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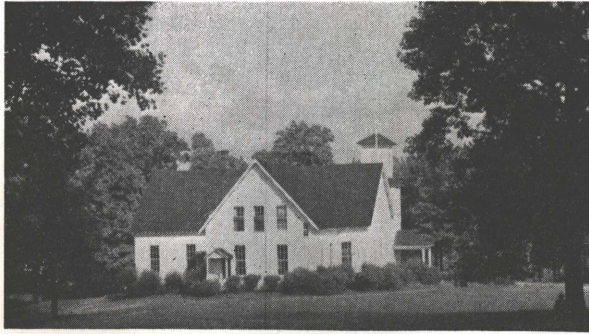
WHOLENESS VS. HOLINESS IN THE MOUNTAINS

Pleasant Hill Academy
Pleasant Hill, Tennessee

VICTOR OBENHAUS



Reprinted from RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



THE ACADEMY CHAPEL



COOPERATIVELY OWNED POTATO SPRAY

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ONE of the community workers in our region expressed the conviction of many others about this part of the country when he said, "We were doing all right until the Holiness got us." The Holiness type of religion represents one of the phenomena in the life of Americans. The growth of a type of religion which provides escape from the hardships of life here and betrays little concern for improving the lot of the people to whom it appeals is an increasingly common feature of American cultural and religious life. Large areas of our country and especially rural areas provide fertile soil for this type of religion when their people get in a mood of despair and hopelessness. Not only does such a religion emphasize escape in the life hereafter; it actually discourages active participation in showing the conditions which make for such despair.

This record tells in part what one institution is doing in a region which is very strongly influenced by the Holiness movement and others related to it. Since this is not only a problem of conflicting religious expressions, we shall present a general picture of the economic and educational background. Since we believe these are all of a piece, we shall need to review the total program in which we are engaged, both because we feel no phases can be considered independently, and because of the fact that the school through which we are working is, in origin, by present affiliation, and by preference of its staff, avowedly "Christian."

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Pleasant Hill Academy is one of the mountain schools which is set in an area heretofore scarcely touched by the impact of the machine age. Within the past two decades a whole new basis for existence has been opened for many people in what has often been referred to as "America's Last Frontier." The highlands of America's Southeast presented a type of life little known to the reading or traveling public until this region became famous as a vacation spot.

Much has been made of the fact that this part of the country is populated by people of pure Anglo-Saxon stock, but that fact means little to the residents of this region simply because they have not come in contact with the descendants of emigrés from any other part of the world. Of course, that situation is now changing.

After the Civil War the search for new timber started a boom on the Cumberland Plateau, the western division of the Southern Appalachian Highlands. By the turn of the century, this region, with much of the land cleared of timber, was being promoted for its health advantages. At the same time, it was found that the entire mountain was heavily underlaid with coal, and large scale mining operations were begun. New openings were created in seemingly inaccessible locations, and railroads were laid down, honeycombing what was, shortly before, a vast wilderness.

Following the Civil War a farmer in search of land came from Illinois. After taking up residence in this seemingly

remote part of America, he discovered that private individuals would have to provide schooling for any families living here as public education was practically non-existent. The denomination with which this family had had a former relationship was appealed to to send a minister. On arriving, this courageous pioneer, himself already at the retiring age, and accompanied by his family, started a school and a church. This was the beginning of the community now known as Pleasant Hill, Tennessee. From its beginning the church and school life were identical. What was true here has been true throughout the mountains, as practically all of the 150 schools started during those years were church affiliated. The history of the relationship in the South will provide a fascinating chapter in American church-state relationships.

From the time the doors were opened to those wishing to take lower elementary school work, all who came had to engage in physical labor as a means of helping to pay for their education. Labor was primarily a means toward securing an opportunity for education. It was not regarded as an integral part of the education itself. Of course, there was no attempt to deny the educational value of such work, but it was not considered as important as book study. If those pioneers in education could have read the American Council on Education brochure placing work as one of the foremost needs of all young people, it might have revolutionized education for a whole region. But that recommendation came a half century later. Mental work was the important ideal because this was the only avenue to employment which would be of a dignified and less arduous nature.

It is to be understood, therefore, why every teacher in the public schools of this county and surrounding counties was at one time a graduate of this school. Being the first school in the entire area, it

could provide teachers when public education came into prominence.

As public education improved, the grade levels of the private school advanced also. A new grade was added every few years until finally a full high school course of twelve grades was established. Gradually the state program of education enabled the counties to pay a reasonable wage to elementary school teachers, and the elementary grades of Pleasant Hill Academy were made a full public school, though these grades have met in the same building with the high school even until this day.

On the northwest Cumberland Plateau there are still vast stretches of virgin timber and land inaccessible by road and almost impassable on foot. As one passes over the plateau going from Knoxville to Nashville, a distance of approximately two hundred miles, he rarely suspects that lying to the north and south of the hard surface road are wilderness areas inhabited by large numbers of the descendants of the pioneers who moved into this country, in some instances as long ago as a century and a half. Contrary to the general impression, the mountains are comparatively densely populated. The statistics for birth rates in the southeast portion of the United States have startled the country at large. This is one of America's population reservoirs, for mountain families are larger than the average for the nation as a whole. Thus when one sees the remoteness of many homes, the lack of educational facilities, and the large number of children for whom educational opportunities are sought, one sees the first justification for such a program of education as is now being developed in this and other schools of the mountains.

Frequently it is asked whether the time has not come for the closing of such schools as these. In Professor Dunn's study, conducted under the auspices of

the Russell Sage Foundation, one gets a partial answer to that question. A great many of these schools during the decade from 1930-1940 did close. Four denominational schools within sixty miles of Pleasant Hill Academy closed during that time. At one time the Congregational Church operated more than two hundred schools in the South. Most of them have become public schools now. In a few instances, where a special need existed or where a special type of work was being accomplished, the institutions of this denomination have been maintained. Whether this and similar schools should close may depend upon the type of answer they may give through their total program to the major problems of the area they serve.

JUSTIFICATION FOR SUCH A SCHOOL PROGRAM

1. *Educational opportunities.*

Of the five basic reasons for the continuance of this particular school, Pleasant Hill Academy, one has already been mentioned, the necessity for providing additional educational opportunities for young people who could not otherwise obtain them. That reason, alone, however, would probably not be sufficient to warrant continuing this particular enterprise. It is a significant reason, but in the end it is insufficient. The other four major reasons supplement the first and they are closely interwoven.

2. *Education of type most needed.*

The second justification for continuing such a work as this lies in the type of education being provided for the student in school here. At one time it was felt that a person must go to the cities north of the Ohio River to make a living. Akron, Springfield, Dayton, Detroit all took a great many young people from the mountains. Temporarily, of course, that condition is again true, as the large wages are to be found there during the present war production program. However, during the past decade more and

more young people from this part of the country realized that there might be an opportunity to secure a reasonable living here on the plateau. The type of educational program being developed here at this school was designed with a view to the fact that many of our young people would remain here. Even if they do not do so, the educational experience they had here would serve them in at least as good stead as the traditional type, and in all probability would be distinctly superior.

There is not sufficient space for a full report of the curriculum developments being undertaken. A few, however, could be mentioned. In the first place, we have recognized that the labor which has been so definite a part of this whole enterprise is as truly a part of the total educational experience as is any other aspect of life. Whereas at one time the operation of the farm was considered labor and classroom work was considered true education, we have been able to make the operating of the farm in all its phases the accredited agricultural training. The real learning has always come from that phase anyhow, but credit has never been given for it. Similarly, the girls had taken home economics, learning to cook on a small stove in what we call the practice cottage, but getting their actual experience in preparing the meals for the entire student body. We had always known that the greatest learning took place in the operating of the school kitchen but it was "labor" and, therefore, not truly educational. True, there are difficult hurdles yet to overcome in effecting such changes, but they are largely of a technical nature.

Classes in senior science have planned and executed the wiring of a new school-community building; also, the new co-operative store and gasoline station. Another group has specialized on household chemistry and the type of science needed by every housewife in operating the many phases of the home.

In this part of the country, tuberculosis has to be reckoned with as a large and ever present factor. Thus, health constitutes a sizable total of the curriculum. It was our good fortune to have come to our campus a highly skilled and very competent doctor who with his talented wife were fleeing from the Nazi terror. The presence of such people has enabled us to make our young people decidedly more health conscious. Even before their arrival, however, one class had undertaken to scour and disinfect and paint the walls of the court house in the county seat, some eleven miles from us, as a part of the program for reducing the spread of tuberculosis germs. Public buildings are not always noted for their cleanliness and citizens are not always careful of the health aspects of such buildings.

Still another class constructed a set of toilets for the elementary school, doing all of the work from building the cement blocks to adding the actual fixtures and installing them.

High in the rank of importance in the type of education we are stressing is the crafts program. Through this part of the country there are many individuals who have special skills, but who need encouragement and opportunity for continuing their skill. The art program of this school was launched at a time when many criticized it, saying that other things were more important. In this and in surrounding counties is to be seen the evidence of the wisdom of the decision to stress local and hand-made creations. Homes have been beautified, hobbies have resulted from such encouragement and, in many instances, actual financial gain is to be recorded as the skill of the craftsman has found outlet. Needless to say, the entire campus bears the mark of such emphasis.

Here people live without opportunity for social life except in their church. One of the essential features of this school has been the strong emphasis in

teaching the kind of recreational activities which will be of lasting worth. The singing games and folk dances, always known to the mountains, are being revived and encouraged largely through the Southern Mountain Workers. Such a center as the John C. Campbell Folk School has been of great benefit in encouraging this type of recreation. We are indebted to these two organizations beyond our ability to express ourselves. The young people of our own community, both in the school and out of it, have found a new and wholesome kind of recreation and the interest has spread in many directions. A capable teacher of music, awakened to the possibilities lying in such a type of recreation, has among his other contributions become the leader and tutor in community recreational life. Likewise, a number of our students have had the opportunity to visit many different states with their singing games, ballads, and folk dances, teaching them to other parts of the country as well as our own.

This does not indicate that we attach no importance to other phases of education. It is our problem, however, to guide the total educational experiences of our students in such a way that they, as well as the teachers who are planning the program, may sense the purpose of whatever they may be learning, and that their learning may arise from their own sense of that purpose.

3. *Work with adults.*

A third major emphasis justifying, we believe, such an enterprise as this is the work with adults. Children will in time influence the homes and community, but the gap between the present and the time when such influence will be felt is often great. Too, if a school is to be a truly vital part of a community's life, it must be of worth to all ages. Increasingly, we are trying to effect a closer identification of the school with the total life of the community. This has been one of the major gains in our type of

educational progress of the past few decades.

Because the fact had already been established that a young person must go to some other part of the country to make a living, little emphasis was placed upon the vocational opportunities and economical benefits to be derived from our own part of the region. A member of the school staff, sensing the possibilities for adult education, started a number of study groups, and, working in conjunction with the Community Church, helped to launch a small cooperative store as an outlet of one of the study groups. Later this organization, discovering what capacity it contained for economic and cultural benefit for themselves and their neighbors, enlarged the program of the store, taking over a building not in use at the time and installing a gasoline service as well. Members of the co-op refinshed the interior of the building as part of the rent. Students in the senior science program at the Academy worked out the wiring plans and installed the necessary electrical equipment.

Similarly, a company of men in the community were encouraged to purchase a harvesting-threshing combine in cooperative fashion. In less than two years this combine was fully paid for and the venture was so inspiring that a much larger combine was purchased, the money being borrowed from a local citizen. Already the additional machine is more than half paid for and the prospects are very good for owning the machine outright in a few more months. If there were any question concerning the value of such activities to the people of the region, the advantages which have accrued to the participants in the several cooperatives and also to many neighbors who have needed work done on their own farms could be cited. In similar fashion, other farm cooperative organizations have come into being. Important to all of these and to the entire community is the establishment of a Federal

Credit Union, a genuine bank of the community people. Its funds have enjoyed a rapid turnover and the assistance it has afforded to those who can take advantage of its benefits has made a marked difference in the welfare of the people who comprise this sturdy organization.

The total effect has been to provide a sense of hopefulness in existence which has heretofore been lacking. Perhaps it can be added that because of this influence and the work which preceded it there is less likelihood that people of this community will become enmeshed in a religious emphasis which extols the virtues of some far away life instead of using one's abilities to better life here.

4. *Aid to public education.*

Fourth in the series of justifications for the type of work being done here is one which is somewhat difficult to state lest interpreted as arrogant. The administration of the American Missionary Association has steadfastly held to the thesis that in addition to the functions mentioned above, there should be a continuance of a contribution made by the schools of their organization to the public schools in the areas surrounding them. As Pleasant Hill Academy was one of the first schools in this part of the country, it helped to set the standard for other schools which came into being.

If our type of program cannot be adapted to public schools, then a large measure of our usefulness is nullified. On the other hand, if we are determined that the type of education we are conducting can be applied in the public schools, we shall have performed a useful service.

The functional type of education mentioned in previous paragraphs is in many instances capable of adaptation to other schools than our own. We are not contending that it is a wholly exemplary

achievement, but rather that it is in the right direction.

Many school programs presuppose invited public speakers, and schools which have tried to introduce so-called "New Type of Commencements" have met marked opposition. That was because the students found it more difficult to analyze the program of education in which they had been engaging than to hear a speaker tell them something. After three consecutive years of developing the new type of commencement with participation by students themselves, rather than having them listen to an outside "spell binder," we are, for the most part, convinced that this represents a distinct gain.

5. *Religious education.*

The fifth justification is the most difficult of all, but that is not the reason for leaving it until the end. The responsibility for religious leadership in a school which is traditionally religious-minded creates an obligation for which most of us are inadequate. Reference has been made to the type of religious life which is prevalent through this section of the country. Perhaps, the most effective single illustration is to be found in the type of hymns which constitute the overwhelming nature of the musical diet of religious groups here — for example, such gospel hymns as "Won't it be Wonderful There," or "We'll Understand it All By and By," "I'll be a Millionaire Then" and "Blessed Jesus, Hold My Hand." The music of such hymns is distinctly contagious and is not far from swing music. As such, it is perhaps a type of folk music. Judging from its popular appeal and the vast output of new songs each year, one senses an obvious call for this type of song. It grows out of the monotony of common life and the hope of escape.

Out of this background come most of the students of this school. Religion is something one "gets." It can be ac-

quired in a big revival, culminating in baptism in the river. We have been told that the reason parents permit their children to come to this school is that we are not religious and, therefore, cannot pervert the attitudes of young people.

Gradually students have come to see that there is a connection between the entire level of social life and the "Golden Rule." The presence on our campus of four non-Christians has made for a new appreciation of the brotherhood of man and a common Fatherhood of God.

Music with us has played a part of indescribable importance under the direction of a leader who understands the background out of which our pupils come and who at the same time has profound appreciation for the best in the world of music. Without argument, but simply by letting the less stable type of hymns appear in contrast with great religious music, there has arisen a noticeable appreciation of the better type of sacred music.

Though this story deals primarily with the work of a single institution, the story of this community is incomplete without inclusion of reference to two other significant pieces of work being done in this community. The Community Church was established almost simultaneously with the school and by the same person. During its history much in the nature of extension work has been done in the outlying communities, this consisting of social work in its many phases, both group work and family case work. Student summer service workers have conducted daily vacation schools, and teachers of schools in remote places have been able to clothe their children because of the interest of the Community Church in Pleasant Hill. The emphasis in the preaching service has been upon building the good life here and now, in contrast with the prevailing emphasis upon the later life.

The other institution which has been

of untold benefit to this entire region arose out of the school and the church. Uplands Sanatorium is the product of the heart and mind of two pioneering women, one a doctor and the other a nurse, who saw the great need for medical assistance in these remote places. Too, the fact that tuberculosis was so prevalent aroused these women and the others who became associated with them to provide for those afflicted with this disease. This superb service, with the obstetrical aid, the General Hospital with available surgical help, plus the regular clinics held throughout the region, have given the people of this area an idea of what practical religion means.

Pleasant Hill Academy is traditionally a Christian school. No attempt has been made to effect conformity to any single creed or to secure converts. As has often been said, it is a source of both strength and weakness in the Congregational-Christian Church that they have not sought proselytes. However, such freedom need not be confused with indifference. Our staff has spent many hours considering our relationship to the whole Christian ideal and to the church. Naturally there are differences of judgment, and conformity has not been sought. The important fact, however, is that a staff of workers is continuously seeking to appraise its work in the light of a common loyalty, and this makes for a unity of spirit despite diversity of opinion. There can but be a carry over from such a state to the life of the institution as a whole.

In order that students might have opportunity to share in the life of a church, it was decided to form a student church to supplement rather than compete with the Community Church. Imagining that this was a company of people constituting a religious body in a new hitherto unsettled part of the country, the question arose as to the type of denomination the new church was to represent. Each

wished to incorporate its own unique features. Some insisted upon foot washing, others upon immersion, others upon the common regulations of each Sunday, et cetera. Finally, one student suggested that we postpone these features until we found what was characteristic of the church when it was first established. From that day to this, almost three years later, the question has never arisen again.

The church has its own benevolence committee and its cabinet responsible for various types of worship. Two members of the staff serve as counsellors, one in special relationship to the morning service and the other to the much more informal Sunday evening program. In the beginning the students voted against giving the "Pioneer Church," as it is called, responsibilities for all religious activities on the campus (Hi-Y, Girl Reserves, Academy Fellowship). A year later the vote was unanimous that this be brought about, indicating that the church administration had gained the confidence of the student body.

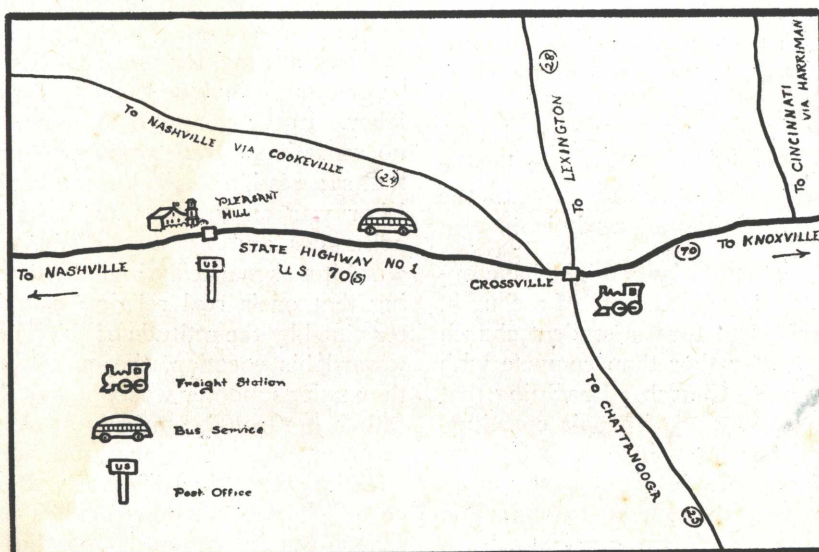
When a mother came to withdraw her son from school on the grounds that he had become an agnostic through the work of the sophomore Bible course, it became the Principal's obligation to point out to her that her agnostic son came to this school as one teacher put it, "without any affinity for work." His orthodoxy did not include capacity for honest labor. In the course of the year, though no sensational transformation occurred, that same lad, at least, knew what honest labor was on the part of some of his colleagues and his own disposition toward it was markedly improved. Believing that one's real religion may be determined by the attitude of the individual toward his vocation, the question asked the anxious mother was whether she had rather her son be an honest workman or have him believe that the stories of Creation were literally true. It should be added that the same boy is back in school, but on condition that his work-

manship be improved, and with a substantial voluntary increase in tuition payment on the part of his self-supporting mother.

Many others, as well as members of the staff, have asked what warrants designating this whole program as "religious." Perhaps that can best be answered by the procedure followed and the plan projected by students and faculty in developing a plan for one grade group. The students had had experience in shaping up a curriculum the previous year, so they were not wholly unprepared to select the areas they wished to explore. Those chosen were language use, science, world affairs, and religion. A suitable and effective springboard was

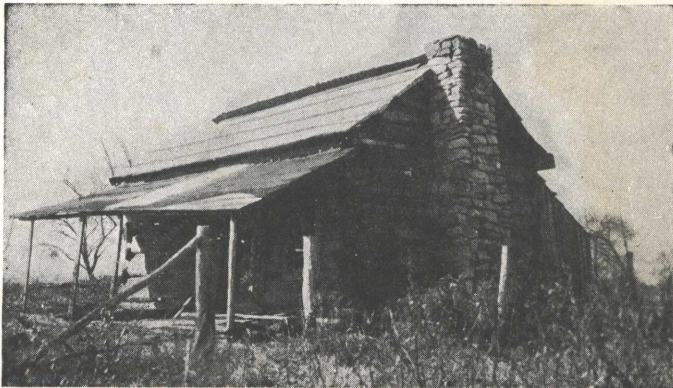
the statement of the Four Freedoms — which, otherwise translated, imply the dignity of man. From whence came such notions of humanity and what do they signify? It is apparent that there is full opportunity for the application and exploration of the areas chosen. But the major problem itself is decidedly a religious problem.

In brief, it is the conviction of our staff that in a similar way the approach to the whole life of our mountain area involves this question of the Dignity of Man. Being a Christian institution, we can relate ourselves to that part of our tradition which stems from the central character of the New Testament.





WORKING ON SOUTHERN HIGHLAND CRAFTS



A NEIGHBOR'S HOME



CLASSROOM BUILDING



STUDENTS CONSTRUCT AN IMPLEMENT HOUSE