The Reader's Digest

An article a day of enduring significance, in condensed permanent booklet form

Humbly starting with $1.65 and a vision, Laurence Clifton Jones has enriched the lives of thousands of Negroes

The Little Professor of Piney Woods

A husky black boy of 13 lifted a gunny sack to the top of the teacher's desk. Behind the desk the short, scholarly-looking Negro glanced up.

"What is it, son?" he asked with a smile.

"Sweet 'taters — they's all Ah got," answered the boy. "Pappy says Ah needn't to come here without no money, but preachah says you'd take me. Ah'll wuhk hahd to learn things." He wriggled his bare toes in an agony of uncertainty.

"Of course I'll take you," said the teacher. "Nobody's ever been turned away from Piney Woods School because he hadn't any money."

Today, grown to manhood, that boy, R. P. McGhee, is head of the manual-training department in a Mississippi Negro high school. "I'd be an ignorant field hand if it hadn't been for the Little Professor of Piney Woods — and so would a lot of the boys I've taught," says McGhee. "He taught me to do things. What's more, he inspired me to help other people do things."

"The Little Professor" is Laurence Clifton Jones, Missouri-born, northern-educated Negro, who turned his back on good jobs and comfortable living to bring practical education and opportunity to members of his race in the most backward region he could find. In 1909 he founded Piney Woods Country Life School, near Jackson, Miss., on a pine stump with three illiterate pupils and $1.65 cash. The school now has a $250,000 plant, 1700 acres of well-tended land, and an enrollment of 440 pupils ranging in age from six to 40, drawn from 15 states and one foreign country. It has sent out to rural communities thousands of trained farmers, mechanics and housekeepers and hundreds of practical, competent teachers. In addition it has carried the gospel of good farming, healthful homemaking, sensible religion and stimulating social life to Negroes for miles around.

The only Negro in his class, at...