

AMERICAN EDUCATION SERIES
GEORGE DRAYTON STRAYER, GENERAL EDITOR

SUCCESSFUL TEACHING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

BY
MARVIN S. PITTMAN, PH.D.
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF RURAL EDUCATION,
MICHIGAN STATE NORMAL COLLEGE,
YPSILANTI, MICHIGAN



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PITTMAN—SUCCESSFUL TEACHING

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

IF our American public school system is to provide adequately for the education of all boys and girls, the rural schools of the United States must be improved. It is important in the consideration of this problem that we discuss methods of finance and of administration. It is even more important that well-trained teachers be placed in every classroom, and that those already at work in rural schools grow increasingly more efficient.

In this volume the author has presented to rural school-teachers a record of achievement by a group of rural school-teachers which is not only enlightening but inspiring. The book could not have been written by one who approached the problem as a theorist. It is out of a rich experience in achieving the ideals set forth, that Dr. Pittman has written to the rural school-teachers of the United States.

"Successful Teaching in Rural Schools" meets the standard set for the American Education Series because it contributes directly to the improvement of the practice of those who work in rural schools. It is confessedly a book which grows out of the optimism and enthusiasm of one who has found it possible to help rural school-teachers to achieve success.

The author has most fortunately used the letter written by one teacher to another as the form of presenting his contribution. The genuineness of the problems which are discussed and the reality of the solutions proposed could

not have been so well expressed had the author followed the usual topical method of discussion. The references which are given and the questions which are offered for discussion make the book most available for courses on rural school problems in teacher-training institutions or for the courses organized under the direction of state reading circles.

GEORGE D. STRAYER

PREFACE

THE story which follows is a description of an experiment in which an attempt was made to apply present day educational theory and scientific educational principles and technique to the most difficult American educational situation—the one-teacher rural school. The story is based upon fact. Only enough liberty has been taken with the facts to fill out a fairly general treatment of elementary education as it is applied by the classroom teacher. The hope of the author is that he may transmit to other children, parents, and teachers the spirit of the children, parents, and teachers of the fifteen rural schools which made this story possible.

The author is indebted to so many people for their contributions to this book that no attempt will be made to name them. Many of them appear, in spirit, in the story. I shall leave the reader to thank them when they make their contribution to his life as they have to mine.

The author and the publishers wish to acknowledge their obligation to Mr. Henry Holcomb Bennett for permission to use his copyright poem, "The Flag Goes By," as the basis of a demonstration lesson. M. S. P.

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CHAPTER I

MARTHA SETS HER HOUSE IN ORDER AND PHILOSOPHIZES ON THE NEEDS OF THE RURAL SCHOOLS

September 3

Dear Hilda:

Here I am once more back at old Rondell. For the third time the early September days have found me setting my house in order. It is no small task either, for during the summer season a Mid-Western rural school building serves a variety of purposes. Roving harvest hands find it the oasis in the desert. The secret councils of the Royal Order of Boy Errantry hold their midnight conclaves there. Such of the animal kingdom as desire a temporary shelter find there a convenient place of refuge.

Mr. Inkle was at the schoolhouse this morning and mowed the yard. This afternoon some of the children and I scoured the floor, dusted the pictures, arranged the books in the bookcase and hung the curtains. Mrs. Worthy had laundered them for us during the summer. We did a few other things to make the place habitable when we return to our school work next Monday morning.

I had two pleasant surprises when I got back yesterday. The first was that the school board had decided to have nine months of school this year instead of eight for which I had contracted at the close of the term last spring. The second was that my salary had been raised from eighty to one hundred dollars per month. What do you think of

that? When I heard it, I almost fainted from surprise. When I asked why they did it, Mr. Inkle said that the farmers had had to raise the salary of the harvest hands twenty-five per cent during the season and that the board thought that I was a pretty good harvest hand. He said the children of the community are the finest crop that the community grows. "Besides," he said, "I understand



MARTHA AND HILDA WORKING ON THE COOK CAR

that you have been pulling down a hundred dollars per month ever since the close of school as chief cook for a threshing crew. We thought if you are worth a hundred dollars as a cook for fifteen men, you ought to be worth as much as teacher and part-time cook for fifteen children. I am sure you work as hard in the winter as you do in the summer."

That sort of attitude on the part of the school board causes me to want to continue to be a teacher. There are some things, though, Hilda, that make me want to "chuck the job and take to a cook car for keeps." It is not the lack of pay or the absence of a sort of appreciation.

It is the absence of professional companionship, contact, and inspiration.

You and I had lots of fun this summer planning our meals even though there was a very narrow menu possible. The difficulty actually added to the interest of the task. Planning the meal with you and then watching the effect of it on the men was worth almost as much to me as the hundred dollars that I received. I enjoyed the work and forgot the pay. That is what I need in the school work—someone to help me plan, someone to inspire my plan, someone to appreciate, in an intelligent manner, the things that I plan and perform. I do not want, merely, general, blind appreciation. I want appreciation of particular planning and performing.

Last summer I looked forward to the meals at which we had cream cake, with almost as much enthusiasm as did old red Ole Hanson himself for I knew how much he would appreciate that meal. It was always a joy to serve wieners and sauerkraut to Fritzie Reitz, macaroni and cheese to Rafael Spataro, and hot biscuits and molasses to old long "Alabam" Smith, for I knew that it would make each one feel that he was at home once again. If each one, when his home dish was served, said: "Miss Martha, this is just like mother used to make," then I knew that as a cook I had "arrived," for each of them was an intelligent critic of his own home dish. Would that we had intelligent critics in the school work, who have an appetite for good teaching as those boys had for good food, and who have human qualities that have lost nothing by being transported from the dinner table to the schoolroom.

The trouble with this rural school work in the Middle West—and in the whole country, if I am any judge—is that the teachers are too far apart for companionship. To begin with, we are usually a lot of high school girls who are blessed chiefly with youth, romantic notions, and a desire for companionship. We are very *plastic*, capable of being made or marred very easily and very quickly. If we meet the right influences, we become socially useful and personally noble; if we meet the wrong influences, too many of us, socially and personally, wither and die.

About the only social life we have out here is the barn dance and that, according to my observation, is not the sort of atmosphere in which great teachers grow.

I do not know, but it seems to me that if we had some one who would organize these rural teachers into little social, educational groups, in which they would do some educational planning and performing, and some plain, ordinary, wholesome playing of a sort that young teachers, considered as young human beings, would enjoy, it might change the whole rural educational and social situation. I do not know how it could be done. It is very presumptuous in me, certainly, to be even talking about it when all of the big educators, from Theodore Roosevelt and his Country Life Commission down to the county superintendents of the country, have been devoting themselves to this problem ever since 1907. But, presumptuous or not, I think I have some ideas about it. I believe that one of the troubles is that too much of the country life work has been done from afar—New York City, Washington, and at our national, state, and county educational meetings. Too much of it has been on paper and too little on

the soil. Too much has been big talk about it. We need some one actually to *do* something about it.

Doubtless, Hilda, you think by this time that I am trying to get you to turn educational reformer and do the impossible. Well, if you should happen to have a plan, suppose you quietly put it to the test. If it works, then tell the world about it. That would be an interesting change in educational practice.

Gloriously gloomy,

Martha

HILDA'S MEDITATIONS

1. Should country school buildings and grounds have a caretaker during the summer months to prevent vandalism and to keep them in such condition that they would be a community pride? What would it cost in money? What would it be worth in rural ideals?

2. What should be the ratio between the salaries of teachers and the salaries of other people employed in a community in order to encourage efficient people to engage in teaching?

3. What may be done to keep rural school boards abreast with the times? Could the county superintendent help? How?

4. Is it true that intelligent appreciation is the thing most needed to inspire teachers to professional growth and to efficient service?

5. How can teachers be grouped in my county so that we may have enough in each group for effective work and so that our interests would be the same?

6. How can a social aspect be added to a teachers' meeting so that teachers will feel socially delighted as well as professionally edified?

7. What was the Country Life Commission? What did the Country Life Commission find? What did it recommend?

8. Is Martha correct in her statement that too many of the rural solutions are paper solutions? What can we rural teachers do to change this situation?

9. Why does Martha suggest that I work my plan before I tell about it?

WHAT HILDA READ IN ORDER TO ANSWER
HER QUESTIONS:

Teachers' Salaries and Salary Schedules—National Education Association Bulletin, Series No. 6—Dr. E. S. Evenden.

Report of the Country Life Commission—Roosevelt.

The Teacher, the School, and the Community—McFee. Chapter IV.

Rural Life and the Rural School—Kennedy. Chapters IV, V, VII.