

Modern Mill Villages

By J. C. Patton

THOSE interested in sociological problems in mill communities may find much of interest at Marion, N. C., the pretty foothill town nestling at the base of the Blue Ridge mountain range, and only forty miles distant from Asheville. Marion is the home of numerous small industries as well as one of the most perfectly planned cotton mill layouts in the entire country.

Reference is made to the group of three mills operated under the management of D. D. Little, of Spartanburg, S. C., and Hugh F. Little, his son. The latter is actively in charge, living not far from all of the properties over which he has general direction.

To give an idea of the size of the Little mills it may be noted that Marion Manufacturing Co., Clinchfield Manufacturing Co., and the large new mill now building represent an investment of something like three million dollars. Clinchfield No. 2 will probably be in operation early in the autumn. Standing as it does to-day, without a roof, it represents an outlay of one million dollars, and from the standpoint of construction is one of the most perfectly planned and arranged mill structures in the South. The three mills will have a total equipment of one hundred and one thousand spindles. All of the mills are on wide print cloths.

The Marion Manufacturing Co. plant is about one mile east of Marion. The Clinchfield mills are less than a mile further in the same direction. The company owns hundreds of acres of land in the tracts on which these plants are located, and the topography of the land has been taken advantage of in the entire work of village building. The elevation here is something above 1,500 feet, and most of the acreage lies on high ranges, affording magnificent views of the nearby surrounding mountains and providing the finest of natural drainage to the homes of the villagers. The hills are closely studded with native white and red oak, and in addition to the natural decorations of the land Mr. Little has recently brought in a carload of shrubs and flowers, and these have been tastefully arranged over the various properties of the mill and of its workers.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

When the work of building the mill villages was begun, landscape architects were called in to lay out grounds, streets, etc., and the result is that one finds in both of the mill communities a most attractive plan of town construction. Instead of the conventional straight streets and squares, the lots are described along streets marking graceful curves and circles about the many intervening hills.

At the Clinchfield settlement one finds the more modern type of house architecture, the bungalow being mostly in evidence, although the homes in the Marion Manufacturing Co. village are neatly constructed, well painted and tastily laid out upon ample lots.

Hugh F. Little busies himself from morning till night in carefully supervising all of the varied work to be found in a busy mill community. His first thought seems to be for the comfort and well-being of his operatives, and neither time nor money has been spared in making these mill communities as near ideal as it is possible to make them. It will require ten years to see the completion of the comprehensive plans under way, and when the work is finished a more perfect scheme of cotton mill village building will be hard to find.

In the center of the Clinchfield grounds is a large tract of beautifully wooded ground given over to a playground for the children of the village. Nor do the youngsters fail to take advantage of the opportunity thus afforded for fun making.

SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES

The mill management has done much to promote the social and religious life of the villages. It is the policy of the company to donate tracts of land for church building and to give 50 per cent. of the cost of construction. Deeds are made out for the land, with the one stipulation that in case the property is ever diverted to other uses it reverts back to the mill corporation, the latter then agreeing to pay one dollar and the cost of all improvements made on the land.

In the two mill villages are to be found something like fifteen hundred mill workers, and in the majority of cases all are intensely interested in religious work. The various churches in both mill villages and the Sunday schools are well attended.

Schooling facilities, provided almost wholly by the mill management, are of the very best in both mill settlements. In fact, just now Mr. Little is having plans drawn for a modern steam-heated school building, costing \$15,000,000, at Clinchfield, which will accommodate all of the children of the village. In addition to the numerous class rooms there will be a large auditorium on the second floor with accommodations for 850 persons. Plans for shower baths in the basement have not been fully decided upon. In addition to the regular class rooms there will be rooms for teaching sewing and domestic science, and the mill will have experts in charge of this work. Just now great interest is being taken in both mill settlements in gardening. The mill management ploughs all gardens free of charge and in every way possible strives to stir deeper interest in the work of flower and vegetable production. As a result, one finds in these mill settlements a veritable network of gardens and flower beds.

MILL STORES

Company stores are operated in both mill villages and goods are furnished operatives on a cash basis at cost plus the actual cost of operation. This has meant a big saving to mill workers. In addition to this, the company furnishes all workers with coal and wood at actual cost prices, the cost of course including the item of delivery. In fact, through a greater part of last winter the price of \$5.75 per tons, at which operatives secured coal was considerably less than the actual cost of same to the mills.

Beginning last week wages in all of the mills were raised 15 per cent. This is the third spontaneous wage increase granted operatives during the past twelve months, the three increases together totaling almost 50 per cent.

Water of the very best is accessible to all from deep wells, scattered at various points throughout the settlements. Good water, excellent natural drainage, roomy quarters and a climate that is ideal have meant good health in these mill villages, and such a thing as a scourge of typhoid is unknown. The death rate is exceedingly low. The operatives are a robust class of people. In the main they have come to the mills from small tenant farms in the mountains, where the comforts of home life were far inferior to those afforded

in the mill village, and where schooling facilities were poor and opportunities for social intercourse slight. They are a sturdy people, and coming into the mill settlement, have quickly accustomed themselves to the new environment, and have been as quick to seize the new cultural opportunities offered. In the great majority of cases the mill workers are economical, many having made unusual records in savings and investment. They are law-abiding, steady and dependable, and are quick to appreciate the efforts of the mill owners to provide them with better living advantages. Few people coming into these mill towns move away.

A NEW CONCEPTION

The mills at Marion represent the new conception of industrial building in the South. Even the mill buildings proper have been constructed with a view to promoting not only efficiency but comfort and health. The air the operative breathe in these mills is as pure as the air outside the mill and every equipment for promoting good ventilation has been taken advantage of.