

APRIL 23, 1934.

Let

IN SUPPORT OF CHAUTAUQUA.

Its Abandonment Likened to Letting a University Die.

To the Editor of The New York Times:

Thousands of people in the United States, and I am one of them, will thank you for your recent understanding editorial on the A. A. E. P.—American Adult Education Pioneer—as you so aptly call the Chautauqua movement. Chautauqua Lake lay only fifty miles or so from my childhood home. Where the Chautauqua institution now stands a Methodist camp meeting was then held every Summer.

My parents being good Methodists saw to it that we children had our annual outing at the lake when the camp meeting was in session. What they wanted us to have there was the excellent training given in the Bible with all sorts of inviting accessories! I shall never forget a relief map of Palestine that ran for many rods along the lake front. We used to romp from Baalbec to Beer-sheba, shouting out the points of interest, and when we dared, wading in the Dead Sea. No youngster who knew that map was ever wanting in a biblical geography examination.

I saw the Chautauqua camp meeting gradually transformed to an educational institution in which there was as strong and universal a passion for knowledge as in any institution with which I have ever been connected. It began with the founding of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle by John H. Vincent, the man who had from the start given to the place its color and its vitality. The C. L. S. C. was presented at a meeting which is one of the most vivid memories of my life. I was still a high school girl and happened in at the gathering in the auditorium, as they called the meeting place under the trees, at the moment when Dr. Vincent was putting before his Summer followers a plan for a reading course running over four years patterned after a college course and designed to give its outlook.

The plan had grown out of his sympathy for the hunger for more knowledge which he had sensed in most of the people who came to the Summer gatherings. Here was something within their reach to satisfy that hunger. I think of all the inspirational talks that I have ever heard that was far and away the greatest. It lifted his whole audience, and before the night fell almost everybody there had signed for that four years reading circle, I among them.

Interest in the C. L. S. C. spread in an amazing way, reached the mountains and the plains, stimulated as it was by the sympathetic and understanding administration which quickly developed. Circles of readers were formed in hundreds of towns. The four years' course led to a definite goal—graduation—a diploma given at Chautauqua itself in a moving and sincere ceremony. You marched under a golden gate; you received your diploma from the hand of the beloved Dr. Vincent.

But that did not end it. Knowledge

But that did not end it. Knowledge was endless—you had enlisted for life. Courses were ready for you in whatever your interest may have developed, and you went on and on reading, seals being set on that original diploma for every specific achievement.

I came later to have an intimate knowledge of what the C. L. S. C. was doing for thousands of people. I had left college and gone on my own and finally came into the editorial rooms of the magazine which acted as the organ of the readers—The Chautauquan.

My duty was to help develop aids for the readers and the circles. Hundreds of these people lived where there were practically no books of references. The Chautauquan must make up for this limitation. So monthly I prepared what were called notes on the required readings, translating foreign phrases, writing little biographical sketches, explaining allusions of all sorts, scientific, philosophical, literary.

Our efforts to aid brought us an enormous correspondence. There passed through our office day by day hundreds of letters which told of the determination that thousands of people were putting into a struggle for more knowledge, for a broader outlook.

The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle laid the foundations for adult education in this country. It laid them solidly by establishing the habit of reading good books. If more and more we are becoming a nation of readers, as I believe, no little of it is due to the C. L. S. C., or, if you prefer, the A. A. E. P.

Chautauqua, the Chautauqua which is now in temporary embarrassment, has always been the physical centre of the movement, the Mecca to which its followers have turned. As the years have gone on many things, of course, have changed in the movement, but Chautauqua itself still has its lecture platform, its courses of study, its splendid music, its healthy and stimulating Summer life. All of these things make it an institution that the country should not forget nor neglect. To let Chautauqua die would be like letting one of our universities die. We owe it more than ever has been estimated. Its future should be made secure.

IDA M. TARBELL,

New York, April 20, 1934.

120-882-1874-47

Chautauqua Institution is entitled to use the alphabetic title A. A. E. P. (American Adult Education Pioneer) for its C. L. S. C. (Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle), and its serious Summer studies deserve for it this distinction along with sympathy in its temporary embarrassment. There is an old Greek saying that allowance should be made for pioneers. To those who remember the pioneer Chautauqua days when President W. R. HARPER carried great classes in critical studies, when Professor WILLIAM JAMES and Professor PALMER of Harvard lectured in philosophy, when Johns Hopkins professors gave courses in history and economics, and when Presidents or ex-Presidents of the United States were among its guests, no allowances need to be made.

WILLIAM JAMES found the ideal "so completely victorious that no sign of battle remained." While there he felt that he had a foretaste of what human society might be were it all in the light with no suffering or dark corners. But his after-criticism was that there was no "heroism ever and anon snatching victory from the jaws of death." He was almost ready for "something as bad as an Armenian massacre to set the balance right again." This was, of course, said of the institution at Lake Chautauqua and not of the traveling lecture and entertainment companies that took on the name of "Chautauqua."

The itinerant activities have for good reasons ceased to make such wide appeal as for a time they did, but it is good news that the parent Chautauqua, now under a friendly receivership, is planning to go forward with renewed vigor. The radio and motion pictures and village library are in these days and nights reaching homes that forty or more years ago were shut away from systematic opportunities save through the C. L. S. C. But the Summer Chautauqua advantages are still without such serious competition. To be sure, colleges and universities are now offering a wide range of Summer courses, but these are chiefly for teachers and young people. Chautauqua makes special and unique provision for adults who have had enough heroic struggle through years of maturity to balance a few weeks of utopian experience under highly competent teachers and lecturers and in a wholesome social environment.

What with half a square mile of wooded land, a mile and a half lake front, with half a thousand owned cottages, houses and hotels, a half dozen lecture and music halls, a public library and all community conveniences, Chautauqua should surmount her difficulties, while the need of her instruction and recreation will doubtless be as perennial as the Summers themselves.