

## FROM ILLITERATE BOY TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

**H**OW an illiterate boy of 21 became the principal of a large and growing school at Crossnore, N. C., within the space of ten years was told recently by C. McCoy Franklin. He is one of those sturdy Appalachian mountaineers whose Scotch Irish forefathers settled in the Southern States nearly 200 years ago.

"I come from the section of the Appalachian Range known as the Great Grandfather Basin," he began, singing out his words in his rich Southern speech. "It lies in the northwest corner of North Carolina. That venerable old mountain, the Great Grandfather, rises 5,962 feet above the sea level. That may not seem very high to those of you who have travelled, but down there we are completely shut off from the rest of the world. No roads have been built into our country, the beds of our streams are oftentimes the only 'roads' over which the lumber wagons can get up the mountain sides. Bicycles and automobiles are unheard of. I can talk to you in one of two languages—in English, or in our own mountain tongue.

The mountain language to which Mr. Franklin referred is the so-called dialect spoken in the highlands of Kentucky and the Carolinas. Some protest that it is wrong to call their way of speaking a "dialect," for many of the words used can be found in Chaucer. Who has not heard them talk of their poor "beest," or say that they were never "afeerd," or that Johnny would be in "afore dark," or that Eliza had "clomb" that mountain?

### THE SCHOOL HE WENT TO

As he related his story, Mr. Franklin only occasionally burst forth with a native expression. "You want to hear about the mountain folks down South, and I reckon I can best give you a picture of their lives by letting you take a peep into my own

home. My family was typical with one exception, mammy and pappy only had fifteen children while most of our neighbors had twenty or thereabouts. I was the oldest and had to help to bring up the family. From the time I was a wee little lad I wanted 'larnin'' more than anything else. My pappy couldn't understand. He said he'd never had any 'larnin',' and he did not see why I needed any. There was land for me to cultivate as he had done. He expected that some day I would work for my family from dawn to sunset as he had done for his.

"My dreams were other than that. I had heard that afar off there was another world where people had books; that was where I wanted to go, to the land of the 'ferreigners,' as they say up there in the hills I came from.

"Oh, I went to school, yes. But come with me up the mountain side and let me show you the schoolhouse. There are no roads or paths, so we will walk up the bed of the stream, and if you prize your shoes you had better take them and your stockings off. The schoolhouse is a little log cabin with one big room. In it sitting around the walls, for the benches have no backs, are boys and girls ranging from 8 to about 16. One speller suffices for us all; from it we learn reading and writing. Please don't for a minute imagine that we have school every day. The teacher visits from village to village. Some years there is not money enough to bring him to our schoolhouse but one week out of the year. All in all, I had six weeks' schooling up to the time I was 21 years old!"

From a different source we have another picture of a Carolina mountain school much in appearance like the one described by Mr. Franklin. In the middle of the floor two planks had been raised, leaving an open space about two feet square. All around the room sit boys and girls, "chawin'!" We are told by our informant that neither they nor the teacher ever missed the mark!



## LEARNING NOT ALL IN BOOKS

"But," he went on, "there are a hundred things a boy can learn without books if he loves the great out-of-doors. My real school and church were in the forests and in the farm yard, such as it was! In the open, among the trees, the bushes, the flowers and the animals I learned many of nature's secrets. Early of a morning I would go out in the woods and, sitting quietly hidden by the shrubbery, I would wait for the call of the hermit thrush caroling to his mate, then the mocking bird awoke and soon the bob white joined in the chorus." Just to prove that he really knew their songs, Mr. Franklin imitated them all.

"Full well I knew that I must be content with Nature's teachings until I was 21, for up to that age I was my father's property, subject even to corporal punishment if he chose to exercise his authority—which, let me add, was never administered unless deserved. There were no idle hands in the family. When the spring came we all set out the crops and helped bring in the harvest in the autumn. Our farms down there in the Great Grandfather Basin aren't like the vast acres of open country that the word 'farm' conjures up to your mind. They are tiny little plots of ground clinging to the steep mountainsides.

"One day mammy left me to mind baby—I was 12 and he was the tenth—while she and the others worked in the field. My particular duty was to see that no snakes bit my little brother where he lay in an improvised cradle on the ground. Somewhere up in a tree a mocking bird sang—I forgot my charge! As I moved away to look for the songster, baby turned over and rolled from the ledge on which he lay. Over and over he went so fast that I couldn't catch him until some shrubs stopped him in his course. That night I felt the sting of the birch rod!"

John Fox, writing of the Appalachians, tells of a man who fell from his own corn-field and broke his neck! A mountaineer

trying to give a "ferreigner" an idea of the swiftly mounting sides of the hill in his "neck o' the woods," said: "Goin' up you mighty nigh stand up straight and bite the ground; goin' down a man wants hobnails in the seat of his pants."

"There is no machinery to help us in our farming," Mr. Franklin continued. "Fields are cultivated with a hoe, and the small amount of wheat we raise is flailed out on the bare ground and winnowed by pouring the grain and chaff from basket to basket while some one stands by and fans with a cloth. The women work as hard as the men. They not only bear the children, help with the crops, cook, wash and iron, but they make all the clothes as well. My mother spun the cloth for our clothes and even made our hats. Pappy made our shoes, brogans we called them, from the hide of our own cattle. You can imagine the crude things they were.

AT TWENTY-ONE, STARTS OUT TO GET  
"LARNIN'"

"The end of my twenty-first year approached. I had three pets which at odd times my father had given me—a rooster, a calf and a pig. The last had been frozen and given up for dead, but seeing its ear wiggle I knew that it had a fighting chance and begged my father to let me have it. These three beloved creatures were my capital; in them lay my future. The day before my twenty-first birthday I sold them and got \$25. Never had I dreamed that there was so much money in the world. The next morning I rose early and donned 'my best,' packed my few belongings in my trunk—a wooden box constructed for the purpose of accompanying me on my voyage.

"'Whar' yo' goin', son?' asked my father, seeing me thus attired.

"'I'm a goin' to town to get larnin.' I'm free today—I'm twenty-one.'

"No amount of persuasion could dissuade me. Mammy and pappy stood in the doorway watching me as I left and my brothers



and sisters, those of them that could walk, followed me through the woods, until weary they dropped, unable to make the sixteen miles I had to tramp to the station.

"I can't describe my sensation when I saw the train. I started to get aboard with my trunk on my shoulder and was terribly worried when I learned that I had to relinquish it, receiving in exchange only a little slip of paper. I bade farewell to my little wooden box forever, but trunk or no trunk, I was going to Berea, Ky., where I had heard there was a school.

"The train pulled out. I watched from the windows and exclaimed out loud as I saw what I thought was a giant picket fence whirling by me.

"That ain't no fence. Them's telegraph poles,' explained a fellow traveler. I did not understand; telegraphy was unknown to me.

"When I arrived at Berea and walked up the main street trudging under the burden of my luggage, I could not imagine why the children pointed at me and laughed. Now I know what a funny sight I must have been. Six feet tall, thin as a rail, my obstreperous hair standing upright through a hole in the crown of my home-made hat, my strange looking clothes hanging loosely on me, and my brogans making a weird noise as I moved along. I learned where the school building was and made my way to the registrar's office.

#### HOW HE REPAID HIS BENEFactor

"Want to go to school, do you? Well, read this.' He thrust a reader at me. It might have been Greek.

"I reckon I didn't larn that,' said I.

"Try this.' He handed me a simple problem in arithmetic.

"I reckon I didn't larn that neither.' The golden gates of my Paradise of learning seemed to be closing in my face.

"Well,' he snapped, 'you can't come here.'

"A warm arm was laid about my shoulder, and I felt a kind hand take mine.

'Yes, there is a place here for you if you want knowledge badly enough to come so far in search of it.'

"It was the principal of the school who, sitting somewhere in the background, had seen and heard me. I was entered in the first grade with boys and girls even less than half my age. Many were the jibes and taunts they flung at the big fellow who stood so long a time before the blackboard trying to work out his problems. Outside of school hours I worked to pay for my living. The years passed, I was graduated from the Berea School and went to the Kentucky State College, of which I am a graduate.

"Now I have gone back to my own people and am helping the boys and girls in the part of the country where I came from to get the thing I sought without having to fight so hard for it. For one year I have been Principal of the Crossnore School.

"Mine is the story of thousands upon thousands of young people in the mountains who yearn for 'larnin' more than all else. Once the opportunity comes to them they are quick to grasp it. Theirs is the same blood that flows in the veins of the early New England settlers, only less fortunate. Their ancestors turned their eyes toward the South, where they were locked in the stern embrace of the mountain fastnesses. Unable to get beyond or out of them, they have stayed, proudly living their lives in complete isolation. Today a way is opening to them. By means of it they will not go out into the world, but the world will be brought in to them."

The Crossnore School of which Mr. Franklin is the Principal was not founded until some time after he left home to seek his education. Its founders, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Sloop, who were tramping through the Linville River Valley, saw and appreciated the need of the mountain children. They reclaimed a small log cabin and turned it into a schoolhouse. Today a modern, well-equipped building stands on the old site.

—The New York Times.