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☞ Education and real life meet in this institution where students earn their own way to learning

Self-Supporting College

By
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IN 1904 the Nashville Agricultural Normal Institute at Madison, Tenn., consisted of 11 students and some dilapidated farm buildings on 400 acres of worn land purchased with the last cent of its founders—Dr. E. A. Sutherland and four other teachers. In addition, however, it had one invaluable asset: Dr. Sutherland's idea that a college education should be made available to any boy or girl willing to work for it.

From this idea has grown a unique institution which, practically without endowment, has put $520,000 from its own earnings into buildings, grounds and equipment. It now has 300-odd students from 36 states and nine foreign countries.

Madison's curriculum includes 27 campus industries, run by the students to support the college and themselves. Every student is required to work for at least half, and preferably all, of his academic expenses. He can enter Madison—as two thirds of the students do—with no more than the required deposit fee of $35, complete a four-year standardized college course for a Bachelor of Science degree, and graduate with the deposit intact. He will receive no outside financial aid in all that time. And he will leave college equipped to do not one job but several—multiple insurance against the caprices of fortune.

Dr. Sutherland, the man who conceived this idea, had been president of two small colleges before he started his experiments at Madison. To provide an income for his new school, and at the same time to train health workers and care for ill students, he planned a sanitarium in connection with the college. But, if he was to run a sanitarium, he must qualify as a doctor. So for four years this energetic educator ran Madison while taking courses at Vanderbilt and the University of Tennessee. Finally, at the age of 50 he obtained his M.D.

Today the Madison Rural Sanitarium, with 100 rooms, up-to-the-minute equipment, and a staff of 14 physicians, is the Institute's most important industry. Although it is operated for the benefit of the college, at rates of $25 to $35 a week, the Sanitarium has never turned away a charity patient. Students do all the routine work, getting practical training in the process of earning their education. The 25 to 30 graduates of its nurses' courses are snapped up each year by the best hospitals, and its pre-medical and pre-dental work is accepted by all colleges and the American Medical Association.

The school farm is as important to the college economically as is the Sanitarium. There are 60 acres of garden, 70 acres of fruit, and two greenhouses which, incidentally, supply flowers for the hospital rooms. The student canning factory puts up enough vegetables to feed students and patients the year round. And 15 years of research in food chemistry have resulted in new food products too useful to confine to campus menus.

Hence, Madison Foods—an industry that is largely responsible for making the soy bean appetizing to Americans. The school's food chemists, experimenting with 200 varieties of soy beans, eliminated objectionable taste and produced savory breakfast foods, bread, coffee substitute, condensed milk, and meat substitutes which look and taste like beef but are even more nutritious and digestible. Vigorost, made from soy loaf after the milk is extracted, is featured by a cafeteria chain in New York City. More than $60,000 worth of Madison's packaged and canned foods was sold in 27 states last year, and the Institute runs its own health-food cafeterias in Nashville and Louisville.

Madison Foods have developed soy milk until it is now not only cheaper than cow's milk but, on the authority of the American Medical Association, better for babies. Observers have come from Africa, India, and other countries where milch cows are scarce, to study the methods of Madison's soy bean "dairy."

None of the commercial industries which support the school competes with established businesses. The soy bean products create their own market. The Sanitarium, highly regarded throughout the South, is in a class by itself. The broom factory, which uses 25 acres of student-grown broom corn for its daily output of 50 dozen, sells its products at prices higher than other brands. Among the school's lesser commercial industries are a rug department which buys waste from stocking factories and sells an attractive floor covering to visitors; a photographic laboratory that fills orders for colored slides from all over the world; auto repair shops that do some outside work; a printing establishment that does some outside work as well as supplies the four-color labels for the cannery.

There is no private profit from any of these industries—the income is used for the support and further development of the college. The school sets its scholars an example of self-sufficiency, receiving no aid from public funds and asking none. The only interest-bearing endowment is an unsolicited and unexpected $50,000 bequest from a former patient of the Sanitarium.

Income from several of the industries might be increased sufficiently to permit the hiring of outside professionals for construction and maintenance work on the buildings. But how then would the students learn practical architecture, carpentry, plastering, plumbing and steamfitting, electrical work, metal work, and so forth? For that reason no enlarged food factory will supplant with its profits the educational opportunities offered by the score of industries which make no money.

Students work five hours and study five hours daily the year round. Their work is credited against educational and living expenses at a basic rate of 10 cents an hour. Necessities, almost all of which are provided by the school industries, are scaled proportionately low. A year at the college costs about $318 worth of work; the largest items are tuition, $72 to $84; room, $60; and board, $90. Those who find the combination schedule too heavy may work less and make up the deficit in cash, or balance their budget with fewer classes.

The 120 college and sanitarium buildings, cottages and dormitories on the 900-acre grounds have been entirely student-designed and student-built under skilled supervision by the 28 instructors, most of whom are masters of a trade as well as of their academic subject.

About forty students will have worked on a classroom building during its year or two of construction, and nowhere will the workmanship look amateurish. Once a visitor, admiring the work of a student floor-layer, asked him how much experience he'd had. The youngster answered, "From here to the door." The newer buildings are roofed with a beautiful tile made by a special process in the student factory—a tile only half as heavy but sturdier than commercial types. Much of the woodwork was cut in the college's sawmill from lumber chopped on the grounds. The home economics girls prepare and serve the students' meals with food from the college farm. Some of the boys fixed up a steam roller bought from the county as junk iron, and now they keep their own roads in repair. In case of fire, they are ready with a shining, rebuilt fire truck. Exhaust steam from the student-built heating plant, run by a student-engineer, furnishes electricity nine months of the year for the entire institution.

In so far as possible, students are given their choice of work. Whether they are washing shirts or hauling cement, however, pride in earning their own way and at the same time accomplishing something visible and useful stimulates happiness, a sense of responsibility, and a keener mental attitude toward academic studies.

With limited and hard-earned funds, Madison has to make money go farther than do most colleges, but it is doubtful whether material advantages of any importance have been sacrificed. Madison's biology class grows its own specimens—and no college could buy better ones. The school has the finest ar-

boretum and botanical gardens in the state. The physics students have constructed three-fourths of their own equipment, as well as recording machines for the voice culture classes, and a talking picture projector. There is nothing crude about these mechanisms, and it is obvious that a student who helps make a precision instrument isn't just absorbing a superficial veneer of technical phrases.

Many graduates go into nursing, medical work, home economics, or agriculture. Almost 200 of them have helped establish three high schools, six junior highs, and 21 grammar schools in the South, all modeled on Madison's self-help principles. Usually they include a health center providing the only medical service within miles.

With twice as many applicants as can be provided for, Madison as a rule accepts only those who could not otherwise arrange for a college education. Rare exceptions are two boys whose longheaded fathers want for them the kind of education which can't be bought at Harvard or Yale. The youths relish the experience of manual labor and self-reliant individuality — and their classmates do not know they are the sons of wealthy men.

There are larger and older schools that combine industrial with academic training, but Madison has shown how education can be put on a self-supporting basis.