MOUNTAINEERS LEARNING THEIR LETTERS
IN "MOONLIGHT SCHOOLS" OF KENTUCKY

Three years ago, when Mrs. Corn Wilson Stewart of Morehead, Ky., became interested in trying to teach the illiterate mountaineers she could hardly have known how soon her work would be well rewarded. There are old folks of eighty-five attending Mrs. Stewart’s schools now who are able to read and write for the first time. And President Wilson has asked that some of the “ Honor” pupils be sent on to visit him at Washington.

Mrs. Stewart, whose house is in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky, was first inspired with her idea when she came to know of the widespread illiteracy among the people who lived about her. She asked for the assistance of other teachers and outlined her plans for “moonlight schools” to be conducted in the country school houses after the hours of the regular schools. The teachers responded and the excellent work that has since been done has been largely possible through the painstaking efforts of Mrs. Stewart’s assistants who have received no additional pay for their toil.

Thirty thousand men and women have been taught in the “moonlight schools” of Kentucky. Many of them are well past middle life. There are several approaching their ninetieth year who are now able to read and write and “cipher” after spending a lifetime without these bits of learning. Though attendance at the schools has meant real effort and difficulty to many of them, very few have dropped out and most have applied themselves with the greatest diligence. Men who had fought in the Civil and Spanish-American wars stood side by side with their wives and learned to read from primers that are familiar to small children.

As a result of the “moonlight schools,” newspapers are circulated through the Kentucky mountains now where they were never read before and the mountaineers who knew little of the world they lived in are now interested in events of today. Their new learning has also brought a considerable interest in church attendance and many of the old people attend the Sunday school. Preaching is always sure to attract a larger gathering than hitherto. The needed “intellectual urge” of these mountain people has shown itself in many ways.

A great benefit of their schooling as any has been the decline of their prejudice toward college educations. Where they had previously distrusted “book learning” they are now for it heart and soul. And those who can possibly afford it are preparing to send their children to colleges.