

# By Faith Willie Lee Buffington

By REV. GEORGE A. BROWN

EVERY generation of Christians furnishes some outstanding examples of faith in God such as are to be found recorded in "Faith's Hall of Fame," as Hebrews eleven has been aptly called. Among those entitled to a place in the list of present day worthies is Willie Lee Bumngton, the founder-director of the "Faith Cabin Library," which has been characterized as "the rarest and most unique spiritual and intellectual institution in America." But who is Willie Lee Bumngton and what is a Faith Cabin Library?

Willie Lee Buffington was born 29 years ago in a little cabin in South Carolina of humble, Christian parents who belonged to that class in the South known, prior to the Civil War, as "po' white trash." Early in life he came under the helpful influence of "Uncle Eury" Simpkins, a kindly Negro school teacher, who inspired him with the desire not only to become a Christian, but to get an education and fit himself for the gospel ministry. At the age of 16, having finished the small rural school near his home, Willie was sent to the Martha Berry Schools, Rome, Georgia, where he could work his way. Here he spent two years in the course of which, through assisting in the library, he came to know something of the wonders of the world of books. Not only did he find great pleasure and profit for himself in this storehouse of knowledge, but he became possessed with a passionate desire to somehow share the wonderful privilege he enjoyed with his less fortunate fellows, especially his young Negro friends.

Circumstances prevented him from completing his secondary education at the Martha Berry Schools, and necessitated his return home, where he found employment in a cotton mill. Later he entered high school at an age when most boys have finished their college course. After two years of high school he was able to gain admittance to Furman University, Greenville, South Carolina, which he is still attending and from which he hopes to graduate at the end of the next Summer school, and as soon as possible, enter upon the work of the gospel ministry. In addition to his studies, and he is carrying a heavy load, he has a wife and two children to support. The work connected with the Faith Cabin Library must therefore be done in his "spare time." With such abundant labors on his hands we are not surprised that Mrs. Bumngton writes of him, "many nights as the clock announces the arrival of a new day, he is up typing letters to friends, appealing for books and magazines, and acknowledging donations for the library."

And what is a "Faith Cabin Library?"

Mrs. Bumngton says, "Briefly, a Faith Cabin Library is a rustic log cabin built by local Negro citizens in a given community. The building houses the library, affords a community center for hundreds of eager, ambitious Negro boys and girls—something entirely new to rural Negroes in the South. The library program and all social activities are supervised by Negro school teachers." It was during the Christmas season of 1930 that Willie Bumngton, with the vision of such a library, if not a chain of them in his native State, found himself possessed of a capital of ten cents (AND GOD). He went to the post office, bought five two-cent stamps, and going home, he wrote five letters to as many people whom he thought might be interested in his project and do something for it. He asked each one to whom he wrote for a single good book and requested that if a book could not be given, a stamp might be sent to him so that he could write to someone else. In a short time he received his first reply, a most encouraging letter and later the gift of 1,000 books from Dr. L. H. King, minister of St. Mark's Negro M. E. Church, New York City.

The building of the first Faith Cabin Library soon followed. The location selected was near Willie Buffington's childhood home and the school house where his old friend, Professor Eury W. Simpkins, taught the Negro boys and girls with whom he had associated in his early days. The necessary lumber was donated by both Negroes and whites in the community, while the Negroes furnished the labor. It is a one room structure, with a stone fire place at one end, home made furniture, the work of the Negroes themselves, and shelves or cases on which are carefully and orderly arranged the 2,000 or more books and magazines with separate sections for the children, young people and adults, and a large space set apart for religious publications which are ever in great demand by the local Negro ministers and teachers.

At the dedication of this first unit of the Faith Cabin Library system the young founder and director was honored by the presence of an official of the State Department of Education, college presidents, and prominent social workers. Since this first building was erected in 1932 ten other libraries have been established, each with 2,000 or more books as well as magazines and other periodicals, and serving some 8,000 or more Negro people, young people especially, who would otherwise not enjoy the privilege of a library at all. "For of the 8,000,000 Negroes in the South, 80 percent are still said to have no access

whatever to libraries, countless schools have not even an antiquated encyclopedia, 30 children use a single geography, one reading aloud while the others listen, and rural teachers are starving for books and magazines."

Here then is "a library service that is unique in the simplicity of its demands, in the soundness of its methods, and in the magnitude of its possibilities." Certainly it is most worthy of our help and greatly needs it too, for, as Mr. Bumngton says in a recent letter, "the work does not, at the present time, enjoy the financial support of any board or fund. It is still operating upon *Faith entirely*." You and I may have a share in this missionary ministry, this "project for the cause of Christian education among Negro youth," and Mr. Buffington tells us how we may help—"Faith Cabin Library is not seeking contributions in cash, but rather something that will mean more to the development of character of boys and girls who use the libraries than any amount of money could mean. *We need books and magazines*. Not necessarily new books, but books and magazines that can be found in homes like yours. Books of fiction, children's books, Bibles, Bible study, mission study, sermons, travel, biography, reference, science, history, old discarded school and college textbooks. The only expense to helping this needy and worthy project will be the transportation. Unless all shipments come *prepaid* I cannot promise to remove them from the depot. ... I am sure that if you will consider the real value of 100 pounds of books and compare it with the transportation charges, you will agree it is a good investment for home mission money."

It was the privilege of the writer of this article to have Mr. Buffington tell the story of this work to his congregation a year ago last Summer, and also to enjoy a visit in his home at Greenville, South Carolina, last Winter. While there we drove out to Pendleton where the fourth unit of Faith Cabin Library is located. I am sure that if you could have such a privilege you would be moved to do what you can to help maintain people and extend this most beneficent institution in the South. Why not have "A Christmas-Spirited Housecleaning?" Gather up the good books you no longer use. Send them by parcel post, freight or express, *always prepaid*, to Willie L. Buffington, 23 Thruston Street, Greenville, South Carolina, and as long as postage is available and time permits he will very kindly acknowledge your donation and the Lord Himself will most certainly bless both gift and giver.