'Valley Folk' Silent As Hills On Boy's Lynchers

By ROBERT LUCAS
(Defender Staff Correspondent)

PIKEVILLE, Tenn.—The men who lynched 17-year-old James Scales here Thursday will never be brought to justice.

Tennessee's Governor Prentice Cooper has promised an official probe. Monday night the Miller's Alliance in Nashville met to raise $500 reward for the arrest of these mobsters.

But the "valley folk" of Pikeville don't talk, and the one person who could identify the men who spirited Scales "up the mountain" and put four slugs through his head is a typical "valley" girl.

She is Ruth Douglas. It was she who unloked the Bledsoe County Jail for three men who told her they were reform school guards.

"Could you identify those men?" I asked.

Deputy Sheriff A. F. Goforth answered quickly, "No, she couldn't.

"Then why?" I asked the teen-aged cook in the soiled red gingham. She ran her fingers through the blonde curls of her year-old baby sucking contentedly at her naked breast. She did not look at me.

I was sitting on a shabby divan in the parlor of the sheriff who lives in the jail house. A coal blaze glowed in the fire place. And around me sat half a dozen silent local men and women, their faces expressionless. Now and then one of the women would split into the grate.

I had reached Pikeville from Chattanooga after a torturous two-hour, fifty-mile ride up one side of the mountain and down the other. The ancient bus rattled and bucked around hairpin curves.

In front of the drug store on "Main Street," I climbed down and asked for the county jail. It was a two-story white stone building about a block away.

I went up on the porch and knocked at the door. A young man opened it and I asked for the sheriff. A big, pot-bellied man, not at all like the lean, wiry Bledsoe county men, came to the door.

I told him where I was from and he glowered at me under his shaggy brows. Then he began to ask questions—"How old are you, boy? Where you from?"

"Chicago," I answered.

"Where was you born?"

"Chicago,"

We were standing on the porch and he was silent for a moment. Then he called two men from inside and they went into a huddle down on the road in front of the jail. The youngest, a fellow wearing a GI jacket, sauntered back to the porch where I was standing.

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Valley Folk Silent—

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"You belong to the American Newspaper Guild?" he asked sud-
denly.

I showed him my card. After studying it, he handed it back and
added to the sheriff.

"Well, I tell you," Sheriff Go-
forth began, "you get to realize
it's different down here than where
you come from. I know, I was in
the northwest once. You all eat
together, ride together, and every-
thing, now ain't that so?"

"These southerners is different.
Down here you come to the back
door, even in Tennessee."

It had not occurred to me until
then, that a jail might have a back
door.

"Well," said Goforth, "you might
as well come inside." And he
opened the door for me.

Refuse Cigarettes

Sitting in the bare living room was Mrs. Douglas, the young cook
who had been left in charge of the
tail while the sheriff was away.
In her arms was the year-old baby.
Two toothless women sat across
the room. Sheriff Goforth mo-
tioned me to the divan and I sat
down. The two-stone-faced men
sat down opposite me. I offered
them cigarettes but they shook
their heads and one turned and
walked out of the room.

Then I heard the story of the
Pikeville lynching. It was the
most word for word the story that had
appeared in the papers. As soon as
he had finished, Goforth began to
explain some points in his tale.

Works In Mill Too

First, the reason he had been
away from the county until the
week before was because he had
been brought there. The young
man in the soldier jacket, who was
standing beside him, had been
helped him. I learned that the
200 boys in the mill toiled for
seven or eight hours a day and for
the $100 a month he is allowed
for operating expenses.

"There was nobody in jail for
a long time," he complained.

"Course, if I had been here,
nothing would have hap-
pened. We don't believe in that.
In Scottsboro, we brought from
a courtroom charged with some-
thing, we'd have somebody
beaten hard before we got him.
The men said they was guards
from the mill, then they locked
the door for them. They looked
like the same men who brought him here in the Scotts-
boro case."

"Joe Herman, the county judge,
said a word before I left."

"You colored people are makin'
good in business and profession-
aliy," he said. "That's good. Here
in Pikeville there are about 500
Negro people and we get along
fine.

Anti-Republican

"In the past, we have made a
colored precinct, with a colored
judge and clerk. That's the first
time in the history of the county,
maybe the whole state. In western
Tennessee not to have those Democrats don't
even allow the colored folk to vote.

"We're Republicans and we don't
believe in all that."

Farmer mentioned George Wash-
ington Carver as an example of a
great man, and told me that he had
heard and admired Roscoe Sim-
mons at a political rally in Nash-
ville.

"We've sorry it happened," they
said as I left.

On the way to the home of the
Negro school teacher, Professor
Carey Powell, to find a place to
spend the night, from Powell
learned that H. E. Scott, superin-
tendent of the boys' high school,
had established long-need-
ed reforms at the school.

"I want to educate the in-
mates as well as work them. He
had eliminated the parole system,
which imprisoned local Negroes to
get work done by the students at
the school. This was a good
bitter pill for them to swallow, and
even some Negroes said that Scott
was far too easy on those boys up
there."

Fear Attack

Under Pinkley's quiet exterior,
I found that both Negroes and
whites feared an attack on the
250 colored boys still at the school.

The place has been set aflame twice in its history and the arsons
were never found.

The lynching Thursday was the first instance of any violence
and it disturbed the relationship between the races. Negroes and
whites were first disturbed to-
tgether. Negroes live scattered
out all over the town and nearly all and for one of the two or three
men who own Pikeville.

The last of the men who lynched
James Scales? Some say they were
from another community. But Smith,
was described by "three ships through
the head before he hit the ground."

A large county-fo low were dead-
ly marksmen.

So the people in Pikeville and
Bledsoe county are waiting. The
pattern, a familiar one in the
South, is most complete, for a
Negro accused of a crime—a lynching
—an investigation—then nothing
is done until the next time.

Nothing will be done this time,
for Ruth Douglass and the rest of
the "valley folk" are as silent as
the hills that surround Bledsoe
county.