

From Cove to Community

By Warren H. Wilson

Passing through the mountain country one sees at times the reminders of an earlier neighborhood life, in the form of stores now closed, schools abandoned and sometimes missionary "colleges" that have been given up. The patronage of these loyal institutions has been transferred to larger ones, or scattered over a larger area on a new pattern. In all such cases one should look for better roads as the basis of the change. In the old days the country people lived in small "primary groups" which the mountain people called "coves" because of the encompassing walls that shut them in. But in all the states, even in the prairie states where there are no such walls, the small group was the unit, next larger than the family, in which the life of the countryman or woman was lived. In it he was born, married, traded, worshipped, went to school, labored, died and in it he was buried. In the mountains this local form was discovered earlier than in the prairie states, because of its evident boundaries; but it was characteristic of all American country life. Bulletins of the Universities of Wisconsin and of Missouri have recently disclosed the "Rural Primary Group" as being in those prairie states about the same sort of local unit as the "cove" of the mountain states.

There was, however, a greater intensity in the mountain cove organization; and sometimes a military character. The people of Jack's Creek in North Carolina were said to have been "composed of just three families, the Petersons, the McCurrys and the Renfrews. The Petersons alone were accountable for 123 killings in 50 years. Over the mountain were the Sheltons; and there was a Peterson graveyard on Shelton Laurel, as there was a Shelton grave-

yard on Jack's Creek among the Petersons." That is, whenever a Shelton strayed over to Jack's Creek he was in danger of his life and if a Peterson visited Shelton Laurel he might stay there and be buried. The reason for this intensity of the "cove" organization is not fully known; the solidity of the mountain barriers was probably its chief cause; there may have been in addition something in the heredity of the mountaineers. These causes will be better known some day than they are now. We know only that the students of the mountain rural society were the first to discover the primary group life, because it was more assertive. It spoke in acts of hostility, while in the rest of the country the neighborhood was silent and required to be questioned.

The community, which is everywhere taking the place of the cove or neighborhood or primary group is not so easily reduced to uniform terms. In Wisconsin it is called a "trade basin" by Professors Galpin and Kolb; in Missouri it is called by Professors Morgan and Howell "the secondary group." The investigators in the latter state do not find the country people so loyal to the geographical center of their area as they are in Wisconsin. Missourians are moved often by their feelings to go through a nearby village to trade in a town farther from home. In Wisconsin the farmer is prone to trade at the point at which economy of travel gives him an advantage. My observation of the Mountain people leads me to believe that they will go where they please for their purchases, for medical service, and for church-services, rather than go where the economist would send them. They do not mind a longer journey if they can suit a personal liking, or ex-



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