

**TEACHING A DISTRICT
SCHOOL; A BOOK FOR
YOUNG TEACHERS**

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Teaching a district school; a book for young teachers by John Wirt Dinsmore

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JOHN WIRT DINSMORE

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TEACHING A DISTRICT SCHOOL

A BOOK FOR YOUNG TEACHERS

BY

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AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO YOUNG TEACHERS

By WILLIAM GOODELL FROST, PH. D.

President, Berea College

To many who study American history it appears that its most heroic figure is that of the Country School-Teacher. Certainly he stands close beside the pioneer preacher. America is superior to other lands in that the common people here have more virtue and intelligence. And this virtue and intelligence is spread among the masses by the minister of the gospel and by the teacher of the public school.

Ambition, the resolution of youth to be worthy and useful, has three birthplaces—the home, the church and the school. Of these the school is by no means the least important. It comes in where the home has partly failed and where the church has hardly reached.

2-3/19 The country schoolmaster is heroic because of the difficult tasks which he undertakes. Thousands who succeed fairly well in city schools, with ideal conditions of building, furniture and books, and the backing of superintendent, truant officer and a great "system," would fail completely in a board schoolhouse in which one is called upon to teach every grade and to contend single-handed with all the stupidity and friskiness of a country district.

It cheers my heart to know that this little book is to go forth as a helper to the country school-teachers of our

land. Each one will feel his solitude and his need of a friend. In this book Professor Dinsmore comes to your side as the friend you need. You will not read many pages without seeing that he "has been there himself." He has been in a thousand schoolhouses like yours. He knows hundreds of trustees, parents, pupils exactly like those in your district.

Of course Professor Dinsmore has been to other places than the country school. He has been to the great universities and the great libraries, and is expert in all the fine-spun theories of education. But I have particularly urged him in this book to keep all these things in the background, and to stick to plain language and practical topics. He has succeeded in a remarkable degree.

You will not be troubled by big words and abstract ideas. He does not insist upon giving you a stagecoach when you need a baby-carriage or a wheelbarrow! Yet it is good to have a friend who understands the stagecoaches and the palace cars of education.

This book, while simple, is thoroughly sound. Many a sentence which seems so self-evident as hardly to need stating at all represents long research and patient investigation. He gives you the results both of his studies and his experience, without dragging you through too long a process yourself. He gives you what you need for your school this term and starts you on the road of steady progress.

I should not undertake to write a single additional chapter or paragraph for the book. It is for me simply to introduce it and to advise you, my young friends, to read it and to re-read it many times.

Let me add one parting word. Many of you do not expect to follow teaching all your lives (it would be better

if more of our schools were taught by those who expect to make teaching their life work), but while you do teach, try to act and feel as though you were certain to be a teacher all your life. Do not debase yourself by doing any half-hearted work. Have the courage and audacity to undertake to improve on even the best teachers you have known. James A. Garfield was once a country school-teacher. The coming president gave his great powers to the work of leading the children toward manhood and womanhood. God and your country call upon *you* to be as good a teacher as Garfield.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

In respect to professional information and guidance there is no more needy person than the country school-teacher. He is usually so remote from the greater sources of information and inspiration that it is not to be wondered at if he is slow in acquiring proficiency. All things considered, the wonder is that he has attained to his present standard of excellency.

The writer, himself one of the class in the beginning of his career, has visited hundreds of country schools and is well aware of their deficiencies. Nevertheless, he is glad to testify to the earnestness of country teachers as a whole, and to their eagerness to serve faithfully their patrons in the schoolroom and out of it. They have been, and still are, the greatest single power for good in the nation, and the country owes them a debt of gratitude it can never repay.

The teacher of the district school is compelled to rely almost entirely upon his own judgment. Usually there is no one in the neighborhood to whom he can turn for professional advice or counsel. The visits of the County Superintendent are too far apart and too brief to be of much help. The County Institute and Teachers' Association are valuable, but fall far short of his needs. His salary will scarcely permit him to attend the State or National Associations; he may possess a few educational books and journals, but they do not seem to apply to his work. As a

rule these books and journals are prepared by city superintendents or college professors and apply, or appear to apply, to city schools.

Moreover, it is difficult for any one to study the problems of teaching by himself. Those who teach in the city have the advantage of the weekly teachers' meetings and the leadership of the principal or superintendent. The country teacher has no such advantage. Is it to be wondered at, then, if his spirit languish?

This little book is designed to meet the many and peculiar needs of the country teacher. The author expresses the hope that it will be valuable to all, but particularly to beginners. He has kept in mind the sore straits in which he was often placed in the outset of his own career, how he groped for even the common principles of instruction and government, and how slowly those principles dawned upon him. His early experience and later work have made him familiar with every phase of district teaching.

In preparing this book he has never in a single sentence lost sight of the one great object he had in mind, namely, to help the district teacher in solving his problems and discharging his duties. It seems to him in recalling his early career that such a work as this would have been of inestimable value. It would have helped him to avoid many youthful errors. That it may serve such a purpose to all who read it is his earnest hope.

J. W. DINSMORE.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. GETTING READY TO TEACH	11
1. Self-Examination—2. Steps in Preparation—3. Se- curing a School—4. Before School Opens—5. The First Day of School.	
II. THINGS TO BE KEPT IN MIND	27
1. The School for the Children—2. The Rights and Duties of Parents—3. Recognition of Higher Author- ity—4. The Classification of the School—5. Rules and Regulations—6. Opening Exercises—7. The Daily Program.	
III. PRACTICAL TEACHING	46
1. Assigning Lessons—2. Occupation for Youngest Pupils—3. Use of Lesson-Period—4. Explaining and Impressing—5. Questioning—6. Reviewing— 7. Increasing Attention and Interest—8. Good Manners and Good Morals—9. Good Order— 10. Recesses and Intermissions.	
IV. THE SCHOOL IN PROGRESS	77
1. Those Who Do Not Come—2. Tardiness—3. Irreg- ularity of Attendance—4. The Schoolhouse and Its Surroundings—5. Good-Will Among Pupils —6. The Care of the Children's Health—Gymnastics —7. Rhetorical Exercises.	
V. KEEPING UP THE INTEREST	108
1. Helpful Props and Spurs—2. Keeping a Brave Front—3. Encouraging Those Who Need It— 4. Improving Your Teaching—5. Reserve Forces— 6. School Visitors.	