

Folk School Aims At Progressive Education Program In Western N. C.

Few educational institutions are aiming straighter at the needs of the South than the John C. Campbell Folk School on the borders of Cherokee and Clay Counties in southwestern North Carolina. Stressing analysis of conditions here, particularly in the mountain South, and concentrating on supplying stimuli toward doing something about these conditions, the School disregards the academic paraphernalia of credits and examinations, and emphasizes growth of character and principles of cooperation essential if a more intelligent agriculture and a higher level of life are to be achieved in this predominantly agricultural region.

The program of studies, handicrafts, and work—the latter enabling students to earn their board and tuition—all center in the combination of commercial farming and self-maintenance in live-at-home agriculture needed if the South is to come into its own.

Marking the last day in the four months winter session of the Folk School proper, March first was given over to a celebration of the past winter's achievements, with an exhibition of student work and a program of entertainment attended by students' parents and friends of the school from places near and far. Among the visitors of over three hundred, were TVA officials from a number of different centers, twelve students and two directors from the Fletcher Sanatorium near Asheville on an adult-education field trip, and a number from the Ashwood Plantation, a federal government rural rehabilitation project in South Carolina.

The program featured a short address by Mrs. Campbell, the director, describing the school's activities as eye-openers and avenue-openers for young adults wishing to use their lives well through an appreciation and development of their talents and an understanding of the needs of their area; speeches by two of the students, one describing the school activities, the other challenging the rural population of the South to do something about its deplorable conditions by using Cooperative methods of improvement; a student-written play; and folk games in which guests as well as the school 'family' participated.

Edward D. Smith, of Munsie, Georgia, made a stirring appeal to the people of the South to wake up to the problems confronting them and to do something about intelligently solving these problems. Some of the high lights in his speech follow.

"The South needs aid. Not one of us can deny that when we see the deplorable conditions surrounding us on every side. But what form shall this aid take? Surely we do not wish it to help of the sort handed out by charitable institutions in the form of food and clothing. Isn't it pathetic enough to see honest men, women, and children going to various relief agencies for the bare necessities of life! No! I don't think that's the sort of thing we wish for our fellow-men. But what is the assistance desired? Isn't it something that will make the Southern farmer and laboring man self-supporting and possessed of an education which will lift him to a higher standard of living?"

"I think the person who said 'The people of the South just seem to be asleep!' put it rather aptly. Then if we are asleep are we not in desperate need of awakening? It seems to me a pity that we haven't woken up sooner to the wonderful opportunities and vast resources of this region. A stranger travelling through the South might wonder, and justly so, why this isn't one of the wealthiest and most prosperous sections in the United States today.

"To be sure, the South is not a Utopia wherein all fault lies in the people. Around us we see the soil slowly washing away before our eyes, and the remains of forest horribly mutilated by man's greed for money.

The American farmer is sometimes spoken of as the strongest individuality among men, and the southern farmer is no exception. Our forefathers regarded the forests as an enemy to be conquered by the axe. This, and the fact that they saw such an abundance of fertile soil and virgin timber that they saw no need to conserve either, leaves the present generation with a seemingly hopeless struggle to revitalize our spent soil and restore our once plentiful forests.

"But something can be done and is being done to set this to rights. Our federal government has stepped in and through her various agencies is striving to help people by arousing them to the possibilities of what they themselves can do. The Civilian Conservation Corps are doing excellent work in the way of reforestation and through soil erosion prevention projects, thus teaching ways to rebuild soil and forest. A wealth of material on the best crops for certain soils and the best policy for rebuilding eroded land can be had for the asking from numerous agencies both federal and state."

Pointing out two aspects of southern life which cannot be overlooked—tenancy, and industrial workers' low wages—and dwelling chiefly on the tenant-farmer problem most pressing in the rural South, he said, "I am speaking of the tenant farmer who would like to own his own farm but who has no chance to do so because he just can't seem to get that far ahead. Even worse off than the tenant farmer is the share-cropper who is forced to raise only a money crop and has no time for producing the food he needs for his family. Again the government has stepped in and is doing a number of things that should put new hope in life for the small farmer. A man may now borrow money from the government at a low rate of interest and on long terms to either buy or improve a farm. This plan as yet, however, may be modified to advantage. It is such a pitiful thing that this money borrowed is not always used to the best advantage! Also, there are government resettlement projects on which a number of small farmers are moved and allowed to purchase the land which is cut into small tracts. On these projects houses are built for the people who are given some work with wages as a supplement to the farming. This seems to me to be a wonderful opportunity for the younger men who have chosen farming as his life work and wishes to start off as a land owner.

"Hand in hand with the programs comes the activities of the TVA, the rural electrification program and the rehabilitation program, extensive efforts by the government to help the southern man and to make life more pleasant for him.

"But all the answers to the problem of the southland can not come from the government alone. What can we, the people of the South, do to help ourselves, and what are we going to do?"

"We are a democratic people. What is more central in the principles of a democracy than the effort of a group to help the individual? With this in mind, does it not seem most logical for one to work toward the good of his community and neighbors rather than for mere individual gain? In other words, it seems to me that cooperation is the answer to a host of the problems facing us. If, for example, through cooperative the small farmer is able to get better prices for his produce receives the same attention as that of a large plantation owner, does it not seem that the small farmer should back cooperation to the limit? That cooperation will work has been definitely proven by great forward-strides made by Denmark through a thorough going network of specialized cooperatives. If it will do such things for another country, cooperation will do as much for us. Why not look into this matter

and give it our serious thought!"

"Another method by which the small farmer may help himself is through careful study and adoption of the better ways of farming. The first thing any farmer should do is raise at home practically all the food he will need through the year. Next, he should supplement his farming with livestock, such as chickens, cattle or hogs, to bring him a cash income for things he cannot raise. Of great importance, too, is the adoption of the farming to that most suited to his particular farm. If much of a farmer's land is rather hilly and none too fertile, then to switch to dairying or tree farming is far the wisest policy. tree farming is far the wisest policy. prove his land by using proper methods of cultivation and rotation and by planting a certain amount of soil-building crops. I think, also, that intensive farming is wiser than extensive farming. That is, concentrating on the raising of as much as possible on a small amount of land so as to rebuild the soil and conserve time and energy."

Emphasizing thus principles of cooperation and ways of intelligent farming as the small farmer's greatest hope, Mr. Smith dwelt briefly on "I think," continued Miss Wilson, "it a problem that must be contended with, the question of the negro. 'The negro,' he said, 'is here and here to stay, and such being the case we should try to make of him an asset rather than a liability. It is generally known that the negro lowers the wage rate because of his lower standard of living. I think the proper way to remedy this difficulty is to educate the negro to a higher standard of living.'"

Concluding his speech, Mr. Smith repeated that "all the answers to the problems of the southland cannot be given by the government alone. Southern men, women and children must be educated to practical things rather than in mere facts and figures, and they must have aroused in them an earnest desire to raise themselves and their land to a level equal to the best in the country. It can be done, because the South has as great minds as are to be found anywhere. We are capable of putting ourselves ahead; but are we going to do it?"

Speaking for the girls, Miss Geraldine Wilson, of Hemp, Georgia told the large number of recreational facilities have been doing this past winter. "One of the girls," she said, "made this statement. 'My purpose in coming to the Folk School was to have something to do while not taking some special vocational training, and to see what the school was all about. Much to my surprise, it was quite different from what I had had in mind. In fact it is more than I thought it could be. She spoke of the whole group, staff and students, as "a family group and a happy one" in work and at play with

the large number of recreational facilities at the school, as well as in the large dining room where all gather together at meals. She continued by talking of the work. "The kind of work we do here is work that we shall all probably have to do when we start out making our own way in the world. Our work is organized so as to give each student a chance to learn a number of things. For example, the girls have cooking, housework, laundry, and almost any other kind of housework one can think of as part of a rural mountain home life, doing different things from week to week. Pretty generally too, we consider it all not so much work as a chance to learn. Work for the boys is similarly arranged so that they may find what they most wish to do. For many students this school has been a path-finder, not knowing what they want to do with their lives, and feeling quite differently when they leave.

"As far as possible the teaching is put into practice. For example, agricultural problems and methods discussed in classes are actually tried out in the labor of the farm. Surveying, forestry, and simple building construction are taught through doing.

"Most of the girls feel our 'homes' class is one of the most essential ones. We learn to appreciate values in simple worth while things that will grace our homes. Most of us have pretty well planned out what we want to do in beautifying our future homes, and in making them convenient for all kinds of life needs, as well as attractive and pleasing to live in."

Referring to uses to which flowers can be put, she said, "This brings me to something we make a lot of here at the school—the quality of being able to create. We all should have the desire to create something beautiful. In studying, through discussion, basic needs in life, we all agreed that beauty plays a needed and helpful part in our lives." Speaking of the student work on display, she said, "If you noticed the weavings, paintings, carvings, word-work and iron-work exhibited in our craft room, you saw something of our efforts in creating things were not especially attractive, still you must remember the pleasure we had in making these things and the beauty we who made them can not fail to see in them, made as they are from ordinary materials always near at hand."

Continuing she said, "I hope you haven't gotten the idea that what is on display is all that we have accomplished here. These things are only a smaller part. We have no cooking on display, and that most important thing in daily life is only one of the many things we experience through our daily chores. One of the girls said this 'I think the experience we get in the kitchen is worth any girl's time that she can spend here.'"

Miss Wilson concluded with an excellent statement well summarized in the remark to the effect that "we want to be progressive in the real sense, to build tomorrow intelligently and carefully, on the best of yesterday, adding to it the best we can and cooperating to better use and understanding ourselves and our section of the country."

Written by the students, the hilarious comedy "Ingrain Time", which followed the speeches, was enthusiastically received by the large and appreciative audience. Cecil Tipton of Brasstown, N. C., and Alice Holland, Andrews, N. C., were the father and mother of the 'Sluder' family of which Carol Deschamps, Brasstown, N. C., and Monroe Wilson, Hemp, Georgia were the daughter in love and the mischievous son. Jeannie James of Ashwood, S. C., and D. L. Martin of Blairsville, Georgia, were scheming grandmother and mooning and loosing grandson suitor respectively. Sylvan Platt, Blairsville, Georgia, was the successful suitor, a city boy; Cleo Crone, Polk County, N. C., and Ruth Martin, Martin's Creek, N. C., were friendly mother and daughter; John Erwin and A. J. Woodring, Blairsville boys, were stage managers; and in addition a number of students and ex-student took part a neighbors of the Sluders who came in to make music with guitars and banjos and mandolin. Particularly enjoyed were the mischievous antics of the son, Monroe Wilson, in overalls and with bare feet, a bandaged toe, and colorful patches about his legs and back.

Following the play the students demonstrated folk games involving much team work and carefully coordinated thinking and action, concluding with a mass-march game in which most of the guests participated.

Guests, mostly students' parents, at dinner prepared by the girl, were: Mr. and Mrs. W. G. Holland with their daughter, Helen, Andrews, N. C.; Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Wilson with two sons, Hemp, Ga.; Mrs. J. R. Martin with Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Platt from Blairsville, Ga.; Mrs. W. L. Cobb, Blue Ridge, Ga.; Mr. and Mrs. Carl Loudermilk with their son, Buzzy and Miss Mildred Martin from Isabella, Tenn.; Mrs. Fred O. Scroggs, Brasstown; Mr. and Mrs. Leon Deschamps, Folk School; Mrs. W. B. Posey, Murphy, NYA director; and from Ashwood, S. C., Mr. J. P. James, Miss Emma Thames, Miss Ruth Lockman, recreational director, Mr. Loren Yarborough, Jr., and Mr. E. T. Berry.

For the afternoon program, in addition to a number from Murphy, came Mr. Hudson with a bus-full of Andrews High School seniors, Mr. Arrant with two carloads of students from the Ogden School, Clay County, and a number of TVA officials from Norris, Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Murphy, as well as the above mentioned group from Fletcher, N. C.

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