they lay up again for the winter. Hundreds of them are shot for the mere sport of shooting, and no effort is made to find them after they are shot. It is only in unfrequented streams and along marshes and impenetrable swamps where they are now numerous.—Savannah (Ga.) News.

In an English country church the curate had to give out two notices, the first of which was about baptisms and the latter had to do with a new hymn book. Owing to an accident he inverted the order and gave out as follows: "I am requested to announce that the new hymn book will be used for the first time in this church Sunday next, and I am requested to call attention to the delay which often takes place in bringing children to be baptized; they should be brought on the earliest day possible. This is particularly pressed on mothers with young babies." "And for the information of those who have none," added the rector in gentle, kindly tones, and who, being deaf, had not heard what had been previously said—"and for the information of those who have none, I may state, if wished, they can be obtained on application in the vestry immediately after service to-day. Limp ones, one shilling each; with stiff backs, two shillings."

Mr. Julius A. Palmer, a citizen of Massachusetts, presented a petition to congress last Jan., for the erection of a statue in memory of the late Mathew Maury, of Virginia, the great geographer, meteorologist and discoverer of the laws governing the winds, currents and routes of the ocean. The petition sets forth in a concise and graphic manner the incalculable benefit conferred upon the commerce of the world by the genius of Maury, and presents an unanswerable argument to show why the United States, of all countries, should honor his memory. The petition and a bill providing for the monument were introduced in the United States Senate by Mr. Chandler, Jan. 27, 1890, referred to the committee on library, and ordered to be printed.

Baptist Preacher Inventors.

A Baptist minister of South Boston, Va., Rev. Mr. Thompson, has invented a cigarette machine, and had it patented. He has already been offered two hundred thousand dollars for his invention and refused to take it. The machine is said to be very simple, but does its work speedily and perfectly. It will no doubt be put on the market in a short while. Mr. Thompson, if we remember correctly, is a North Carolinian, and was for sometime pastor of a church in Raleigh. Thus Baptist ministers grow rich on inventions. McCabe and Thompson are two great inventors that North Carolina adds to the list the past year.

To Abolish the Supreme Court. ST. PAUL, Minn., April 2.—The indignation of the farmers of Minnesota has risen to white heat over the decision of the United States Supreme Court in the now famous Granger cases, in which the Minnesota Railway Commission was practically laid on the shelf. The executive committee of the State Farmers' Alliance, representing over 3,000,000 tillers of the soil, met here yesterday, and passed a set of resolutions denunciatory of the Supreme Court, and asking all the Farmers' Alliances in the country to join with them in a national convention looking to the abolition of the Supreme Court.

Silcott's Defalcation Made Good. WASHINGTON, March 31.—The Court of Claims to-day gave judgment in favor of Representative Crain, of Texas, in his suit to compel the government to reimburse him for money lost through the defalcation of Silcott, clerk of Sergeant-at-Arms Leedom.

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