TEACHING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

BY

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE United States Census Bureau classifies as living under rural conditions all persons living in the open country and in towns and villages having less that 2500 inhabitants. On this basis, according to the census of 1910, 53.7 per cent of the population of the United States was classed as rural, and the figures probably have not changed materially since that date. In the last printed report of the United States Commissioner of Education it was stated that, during the preceding year, 58.4 per cent of the children enrolled in the public schools of the United States were enrolled in schools classified by the Census Bureau as rural, while of the 600,000 teachers employed, 60 per cent were employed in these rural communities. Approximately eighteen million children were enrolled in these same schools, and about 95 per cent of these were in the elementary grades.

When we turn from a consideration of the United States as a whole to a consideration of the individual States, we find that in 34 out of the 48 States more than 50 per cent of the population was living, in 1910, under conditions classed as rural, and in 17 of the 48 States the number so living exceeded 75 per cent of the whole. In 11 States the number exceeded 80 per cent of the whole. In the 17 States in which the population was more than 75 per cent rural, from 75 to 80 per cent of the teachers and children are working in rural schools. Still more, approximately 215,000 of the 600,000 teachers employed in all public schools in the United States are to-day working in one-teacher rural schools. In other words, fully one third of the teachers employed in the United States to-day are working alone, with small groups

of children, at the difficult problem of rural education and rural-life improvement.

When we recall that salaries for rural teachers are proverbially low, that the best rural teachers are continually being drawn away to the cities, that in many States but few rural teachers have had normal-school training, that many are teaching for the first time, that the teaching equipment is poor and the community devotion to schools often at a low ebb, that adequate professional supervision of the teacher's work is almost entirely absent, and that the problem of rural service which these teachers face is a large and a difficult one, we can see reasons why the problem of proper rural education has awakened so much thoughtful attention on the part of those interested in national educational progress.

As a result of so much attention to the problem there has arisen, especially during the past ten years, a somewhat general demand in all parts of the United States for a new and a better type of educational service for those who live in the villages and on the farms. The demand is that the school shall relate its work more closely to rural-life needs, that children shall be trained for intelligent living on the farm instead of being educated away from it, and that both the teacher and the school shall render larger community helpfulness and service. With the changing character, in many of our States, of our rural population, due to the influx of the foreign-born, the rapid increase of tenantry, the shrinkage in the size of the rural schools, and the realization that many of the best rural families are moving to the towns and cities that they may provide their children with better educational advantages, the problem of rural education has been brought acutely to the front. As a result probably as much good thinking has been given to the combined rural-life and rural-school problems during

the past decade as to any other phase of community or educational service.

The author of this volume in the series, living in a State where four fifths of the population are classified as rural, and where rural education for two races presents a difficult educational and financial problem, has for years been closely in touch with the many movements looking toward the improvement of rural life and education. He has been especially identified with the school side of the movement, and by reason of this he is particularly well equipped to prepare a book on teaching in rural schools which will be of practical service to teachers. This he has done, and for thousands of rural teachers, both beginners and those of some years of rural service, such a volume as the present one should prove to be one of large professional helpfulness. It should accordingly find an important place for itself in normal schools and teacher-training classes in high schools, as well as in state reading circles in many of those States where the population is preponderately rural.

ELLWOOD P. CUBBERLEY.

PREFACE

THIS book is an outgrowth of the experience of years spent in teaching in rural schools and of other years given to the preparation of teachers. Many excellent manuals have been written for teachers in well-graded schools of cities and towns. Some of these manuals give a few paragraphs to the problems of rural teachers. Not until quite recently have these teachers been recognized by special books devoted to their peculiar field. This manual has not only kept the rural teacher foremost in thought, but throughout its pages the teacher of the small ungraded or partially graded rural school has been kept constantly in mind. The treatment aims to accomplish several things, among which are the following: —

1. To bring to attention the needs of rural life, the broadening vision of rural life, and the possible contributions of the rural school to this life.
2. To unfold in a clear and helpful way some introductory guiding principles of education.
3. To start any rural teacher on the road of the best in modern methods in teaching and in managing.
4. To direct such a teacher to the most helpful aids in educational literature in connection with the various phases of theory and practice.

If the book succeeds in these aims, it will justify itself as an introductory study for all rural teachers who wish to become professional craftsmen.

Owing to necessary limitations of space, some topics have been treated briefly, others omitted. Doubtless errors of

omission and of commission may readily be pointed out. But with sympathy and good will this volume goes forth on its mission.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Early American schools. In very early days with any society of people, there were no schools and no teachers as such. Children learned in the family and from people in the group. As knowledge accumulated, teachers became necessary; and as groups grew larger and more complex, schools were started to help the home and the community with the children. Thus, from the first, teachers and schools were designed as auxiliaries of the home and community. The teacher took the place of the parent for the time, and the school was a small community to prepare for life in the larger community. A modern school should keep in mind this same mission.

In our earlier colonial days, people were occupied in the struggle with the wilderness and with a savage people. Very little scholarship was needed for this purpose, hence schools had little to teach. The colonies early took steps to provide the education thought best — reading, writing, spelling, a very little arithmetic, and the rudiments of religion, mainly the catechism. The religious aim was most prominent.

Later on, schools called "Latin Grammar Schools" came to predominate, such being schools after ideas of those in Europe. The prominent aim with these at first was education in the Latin and Greek classics, but later the aim shifted to the discipline of the mind. This led to the introduction of

algebra, and to a greater stress on grammar, spelling, and arithmetic, since these furnished the best matter for disciplinary drill. In the nineteenth century the public schools modified this further by gradual additions of some history, geography, physiology, civics, and primary language, though these were taught mainly as dry book-studies and with the same methods of drill.

Changing home conditions. While all this was taking place in the schools, conditions were changing in the home and community. At first the home produced nearly all the necessaries of life. Milk, butter, eggs, meat, preserves, jellies, and similar eatables were home products. Grains were raised on the farm and converted into meal, flour, and hominy at home, or at a neighborhood watermill. Wool, cotton, linen, and hides were home products, converted into cloth and leather at home, and there made into clothing for members of the family, harness for the horses, carpets for the floors, and furnishing for beds, windows, etc. Farm, ranch, or plantation had its carpenter and blacksmith shops. Boys and girls entered into all these activities of home productivity and equipment, and thus, without calling it such, they were acquiring a valuable education outside the schools.

This old order has largely passed. With the coming of steam and factories a new order has developed, and most of these industries have gone out from the home. What formerly were home products must now be purchased at stores and markets. Children are thus deprived of valuable industrial training in the home, whilst women and children have not the same opportunities as of old to contribute as much to the support of the family.

Development of the rural-life problem. In this new order towns and cities grew up rapidly. People drifted rapidly from country to town and city. Communities thinned out, many farms were abandoned, and other changes took place