

THE DAILY BRITISH WHIG.

YEAR 73.

KINGSTON, ONTARIO, SATURDAY, JANUARY 20, 1906.

NO 17.

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TURPENTINE CAMP WITH DRIP RIDER, DIPPER, SCRAPEE, AND DRIVERS



LOADING BARRELS OF RESIN AND TURPENTINE



BUENING SCRAPEE REFUSE

"Once in turpentine, always in turpentine," the owners say, "so long as there's fruit on the plant trees." But the plant trees have been well shaken during the past decade, for the profits have attracted an increasing number of men with capital, and the industry steadily with the depletion of the pine forests now sees itself threatened with extinction at a period not immeasurably remote. From the pine regions of the Carolinas, out of Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama, the manufacturers of turpentine have been moving into the central portion of Florida, and every year the axe of the scorer mazes his way further and further down the peninsula.

At present these are palm days for Florida. The profits of a turpentine are regular and considerable, and thousands upon thousands of acres are passing yearly into the hands of the manufacturer, who either purchases them outright, or, more frequently, buys the privilege of extracting the resinous juices from the pine timber. From Jacksonville, on the north-east coast, almost to the Everglades, may

be seen enormous areas of forest land wherein every tree shows at its base the V-shaped notch, which the scorer leaves on his journeying.

First into these sandy solitudes, pushing his path through the palmetto scrub, comes the dripper, spying out the country. He traverses the whole extent of the newly acquired territory, notes where are the best trees, and those most mature for operations, and fixes the location of the still beside some railroad and conveniently near to some centre of habitation. Having marked out his ground he disappears, but in his train mule teams appear, with mason and carpenters, lumber is deposited, a siding is laid down and a village of huts springs up. The focus or central shrine of the new settlement is the great still, hammered of copper, which will henceforward be continuously fed with barrels of the crude resin from the pine trees, and will resolve them into resin and turpentine. It is built over a large furnace and surrounded by a circular wall of brick, a wooden-roof shelter it, and a flight of stairs leads to a strong platform level with its top, whereon barrels and barrels of turpentine

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ready for operations. The appearance of the camp is not spectacular, but as the various elements gradually settle down to their own shares of the work, each camp assumes a typical and traditional aspect. To the strong platform, which has been raised horizontally with the top of the still, innumerable barrels of the crude material are being rolled up an inclined runway. A number are emptied into the retort, the furnace glows, the copper cap is fastened on, and soon the drip, drip of the turpentine issuing through the roof changes to a steady flow. Under his work the barrelmaker hammers away merrily. Something like twenty songs go into each barrel that he makes, driven in to the melodious tap, tapping of his hammer; and if by any chance the barrel should be completed before the air of that particular melody which ushers in its birth, the cooper will continue tapping upon the woodwork till his song ceases to an end. A bright glow through the trees shows where the workings are melting their glue. Ev-

eryone is working except some half a hundred pigs, dogs and cows, which scrape in the sun or roam through the camp hunting among the refuse heaps. The product of the average camp in Florida may be set down at 900 casks a year, each of which holds fifty-two gallons of turpentine, besides 2,700 barrels of resin. The residual matter thus amounts to three times the quantity of the distilled spirit.

From these figures it will be calculated that the 600 stills in the state produce annually nearly 30,000,000 gallons of turpentine and nearly 90,000,000 gallons of the resin as it appears in its liquid form. The turpentine brings at wholesale about \$30 a barrel and the resin \$5. About half of the amount produced is utilized in the United States and the remainder exported.

Each laborer is expected to chop a "crop" each year, and to go over his trees once every two or three weeks and "streak" them. A "crop" consists of 10,500 "boxes," the name given to the cup-shaped depression which is cut into the base of the tree, in order to afford a receptacle for the dip of the resinous exudation. Some trees have as many as three or four "boxes" apiece, but, owing to the small girth of the pine timber in the southern states, the average tree receives only one. A "crop" of boxes averages in

production thirty-five barrels of pure spirit and 105 of resin. The chipping of these "boxes" is the first thing to be done after the work commences in the new camp. They are cut some ten inches above the ground and extend around about one-third of the circumference of the tree. The trees are first "boxed" over an entire section of the country before any preparations are made for the extraction of the turpentine. Two or three weeks after these "boxes" have been made the workman goes the round of his trees and "streaks" them, scoring two downward gashes, which extend diagonally toward the centre of the "box," cutting into the bark in the shape of a V. These cuts are made with a sharp instrument, known as a "scorer," made in the shape of an ax, with a rounded and much-sloped blade, which enables the wielder of it to cut through the bark without injuring the tree. These "scorers" are made only in two towns of the United States. From the wounds thus made the turpentine oozes little by little and trickles downward into the "box."

The first crop of turpentine known as the "virgin" crop, is the richest ever collected and generally flows with a profusion which enables it to be dipped out from the "box" with a spoon, while subsequent crops, the product of successive "shrinkings," harden into a white gum, which must be scraped. As contrasted with this "scrape" the first crop is known as the "dip." Yet the proportion of turpentine which is thus collected is the smallest possible residuum of the sap amounting to not more than one-tenth of all. The remainder has evaporated during the absence of the workman, leaving in its place a quantity of the white, gummy substance known as "scrape." This is scooped from the "boxes" and deposited in a barrel. When a sufficient quantity of barrels of "dip" or "scrape" has been collected they are loaded into a wagon drawn by mules and carried to the neighborhood of the still, whence they are rolled up the runway to the platform, where they are emptied into barrels having lock tops, in order to prevent evaporation. Afterward, as required they are emptied for distillation into the still which has usually a capacity of about fifty barrels.

Here the crude product is speedily separated into its three main component parts of water, resin and spirit of turpentine. From the retort a worm leads through a barrel of cold water, part of which is conducted back through a fitting gutter and drops into the still again, the effect being to prevent the contents from boiling over. Passing through the worm, the distillate soon begins to flow steadily through a tap into a large barrel. It contains a large quantity of water, a smaller quantity of turpentine, a little wood alcohol, and some acetic acid. The two last by-products, however, are present in extremely small quantities and, not being commercially of value, run with the waste water.

This mixture which has passed through the worm into its receptacle contains roughly about six parts of water to one part of turpentine. The spirit speedily disassociates itself from the water, as may be seen by taking up a glassful of the liquid, when the turpentine appears rising to the top in a smoky coil. The proportion of turpentine to water being constant, the line which separates the two components always appears one-seventh of the depth of the barrel, and just above this mark a pipe leads into a second barrel, along which the pure turpentine is drawn off as soon as the first barrel is full. The second barrel now contains pure turpentine and as fast as it is filled the fluid is run off into barrels of oak wood, coated on the inside with glue. The turpentine is now ready for the market and needs to be put through no further process of manufacture. By listening at the worm, an experienced stiller knows exactly to what

point to carry his distillation. When a camp has got into working equipment there is rarely any interval between the distillations. So soon as the spirit has been drawn off, the resin and refuse are scraped from the inside of the still, fresh barrels of "scrape" and "dip" are brought from the platform, the still is charged, the cap screwed on and the distillation proceeds once more. Year in and year out, except on Sundays, this process continues.

A typical convict camp is that at Ulmer, two miles from Largo, on the west coast of the peninsula, where thirty or forty convicts are employed. All of these wear the regulation stripes, except two trustees, stiller's assistant and an old driver. In spite of their servitude, the lot of these men is by no means unendurable, and they are far better off in health and surroundings than they could be in a penitentiary. Their diet consists of wheat and corn bread, beans, vegetables and one pound of bacon or a pint of syrup daily for each. Tobacco is supplied them by the company, and two or three times a month a hog is killed for them. A barber is employed from among their number at a stipend of \$3 a month. Besides they receive comparative freedom, not only of the yard within their stockade, but of the camp itself where, so long as they do not stray beyond the watch of the armed guards upon the platforms at opposite corners of the stockade, they may roam at will. Some have guitars and mandolins, and card games are indulged in. By good behavior they can gain fifty-two days a year off their sentences. Efforts at communication are made in the case of deserving prisoners. Upon the expiration of his sentence each man receives \$10 and a suit of clothes.

The laws of Florida give excellent protection to these prisoners. Flogging, the only method of controlling the unruly, is permitted to be inflicted at the discretion of the captain of the guards, but is rarely resorted to, and then only in the case of a convict who is insubordinate or refuses to work. At the Ulmer camp it is inflicted in an informal manner with a broad leather strap, which leaves no scar. Elsewhere more rigorous means are said to be in use. An excellent provision lies in the appointment of state inspectors, who appear unannounced at irregular intervals and question each prisoner in turn, while the guards are ordered to stand out of hearing.

With such opportunities attempts at escape are made occasionally, but they are almost uniformly unsuccessful. The actual fight has frequently succeeded, for it is easy to climb the guards, while passing from tree to tree. In such cases bloodhounds, which are bred in the camp, are set on the trail of the fugitive, his photograph and a notice of reward are posted in 600 cities of the country, and his stripes, which are conspicuous, render his prompt recapture almost a certainty.

—VICTOR ROUSSEAU.

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