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SOME ANCIENT HUMBUGS

How the Sandhills Have Demonstrated the Fallacy of Traditions and Precedents

Some recollections of the beginnings of Pinehurst.

BY BION BUTLER



MR. TUFTS, in talking one day about the character of the land of the vicinity of Pinehurst, narrated a curious experience which overtook him one summer in the mountains of New England. While there he fell in with a man from South Carolina, and in the course of their talk Mr. Tufts remarked that he owned some land in North Carolina, and to designate the location he said it was the poorest part of the State, as regards fertility.

The South Carolina man took exceptions, for, as he said, he knew the poorest part of the State of North Carolina, and nothing ever created could compare with it for absolute sterility. During the war the man had been an officer of a South Carolina regiment which had been engaged in duty, as I recall the story, with Joe Johnson or Hardee in their effort to head off Sherman's army as it moved from Columbia up toward Raleigh. The South Carolina man recalled a little town with the classical name of Carthage, and a few miles below Carthage, down toward the South Carolina frontier, he noted what he insisted was the poorest bit of earth he had ever seen in his life time.

"That is what I say," said Mr. Tufts. "It is the poorest land on earth. That is mine."

AN ANCIENT FALLACY

And that is what this country was rated a few years ago. Because it happens to have a large content of sand it was condemned. Soil fertility was never understood in this country until lately, because the population of the farms was engaged in using that vergin fertility found on new land, and everything was compared with the temporary fertility of new ground, and anything not as good as the best, and not holding out like the prairie soil of the West, was rated as inferior. By that test the sandy land of the North Carolina pine barrens rated strictly zero. Whether it had any possibilities nobody cared to inquire, for no good was suspected, and where you suspect nothing you are not likely to investigate.

BIRTH OF PINEHURST

Pinehurst was bought originally by James W. Tufts with the idea of combining the ideal village with an outlying community of peach orchards and country estates. The first nine holes of the present number one golf course was cleared for these peach orchards. And if it had not been for the epidemic of the San Jose scale which attacked all fruit at that time, and for a period

looked as though it was going to get the better of the fruit business, doubtless Pinehurst would today be the center of another San Jose Valley. As a matter of fact the San Jose scale has long since lost its terrors, and quite spontaneously the orchard development is taking place anyway. But not where the putting greens should be.

AN AGRICULTURAL PROPHET

Then one day came to Pinehurst Prof. W. E. Massey, a widely known agriculturist and writer, and the high priest of the cow pea cult, and Massey discovered that Pinehurst was making corn on a scale wholly in contradiction with all the established theories and assumptions concerning the possibilities of the pine barrens soil. Men noted and smiled, just as they smile when they see an albino girl at a circus or a black sheep in a flock or a red ear of corn in the crop. Certainly you could make a hundred bushels of ear corn at Pinehurst. You could make a hundred bushels of corn on the roof of the house—if, if, if, if—but nobody thought of attempting to raise corn as a commercial industry at Pinehurst any more than they would have thought of going into the business of raising black sheep or red corn, because nobody had ever done that thing, and there was no particular reason to undertake what had never been undertaken. We are a great crowd to follow precedent. The man who gets ahead of the crowd is not often taken seriously until the men who write the reference books of biography have occasion to prepare his biography. Then we all see what a wonder he becomes after everybody else takes up with the things he started.

STUBBORN DELUSIONS

Two or three miles out of Pinehurst on the Southern Pines road J. Van Lindley, a nursery man up at Greensboro, planted a lot of peach trees. What is called the native peach grows in this country with all the scandalous abandon of weeds in the garden, but it had not occurred to anybody here that here a profitable peach soil and climate. Lindley planted peaches and sold peaches until he must make the banks glad when he comes down street on a summer morning after he has marketed his crop and makes his deposits. Then it was agreed almost unanimously that Lindley could make peaches here, of course, and in any quantity and of any quality, but— Now, isn't that funny? We get a notion in our heads, and if somebody shows us how foolish that notion is we agree with him heartily until he asks us to drop the notion, and right there we begin to stack up our clothes and dare the fellow to step across that line.



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