VI

A TEACHER'S TRAVELS

For years past I have been saying that one of the best ways to study history and geography—even education and current problems—is to visit one's neighbors. And to prove that one may now and then have the courage to follow his own prescription, I recently traveled a thousand miles south, and then came back to Virginia. I went south because it was winter; and I came back to Virginia because I could think of nothing better to do. Two thousand miles of distance, six weeks of time, nine states, twenty schools and colleges, more than a score of busy cities, many of them historic, and people—old friends and new friends—these, I aver, constitute good subject-matter and ample for a post-graduate course.

It was the day after the ground hog saw his shadow that I set out. This was perhaps the reason why the snow storm did not overtake me. My first stop was in the vicinity of Roanoke. The snowstorm gave up the chase at Buchanan; but the rain poured down all over Tinker Mountain and Mill Mountain, and all the other mountains thereabouts. At Big Stone Gap and Appalachia, ten days later, the thermometer fell to zero amid some flurries of snow, and the frosts kept pace even to Louisiana and Florida. I had been wondering what I should do with my overcoat when once I reached the Sunny South, but the constantly cool temperatures finally relieved all anxiety upon that point.

And I also learned the real genesis of the term, "Sunny South." It is not to be understood as meaning that the skies are always sunny, but rather that the people always have sunshine in their hearts.

At Daleville College I met an earnest band of students—young men and young women. Several of the teachers I recognized as associates of former years at Bridgewater and Harrisonburg. Daleville is near the historic town of Fincastle, the home town of several girls well known at Blue-Stone Hill.

Virginia College, nestled among the foot hills of Mill Mountain, stands at the head of Rosalind Avenue. Let us call the primeval forest that skirts the campus the Forest of Arden. Then who can doubt, if Rosalind should hang some verses upon the trees, that Orlando would at once appear? In the school only Rosalinds dwell, but when tasks become too heavy Touchstone's wit and Orlando's courage may both be had without delay.

The stimulating reunion in Roanoke, on February 6, with Harrisonburg girls has already been noted in the columns of the Teacher. But let it never be forgotten. The Harrisonburg club in Roanoke is bound to grow and prosper.

At East Radford one always finds a whole-hearted welcome. The State Normal School there, perched on its hill among the ancient oaks, is a place of beauty and industry. The president of the institution, Dr. John Preston McConnel, is one of those wholesome and whole-souled persons that always create a good atmosphere. In fact, he is so pre-eminently potent in this respect that it is hardly true to speak of him as "one of those." He is almost in a class by himself. And the Radford Normal as a whole is a fine expression of his personality and that of the kindred spirits that he has associated with him in the management of the school.

A bishop and statesman were honored in the naming of Emory and Henry College. Near it Patrick Henry's sister Elizabeth spent much of her life—first at Seven Mile Ford, as Mrs. William Campbell; later at Saltville, as Madam Russell. And among the distinguished alumni of the college are a notable line of Stuarts: "Jeb" Stuart, George Stuart, and Henry Carter Stuart.

A number of years ago, when I made my first visit to Emory and Henry, I learned a remarkable fact: that every student in the college was an active member of one or the other of the two literary societies of the institution. This time I learned that this vital interest in literary work is still being maintained. Whether every man in college is now a member of a literary society I did not learn. Between the visits a number of new buildings had taken the places of the old ones, and the group of fair "co-eds" had somewhat increased in size, though the great majority of young women who affiliate with Emory and Henry are provided for in Martha Washington College, at Abingdon.

My next stop was at Virginia Intermont College, in the busy little city of Bristol.
May, 1920] 

THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

103

Here genial President Noffsinger has gathered about him an able corps of teachers, and fine things are being done. On the campus is a concrete example of the Intermont spirit. It is the bungalow in which the war workers of Bristol carried on for two or three years. When it had to be sold, the college girls bought it, moved it bodily to their hill, and there fitted it up as a memorial of days past and as a rendezvous for days to come.

My sojourn at Intermont College was made especially pleasant by the presence of two young ladies who were formerly students at Blue-Stone Hill. They were kind enough to rush up to the platform as soon as formalities were over, and I was certainly glad to have them do so. And it was no small privilege to eat with three hundred girls in the beautiful dining hall of the college. It needs only them to make it complete—and they need it only for the same reason.

From Bristol I went northwest through the mountains—past Mendota, Moccasin Gap, Gate City, Speer’s Ferry, Clinchport, and through the Natural Tunnel—to Big Stone Gap.

At Gate City I wanted to stop and see Stella Kane; and at the Natural Tunnel I wanted to get out and look for the trail of the Red Fox; but night prevented my desires in both cases. At Moccasin Gap the train did not stop long enough for me to get out and assist a little girl in picking up a bag of popcorn, spilled because of a string that didn’t stay tied, and to wonder about a stone monument that stands upon a knoll just across the creek. A few days later, as I was returning the same way, I learned that the monument marks the first meeting place of the Scott County court; but what had become of the little lass with the bag of popcorn nobody seemed to know.

Nobody with any sentiment can go to Big Stone Gap without being impressed. The towering wall of mountains that encircles the place so completely that one cannot see a way out is of itself enough to give the locality distinction; and to one who has read John Fox’s books the scene has a double charm. The recent death of John Fox has heightened rather than lessened the interest that the visitor to the Gap is bound to feel. As one wanders out toward Imboden Hill and pauses near the old mill site, he almost expects to meet June coming down from the old school house among the trees, or to hear the rattle of horses’ hoofs as Dave Tolliver or bad Rufe comes galloping down the ravine. Then as one goes on farther, up the Gap toward Appalachia, he feels like turning off to the left, into the trail of the Lonesome Pine, but wonders upon second thought whether it would be safe to do so. There are so many places in which the Red Fox or those like him might hide.

But the Gap and all the surrounding country is now quite safe. Good roads and numerous railroads have cut through and over the mountains, until one may go here and there almost at will. Since the day, a century or more ago, when Bishop Francis Asbury got lost in the mountain gorge just above Appalachia and left a memorial of the experience in the name of a turbulent stream, “Preacher Creek,” many changes for civilization have been wrought among the mountains. Rich in coal and iron, they have paid well for their own exploitation. But they still rise steep and high and rugged, often in the very path of progress. The electric lights of Appalachia are so elevated, many of them, and so irregularly distributed, that they look at night like bright stars up in the sky. Right in the heart of the straggling, Alpine town, Preacher Creek tumbles into Powell River, and down through the rugged gap they go, roaring and splashing like two spirits of a mountain storm, just out of prison.

On a bluff, high above a deep pool in the river, stands the Appalachia high school. There one cold, drizzly night, I tried to tell the little company assembled about Stonewall Jackson’s campaign in the valley of the Shenandoah. One of Jackson’s right-hand men was General John D. Imboden, of Augusta County. Later in life General Imboden went into the southwest of Virginia and aided materially in developing the mineral resources of the country. Imboden Hill at Big Stone Gap and the village of Imboden, near Appalachia, are memorials of his work. At the close of my lecture on Jackson’s Campaign, in the course of which I had made special reference to General Imboden, I found out that Mrs. Alexander, historian of the Daughters of the Confederacy, and a group of her pupils were present in the little audience, and that they had walked over three miles from the
village of Imboden, through all the mud and snow, to hear me tell the story of Jackson's foot cavalry. After that I felt more encouraged to hope that the occasion had not been altogether a failure.

At Appalachia I was hospitably entertained by my good friend, George A. Jordan, who is the efficient supervisor of the district schools. He is a worthy successor of Miss Rosa Tinder, whose splendid work in the same region, especially during the terrible influenza epidemic in 1918, is a matter of pride to all of our school family.

At another place I have indicated how my wanderings in the vicinity of Big Stone Gap and Appalachia were facilitated and enhanced by the good offices of Janet Bailey. She, her mother, and her good friends, in a most generous spirit, made the time pleasant and profitable. Professor H. L. Sulfridge, principal of the Big Stone Gap high school, and his efficient staff of helpers, made a day's visit with them most enjoyable.

Through the kindness of Professor Sulfridge I became acquainted with a manuscript copy of a book that is very rare and very readable. It is entitled "Life and Adventures of Wilburn Waters." It was written and published some years ago by Charles B. Coale, of Abingdon. It tells of Waters's life as a hermit hunter on White Top Mountain—of his Indian blood, his remarkable adventures, and of the pioneer days in which he lived. It is a valuable source of history for southwest Virginia.

At Big Stone Gap I was disappointed in not seeing Mr. George L. Taylor, a member of the Virginia Normal School Board. He and his family were quarantined on account of the influenza. But I did see again my good friend, Hon. Tate Irvine. Some twenty years ago he, as a member of the Board of Visitors to the University, was in measure responsible for bestowing the John Y. Mason Fellowship on a raw specimen from the mountains of western Virginia. I trust that he has not yet found reason to regret it. He is still a member of the Board of Visitors, I am happy to say. He it was who told me about the significance of the little monument at Moccasin Gap. He could not be expected to know about the little girl with the bag of popcorn.

February 13 was spent in the region of Big Stone Gap, Appalachia, Dorchester, and Norton. It was also Friday. This reminds me of a string of curious coincidences. Here it is. On Friday, the 13th, I rode down a mountain, round many short curves, after nightfall, at a rate of twenty miles an hour, without an accident. The next day, Saint Valentine's Day, I went into a barber shop and was shaved by Martin Luther. On February 19 General Pershing and I were in Chattanooga—and visitors at Chickamauga Park. On Washington's birthday I discovered Columbus (Miss.). A few days later I crossed the Suwanee River, in the moonlight, with a real Indian in the seat just behind me and with a whole lot of darkies in the car just ahead of me.

These reminiscences may be continued if Professor Johnston continues to be hard up for copy.

John W. Wayland

VII

IS THERE A MEDIIEVALIST IN YOUR TOWN?

The medievalist in education thinks that "teachers can learn their art by experience and by observing others perform the trick. In the same way, I presume, he would think that the surgeon should learn to cut out one's appendix by experience and by looking at others do the job. Similarly, an engineer should learn to build a bridge by experience and by observing bridges being built. It would be a waste of time for either a surgeon or an engineer to study the principles underlying his art. To the medievalist there are no principles; there are simply preconceptions and prejudices and generalities. Of course, it would not do a teacher any good to study these latter things; and since there is nothing else so far as the medievalist can see concerning the art of teaching, then there is nothing for the teacher to study that will assist him to understand the minds of his pupils, to select material wisely, and to employ methods which will arouse the initiative and aggressive interest of the learner. If our nation should follow the medievalist's advice, we would be set back in education with Spain and Russia."—M. V. O'Shea, in School and Society.