How to run a little Sunday school

Fergusson E Morris
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Preface

The worker in the little neighborhood Sunday school, ambitious, earnest, perplexed with many difficulties, ought to have a book on Sunday-school method all his own. In point of fact he needs a whole literature. It was necessary that modern methods in general and grading in particular should be worked out first with reference to conditions in the large and well-appointed Sunday schools. This having been done, the time is ripe for an independent literature of the little Sunday school, in which its principles of operation, its strategic factors and its most effective modes of work shall be studied directly, and not merely by parenthetical chapters and paragraphs. To such a literature this book is a modest and at present a rather lonesome contribution.

The size of the little-school interest in America is worth considering. In the great states of the plains and in part of the South the Sunday school of fifty members is the prevailing type. The International Sunday-School Association's statistics seem to indicate that half the Sunday-school population of the United States is enrolled in Sunday schools of sixty-five members or less. Even in populous New Jersey, with the highest average membership of any state, the schools of fifty or fewer enroll five per cent. of the total Sunday-school membership. For Canada the proportion is even more impressive. There is noth-
ing little about the little Sunday school, when con-
sidered as a constituency standing for its rights.

When we realize, moreover, what our country and
the world owe to these same little Sunday schools,
and what our city churches have received from them
in well started religious life, is it not our common
shame that the call of the little Sunday school for
adequate educational leadership should for so long
have gone practically unheeded?

As General Secretary of the New Jersey Sunday-
school Association, and later as Educational Super-
intendent of Sabbath-school Missions for the Presby-
terian Church, the writer has come into close contact
with conditions and needs in the work for little Sun-
day schools in all parts of the United States. While
realizing the inherent difficulties of the typical little-
school situation, he nevertheless believes that the best
and highest in modern Sunday-school method belongs
of right to this work, and that the workers in these
fields are themselves competent to introduce it and
lead it to a successful issue.

This book, therefore, is written for the man or
woman in the little Sunday school, to show how such
a school may lift itself out of the ruts of custom and
tradition, gain the vision of a better day, and take its
rightful place among the progressive, graded, efficient
and spiritually successful Sunday schools of its field.

Thanks are due Miss Martha E. Robison, Superin-
tendent of Rural Work of the Pennsylvania State
Sabbath-School Association, for a number of valuable
criticisms and suggestions, which have been embodied
in the proofs.
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WHAT IT NEEDS

General Needs.—Whoever has to do with the leading of a Sunday school, in a neighborhood where workers are few and difficulties many, will have to give careful consideration to the question of what his Sunday school needs.

Some needs, while undoubtedly great, are so general as to call for little comment. They speak for themselves. The Sunday school needs first of all a competent leader. Perhaps the superintendent feels that that need, at any rate, is now well supplied. Perhaps he feels that a great mistake has been made in choosing him, and that some one far more competent than he ought to be found and installed as his successor. If this last is his feeling, there is much hope for the school. He should however hold his place until the ideal successor appears, and meantime do his best and learn how to do better.

Devoted workers are needed to stand by the leader and help him in carrying out his plans. Well adapted supplies are needed, including some helps not now on the market in form suited to the needs of such a school as we are about to study. God’s gracious power is needed, with a constant sense of dependence on Him and a spirit of prayer and love for souls. The school must realize its need of these things. We may say indeed that humility, a sense of need for help, human and divine, is the greatest need of all.

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Leaving for the time these general needs, what are some of those specific needs of the little Sunday school which effort might conceivably supply? The term "little" is of course relative. A school of fifty members is little in comparison with the average Sunday school of the city, about which nearly all the books on Sunday-school work are written. It is larger, however, than the average Sunday school in some states of the Union. What are some of the needs of such a school?

Members.—To begin with, there must be enough persons, big and little, to form an organized company. Nine people, for instance, could make a Sunday school, with three in a younger class, four in an older class, and two teachers, one of them acting as superintendent. A Sunday school of eleven, with an average attendance of nine, ran for several years in Ocean County, New Jersey; and there are doubtless hundreds as small or smaller the country over.

Larger numbers than that, however, are required for a properly organized Sunday school. The school of thirty members, or twenty, or even ten, need not feel discouraged; but fifty is the membership required for a really satisfactory educational organization. With two officers, five teachers and forty-three pupils, a Sunday school in the rural districts may consider itself ready for thorough and up-to-date work.

Let us take these numbers as the standard of membership for the typical little Sunday school. Such a school, of course, will try to grow as much larger as it can, by organizing new classes and increasing the size of those it has. But, for the purposes of our study, we will think of a Sunday school as composed