A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH
Of the Early Days of the Piney Woods School

By JOHN R. WEBSTER

CARL BEAL, an earnest young man who has chosen as his life's work the lifting of humanity into a higher sphere of life, who is now a student in a theological college, has sent me copies of the Reader's Digest and the Rotarian in both of which he has been capitalizing on our human weakness to want to do a little talking myself. I said, "But suppose that fool did do a thing like that." I said, "Listen, Albert, don't ever think that fellow is a fool, and besides, the poet says, 'Fools go in where Angels fear to tread'."

Now, remembering those days, I can see how Jones and Uncle Ed Taylor used my paws to rake their chestnuts with. At that time, nearly every man in the country, including merchants and farmers, was getting in some way money out of the saw mill. Naturally, I would have some influence in the community. Besides, I wasn't one of 'em furiners', some of whom were drifting in. I was a native prove, so employed Negro, and labor on the same terms; most of them, boys I had been raised with. When Jones went out to interview these farmers round about, he would always say, "I have been talking to Mr. Webster and I said so far as he was concerned it was all right, so I have come to get your consent also". He would go on to relate his project. He would stress the point that this was not to be a book larnin' school, but he was going to teach how to work on the farm, and to build fences, gates, water gaps, sharpen plows, work with cows and hogs, etc. This was the type of school that was pleasing to the people and Jones was capitalizing on our human weakness to want to be consulted about things. It enhances our self-respect and satisfies our ego, and further thought was to be a way to get more and better work out of a Negro.

Now it was the chief conversation in the community. As these fellows would come into the store to get their mail, you would hear them say, "Well, what do you think of that nigger school?" Well, I don't know. Did that nigger come to see you too? Yes. What do you think about it? Well, I think it's a good thing. He says he ain't gwine to teach 'em so much book larnin', but he wants to larn 'em to do more..."