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THE SMALL SUNDAY SCHOOL

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THE SMALL SUNDAY SCHOOL.

ITS PROBLEMS OF TEACHER TRAINING.

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The average enrollment of Sunday schools in America is ninety. The problem of the small school is the problem of the majority of schools then. It furnishes by far the largest number of religious workers; it receives a small share of encouragement from religious leaders; and it has peculiar discouragements.

The specific problem is this: How can the Sunday school, with an enrollment of a hundred or less, with an average attendance of fifty or sixty, assembling in one room, maintain the teacher-training class successfully?

THE CLASS IN THE SCHOOL.

It can organize a class by a selection of pupils sixteen years of age and beyond, and give this class a continuous life in the school. This provides the teachers for tomorrow. Not only does it forecast the future in this essential, but it appeals to the strongest and most deeply religious among its young life at the very day when they are most willing to give themselves to service. This class should enter upon a definite course of study for one or two years. It should receive all encouragement from the minister and superintendent, and, indeed, from the whole church. It should receive the most cordial public recognition and be surrounded by all the comfort and good cheer that can possibly be given those who are doing work of the highest honor to the cause of religion. It should be given the social encouragement that comes from happy events. It should be given the best available teacher. It should be asked to do thorough work and receive the drill and discipline of extended periods of study with careful examinations, and finally receive certificate or diploma at the completion of the course. These young people will respect high standards. If they have heard at all the Master's call for service, they long to be skilled workmen and to win success. Their graduation should be one of the events of the church year. All of this can be done with a class of less than ten; indeed, four or five can follow this work successfully.

THE WEEK-DAY CLASS

For the teachers already at work in the school, this plan of study at the time of the Sunday-school session is impossible, and their work must be done at a week-day hour. The simple fact that many of the most successful teacher-training classes have carried forward their work in the busiest cities, is ample proof that the work can be done anywhere if there be real willingness of heart. In the country, groups can meet at private homes or at the church, and for eight or nine months in the year pursue this work with little interruption. In the village the hindrances are less than the Sunday-school worker finds in the longer distances and more crowded life in the city.

It may be more difficult to find a teacher for the training class in the small church than it is in the large one. The minister often must take this as a new duty and a new privilege offered in his own life. More than one-half of the classes, in fact, are taught by ministers. Many talented teachers of the public schools or high schools are willing, out of a deep Christian purpose of heart, to devote time to work that is specifically religious. And there is a vast amount of unused and untrained talent everywhere that can be brought into service when very plain, definite and thorough work is placed before them.

UNION CLASSES.

In some cases a union class can be formed in the county or village community by bringing teachers of several schools together. In this case, careful organization of the class by selection of president and others who will bind its members by close ties and maintain a spirit of faithful work is absolutely essential. Where the individual student is desirous of taking this work, a correspondence method can be made very helpful, provided there is patience and deep determination in carrying the course through to the end. There will be much loss, of course, in this plan from the lack of discussion and inspiration that belong to every earnest group, but much information may be gained. Only those who are earnestly seeking it will be inclined to take this study alone.

The problem of the small school comes back after all to the problem of the isolated Christian worker. The busy men and women who are called to teach religion are often left so much alone that they fail to receive the higher inspiration and joy that really belong to their service. And there can be no higher duty of religious leadership than to reveal to these more lonely workers in the quiet fields the possibilities of success and the high responsibilities that are upon them. Isola-

tion may mean intellectual stagnation and mental torpor, or it may give opportunity for the quiet of deep thought and the brooding and self-development that produces the most sturdy and self-respecting character. There is no higher service offered today than that given the intelligent, earnest Bible teacher. The dignity of such work, the intellectual heights of such study, rescue the isolated worker from the danger of drudgery. If the farmer can turn his furrow, with the Shepherd Psalm and the messages of the herdsmen of Tekoa in mind, he will be redeemed from that sordidness of soul revealed in some recent facts regarding the moral backwardness of rural life. If the village workman can follow the tent-maker of Tarsus and the fishermen of Galilee in their spiritual heights, he will be trained as a fisher of men and a winner of souls, and lifted far above the mere hewer of wood or the cog in the industrial machine. If the teaching of Bible stories possesses the heart of the worker in the kitchen or shop or store, she can lift her eyes from the monotony of her task to a realm of poetry and ideal beauty which she can interpret to the child life about her. Herbert's fine phrase about "making drudgery divine" applies splendidly here. Men and women in quiet places, lacking the splendid inducements and enthusiasms of great classes and schools, must see that the highest success in work lies before them; and that the work itself will give a new dignity and meaning to their own lives. So we must appeal to them for a thoroughness and earnestness in study, not only for the sacredness of the task, but for the sake of the workmen as well.

Whoever sees the real tomorrow sees the moral issue is the pivotal question. The only question in American influence is regarding the honesty and deep loyalty of heart to Christian standards. The moral issue comes back for inspiration and authority to Christian teaching. The richest chance for Christian teaching is in the Sunday school, and upon the schools in the country and the small school depends, in the largest degree, the Christian type of our national character. One great service leader in religious education can render is to restore the joy, the self-respect and the spiritual vigor of the country church; and the Sunday school is the most direct avenue of approach. In no way can this be done so rapidly or so effectively as by the awakening of the country Sunday school to lift its eyes and see the abundant opportunities for success that lie right at its doors.