

Pioneering Practical Education

AN energetic young man with a prophetic gleam in his eye stood up before a civic group in Memphis, Tennessee, to make a speech. It's quite possible his knees were just a little shaky, because he had made up his mind to say something that was rank heresy in that stronghold of southern aristocracy.

The young man, a teacher in the public schools of Memphis, addressed his audience like this:

"I am just as proud of my southern ancestry as any of you. I love the South. My people fought and bled in the battle of Shiloh. But I want to say this. I think that what the South needs is to forget its enormous pride in its Anglo-Saxon ancestry—and *go to work!*"

The good citizens of Memphis were startled, then indignant. Newspaper headlines were not entirely flattering to the young school teacher who spoke so lightly of the traditions of southern aristocracy. But after a while, some of the more thoughtful citizens decided that the young school teacher who had graduated from the University of Oklahoma and took graduate work at the University of Chicago along with another young man named William Bennett Bizzell, might be talking sense after all.

That was twenty-five years ago. Today, that young man, now grown mature and bearing a shock of unruly gray hair, sits in the principal's office of the magnificent Memphis Technical High School. It is a million dollar high school dedicated to practical training of young people, and it's the fulfillment of the dream that J. L. Highsaw, '11, had in his heart when he told the citizens of Memphis that they should put their young people to work.

Few men have kept their eyes so steadily on their goal in life as this O.U. alumnus.

His conviction that high schools should offer more practical training came to him early in life.

"I saw failures all around me," he recalls. "Men who had all kinds of scholastic training, but were unable to fit themselves into useful positions."

This feeling that the standard high school course of study was not meeting the needs of the South was so strong in him that when Memphis completed its large Central High School building in 1918 and offered him the principalship, he declined.

"I'd rather do this," he told the school board. "Let me take the old high school building and organize a vocational training school in it."

The board thought he was foolish. But he was a man with a vision and he talked them into letting him try out his plan.

In the old high school building on a



J. L. Highsaw, '11, and a view of the front entrance to Memphis Technical High School, a million-dollar plant that fulfills the dream of practical training for young people that he had a quarter-century ago.

bayou in Memphis, Mr. Highsaw started the first technical high school in the entire South. He began with four teachers and 72 students.

It developed that regardless of what the older citizens might think about aristocratic traditions, plenty of Memphis young people wanted to "go to work." Technical High School grew so rapidly and became so popular that in 1928 it moved into a million-dollar building on a beautiful 10-acre campus guarded by sky-scraping pine trees. It had 1,400 full time day students, 1,000 part time students, and 2,000 night students—a total of 4,400 students. The faculty numbered more than a hundred.

In fact, the program developed so extensively that branches were established for better organization of the work and now there is a Memphis Vocational School and a Memphis Part-Time School to take care of the needs of students not taking the regular full time courses at Memphis Technical High School.

What is a technical high school? How is it different from the standard high school?

Those questions are being asked constantly—so often, in fact, that Mr. Highsaw has put a faculty group to work preparing a question-and-answer pamphlet that will explain fully just what Memphis Tech is and how it operates.

Since it was the first school of its kind in the South, the many cities all over the country that are now trying to start the same kind of thing naturally write to Memphis for information.

The basic idea is simple. Memphis Tech offers standard high school subjects (without classical frills), in combination with a great variety of vocational courses. Every regular student is required to take four years of English, one year of American history, two years of mathematics and two

years of science, besides vocational work.

If he is preparing for college, the student is required to take an additional year of mathematics and two years of languages. The school is a member of the Southern Association of Secondary Schools and its work is fully accredited for college preparation.

Ninety of the 383 students who graduated from Memphis Tech last Spring entered college this Fall. Many of them are engineering students.

The school has a good football team, an R.O.T.C. unit with honor rating, debate teams, band, and all the usual high school extra-curricular activities.

So Memphis Tech isn't just a school designed to teach a routine trade. It is a successful attempt to train both the hands and the head in useful work. You might say that, in a sense, the technical high school trains young people for industry like the 4-H clubs and the Future Farmers of America train rural young people for agriculture.

The training given may serve as an immediate entry to trade or industry. Many graduates go directly from Memphis Tech into printing plants, or machine shops or factories. Some graduates continue preparation for industry or trades by attending the William R. Moore Technology School, located close to Memphis Tech. This is an endowed junior college offering two years of advanced work in trades.

Other graduates of Tech go on to college to continue training for various professions. Future engineers find excellent preparation in a technical high school.

Girls are offered extensive courses in home economics, office work and other fields that provide good prospects of employment after graduation.

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Weatherford

Ernest Crain, '36m.ed.; J. C. M. Krumtum, '09, '23ma, '36ed.d.

Wewoka

Hicks Epton, '32law; Mrs. Hicks Epton (Thelma Pate, '32ed); Dennis H. Petty, '32law; Hugh Roff, '28law; Mrs. Hugh Roff (Louise Wewerka, '24).

Woodward

John Chenoweth, '38fa; Sybil Leslie, '39; R. R. Russell, '21ex.

TEXAS

W. D. Henderson, '29geol, Mrs. Lane McAfee (Hylagene Robberson, '33fa), and E. A. Paschal, '22, Amarillo; L. L. Wiles, Jr., '36eng, Borger; William G. Cullen, '16, G. M. Groenendyke, '33eng, Mrs. Maurine Huff Matney, '29fa, Verne H. Maxwell, '32law, Dr. Price M. Walker, '20, '22med, Mrs. Price M. Walker, '22, Dallas; A. R. Douglas, '33, Electra; Walter R. Berger, '20, C. B. Truitt, '31eng, Mrs. Maurine Harvey Truitt, '36ex, Fort Worth; Mrs. Florence Cogle Willis, '27, Hartley; F. Jack Griffith, '23, Panhandle; J. C. Word, '39eng, Phillips; Clifford C. Meyer, '17, Tyman; D. R. Teis, '36eng, Mrs. Marie Barrett Teis, '36, Vernon; Pansy Briscoe, '27ex, L. Edwin Patterson, '30, '32ms, C. P. Price, '23, Wichita Falls.

OTHER STATES

Carl Wilson, '37, Fort Smith, Arkansas; Mrs. Lillian Neely Bellah, '22, Los Angeles; Mrs. Mary Heckler Whisenant, '23, and R. G. Whisenant, '22ex, Long Beach, California; Carl Albert, '31, Mattoon, Illinois; Joe W. Hicks, '23, and Mrs. Lois Marshall Hicks, '25ex, Winnetka, Illinois; Ralph Brand, '33, '38ma, Chanute, Kansas; Harry C. Jordan, Jr., '33, '38, Coffeyville, Kansas; Ralph E. Gilchrist, '31law, Wichita, Kansas; Chester C. Clark, '10, Shreveport, Louisiana; Joe T. Dickerson, '21law, St. Louis, Missouri; John H. Black, '38ma, Portales, New Mexico; Mrs. Ruth Crowe Loeb, '27, Memphis, Tennessee.

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Teaching to broadcasting

The life of Mrs. Gladys Davis LaVance, '34ed, provides a fiction-like success story. In little more than a year she went from rural school teaching in Oklahoma to national broadcasting in New York City. Until the closing of the New York World's Fair, she was at the head of a corps of fourteen attractive young women who made up the information staff in the Ford exhibit.

Known professionally as Miss Gladys La Vance, this young lady is scheduled to be teamed with "Texas" Jim Robertson, cowboy singer, on the red network of the National Broadcasting Company. The wild west theme will not be new to her. She earned a string of equestrian laurels at rodeos and fairs throughout the Southwest even before entering the University.

It was these accomplishments that eventually led her into New York in 1938. She had only \$35 in her pocketbook. By applying for modeling work in a sleek black satin dress and Mexican sombrero, she gained a job with John Powers, a famed model agent. Other opportunities have come rapidly.

She says that she was given the supervising job at the Fair early this year because her educational record surpassed those of the hundreds of other applicants. Besides her work at O.U., she studied journalism at Missouri and violin at California.

Pioneering in Practical Education

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Few of Mr. Highsaw's students have trouble finding work after they leave school. They are prepared for specific duties, and they generally are given preference among job seekers.

Perhaps the clue to Mr. Highsaw's vision and energy might be found in the verse beside his name in the 1911 *Sooner Yearbook*.

"His hair is red and his eyes are blue,
And he is Irish through and through."

He has the enthusiasm and the strong loyalties of the Irish temperament. Although he has not had an opportunity to return to the O.U. campus often, he still considers himself a loyal Sooner.

As a student he was on the varsity debate team, was a member of Senate society, and president of the Texas Club. He was elected an alumni member of the University chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, honorary scholastic society, ten years after graduation.

Mrs. Highsaw is also a graduate of the University. She is the former Mattie May Baker, '10. They have two sons, both of whom made outstanding scholastic records at Princeton and Harvard.

Like most men who have devoted most of their lives to fulfillment of a vision, Mr. Highsaw has not become wealthy. But he has many compensations.

A few years ago he was traveling in New England and stopped for a short time in a small town. He was walking down the street, thinking that he did not know a single person anywhere near there.

"Hello, Mr. Highsaw," a voice said. It was a graduate of Memphis Tech, and he explained to his former principal that he was a practicing architect in that city. He had just been awarded the work of drawing plans for a large public building, and was quite successful in his profession. His training had all been secured at Memphis Tech.

There is a "Tech Club" in New York City with 75 members. Graduates of the school scatter far and wide because they find opportunities in many places.

And J. L. Highsaw enjoys the satisfaction of knowing that his dream of providing practical education has become a reality.

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Advisory council changes

Harrison Roe, '33law, attorney at Frederick, has been appointed chairman of the Tillman County Advisory Council, succeeding Gene Stewart, '36 ma.

O. M. Woodward, '38, has been named chairman of a new council set up at San Fernando, Trinidad, British West Indies.

Lawrence H. Armstrong, '36, has been appointed chairman at Jefferson City, Missouri.

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