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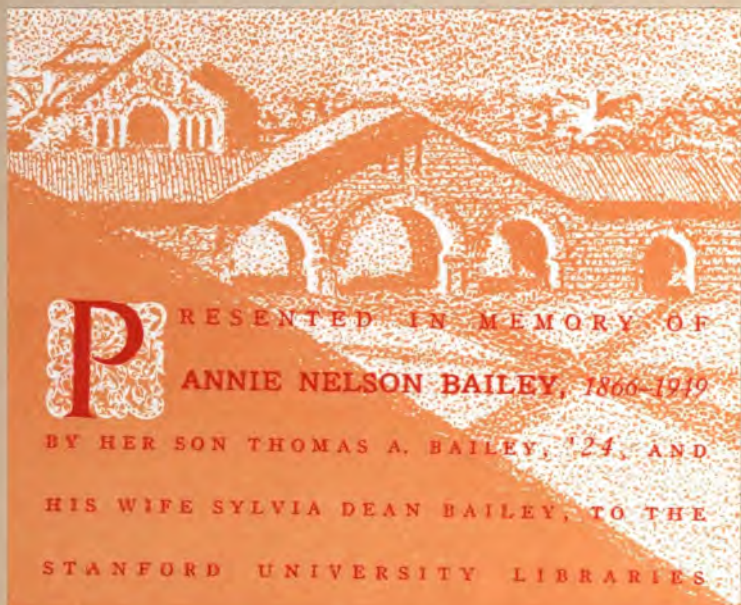
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THE RURAL CHURCH
MOVEMENT

EDWIN L. EARP



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A typical rural church at the close of the pioneer period



A schoolhouse and preaching appointment of the pioneer period

THE RURAL CHURCH MOVEMENT

BY
EDWIN L. EARP, PH.D. (LEIPZIG)

*Professor of Sociology, Drew Theological Seminary
Madison, N. J.*



THE METHODIST BOOK CONCERN
NEW YORK CINCINNATI

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EDWIN L. EARP**

**TO MY FOUR BROTHERS AND FOUR
SISTERS, WHO SHARED WITH ME
THE STRUGGLES AND THE JOYS
OF LIVING IN THE OPEN COUNTRY.**

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PREFACE

THE writer believes there is no field for life investment in the real issues of the kingdom of God on earth so promising of results to the man who wants to deal in "big futures" as that of the church in the open country, because it contains *one half* the population of our great country; and, without intending a reflection upon any other part of the national household, he thinks, the *better half*. Believing the problem of spiritual leadership to be the most important factor in the country-life problem, I have treated the subject of the open country's call for such in the front of the work; and as the home missions activities of the churches are also vitally involved, I have placed emphasis upon a suggested home missions policy at the close of the work.

The idea of putting the other chapters in the logical order of a more or less historical treatment of the country church as a movement was first suggested to me

PREFACE

by Mr. Albert E. Roberts, international secretary of the County Work Department of the Young Men's Christian Association, who asked me to give a course of lectures at the Silver Bay Summer School for Leadership last summer. The splendid reaction of the men at Silver Bay, of a favorable character, and a like response of the class in Rural Leadership at Drew during the winter, and the encouragement of men like Mr. Henry Israel, editor of Rural Manhood, and of Professor Harold W. Foght, chief of field service in rural education, United States Bureau of Education, and also the many inquiries which come to my desk from young ministers in the open country, have been the deciding factors in giving this volume to the public when there are already so many good things written on the subject of the country church.

My main purpose has been to select out of the history of the movement those outstanding facts and methods that have been of value and apply them to the conditions in rural life the church is now facing, showing those to be adapted to

PREFACE

new plans, and those, because no longer useful, to be discarded.

The author is not unmindful of the splendid successes being won by men in some of the country churches, the record of which has appeared in the leading periodicals of the religious press. It is with the hope that the entire Rural Church movement will become so thoroughly organized on an intelligent cooperative basis in social sympathy, that all the legitimate church enterprises in the open country may be likewise successful, that these chapters are written and published in usable form both as a text for the class and as a volume for the general reader.

EDWIN L. EARP.

Madison, New Jersey.

CHAPTER I

THE OPEN COUNTRY'S CALL FOR SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP¹

THE report of the Commission on Country Life appointed by President Roosevelt during the last year of his administration lifted the vast rural domain of the United States like a new continent into the consciousness of the American people. Growing out of the disclosures of this commission and the findings of other leaders in rural life through surveys in different regions, we have begun to talk and act in a constructive way concerning the reclaiming of soils, reforestation of denuded areas, prevention of floods, and utilization of wasted water power, and also regaining for this vast resource field its priority of leadership. In the open country has been developed in the past the splendid heroic individuality that has produced the religious, moral, economic, and political

¹ Compare my article in *The Bible Magazine* for April, 1914.

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leadership of all the ages, while at the same time it is here we discover to-day the greatest national waste of resources natural, human, and spiritual. In other words, we discover among other pressing needs of country life that of *leadership*; and no call of the open country in this regard is more urgent than that of *spiritual* leadership to make our new rural civilization Christian. And, furthermore, I do not believe there is a more important field open to trained men and women to-day than that of leadership in our vast rural domain which in more than a material sense is the *resource* field of the nation's life. There is no part of our national domain, not excepting the congested quarters of our great cities, that needs better trained spiritual leaders than that of the open country.

As space permits we will treat of (1) The Open Country, (2) The Call for Leadership, (3) The Kind of Leadership Required, (4) Factors that Make Such Leaders, (5) Life Investment in the Open Country.

THE OPEN COUNTRY'S CALL

THE OPEN COUNTRY

Since we are dealing with people, and not merely with land, we consider that part of the population as distinctly rural which is grouped in villages or towns not to exceed twenty-five hundred in number, and that part of the national domain where farmers and other country folk live in houses more or less isolated from each other and where distances must be traveled to reach the school, the church, and the store.

In the United States the open country includes over one half of the population, and in only six of the forty-eight States was there a decrease in rural population during the last decade covered by the thirteenth census, while eight increased in rural population over 50 per cent; six from 30 to 50; two from 20 to 30; ten from 10 to 20 per cent; and only sixteen increased less than 10 per cent. The value of farm property for the same period increased over 100 per cent, and aggregates more than forty billions of dollars.

The open country not only includes this vast population and aggregate of

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wealth, but also includes all kinds of climate and many varieties of soil and degrees of fertility. One must travel far to get the proper perspective of the vast reaches of the open country as well as the great contrasts of land area and soil fertility. For example, there is quite a contrast between the washed-out mountain country of Virginia and East Tennessee, where a traveler in questioning a native by the roadside, leaning against a remnant of a worm-fence, as to why he didn't speak louder, got the reply, "The land is so poor down here a fellow can't raise his voice," and the rich prairie land of central Kansas, where it is said a settler from New England couldn't raise pumpkins because the vines grew so fast they wore the blossoms off before the young pumpkins could get a fair start.

THE CALL FOR LEADERSHIP

This call reaches us from many angles of need. To illustrate: Why are we discussing so much in these days the problem of the rural church? Because in many sections of our country we find the rural

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field one of the most difficult mission fields of the world to cultivate because it is a lost home field. When one returns to his home country in the rural sections of the Eastern and Southern States and in some sections of the Middle West, what does he discover? He finds the splendid old circuit system broken up and the fires of religious fervor gone out upon many abandoned church and family altars; and the message of the minister in many instances is as ineffective to meet the exigencies of the situation as is the mummery of an Indian medicine man to cure a case of appendicitis.

Why is this so? Because of population change through population movement, while there has been little, if any, change in methods of church work in these sections to meet the changing needs of these rural communities. I could illustrate by giving incidents gathered from surveys made in Maryland, Tennessee, Indiana, and Missouri, recently published, also from observations made by social experts in New England and New Jersey, and the Southern coast and Gulf States. But I prefer to

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give a few facts discovered in a casual way by an investigator while visiting a year or so ago a fairly prosperous farming section of one of our Eastern States:

A farmer had committed suicide, isolation and lack of income and worrying over small debts he was then unable to pay being the causes.

Another farmer in debt, his wife demented, and his farm advertised to be sold for taxes.

A farmer's wife, with family of five—two grown sons, two grown daughters, and a little girl of eight; a hard-working husband with little initiative for new things; this woman bitter in soul, though patient and loyal, because at the age when burdens should have been lightened, she was compelled to drudge harder than ever with the cooking, housecleaning, washing, and dairy work. Oldest daughter teaching school and sending no part of her income to help lighten her mother's burden.

Fifteen boys from twelve to twenty years of age playing craps in the light of a lantern on the porch of the village store and post office, while there was a vacant

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hall over the store not in use, though offered by the owner free to the public; and a church on the hill open only an hour or so on Sunday afternoon, when it didn't rain too hard.

Another farmer's wife told a distressing story about her pastor: how he came to their home so intoxicated that he could with difficulty say grace at the table, and after supper went to bed, taking her husband's overcoat with him by mistake, while in the pocket of his coat left in the hallway they discovered a flask of whisky. And she confessed they didn't know how to get rid of the minister, for there was no one willing to take the lead in informing the bishop.

In the entire community this social expert found no organization or movement or association of any kind to help either of these distressing cases. Yet similar facts could be duplicated in many rural communities throughout the open country.

What can we do about it? Show them a better way by developing among them leaders in community building. The open country's call is for leadership to meet

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the needs which constitute the call for Christian men and women to invest life in these fields of social service.

I have not time to emphasize the call from the viewpoint of the increasing death rate in rural life as compared with cities; the need for training in sanitation and hygiene and eugenics in rural life, as well as in city life.

THE KIND OF LEADERSHIP REQUIRED

It goes without argument that the leadership required in the open country must be essentially rural-minded. If we hope to socialize these isolated population groups in the country districts, it must be done by a native socialized leadership. In certain cases, however, a young man or woman brought up in the city, if trained in rural economics and sociology, and possessing tact, will succeed in winning the confidence of the people of the country quite as well as one raised in the open country. What is essential is a proper training and a right spirit. We mean by a leader not merely the man who is ahead of those who are following, for that may

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be true and yet the group be getting nowhere, or may be headed for no definite goal, but we mean, rather, a man who has experience and vision so that he can see the needs of the people and show them a better way. He must be also a man of practical skill and untiring zeal stimulated by a constructive imagination and the dynamic sense of human worth; one who actually gets people to do something for their own betterment as well as for the uplift of the whole community.

It is, of course, necessary to keep in mind the different vocations in which rural leadership is especially needed: as, for example, in the church, in the school, the rural Sunday school, the Young Men's Christian Association, and the Young Women's Christian Association, which is doing such splendid work of leadership among the girls and young women in the open country; also leadership in the Grange, farmers' clubs, agricultural leagues, farm bureaus, and all other forms of organized life now taking shape in the open country for the cooperative action of the whole community for the welfare of the people as

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a whole, as well as for the individual in special need.

Young men and women who feel specially called to Christian service in the open country must be definitely trained in schools that have placed special emphasis upon rural science, or in colleges of agriculture whose curricula have been broadened to include courses in rural sociology and religious social engineering, and they must be urged to volunteer for service in the *rural* field as in other fields of missionary enterprise.

In case they go to the theological schools for graduate study, adequate provision must be made for courses that will train them for the country church as a lifework rather than away from the open country, as has been the case too often hitherto. The commission referred to above in the summary of its report has well said: "Most of the new leaders must be farmers who can find a satisfying business career on the farm, but who will throw themselves into the service of upbuilding the community. A new race of teachers is also to appear in the country. A new

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rural clergy is to be trained. These leaders will see the great underlying problem of country life, and together they will work, each in his own field, for the one goal of a new and permanent rural civilization. . . . It is to be hoped that many young men and women, fresh from our schools and institutions of learning, and quick with ambition and trained intelligence, will feel a new and strong call to service."¹

FACTORS THAT MAKE SUCH LEADERS

When we analyze the character of any great spiritual leader in the modern Rural Life movement, we find the factors that make him such a leader few and simple, and that they were evident in each stage of his development as a real leader. They may be stated and explained as follows:

1. *A Chance to Express the Adolescent Impulse to Achieve.* I have in mind now a young man from one of the Southern States who is acknowledged to be a leader in modern rural life work who started his career at the age of sixteen by being given a chance to teach a Sunday school

¹See Report published by Sturgis & Walton Company, pp. 30, 31.

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class in a country church where a majority of the pupils were older than he; later he was given the superintendency of the Sunday school at the age of seventeen; at the age of twenty-one he went to a preparatory school; at the age of twenty-eight he graduated from college. He would never have developed leadership in any good cause had he not been given a chance in early adolescence to *do* something. Even at twelve he did a man's work, plowing his six rows of corn in turn like the rest.

Functional psychology confirms this point of view with respect to leadership. As a matter of fact, our educational system hitherto in the rural schools, in the colleges, and in the theological seminaries has educated men away from the rural field, not purposely but as a matter of mental adjustment. When we used to go on a "'possum hunt" in my boyhood days, as I remember, the leader was always a young man who had been on a "'possum hunt" before, and by actual experience knew how to lead. So for every department of organized endeavor of rural

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betterment to-day there must be given young men in the country a chance to express this adolescent impulse to achieve, and it must be given deliberately in every case, whether by Sunday school, church, Grange, farmers' club, or county Young Men's Christian Association.

2. *Ability to Sense and Perceive Human Needs.* A second factor to be emphasized in this discussion is the ability to know the needs of the community in a sympathetic and intelligent way.

A real leader in rural life can make a social survey of his community without even giving evidence to the observer that he is engaged in such a complex undertaking. He can readily see the lack of cooperation, the results of isolation and suspicious individualism, the product of generations of such isolation, or lack of community solidarity. He can readily see the economic basis of many of these human ills, and trace the social and spiritual evils to their most important cause.

He can not only sense the needs, but, if he be a leader, he will see through them to their causes, and thus be able to

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intelligently direct to available resources for their treatment and cure.

3. *A Constructive Imagination.* A real leader has also the power to construct a plan by which men can work toward achievement. He is able to build up a community structure in the minds of the people before they have actually achieved results. Take, for example, a successful country minister who has upon his study walls a map of his parish, with the problems and needs all charted—this man has taken the first constructive step in showing his people how they can get together. So must the leader in rural life to-day arouse the imagination of the farmer to see the relative greatness of our rural domain, and its tremendous significance as a resource field for the supply of the populous cities of the world. Thus will be given dignity to the toil of men and women in the open country.

4. *Engineering Skill in Avoiding Friction.* Still another factor is that skill which enables a man to keep at work with various groups that, because of individualism and class consciousness, are often in conflict

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instead of cooperation. In other words, it is the skill to get team work. I remember once, when a boy on the farm, seeing a great steam thresher drawn by four horses stuck in the mud on a hill, and I admired the skill with which another farmer hitched on his team and pulled the thresher out and up the hill by getting the eight span to pull steadily together without jerks, and without geeing and hawing.

The rural leader should have the skill to unite for community work the church, the school, the Grange, and all other organizations when some great occasion demands that they all pull together for the benefit of the community.

5. *A Persistent Purpose to Win in a Good Cause.* The last and not the least factor is persistent purpose. Leadership cannot really count unless it gets the people somewhere. I recall a little country church near a village surrounded by a fairly prosperous farming district that had closed its doors for a year because of the lack of interest by the people in paying the salary of an inefficient pastor.

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One young man, a farmer, and the village shoemaker got together and determined to hold a Sunday school in that church building even if only a dozen people could be persuaded to cooperate. And as a result of persistent effort and masterful purpose, carried out for a period of two years, that whole community was revolutionized and nearly a hundred adults were converted and made members of the church.

So with all forms of community leadership: to succeed there must be added to all the other requisite factors this indomitable purpose to carry to successful issue the cause we have undertaken.

The time to pull and push hardest is when the load is nearest the top of the hill. This is the supreme test of successful leadership, to get your team to pull the load over every "break" in the hill of human uplift. These, then, are the most important factors in the make-up of a real leader in the open country.

How to develop such leadership is being solved to-day in a measure too little known to the public in general, by the

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colleges of agriculture, the theological seminaries, the County Work Department of the Young Men's Christian Association and, in some States, by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Public Education.

Some of the leading Sunday school publications contain departments of country life; and home missions boards of the leading denominations are following the lead of the Presbyterian Board in organizing bureaus of country life as a part of home missionary enterprise.

There is one other agency by which very quick results could be secured in the matter of discovery and training of such leadership, and that is through Bible study classes in the Christian Associations of our colleges and universities. There is a splendid chance in the scriptural background for such a study. Take as one course "The Rural Training of the Prophets," and as another "The Rural-Mindedness of Jesus"; or still another mission study course in "The Conquest of the Germanic Races a Rural Achievement"; or still another, "The Lutheran

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Reformation in Relation to Country Life"; or "The Pioneer Period of Protestantism in America." Such subjects for Bible and mission study would give new zest to Association work in many of our schools, and at the same time would be performing a useful service in developing leaders to answer the open country's call.

LIFE INVESTMENT IN THE OPEN COUNTRY

If ever we are to master the great cities for Jesus Christ, we must do it first by mastering the open country and the rural towns, whence flow the streams of population to the cities and back to the suburbs to form the basis for the greater cities. When Napoleon returned from Elba the country folk and the small towns rallied to his leadership, and when he reached the gates of Paris they had to open to him, for his following was invincible. I heard a distinguished Bishop say a few years ago, after a residence of some years in New York city, "If the churches ever hope to retain their religious fervor in the cities, they must take care of the country churches, for they feed the city

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churches with workers with religious fervor."

The central parish plan to replace the old circuit system is opening unusual opportunities for Christian social service in which young men and women of our colleges should excel. Here will be centered the consolidated school with its socialized curriculum, which will include the training of splendid moral, religious, and political leadership of the future. Also here will be centered the voluntary economic, social, and political associations of rural life. And from a study of the problems of organized charity among the poor mountain whites, the Negroes, and foreigners in the open country, here will be another fruitful field for life investment of consecrated Christian manhood and womanhood.

The modern farmer has learned the necessity for bookkeeping and advertising. Here will be another opening for secretarial work for young men and women. And, unless I misinterpret the signs of the times, here also in the open country there will be an opportunity of grave

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responsibility for leadership by college women when they have won the political battles for the use of the ballot. Too long have the best of the daughters of the open country heeded the call of the city, attracted by its lure, leaving mothers and younger sisters overburdened by their tasks; but in the dawn of a new day for the nation's good they are hearing in the college halls during decision days for life investment the still small voice of the Spirit calling to Christian service, and, for some of the best of them, it is the open country's call for leadership that will help make this land of ours a better place for all of us to live in.

CHAPTER II

THE RURAL-MINDEDNESS OF THE PROPHETS AND OF JESUS

ALL the great leaders in the Rural Life movement to-day are practically agreed that the country church is the most important factor in the adequate solution of the problem of the betterment of rural civilization. Theodore Roosevelt, Liberty H. Bailey, Kenyon L. Butterfield, Sir Horace Plunkett, Gifford Pinchot, and Albert E. Roberts, as well as many other writers and lecturers upon the subject, are all in accord on this point of emphasis in the modern rural situation.

OTHER SOCIAL MOVEMENTS WITH A SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

The social service movement had a scriptural background, as the writings of Benjamin Kidd, Francis Peabody, Walter Rauschenbusch, Shailer Mathews, Washington Gladden, and many other writers will show at first reading.

THE RURAL CHURCH MOVEMENT

The social settlement and city evangelization movements likewise made their appeal to the Scriptures in citing the example of Jesus "dwelling among us" in his ministry of personality, and also in pointing to the scriptural references to "the City of God," "the New Jerusalem," and other like references to the cities. As a result the whole missionary movement, for a generation or two, was directed to the cities rather than to the rural populations of the world's mission fields.

It is therefore fitting that in the beginning of a work upon the Country Church movement of our times we should give it a scriptural basis, not that we hope to find the solution of our problems worked out for us there—which is an error to assume for the solution of any specific social or economic problem—but, rather, that we may discover the fact that we are dealing with a real dynamic problem of human history, and that we have scriptural sanction for the emphasis we are now placing upon the rural life problem.

Again, we do this deliberately for the

RURAL-MINDEDNESS

reason that country folk are extremely conservative with reference to the sanction of any movement unless it has attached to it the value of scriptural sanction. Therefore if we can show a real basis in the Bible for the modern methods of rural improvement, we will the more easily win the consent of the country folk to our program, which is, after all, the nub of the whole Rural Life movement in so far as securing the cooperation of the country people is concerned.

So rich are the materials for such a purpose, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, that it will be impossible in one chapter to do more than select a few references that will indicate the mine of material we have to work out for Bible study courses on the rural-mindedness of the writers of the Bible. We will, therefore, treat only three points under the general topic of the chapter: (1) The Rural Survey Outlined by Moses; (2) The Rural Survey and Program of Jesus; (3) Illustrations of the Rural-Mindedness of the Prophets and of Jesus.

THE RURAL CHURCH MOVEMENT

THE RURAL SURVEY OUTLINED BY MOSES (*Num. 13. 17-20*)

In the first place we are to note the kind of men chosen to conduct the survey: "And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a prince among them" (verses 1, 2). We notice that he selected *men*, one from each group (tribe), and every man was to be a *prince* among his fellows.

The church of to-day will not win back its lost rural domain, nor win new fields of rural conquest, by sending to this field, as is too frequently the case, superannuated preachers, unprepared novices, or flunkers in preparatory schools or theological seminaries, or those who couldn't hold a city appointment. It will win only when it places in this field men who know and love the open country, and every man a *prince* among his fellows—the choice men who know their problem and delight in hard work.

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In the second place we consider the character of the survey plan (verses 17-20). In order that the reader may the more readily get a graphic view of this survey plan I will italicize the words to be emphasized in the verses quoted: "And Moses sent them to *spy out* [survey] the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up *this way by the South*, and go up into the *hill-country*: and see the land, what it is; and the people that dwell therein, whether they are *strong* or *weak*, whether they are *few* or *many*; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it is *good* or *bad*; and what *cities* they are that they dwell in, whether in *camp*s, or in *strongholds*; and what the *land* [soil] is, whether it is *fat* or *lean*, whether there is *wood therein*, or not. *And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land.* Now the *time* was the *time of the first-ripe grapes.*"

This may not be a model for a modern rural social survey, but from the viewpoint of mastery of a situation that requires militant methods it has points of suggestion as to plan that ought not to be left out of any modern program for

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the mastery of the problems of rural regions.

Notice in detail the nine points in this survey:

(1) They were to begin at the low lands of the south and proceed to the hill-country of the north—a general survey of the land, a study of the *topography* of the country.

(2) They were to make a careful study of the people, whether *strong* or *weak*, *few* or *many*—a general census, and a study in demography.

(3) They were to study the economic and moral values of the country—whether *good* or *bad*.

(4) They were to place special emphasis upon the character of the dwelling places of the people—whether in cities, in camps, or in walled towns; whether they were a commercial, nomadic, or military people.

(5) They were to make a study of the soil and its products—a geological, biological, and botanical survey; a study of the vegetation, forests, fruits, etc.

(6) They were to be *courageous* in seeking and securing all the facts.

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(7) They were to bring back the *goods*, to show that they had been there.

(8) They were to make the survey during the best season—"the time of the first-ripe grapes."

(9) They were to conduct the survey within a definite period of time—forty days.

We can see that from the military, exploiter, point of view there is little we could add to make such a survey plan complete for modern times.

THE RURAL SURVEY AND PROGRAM OF JESUS

(*Matt. 9. 35-38; 10. 1, 5-10, 16, 28; 11. 1, 20-24, 28-30*)

These Scripture references give us the basis for the modern rural social survey from the viewpoint of the Christian group which seeks to serve the rural community. The man who makes a survey of a community with this great Christian motive of service for the people will see vastly more than the man who seeks only an opportunity to exploit the resources, natural and human, of the region he surveys.

In studying this survey plan of Jesus

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we notice that it has a progressive movement. It began with *work*. (Jesus went about all the cities—rural towns—and villages teaching, preaching, healing.) It developed *vision*. (He saw the multitudes distressed and scattered.) It moved the *will*. (He was moved with compassion for them; he prayed for laborers.) It resulted in a program. (He called unto him his twelve disciples, gave them authority, instructed them, and sent them forth.) In modern days it is the man who starts out to work the fields of need that discovers the facts and develops a program that reaches results.

In the next place we notice that this program of Jesus included specific instructions for rural leaders: (1) They were not to scatter nor dissipate their energies, but were to work their specific field. (“Go not into any way of the Gentiles, and enter not into any city of the Samaritans.”) They were to serve those who needed them most—they were to seek the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (2) They were to get their support from the field where they worked on the basis of services

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rendered. ("The laborer is worthy of his food.") (3) They were instructed to seek out first the worthy members of the community in presenting their message of the Kingdom. (4) They were told to be men of personal equipment in character—men of *wisdom*, *gentleness*, and *courage* ("wise as serpents, and harmless as doves"—fearing only him who could put a mortgage on their souls).

Again we notice that the method of Jesus was to deal with fundamental facts:

1. He places condemnation upon *the system* that was causal to the distress he discovered. The rural districts of Palestine were the victims of the commercialism and militarism of the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. He pronounced his *woes* upon the exploiters and not upon the victims. He discriminated between *cause* and *effect*. The taxgatherers, the merchants, the lawyers, and the soldiers all came in for their condemnation.

2. He had comfort for the victims. He placed emphasis upon the dignity of toil. ("Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden.") He proposed better

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methods of doing work—not rest *from* labor, but rest *in* labor. (“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me.”) He taught the greater lesson of *soul rest* as the supreme need of the worker. This is especially true of many rural folk to-day.

Such a program for a rural social survey from the viewpoint of service to the entire community can scarcely be improved upon to-day, from the viewpoint of emphasis upon fundamentals.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE RURAL-MINDED- NESS OF THE PROPHETS AND OF JESUS

It would take a concordance of some size to record all the rural references in the Old and New Testaments, from the second chapter of Genesis, where it is recorded Jehovah God planted a garden eastward, in Eden, and out of the ground made Jehovah God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food (verses 8, 9), to the twenty-second chapter of Revelation, where the writer in vision saw in the midst of the Holy City a river of life on either side of which was the tree of life bearing twelve manner

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of fruits yielding its fruit every month (verses 1, 2). We will give therefore space for only a few typical illustrations from the Old Testament prophets, and a few of the many sayings of Jesus in the New Testament whereby he illustrated his teachings from the facts of rural life.

THE RURAL-MINDEDNESS OF THE PROPHETS

1. In the book of Numbers (22. 21-35) we have the story of Balaam's ride across country to meet Balak, king of the Moabites, who describes the children of Israel as devouring his land as an ox *licketh up* the grass of the field (verse 4), a fact of rhetoric that every schoolboy in the country could readily understand because he knows the dental make-up of the ox's mouth.

One needs but little imagination, in reading this story, to see the ass with his rider shying at the apparition in the road, and taking to the plowed field, or crushing the foot of his rider against the wall or gatepost, or balking and refusing to go through a narrow pass.

2. In Isa. 1. 3 we note the acquaintance-

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ship the prophet had with the character of domestic animals. In 5. 1, 2 the vineyard is described. "Land hunger," one of the evils of rural life pointed out by the Country Life Commission, where the avaricious landowner adds farm to farm and never thinks of improving the living conditions of his wife and family, or of his hired men, is illustrated in 5. 8.

Domestic animals and their enemies are described in 11. 6-9. Warfare one must wage in husbandry is pointed out in 27. 2-6. The value to a nation of peaceful agriculture we find in 32. 20. The blessings of rains in rural regions, and of good roads, are illustrated in chapters thirty-five and forty.

Chapter fifty-three, that masterpiece of Messianic significance, is rich in rural imagery. Chapter fifty-five starts with an inventory of the resources of the land to meet human needs and ends with a lesson in forestry, while in chapter sixty-four the destructiveness of the forest fire is portrayed, and the brickyard and the pottery are mentioned.

3. Jeremiah, though essentially a prophet

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of the city, borrows much of his imagery from country life. His first vision is of the rod of an almond tree (1. 11).

4. Ezekiel mentions many varieties of farm and garden vegetables in 4. 9; the trees and the vine in chapter fifteen; hunting big game in 9. 1-9, and the need of caution against forest fires in 20. 45-49.

5. The book of Daniel furnishes a splendid study of how a country boy became a great leader in religion and in government in chapters one and two.

6. Joel, in 1. 8-12, expresses many rural ideas, and in 3. 10 he gives us the reversal of that famous text so often quoted from Micah 4. 3 with reference to the ideal age. Instead we have the significant statement that they shall beat their "plowshares into swords, and their pruninghooks into spears." One is reminded here of how the "up-state" farmers come to the rescue of our reform movements when a great moral issue is up in politics.

7. Amos, in 3. 1-8, takes us back to our boyhood days when we set snares and hunted wild game.

8. Even in Jonah, in 4. 6, the gourd

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has as much pedagogical value as the incident of the whale.

9. The poetical and historical books, and the Wisdom literature as well, equally abound in references to rural life. The twenty-third psalm is a classic in rural imagery.

THE RURAL-MINDEDNESS OF JESUS

Apart from the rural survey and program of Jesus given above, we give space for only a few illustrations of the rural-mindedness of Jesus expressed by the writers of the Gospels. Born in a Judæan hill town in a stable, and brought up in Nazareth in the open country of Galilee, it is not difficult to see how he came to use so much illustrative material in his preaching from the scenes and struggles of the common folk in the open country.

1. The parable of the sower (Matt. 13. 1-9) and its interpretation (verses 18-23) furnish a splendid text for a study of soils and of preparation of the ground for seeding, and for a study of the natural and destructive forces with which the farmer has to contend. It gives also an

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impetus to intensive farming to reach the maximum yield.

The parable of the tares and the wheat in the same chapter (verses 24-30), and its interpretation in verses 36-43, give an interesting background for the study of social friction and local feuds in rural life, for in the open country, as in Kentucky, they are often the most bitter and long-lived. It gives also the basis for a philosophic answer to the vexing problem of good and evil in the world, which so often perplexes the people of the country as well as those in the cities.

2. Mark gives us additional material in the parables of the seed and the Kingdom. In 4. 26-29 he gives a lesson of the naturalness of the growth of the kingdom of God on earth as a grain of mustard seed.

3. Luke gives us in 12. 13-21 that wonderful description of the fool farmer who filled his belly and his barns and then died with a shriveled soul. He gives us the story of the lost sheep and the shepherd's anxious hunt throughout the night, and of his tender care in bringing it warm in his bosom to the sheepfold

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again. He tells us the story of the younger brother who went wrong and repented and returned home to find his father's forgiveness and favor.

These two stories in the fifteenth chapter of Luke have furnished the spiritual dynamic of many a country revival that has brought back to a clean life the prodigal son of many a rural homestead.

In closing this brief outline of the rural background of the Bible I would like to suggest that the Christian Associations in all our colleges, universities, and theological seminaries would do well in starting courses in Bible study based upon the facts of the rural consciousness of the writers of the Old and the New Testaments.

CHAPTER III
THE SPIRITUAL CONQUEST OF
THE GERMANIC PEOPLES A
RURAL ACHIEVEMENT

IN one brief lecture covering so vast a period of history as twelve long centuries, the time it took for the spiritual conquest of the Germanic peoples, it will be impossible to do more than mention those outstanding facts in this world achievement that will in some way contribute to our problem of the modern country church, and the methods by which we hope to reach its solution.

The Germanic peoples were of a sturdy race of nature-worshipping nomads, who lived in the open country or in the thickly wooded forests of the mountains and the river valleys of the Rhine, the Elba, the Wieser, and the Danube. Though driven later by military expediency to live in "Städte und Dörfer"—cities and villages—yet until after the war with France in 1870-1871 they were essentially a rural,

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agrarian folk. At that time seventy-five per cent of the population were reckoned as rural, while to-day the reverse is true owing to the marvelous industrial development of Germany during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

There are three periods in this rural achievement that we will consider: (1) The Pre-Reformation Period; (2) The Lutheran Reformation; (3) The Modern Rural Movement in Germany. We shall treat only of the outstanding facts of these three periods and apply them to our rural problem.

THE PRE-REFORMATION PERIOD

The great outstanding fact of this period from the fourth to the sixteenth century was the planting of martyrs in German soil. In fact, the soil seems to have become inoculated with the germs of martyrdom, for in the period directly following, during the Peasants' War, over one hundred thousand country folk were put to the sword, even with the sanction of the Protestant reformers. Indeed, "the seed of the church" were planted so thick in

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some localities that a country preacher of those times couldn't dig for the foundation of a church without turning up the bones of the martyrs. I remember having seen in one of the treasure rooms of the Cologne Cathedral one case of skulls that was said to contain the unearthed remains of two thousand Christian virgins martyred at one time by some heathen worshiper of Woden.

The missionaries of this early period were mostly of Frankish, Scotch, Anglo-Saxon stock. Rupert in Bavaria, Winfrid (Boniface), the apostle to the Germans, and Charlemagne are the outstanding leaders of this period. Methodius and Cyrill converted the Moravians the middle of the ninth century. All of these leaders were men who had a passion for the uplift of the people to whom they ministered. They were men trained in the monasteries—the theological schools of their times. The country church to-day needs men and methods of a similar character.

1. We need to *plant some martyrs in the country districts*. I mean by martyrs men who are willing to be of no reputa-

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tion, to live on meager fare, and work hard to build up a spiritual domain in the rural communities to which they have been sent of God.

2. The Rural Church movement will for a long time to come be compelled to adopt a *missionary plan of administration*: (1) in seeking for volunteers to undertake the task; (2) in training such men by special courses in rural sociology and economics, as well as in agricultural science as a background and foundation for a spiritual ministry in rural communities; (3) in its financial policy of support of its rural work, for in many of the most needy communities it will be impossible for the right man to secure his living entirely in the community where he does his work—especially the matter of providing proper equipment and helpers for any adequate work.

3. We will have to depend upon leaders outside and train them in theological seminaries for the task. One of the most successful rural pastors I know is a young man brought up in the city and educated in college and seminary, who studied the

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problem of country life and volunteered to take a rural parish as his lifework. It is true that he has had no easy row to hoe, but he is winning out by a policy that puts the community and the kingdom of God ahead of the interests of any hide-bound, close-fisted trustee of his church, who, like his New Testament prototype, thinks more of his sumptuous board and his bulging barns than he does of the church and the community. He has a following of the young men growing up in the community who begin to see the real significance of the problem of rural civilization and the part the church is to play in its development. These will carry on his work, no matter what may become of the minister in the exigencies of the vote of a temporary majority of the stand-patters who talk progress while they amble like a crab in reverse order to the way they seem to be headed, or like a razor-backed swine you want to drive into a new pasture.

4. There is a notion among some modern workers and writers on the Rural Life movement that country folk resent having

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a minister who is not rural born and bred. I find, as a matter of fact, that this is not true. It depends upon the man as to whether he knows, and can teach others, no matter where he had his birth or preparation. A Methodist minister in the country in Ohio who had retired from the active ministry was sent to a country charge by the district superintendent to fill out the year, there being available no other supply. Though living in the city, he adapted himself to his people of the open country in such a masterful way that he has been compelled by them to remain four years as their pastor. I met him some time ago at the commencement of his alma mater and found that he was a master in nature study, and does expert work for the State and national biological surveys. This is in part what he wrote me some time ago in response to a request for information on his methods of interesting the farmers in church work:

“In addition to the blue litmus paper test of the soil for acidity and examination of fruit trees for scale and other insects, one can also suggest to farmers and gar-

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deners how to fertilize the soil by growing nitrogen-catching crops and by applying commercial nitrogen, phosphate or potash, according to the needs of the particular plot. Much money is wasted in buying fertilizers that are not needed at all. Also how to prune trees for growth or for fruit; how to feed and care for poultry and all sorts of livestock, and a thousand other topics relating to rural life are of great interest to many people and afford topics for conversation of mutual interest and a point of contact with many a man who is utterly indifferent in regard to church matters until his friendship and favor is first secured through some other avenue of approach. But people will want to know how a religious worker is to get the necessary information. Public libraries usually contain books and magazines on horticulture, gardening, fertilization, insects, birds, live stock, etc., that the average rural resident does not possess and has probably never heard of. One can write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., and get a list of all their bulletins for free distribu-

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tion and those for sale. The latter can be secured free by ordering through a member of Congress. From the lists one can select what is desired. Also from the State Departments of Agriculture and experiment stations free bulletins are sent on application. It may be well to read an agricultural paper, such as *The Rural New Yorker*, or *The Country Gentleman*, or one of the many others that could be named. Most of them cost one dollar a year, and some of them less."

THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

During this period of the spiritual conquest of the Germanic peoples we discern three outstanding facts: (1) *Leadership* of native German stock, clerical and political; (2) emphasis upon popular *education*; and (3) rural church *organization*.

Luther was in the truest sense an "echt Deutscher," a true German. Melancthon and Lambert were also trained for leadership in association with Luther on German soil. Under such leadership, with the support of the temporal princes and rulers of the evangelical provinces, Saxony,

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Hesse, Franconia, Luneburg, East Friesland, Schleswig and Holstein, Silesia, Prussia, and a number of cities of lower Germany were organized upon a permanent basis of evangelical doctrine and liberal education. The revelations of the peasant war, in which one hundred thousand perished, opened the eyes of these leaders to the necessity of any permanent reform movement being *organized* and *intelligent*.

So, for the modern Rural Church movement, we must lay emphasis at this stage of the movement, upon (1) the character of its leadership, (2) the policy of its education, and (3) the form of its organization.

1. *Leadership.* We must secure two classes of leaders in the modern rural church—the native-born-and-bred minister, and the patriotic, freedom-loving layman who loves the open country, its people, and the religion of Jesus Christ. There must be developed, as in Germany during the Reformation period, the closest sympathy and cooperation between the two classes of leaders. Our colleges and seminaries should train them. The present

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demand for rural leadership should bring them to the front. The church and the Christian Associations should discover and employ them in the reorganization of the rural church and in the development of a new rural civilization.

2. *Education.* We are just beginning to reorganize our system of rural education, but it is only a beginning. The task is one that will take a generation to complete, because under our modern system of local authority in education the powers that control are incapable of very radical changes, hence the process will be slow. But that should spur the church and civic leaders to even greater efforts in the work of extending popular ideas of rural education through conventions, conferences, and short courses in summer and winter schools.

3. *Organization.* Luther, Melanchthon, and Lambert organized the German reformed churches to meet the needs of their times. So must the modern country church be organized on lines that will meet the modern demands and needs of our rural population. (1) It must be organized on the plan of a more effective

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ministry—men adequate to meet the needs of country folk. (2) It must be organized on the basis of a modified theology and church polity—emphasis upon function rather than form, the sanction of normal processes of growth and the prevention of abnormal and destructive ideas due to native and traditional ignorance. (3) It must be organized to take care of the recreational life of the young people of the country. Something must be done to make country life more attractive to counteract the lure of the city and the unguided wanderlust of the rural prodigal son.

THE MODERN RURAL MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

Modern Germany has suffered in its religious development from oversensitiveness of the ruling class against voluntary organizations of the people. Fortunately, in later years the Young Men's Christian Association has done much to soothe this sensitiveness, and the presence of evangelistic denominations like the Baptists and Methodists has put a new spirit of

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evangelism in the established churches. The Raiffeissen Banking System for rural communities, based upon the character and good will of the people, has done much toward the improvement of rural conditions; and, besides, the agrarian interests in the Parliaments of the German states keep the rural problem well to the fore in the mind of the nation. I have no doubt that the printed report of the Commission on Cooperative Agencies in Rural Life in Europe will add greatly to our information concerning the present status of the rural church in Germany, and contribute something of value to the solution of our rural problem in America.

CHAPTER IV

THE RURAL CHURCH AND THE PIONEER PERIOD IN AMERICA

It is not our purpose in this chapter to go into details concerning the men and their experiences during this interesting period of church history in America—these may be secured from any good volume on the pioneer period of American history—but our purpose is, rather, to point out those distinctive features of the rural church of that period, and to deduce from them some suggestions that may help us in solving the problem of the rural church in our day.

It must be understood at the outset that the pioneer rural church is still at work in our time in the Northwest regions and in the Southwest under the leadership of the sky pilots of the lumber camps and the stump areas of the new agricultural regions of Minnesota, Montana, Washington, and Oregon, and the newly reclaimed areas of arid land through irrigation under

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federal control. But the period we have more distinctly in mind is that which followed the close of the Revolutionary War, from 1800 to about 1830 or 1840, during which time vast areas of the Mississippi basin, on its eastern slope especially, were settled by the pioneer, when the rural church was the greatest factor in the molding of an enduring democracy through the union of these new population groups which built up the great States of the Middle West. We therefore wish to speak of (1) The Character of the Pioneer Period, (2) The Character and Function of the Pioneer Preacher and the Pioneer Church, and (3) to make some applications to present needs in rural church conditions.

THE CHARACTER OF THE PIONEER PERIOD

It was a period of warfare with primitive opposing elements. The whole Western area of this continent was practically an untamed wilderness. The primitive elements of opposition were (1) the hostile tribes of Indians, who for vast periods of time had been in undisputed possession of the virgin forests and prairies and

THE PIONEER PERIOD

streams and valleys with all their wealth of nature's resources, (2) the primitive soil with its forests and shrubbery and grasses—barriers to then known methods of agriculture. Against these the pioneer must battle often single-handed with ax and grubbing hoe, and improvised plowshare, with nerve-wrecking ox team, spavined horse, or balky mule; (3) wild beasts—the panther, the wild cat, the wolf, the bear, the bison; and the rattlesnake, viper, and other poisonous reptiles; (4) primitive instincts of selfishness due to isolation, and a natural suspicion of the adventurer as a criminal or fugitive from justice; (5) superstition, “fire water,” and the devil.

All of these opposing forces made the task of the pioneer preacher one of warfare also, and aroused in him the martial spirit of the Crusader and the martyr spirit of the primitive apostles of Christianity to the heathen world.

THE CHARACTER AND FUNCTION OF THE PIONEER PREACHER AND THE PIONEER CHURCH

In the first place, he was a man who

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had a natural instinct for leadership. He knew what to do in any given situation, and won by the force of his character against the odds of his primitive environment. Peter Cartwright is a type of the early period; Higgins, the sky pilot of the lumber camps of the Northwest, is a type of the modern period. One of our bishops tells of a preacher in Montana who went into a pioneer town of that State ten years ago, and was compelled in self-defense to thrash a group of toughs on the street the first day, and in so doing won their respect to the extent that he has been twice elected mayor of the town.

Secondly, they were men who believed in their calling and in their country. They had the conviction of Elijah, John the Baptist, the apostle Peter, and John Knox pretty well mixed in their entire make-up; and they preached with such earnestness that men were compelled to believe in their gospel; and they were such patriots that they led whole States to trust in the Union and in the authority of the federal government. They laid the foundations in Christian character that

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made possible the preservation of the Union, and loyalty to the flag in that great struggle that tested the work of the builders of our constitution, and made it possible in our day for us to see the veterans on both sides in that struggle in fraternal exchanges of war experiences review together, after fifty years, the bloodiest battlefield of human history—Gettysburg.

Again, we find that the country church of this period, whether held in a log "meetinghouse" or in a log schoolhouse, furnished a place of meeting on a democratic basis of social equality for the settlers of these wilderness regions; and the pioneer itinerant preacher was the socializing agency for the social, political, and intellectual solidarity of isolated groups. They were the only people who traveled and learned what was going on in the world. They became the sources of information on subjects of political, social, and economic, as well as scientific and educational value.

The Conference held annually by denominations such as the Methodists brought together men from various parts of the

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newly settled districts, and gave an opportunity for the exchange of valuable and important information concerning public as well as religious affairs. In fact, the country church and the pioneer preacher formed the social medium through which, by interstimulation and response, the whole organization of society of that day was built up. Or, to use another figure, the churches formed the warp and the traveling preacher produced the woof, which together made into one closely woven fabric the growing Territories into States, and the States into a homogeneous federal government.

APPLICATION OF PIONEER PRINCIPLES TO PRESENT NEEDS

The country church of that period selected methods and men to suit the needs of that time. The Country Church movement to-day will succeed when it adopts this policy. Then the preacher was a moving tie; to-day he must be the central cell of a new social nucleus. The circuit system in most rural communities has ceased to be effective as it was then.

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The "meetinghouse" (may we preserve the idea, if not the name!) is still essential; but it must be more than a meeting place—it must become a center for the organized expression of the whole community life.

The circuit rider was an heroic and necessary social agent then; he is so no longer. To-day we need a new heroic type of country preacher who will have the courage to stay camped in one community until by religious instruction and social service he has, like John Frederick Oberlin, built up in one whole sweep of country a new rural civilization in which the character of Christ is the badge of citizenship.

It is rather significant and confirmatory of this proposal that the recent rural survey published under the name of Mr. Pinchot and Mr. Gill shows that in the territory surveyed the denomination which emphasizes the parish plan is growing more rapidly in rural districts than any other denomination; while our studies of the pioneer period show that the same denomination was the slowest to increase in the frontier territory, while the itinerant,

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circuit-forming Methodists increased the fastest.

THE BASIS OF APPEAL

We must produce by actual portrayal of the facts a moral equivalent of the war spirit of the pioneer period. The facts of the rural social survey when properly presented will furnish the basis for such an appeal as will enlist a new type of men for the task of redeeming our lost rural domain for the kingdom of God. Such a survey, to be successful, must do two things: (1) It must make such an inventory of all rural resources for human betterment, make such a classification of the normal wealth and life-producing forces in soil, climate, water power, and animal and human husbandry, that any man with normal powers of mind can appreciate the possibilities for human betterment in our vast rural domain. (2) It must also take into account all the opposing forces to human health and happiness in rural life, and portray in good red colors all the rural devils that contend with those who seek to better the conditions of those who are in need of a richer social gospel.

THE PIONEER PERIOD

When this has been done, when the church and the Christian Associations and other voluntary associations for the betterment of the rural conditions make their appeal for men to volunteer for the task from the universities, the colleges of agriculture, and from the ranks of men in the field who have seen service in the cities, and have kept in touch with the rural situation, will come the answer, "Here am I; send me."

THE CHURCH HARMONIZED WITH KNOWN CONDITIONS

The character and function of the rural church and the rural minister must be made to harmonize with the actual conditions discovered. The church building and organization must be constructed and formulated on a community basis, with a social sympathy that includes the cities and the larger interests of the nation as a whole. It would be a great mistake to develop the country at the expense of the city and the nation. It would be just as bad for the rural life movement to become class conscious and fleece Wall Street as it would

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be for Wall Street and the middlemen of the cities to fleece the country lambs in the economic struggle.

The country minister must still be a socializing agent. He must have opportunity for conventions, and must travel and hold conference with other social groups than his own territory, so that, as in the days of the pioneer preacher, he may be a real bond for the social solidarity of the nation as a whole. He should not confine his studies to theology, but should broaden the range of his human regard so as to take into the sweep of his ministry even the simple-minded folk of a rural hamlet and give to them the ideas that are fundamental to the establishment of the kingdom of God in actual government in this world wherein abideth righteousness and peace and spiritual joy in actual achievement of the tasks Jesus Christ gave us to perform.

CHAPTER V
THE PERIOD OF RURAL CHURCH
DECLINE

IN any case of social change there can be no definite time or line of demarkation discovered as to when such an epoch really began or closed, because the processes of social evolution are constant in their working, and the laws of growth and decay are unceasing in their operation. But we can approximate the period when any organic living thing has its greatest growth, its cycle of greatest fruition, and the period of decline and decay. So with the country church in America. Its greatest growth was during the pioneer period from 1780 to 1830 to 1840. The time of its greatest fruition as a factor in molding the *religious*, moral, and political life as well as the *educational* life of the nation was from the forties to the seventies. The period of decline may be worked out roughly as the last quarter of the nineteenth century, or from 1870 to 1900, or

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from 1880 to 1905, at the close of which period the country church as a factor in the Rural Life movement was pointed out by men like Dr. Wilbert L. Anderson, the author of *The Country Town*, and President W. DeWitt Hyde, on *The Impending Paganism of New England*, and later by the epoch-making report of the Roosevelt Commission on Country Life, headed by that master prophet of the new rural civilization, Director Liberty H. Bailey, of New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University.

We shall best find the kernel of this period by (1) stating certain typical facts of the church's decline, (2) by stating the chief causes of this decline, and (3) by making from these facts certain deductions as to what we can best do to reclaim the church's lost domain in the open country.

TYPICAL FACTS OF THE CHURCH'S DECLINE

Surveys in various parts of the country—the West, the South, the East, the Central, and the New England States—made by church boards of home missions

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all confirm the fact of rural decay. (See those published by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions—Country Church Department.) One recently made by the Newark District Church Society of the Newark Conference in the rural sections of that district shows similar results. Also a very interesting survey made by Mr. Shapleigh in Morris County, New Jersey, under the direction of the County Work Department of the Young Men's Christian Association, shows similar facts of decline.

The most recent and typical of this period, because based upon scientific methods covering a period of twenty years, is that recently published over the names of C. O. Gill and the Hon. Gifford Pinchot. This survey gives us some interesting facts as to the decline of the country church in two counties of two of the original States of the Union, New York and Vermont. Under "Summary of Results" (p. 11ff.) the following facts are interesting to study:

1. "They show that in these counties the country church has suffered a decline

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which proves beyond question that it is losing its hold upon the community" (p. 11).

2. "Church membership in Windsor County increased in twenty years 4 per cent and in Tompkins County 2 per cent" (p. 13). These statistics of increase of membership lose some of their significance as to actual conditions of church life when we find this fact, based upon accurate information, stated thus: "One church in Windsor County, with an average attendance of 75 had an enrolled membership of 271, of whom only 186 were *finally found to be living*. In another church the actual count for a period of six months showed only 10 per cent of the resident members attending church" (p. 21).

3. Decline in church expenditures: "Church expenditures in Windsor County declined 2 per cent, and in Tompkins County 9 per cent in twenty years" (p. 13). "The churches of both counties are giving less and less pay to their ministers" (p. 14). "The amount of real pay declined 7 per cent in Windsor County and nearly 16 per cent in Tompkins County" (p. 14).

4. The *character of the ministry*: "In

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Windsor County 75 per cent, and in Tompkins County 85 per cent, of the ministers have never had a full course of seven years' preparation in college and theological seminary" (p. 15). "In Windsor County 25 per cent, and in Tompkins County 33 per cent, are either foreign born or sons of foreigners, yet in both of these counties the Protestant population is of nearly pure stock" (p. 15).

5. Decline in church attendance: "Church attendance in Windsor County fell off in twenty years nearly 31 per cent, and in Tompkins County 33 per cent" (p. 15). "So that in the two counties together the attendance declined in proportion to membership in 71 churches out of 85" (p. 16). "In the strictly rural districts in Windsor County there is a loss in church attendance of no less than 53 per cent" (p. 17). "The great decline in church attendance in the open country is the most alarming fact developed by the investigation" (p. 18). "In the smaller communities the more numerous the churches the greater the loss in attendance in the last twenty years" (p. 18). This

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fact refutes the old plea that denominational rivalry stimulated the churches to efficiency. "Thus in the small communities with only one church there has been a loss of total attendance of 30 per cent in twenty years, while in the small communities with two churches there was a loss of 50 per cent, and where there were *more than two churches* a loss of 55 per cent" (p. 18). "The tendency to stay away from church exists not only in the community in general, but in the church members as well" (p. 22).

THE CAUSES OF DECLINE IN THE RURAL CHURCH

It is often difficult for the untrained mind to distinguish between causes and effects, for the reason that an effect may become a new or secondary cause. No one may know how hog cholera originates on one's farm, but every farmer knows that one hog with the disease may infect the whole herd.

I find up in my summer home in New Hampshire among the pines that a crotch and a crow's nest will cause the decay of

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a giant pine; but a little thought leads one to search for the original wind or worm that killed or diseased the parent stem and caused the crotch that held the nest that caused the rot that killed the pine that God made. So a crank and a crotch (schism) in the religious life of many a rural community has furnished a sufficient cause to account for the decline and decay of many a flourishing country church. But who knows but that back of both there was not originally the work of some personal devil who could have been laid low by a more effective ministry? Some one should invent a "crankicide" for the country churches—a mixture of the oil of joy and the waters of salvation.

The most important cause of the decline of the country church during this period we are now considering was the cause in common with the decline of rural life in general, namely, *the growth of industrialism* and the resultant *urban movement* of the rural population which created a real city problem for the churches; and, as a result, the consciousness of the church was centered upon the cities rather than upon

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the rural districts; and, to use a military figure, the church militant has in every age created for itself the most difficult missionary tasks by not guarding the rear. So it has awakened to the fact to-day, that it has lost prestige, if not control, in this vast rural domain.

Another cause lies in the fact that during the period of population changes going on in rural communities the methods of church work in ministering to these new conditions have changed very little, if at all. While other groups of population were being socialized in consciousness and in activity, and even the forces of evil were becoming socially organized, yet the church, especially in the rural districts, was still placing emphasis in method and in message upon individualism to the exclusion of the social message of the gospel of Jesus.

Evangelism in church and camp meeting during this period was mainly, if not almost exclusively, directed to catch the hardened adult sinners, while the young life of the rural communities was allowed to run wild, and no adequate provision was made for the recognition and culture

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of the dawning religious consciousness of the boys and girls of the community, save where it was done by an exceptional minister or layman who was awake to this essential demand of all normal growth.

Still another cause of decline was *an inadequate, and relatively inferior, rural ministry*: at first a result and later a *cause* of rural church decline. In my experience as a farmer boy during this period I remember only one country pastor in my home church who really loved the country folk and worked among his people as though he were really called to that field. He had a *lasting* revival as to results. Then, as I remember it, these ministers preached mostly hell and damnation to come, and heaven and hope deferred, rather than a gospel that would tell us how to get rid of the brand we had already in our community, and how to bring a little more of heaven and hope into our daily life right down there where the crops were poor, the roads hilly and sometimes muddy, and the teams in most tight places balky. The fact is none of them were adequately *educated* for their job,

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and there were among us those who had serious doubts as to whether some of them were ever *called*.

Urbanized education, from the log school-house to the theological seminary, has been one of the most prolific causes of decline in the rural church. "Urbanitis" is the real name for what ails the rural church. When I was a student in the theological seminary, from 1895 to 1898, I do not recall that we ever heard of the rural church as a problem. We surely never heard of a plan for the country church. And until recently in all our theological schools no department ever took up the country life conditions as a problem for the church to treat seriously. As a matter of fact, sociology, as applied to rural life, is even now just beginning to be written and talked about by the leaders in this great educational movement for a better rural civilization.

DEDUCTIONS FROM THESE FACTS AND CAUSES

1. We must make as a basis for the reorganization of the country church in

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each community a social survey that will discover not only tendencies and facts, but will reveal also sources where causes may be discovered and remedies applied.

2. We must work out a scheme for the socialization of the country church upon the central-parish plan for the whole community.

3. We must insist upon a readjustment in the rural schools and in the curricula of the colleges and seminaries, so that not only shall the rural ministry be better equipped for the task, but also that the people of the open country may be taught to appreciate the larger social values of their inheritance, and build up in the country towns and hamlets a richer and nobler type of civilization.

4. We must develop some adequate system of *rural finance* to help the farmers in their seasons of economic distress, and give the rural minister and his growing family, if he has one, adequate compensation for the tasks his calling brings to his hands.

5. We must learn some method of church federation that will remove the chief cause

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of non-churchgoing, and bring into closer union the religious forces of country life so frequently now divided in the face of stronger organized enemies of religious progress.

CHAPTER VI
AWAKENING OF INTEREST IN
THE COUNTRY CHURCH

IT is a well-observed sociological law among all population groups that no social organization to meet human needs begins until those needs that have long been felt, and perhaps keenly perceived by individuals here and there, are *brought into the consciousness* of the *people as a whole* and have been placed upon a scientific basis.

So with the modern awakening of interest in the country church. There has been a feeling for a long time within the church at large, growing out of the lack of results in revival efforts in rural communities, the passing of the old-time camp meeting and the closing up of so many rural preaching places, and the breakdown of so many of the old circuits in the rural districts of Conferences, synods, dioceses, etc., that something was wrong with the country church.

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Here and there some modern prophet has seen the trouble in more concrete and scientific form, so that we have articles written in leading church papers and magazines on the condition of country churches and their communities. These began to appear as early as 1886, and continue unto this day. Later on, commissions and survey-groups were appointed by various bodies to investigate and report. Still later organizations for the aid of country churches were formed in various sections. Afterward home missionary boards organized departments for the study and administration of the country church affairs as a part of a great connectional plan of missionary work. And as a result the country church is considered to-day by all groups of men interested in our modern civilization as one of the chief factors in the whole program of the Rural Life movement.

It is, therefore, fitting that we devote our time to the study of the factors in the awakening of interest in this most important phase of the Rural Life movement. We will treat (1) the economic

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facts that are dynamic in the awakening of this interest, (2) the leaders in the Rural Life movement who recognized the church as an important factor, (3) the awakened national social consciousness to the importance of the conservation of the religious resources of country life, (4) specific surveys of rural regions, and (5) other factors, such as summer schools for rural leadership.

ECONOMIC FACTS THE DYNAMIC OF THE MOVEMENT

The following economic facts may be considered as causal to this awakening:

1. The phenomenal growth of towns and cities during the last two decades led men to ask why people were leaving the country for the city.

2. The increased cost of living in the actual food products of the farms, while the farmer and the country folk seemed to be getting relatively poorer.

3. The enormous profits of the middleman, and the monopolies of transportation companies of the marketing of the products of the country.

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4. Forest fires, floods, and drought of whole farming regions, due in large measure to the denuding of watersheds by deforestation; also robbing of soil by poor methods of agriculture, resulting in excessive erosion in the open season in certain parts of the country.

5. Scarcity of farm labor and the resultant *high cost of farming*, or the reduction in produce from the farms in certain regions.

All these facts led to the focusing of attention upon the country, and men began to ask, "Where has been the leadership in the country?" And the religionist began to ask: "Why is the hurt of the daughter of my people not recovered? Why has not the church maintained its hold upon the people and defended them from exploitation and from their own ignorance, lack of foresight, and of co-operative organization?"

LEADERS OF THE RURAL LIFE MOVEMENT

1. Writers like Dugdale, on *The Jukes*, and Dr. Goddard, of Vineland, on *The Kalikak Family*, showed up the facts of

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physiological and moral degeneracy in a section of New York State and in southern New Jersey, where the country church had once been the dominant force in the field.

2. The Rev. Henry Fairbanks, of Vermont; Samuel Dyke, of Boston; and President William DeWitt Hyde, of Bowdoin College, in the earlier stages of the modern awakening from the middle eighties to 1906, pointed out, after scientific investigation, the conditions confronting the country church of the present.¹

3. The leaders in rural education in our State colleges of agriculture: Director Liberty H. Bailey, President Kenyon L. Butterfield, and other leaders like Sir Horace Plunkett, Gifford Pinchot, Warren H. Wilson, and chief among them for stimulating the movement for a better country church, as well as a better country life, is Theodore Roosevelt, who appointed the Commission on Country Life during the last year of his administration.

That commission in its report had this

¹ See in *Annals American Academy Political and Social Science*, March, 1912, p. 133, article on "The Rural Church."

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to say about the country church: "The time has arrived when the church must take a larger leadership, both as an institution and through its pastors, in the social reorganization of rural life."¹

It can be truthfully said that the report of this commission marks an epoch in the Country Church movement. *Dr. Butterfield*, in his book on *The Country Church and the Rural Problem*,² gives this analysis of the task of the country church: "The country church (and its allies) is to maintain and enlarge both individual and community ideals under the inspiration and guidance of the religious motive, and to help rural people to incarnate these ideals in personal and family life, in industrial effort and political development, and in all social relationships." Sir Horace Plunkett, in *The Rural Life Problem of the United States*,³ says, "More important, I believe, than is generally realized, from an economic and social point of view, are the rural churches."

4. Due credit should be given to the

¹ See page 138, 1911 edition (Sturgis, Walton & Co.).

² See p. 75.

³ See p. 163. (The Macmillan Company.)

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men of science in the Carnegie Institute at Washington, and in the Rockefeller Institute for the Study and Cure of Diseases, for the facts they have brought to light as to the conditions of health and morals in rural communities, especially among that sturdy race of mountaineers of the South, where the hookworm disease has been so prevalent and the percentage of illiteracy so high.

THE NATIONAL SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS AWAKENED TO THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSERVATION OF THE RELIGIOUS RESOURCES OF COUNTRY LIFE

1. The conservation of the sources of ministerial supply. It is a well-known fact that hitherto about eighty-five per cent of our young men called to the Christian ministry have come from the open country. In the pioneer days and later, when the rural church was at its best, it was a common thing for parents to pray that their sons would be called to the Christian ministry, and the best of them were often called. But now that the type of rural minister has so greatly

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changed in many sections of the country, it is doubtful whether we can expect so large a percentage from that source to enter the ministry with the same degree of efficiency as in former days. And of this we are certain: that unless the type in some quarters changes for the better, it is doubtful whether *any* mothers or fathers will pray that their boys be called to the Christian ministry. We need, therefore, to improve the country church for the sake of the ministerial *source of supply* for *all the churches*.

2. The majority of our great leaders in commerce, trade, finance, and in engineering, also in the great professions of law, education, and government service were born in the country. Thousands of young men and women workers in the industries of the cities and centers of trade come directly from the country unacquainted with the temptations of the city streets, and many of them fall victims to the exploiters of youth in their innocence of the ways of the world. These facts have led to the awakening of the national consciousness to the importance

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of laying well the foundations of moral character and religious conviction during the formative period when the will should be strengthened to do good or resist evil when under moral stress. The country church, by virtue of our educational system, is the only institution outside the home in rural life that can give this training to this great class of the nation's workers and potential leaders.

3. There is a growing consciousness that the country church has a vital part to play in the leadership of the modern social movement as a whole. The country is the vast resource field for the national life itself, and the kind of leadership that controls that field and directs the social mind in channels of altruistic service based upon a broad social sympathy is the only way to maintain the union of all our national groups, and conserve for all the people the great resources of the nation. Just as in the pioneer days the country church with the itinerant preacher was the socializing factor in the building of the States and the nation, so to-day in the process of a wider and stronger social

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synthesis in the nation, the country church is to be the most important factor in furnishing the leadership of the modern social movement.

4. Another factor in the awakening of this consciousness of the importance of the country church has been little mentioned by writers on the subject: It is the *ebb tide* of the urban movement—what we call the *suburban movement of population*. The well-to-do sons of the earlier period are returning to visit the homesteads; and they find the abandoned farm, the broken-down church, and the religious fires gone out upon many church and family altars. They are asking, “Why this decline and decay?” and are lending their aid in making the survey that is revealing the causes of this decline and stirring the social will to action.

SPECIFIC SURVEYS OF RURAL REGIONS

1. The first to be mentioned is the work of that modern type of saint that should have erected to his memory a brass tablet with a halo of horns and a pedestal of hoofs—the muckraker, who

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wrote for *The Country Gentleman*, *The Rural New Yorker*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. There should be mentioned also his twin brother of a different calling, the political spellbinder, who sent copy to the popular newspapers, and when he got to Congress sent his rural constituents a ten-cent package of garden seeds that, like his proposed reforms, never sprouted. But these two classes of "public servants" did much to bring to the attention of the American public the need for a scientific study of the rural field and a social reorganization of our rural forces.

2. Then followed the federal commission survey that set before the American people the rural life problem in its national proportions, while pointing out by careful scientific analysis the three great divisions of the problem—the economic, the social, and the religious—under which, by specific programs of organization and cooperation of all the rural forces, we should finally reach the desired results of better farming, better business, and better living in the country.

3. Since then we have had the surveys conducted by the home missionary boards

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of the denominations, chief among which have been those under the direction of the Country Church Department of the Presbyterian Board.

4. Those conducted by the County Work Department of the Young Men's Christian Association which have led to splendid work, achievement, and propaganda in the arousing of the country folk to do for themselves, and the churches at large to do for the country regions, what for so long a period they have neglected to do—give the rural church trained leadership and adequate equipment.

5. There should be mentioned also in this connection the survey conducted under the sanction, and published with the approval and indorsement of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, and under the direction and supervision of the Rev. Charles Otis Gill and the Hon. Gifford Pinchot.

OTHER FACTORS IN THE RURAL AWAKENING

1. One of the most important factors in arousing the whole country to the im-

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portance of the country church has been the summer schools for rural leadership conducted under the direction of leading colleges of agriculture, such as the one conducted for three consecutive summers at Cornell University, and one at Amherst; also the summer schools for leadership under the direction of the International Young Men's Christian Association, such as are held every summer at Silver Bay, at Geneva, and at Estes Park.

2. There should be mentioned also the departments of sociology recently established in our leading theological seminaries, where courses in rural leadership and the country church are now being offered, and conferences on the country church are held from time to time.

3. These factors also include the writings and investigations by leading economists and sociologists in some of the leading State universities, also by the departments of university extension in rural education.

4. The Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Education of the federal government has through the work of the trained men in these departments played

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no small part in awakening the national social consciousness to the importance of maintaining the leadership in the Rural Life movement of the country church as a conserving force in our rural civilization.

CHAPTER VII

THE SOCIAL CENTER PARISH PLAN

It should be acknowledged at the outset that the old circuit system was of great value in the pioneer period, and even later, in the development of the country church in America. This we have pointed out in a previous chapter. It should also be granted that the circuit system is still a practicable method in many parts of the rural domain even to-day, especially in the newer and sparsely settled regions. But, on the other hand, it should be frankly admitted by every one who knows the facts that the changed conditions in our rural life demand a change in our methods of ministering to the people.

The emphasis in church work is no longer merely upon the saving of individuals, but also upon the saving of the community, and in a larger sense the saving of our rural civilization from becoming pagan. Furthermore, some of our leading thinkers and writers on the rural

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situation declare that it will soon be a question of whether the churches in the rural districts will be able to save themselves if the present conditions and methods of church life continue. Professor Carver says: "Unless the church makes itself a positive factor in the building up of the rural community and rural civilization, it will have to get out. And, in the main, the church must rebuild the rural community through its own members by making them better farmers, better citizens, of more value to the community."¹

To save individuals, to save the community, and to save itself the country church must adopt an adequate plan to meet the demands of modern rural community needs. In my judgment that plan best suited to function in this field is what I call the social center parish plan, or the circular system, as a substitute for the old *circuit system*. We will discuss this subject from the point of view (1) of the plan, (2) its value as a socializing agency, and (3) as to how it can be worked.

¹ See Rural Church Message, p. 115.

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THE PLAN

The plan involves three essential things after a thorough social survey has been made. The survey is so necessary and fundamental that it might be reckoned with the other three as the first of the four—a *chart* or map of the entire parish or community, a *program* of work covering the details of the chart, and a *staff of workers* with voluntary or paid assistants.

1. *The social survey* should include all the facts of the community: (1) those that may be termed the *assets*, or life-giving and community-serving resources; (2) those that may be termed *liabilities*, those that are life-destroying or community-destroying factors. It should be a geological, biological, demographical, and sociological, as well as religious, survey of the entire community.

2. *The chart or map* should be carefully made upon such a scale that every member of the parish can understand it. It should be put in usable form for distribution, but especially should it be placed in the pastor's study, or in the assembly hall where the facts of the community as well

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as individual interest and responsibility could be pointed out.

It should not only mark out the present location of farmhouses, schools, stores, shops, churches, roads, the best soils adapted for certain crops, etc., but it should include also what *ought* to be the location of these buildings and where roads ought to be changed, or reconstructed, or graded, new bridges built, and where all public improvements should be made. All these should be so carefully and graphically presented by charts, photographs, and lettering that it would be a means of public education in what the community ought to be. Striking contrasts of what is and what ought to be in rural life can be very easily and cheaply presented by paper and ink, or by photographs and posters. And these are often more convincing and saving than *some* sermons I have heard in rural churches.

3. *A program of work.* To illustrate: I have in my mind our summer camp all charted and mapped out, and a program of work for next year, and for several years perhaps. I know all the dead trees

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that need to be cut next summer, the stumps and stones I want to remove from the soil, the paths I am going to make in the woods, the kind of treatment the soil of the garden requires, the kind of a boathouse I want to build, the color and quality of the paint to be put on the buildings, and many other details. So the rural leader of the social center parish should have outlined a program of work so that he will not only see things done in the community, but will actually get the young life at work, in order that it may function in the essentials of rural leadership and community service. How are you going to keep the boys in the church and train them for real service in the Kingdom? That should be planned out before there is even a tendency for the group to lapse from the Sunday school, and leave the farm for a prodigal experience.

How are you going to keep that rich old lady, a little eccentric perhaps, from leaving her property to the endowment of a dog kennel or a feline sanitarium, and persuade her, instead, to endow some scholarships for the country boys in some

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form of research that will help the community, or to give it for the employment of a young man or a young woman to supervise the play life of the community, so that the children will not fight like cats and dogs at their play? In every detail of community betterment this plan makes possible a program and a performance.

4. *A staff of workers.* This is absolutely necessary; and where volunteers cannot be had it will require a paid staff, such as the County Work Department is putting into some of the communities through its statesmanlike program for rural community betterment.

The graduates of the agricultural college and rural high school, where rural sociology is taught, can be enlisted for this kind of work. Instead of trying to get every young man to express his religious experience in the same way, as in my boyhood days, we will come up to the position of Paul in recognizing that in the work of the Kingdom there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

So I would have a specialist on soils, one on plant pests and diseases, one on

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stock-breeding and dairying, one on rural home-planning, one on hygiene and sanitation, one on recreation and amusement in rural communities, one on religious education and adolescence, and one on any other important phase of community need brought out in the survey and charted in my program.

ITS VALUE AS A SOCIALIZING AGENCY

Such an institution as the rural church organized on the social center parish plan has two essential social aims as its function in the community: (1) to socialize the community in consciousness; (2) to socialize the community in its activity.

1. *Socializing a community in consciousness.* A community is socialized in consciousness when it comes to acknowledge the necessary facts in social evolution of the need for social cleavage in community building, and at the same time develops that social sympathy that keeps these class-conscious groups in sympathetic co-operation with each other in carrying on the work necessary to the fullest life of the community. In other words, the church

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should so broaden the people's definition of the kingdom of God on earth that every man and woman who is doing a necessary part of the world's work which has to do with the health and happiness of the community as a whole may be conscious of doing the work of the Kingdom, and should, therefore, receive a just share of the rewards society offers of social esteem and of economic values, wages, or goods, produced by labor of whatever sort. With such a chart and program as I have described above it would not be difficult to develop such a social consciousness in the minds of all the people of a parish.

2. *Socializing a community in activity.* When is a community socialized in activity? When, awakened to the consciousness of its needs, it has developed adequate organization of its population, invented efficient social machinery, and trained effective social engineers to make use of its available resources for all the people within the community so that they will be in possession of that equality of opportunity which means, not the chance to secure control of resources and exploit them for

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personal or for corporate ends, but the equality of opportunity to secure for each a just share of the products of industry through distribution according to the measure of services rendered. In other words, a community is socialized when it has developed a social medium through which there is a reciprocal correspondence between human needs and available resources.

To me this is, in brief, the function of the country church as a socializing agency in the building up of the community life that will correspond to the New Testament conception of the kingdom of God on earth.

HOW THE PLAN CAN BE WORKED

No plan, however scientific and workable, will work itself. It has to be worked, and by a man who has the essential elements of social leadership in his make-up.

1. Such a plan must have a leader who loves work, who can sense the needs of a community, who has a constructive imagination, and who has will power, or a persistent purpose to succeed when he knows he is right.

2. It requires an adequate *financial plan*

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of support. A fool project may succeed if properly financed, while a reasonable plan may fail if not properly financed. In most communities the people will pay for what they get if they are convinced the goods are worth the money. Sometimes it is necessary to introduce the goods by gift, or cut the price to one half the value. So in some rural communities it will be necessary at first to get financial support for the central parish plan from private gifts or from denominational funds outside the community to be served. The County Work Department has demonstrated the feasibility of this plan.

3. Such a plan on a large scale involves a more statesmanlike policy of the administration of home missions and church extension funds by some of the Protestant denominations than has been evident hitherto. Instead of doling out drips to defunct churches in overchurched communities, or for petty plans for new enterprises of little importance, these boards would set aside a fund for establishing a few central parishes in communities that would act as imitation centers for other

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communities. It seems to me we would make greater progress in home missions and church extension than we are now making under our present policy, which we have inherited from the pioneer past.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF THE RURAL SUNDAY SCHOOL

THERE is hardly any other institution in the open country that has greater possibilities of usefulness in the Rural Church movement than the rural Sunday school when properly organized and directed.

The reason why so many rural Sunday schools have failed and ceased to exist is largely because we have measured the success of such schools not by their actual achievements but by the number of scholars in attendance, and therefore our methods of Sunday school work have too often been directed chiefly toward "bribing" children to attend (the ticket, card, book, Bible system, for example) rather than in giving them something to do for themselves and for the community.

Under the new rural leadership there is dawning a new day for the usefulness of the rural Sunday school, when the emphasis in religious education is put upon the

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child as well as upon the subject-matter taught, and when the adult Bible classes will be organized and taught with reference to *service* they can render the community, the State, the nation, and humanity as a whole, as well as with reference to the moral and religious truths of the Bible.

In this chapter we wish to treat (1) The Social Conditions Affecting the Sunday School and (2) The Social and Political Value of the Sunday School.¹

THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS AFFECTING THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

It was the social condition of the children of Gloucester, England, in 1781, that led Robert Raikes to employ certain women to teach them on the Sabbath day reading and the church catechism. It was the marked improvement of these social conditions, as a result of this experiment, that led to the founding of the Sunday school as a permanent religious social institution. So in modern times we must look to the social conditions of the people as they live their life

¹ See Encyclopedia of Sunday Schools, Thomas Nelson & Sons.

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on the Sundays and during the week to find the real forces that affect favorably or unfavorably the modern Sunday school.

1. The extension of public education in all modern civilized countries has made it unnecessary to teach reading in the Sunday school, and the conflict of ethnic religious groups in modern nations has put the entire burden of religious education of children upon the Sunday school, except where a parochial system is in vogue.

2. Modern economic, industrial, and commercial life makes it impossible in the majority of homes for any adequate form of religious instruction to be carried on. Therefore by the selective social process the Sunday school has become *the* institution for religious instruction.

3. Social conditions have also changed the point of emphasis in religious education in the Sunday school. Formerly the emphasis in Sunday school instruction was upon the Bible truths as subject-matter to be taught; to-day the emphasis is upon the child in his social environment as the subject of our study. The emphasis in Bible study has been placed upon the

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social conditions that led men, under divine inspiration, to write the books of the Bible; to-day the social conditions that affect the children and youth have compelled Sunday school experts to adopt a policy of graded lessons that will enable the school to meet these conditions and mold the plastic life into channels of moral and religious expression. As a recent article¹ puts it: "We come to find the demands of life and the demands of educational theory peculiarly harmonious, if they are not actually identical."

4. Modern populations are divided into three well-defined groups dwelling in three distinct zones: (1) the industrials, largely foreign, in the United States, in the older congested quarters of the cities; (2) the commuters of the suburbs; and (3) the farmers of the rural sections, which includes the mining and lumbering camps and the minor pursuits of the open country.

In the first zone the Sunday school as now conducted is adversely affected by the social conditions prevailing. The wealthy, who own homes and reside in

¹ See Religious Education, Vol. VIII, April, 1913.

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the city, downtown, have a diminishing birth rate, and are often migratory, thus affecting Sunday school attendance. The poorer classes are renters or tenants, and while having more children per family, are either indifferent to the Sunday school, or are too poor to send their children, or by constant moving from one section to another get out of touch with the church and Sunday school. Not owning their dwellings, they have little interest in the moral uplift of the community, and are not so loyal to the religious institutions that have to do with Christian culture. A recent survey showed that all Protestant denominations are losing in Sunday school enrollment in the congested quarters of the cities, while the population is increasing.

In the second zone, the suburbs, the social conditions are more favorable. Here the Sunday school enrollment is increasing. Here are the comparatively well-to-do who own their own homes, rear children, and are interested in the social conditions of the community affecting the morals and health of their children. Here the modern organized men's Bible classes have

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the largest enrollment and are most active. Here buildings adequate for efficient Sunday school work are erected. Here the graded lessons have received the most encouraging support, due to the more effective available groups of teachers.

In the third zone, the rural domain, the Sunday school is adversely affected, because of the lack of adaptation to the new conditions prevailing. Here the union school predominates at the expense of denominational aggressiveness. Here the changing social conditions due to rural education in agricultural colleges and in the consolidated district schools are making it increasingly necessary for the rural churches to consolidate in Sunday school work. A new group of men and women educated as rural leaders are to take the lead in making the Sunday school more effective as a social force in the rural communities.

OTHER SOCIAL CONDITIONS AFFECTING THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Other social conditions affecting the Sunday school may be stated as follows:

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1. *A change in the mind of the public with respect to the observance of Sunday.* It is viewed more and more as a day of rest and of recreation; a day of social pleasure rather than of serious study of the subject-matter of a modern Sunday school curriculum.

2. *Increased facilities for travel, recreation, and amusement on the Sabbath.* The half holiday on Saturday and the Sunday trains and trolleys permit thousands of the common people to visit at long range from their homes over the week end; and they seldom go to Sunday school when away from home. The automobile permits the well-to-do to utilize Sunday in travel over long stretches of improved State and country roads, and to visit friends at a distance.

3. *The crowded curriculum of the public schools* both in the grades and in the high schools makes many parents opposed to serious study by their children in the modern Sunday school where lessons are assigned. Also the efficiency of the public press and the magazines, as well as the religious periodicals, makes it possible for

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many to balk at the idea of a Sunday school.

4. *The failure, in large measure, of the church to master the modern social movement* which is in many ways utilizing the Sabbath for its own propaganda without the church and Sunday school.

5. *The increased migration of population* in well-defined currents of movement, urban and rural, latitudinal and longitudinal, within the national domain; and international, designated as emigration and immigration. Until new adjustments can be made these currents of population must necessarily affect the Sunday school as an educational institution.

6. *The high cost of living* which results in enforced celibacy with its resultant social vices; the high prices of land in and near population centers, and the high cost of building materials, as well as skilled labor in the trades, with corresponding low wages of women, and unskilled male labor. All these lead to a decreased birth rate, and to social conditions not favorable to religious instructions so far as current methods are concerned.

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7. *The difficulty of change sufficiently radical to be effective in results*, due to the fact that the forces that control the social machinery of the church in relation to the Sunday school are, in so many instances, a conservative majority of men incapable of change due to physiological and psychological facts.

But all these social conditions affecting the Sunday school adversely or otherwise only serve to arouse the social consciousness of the church, which will give the modern Sunday school its real opportunity for effective service to our generation.

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL VALUE OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

The value of the Sunday school as a social and political agency must be determined from the point of view of what it may do to help establish upon this earth the world kingdom of Jesus Christ as he conceived it and as his apostles preached concerning it, the record of which furnishes the foundation textbook for every school of Christian education; but not the only textbook, for, "I suppose that even the

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world itself would not contain the books that should be written."¹ Also by its present opportunity to do effective work toward that end, and also by its methods of work in dealing with this world problem.

The kingdom of God on earth is both a political and social idea. The Sunday school is one of the chief agencies in the establishment of that kingdom. The social and political value of the Sunday school may be expressed by these facts:

1. *It furnishes a practical method and place of meeting of all classes of society on a democratic basis.* This the public school does also, but not in the same sense and with the same motive as the Sunday school. It thus places a badge of honor upon all the children of men who seek for knowledge of God. It recognizes the fact of social cleavage without which there could be no nation-building; but it denies social conflict by its very method of service.

2. *It is organized on the group plan,* presenting as do other educational institutions an opportunity for helpful rivalry of class-conscious groups, while at the

¹See John 21. 25 (American Revised Version).

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same time developing a mass-consciousness in which all groups are included as one unit—akin to what we sometimes call “college spirit.” This is a sociological and political fact of the greatest value in the education of a people. It is laying the foundations for a social synthesis of wider dimensions which will ultimately result in the consciousness of the kingdom of God, and, we trust, in the fact of organized humanity in “the brotherhood of man and the federation of the world.”

The evil result in the history of Christian education under denominationalism has been the tendency to denominational caste, or religious social stratification; so that instead of being a help to religious progress it has been a fruitful source of religious strife, intolerance, and bigotry. But this is happily being overcome to-day by a spirit of Christian federation and comity among all the churches.

3. *It deals with the most susceptible part of the population—the children and youth.* Under the modern graded system it has the opportunity to instruct the millions of the most promising youth of our genera-

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tion so that they may see the value of social cleavage as a part of the social process, and at the same time be taught the meaning of social justice that requires of them enlistment in the warfare against organized vice and sin; and, further, it has the chance to give them that view of society that will enable them to see the obligations they bear to one another in the great social fabric of which they are a part, and give to them a social consciousness that will overcome class consciousness and lead them to respect the rights of others in the fields of opportunity.

4. *It uses a textbook that deals with social and political facts of human history and contains those moral and spiritual truths that furnish the main supports of an enduring government: (1) honor to all men who do the world's work, (2) a heart interest in human brotherhood, (3) reverence for God, and (4) respect for authority.*¹

The international system of Sunday school lessons when put upon a modern graded system of instruction, with well-

¹Compare 1 Pet. 2. 17.

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chosen extra-biblical material, will furnish a social and political dynamic of the most far-reaching significance.

5. *Through its missionary education and philanthropy it furnishes a school of universal social values—a world view of democracy in the truest sense of that word.*

Illustrations of the awakening of this consciousness among the nations to-day as a result of this propaganda are not wanting, nor the splendid responses of the Christian nations to this new spirit of the Oriental peoples.

6. *The church must furnish a binder for the unmixable and yet useful elements of Protestant Christianity; and later a binder for the Greek, Roman Catholic, and Protestant groups of Christendom; and still later, in God's own time, the great ethnic group of Judaism must be bound ("grafted") in.*

In many sections the union Sunday school has been doing this service in a small way—and by conventions, national and international, in a much larger way, until, to-day, we have the Federation of the Churches of Christ in America, with

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affiliations reaching across the seas, and forming a basis of federation with other groups. We have the World's Christian Student Federation, under the splendid leadership of men like Dr. John R. Mott. No factor has been of greater social and political value in this result than the Sunday schools where these young men and women have been trained. And under the guidance of God's Spirit in men of social vision the Sunday school will yet solve the problem of the world's strife by furnishing the plan by which all these elements of religious, social, moral, and political value will be brought together into harmony with the will of God under the banner of Jesus Christ.

7. *The adult Bible class*, now being organized so widely in the Sunday school, with modern vision of social needs, the result of religious social surveys, is one of the most encouraging religious facts of modern times. With scientific social information, with well equipped social organization for team work in the community, and with religious and moral truth backed by the dynamic of a Christian consciousness, there

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is no estimating the social and political values that may result within the next decade or two. With such groups of men and women on guard in our several communities, with an organization that is world-wide in its federative reach, it requires no gift of prophecy to foretell that the nations that have won the first battles for political integrity and social justice will never go back to the old regime of political corruption and social wrong through special privilege and individual greed and cunning. Then we shall be in sight of that kingdom that cometh not with observation—a kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER IX

THE RURAL BIBLE CLASS

THIS is an age when we are measuring every organization and institution on the basis of efficiency. The church and Sunday school are no longer judged alone by the *intake* of members, but also by the *output* of members in forms of real service to the community in which they are located.

There is no institution so well fitted to express this phase of church efficiency as the Bible class in the Sunday school, and in the open country the adult Bible class is beginning to be looked upon as one of the most promising factors in solving the problem of the country church and other problems of the Rural Life movement.

It is our purpose in this chapter to point out some of the practical things a well organized rural Bible class can do in the community.

SOME PRACTICAL THINGS A RURAL BIBLE CLASS CAN DO

We have gotten beyond the time when

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a Bible class composed of men and women can be said to be a successfully conducted class when it does nothing more than study, or hear discussed, the lessons taken from the Bible in a series, as in the International Lessons, or from the Bible in the graded lessons, using extra-biblical materials, however striking and useful. We consider a Bible class so composed to-day successful only as it puts into actual service, individual or social, through the activities of individuals or groups toward other individuals or groups in the community or the wider ranges of human interest, the truths learned in the class, or discovered through the activities of the class.

Assuming that most of us are agreed upon this proposition, the question arises, and very naturally: what are some of the practical things a Bible class, say of men, in a rural Sunday school, can do in and for the community, or for the State, the nation, or the world at large in the sense of the kingdom of God on earth?

1. It can organize itself so as to become a real working force in sympathetic co-

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operation with all legitimate social forces in the community. Its first task is to develop social organization by which it can express its real life. This will make it socially conscious and capable of being socially active.

2. It can survey the community and discover many facts that could never be known to the class as a class without it—facts of needs to be met; facts of forces to be utilized, facts of resources to be conserved, instances where cooperation would increase income and save waste of labor and worry. This is as fundamental as the first thing. This can be done with a small group of men.

3. Another group can study the economic facts of how the community is fed, or should be fed: farm values and resources, the conditions of the market, and how cooperation in buying and selling would increase the wealth and the welfare of the community. This should also include the question of economic dependence upon other parts of the country, and even the other parts of the world. This should lead to practical methods of Christian

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service to fellowmen in the community, and in a widening of the whole range of human regard.

4. Another group could be delegated to look after the interests of the public schools in the community and in the county or State; to find out what are the modern movements and improvements in the system of rural education, and to see to it that the schools have the best the community is entitled to and can afford. This would involve the creating of a definite public opinion as to the kind of a teacher and equipment required to conduct the work of the school.

5. Another group could look after the health of the community; could find out the causes of sickness and suggest methods of prevention, and also keep the country doctor keyed up to his high calling, so that he will be able to give the latest treatment in cases of accident or disease. This would involve also teaching some lessons to the young men and women of "first aid to the injured" in case of accidents on the farm, or in the woods, or by the streams, as in cases of drowning.

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As a matter of known facts the death rate is now higher in the open country in some States than it is in the congested cities that are well looked after by an efficient board of health.¹

6. It could also, through a small group of its members, make a study of the life of some drunkard in the community, tracing back his life to all factors that have contributed to his misery and the humiliation of his family. Thus they would have something definite by which a canvass for local option or prohibition of the liquor traffic could be carried on in the State and community. Likewise, by a cautious selection of some able group, a study could be made of the moral evils and social vices of rural life (and they are as acute there as in the cities) and suggest proper remedies, like the custodial care, in some institution, of the feeble-minded prostitute who is often the demoralizing agent of the country community.²

7. It could study the life of the successful men and women of the community

¹ See Health Report of New York State, January, 1914.

² See *The Kallikak Family*, by Henry H. Goddard, Ph.D.

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and thus find out the normal factors that are available for success to the thrifty. This is to be emphasized as strongly as the abnormal conditions to be remedied.

8. Such a class can study the importance of wholesome play and recreation for a healthy normal growth of the young life of the community, and thus lead to the organization of field days, and periodic play contests for the young life of the whole community. such as is being done so successfully by the County Work Department of the Young Men's Christian Association in the open country. It could also help to create a high standard of recreation for the townspeople and the village folk, so as to avoid the low grades of amusements so often foisted upon rural communities by fakers.

9. It can make the Bible become a more real book to the people by choosing its themes of study from the great chapters and books of the Old and New Testaments that are rich with rural imagery and show the rural-mindedness of Jesus and the prophets. For example, the twenty-third psalm, the fifty-third chapter of

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Isaiah, the parables of the sower and of the tares, the lost sheep, and the prodigal son.¹

10. It can train the people of the open country to see the enemies of their crops and their poultry and dairy herds, and show them where and how remedies can be had to rid the farms of these pests, especially by cooperative efforts with the State and national bureaus that are eager to help, and must first have the way prepared for them by local leadership. And by such lessons, which have their rural background in the very book from which the class is named, the class, by personal effort, can lead through these lessons to the greater lessons of soul culture that will rid the individual and the community of the pests of the soul and the higher life, thus restoring, through God's grace in Jesus Christ, the normal image in which man was created, even his image and his likeness, the record of which, and the process by which it may be restored, are in *the Book*.

11. The rural Bible class can also be-

¹ Compare Chapter II.

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come a vital force in the teaching of patriotism. Such a class can arrange for a series of meetings during the year on occasions like the national holidays, when they will count for most in awakening the social conscience upon matters that call for civic service. Here will be discovered by the best talent available the political, social, and economic problems of vital interest to the community and to the nation as a whole: such problems as industrial democracy, civic righteousness, and social justice, child labor, women's wages, industrial peace, problems of national health, social hygiene, divorce laws, compensation for accidents in rural industries, also problems of rural welfare, immigration and farm labor, race antagonism and social cleavage in country life; problems of land tenure, size of farms, intensive agriculture, conservation of rural resources, the rural church and the rural school.

Here also in the open country emphasis must be placed upon the relation of home-making to national character and the responsibility of parents for the moral

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training, religious nurture, and education of the young life of the nation. This is the kind of patriotism that counts for something.

Biblical material is not wanting, and history is full of examples of patriotic service rendered to the nation in the rearing of noble men and women in the country homesteads of the republic who have proven their worth as patriots in every crisis of our nation's history.

It is to be assumed that methods of teaching patriotism in the Sunday schools should become a part of the progressive program of the church for real religious education. No department of the church is better prepared to do this than the Bible class of the rural Sunday school; it should, therefore, find a prominent place in its curriculum of social studies.

All of these subjects for discussion and practical work could be grouped about certain days of the year, and under proper direction become vital factors in the molding of public opinion and in the achievement of actual progress in the rural life. These things have been done by groups

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of men organized under a different name. There are cases where the rural Bible class has carried out such a program.

Such a plan of work will make our rural Sunday schools a real force in the communities where they are so organized, and will help to restore to many a rural region the lost domain of the country church and help to reestablish the primacy of the spiritual and intellectual leadership of the rural parish and parson.

CHAPTER X

COOPERATION AND FEDERATION OF RURAL CHURCHES

THE one outstanding fact of the Rural Life movement, apart from that of the need for intelligent leadership, is that of the need of cooperation and federation of rural social forces for the benefit of the farmers, the merchants, the mechanics, and the professions in rural communities.

So in the Rural Church movement, the one outstanding fact, apart from the need of a better trained rural ministry, is the need of cooperation and federation of rural churches. The people themselves have come to see the enormous economic waste in the present system of church rivalry in rural communities, and are either ceasing to attend and support competing institutions,¹ or are planning schemes of cooperation and federation in certain places, as in the town of Victor, Montana,² or in

¹ See *The Country Church*, Pinchot and Gill, p. 211, 212.

² See *The Church of the Open Country*, Warren H. Wilson, p. 100ff.

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the town of Tyringham, Massachusetts,¹ or in many other like situations that could be mentioned.

A minister trained in rural sociology and economics discovered in his parish four farmers living at the four corners of the crossroads, each one delivering with his horse and wagon two cans of milk at the creamery five miles distant, requiring them to get up an hour or two earlier and lose two or three hours each for the best part of the mornings, besides the loss of the wear and tear of the wagons and horses, when one man with one horse could have hauled the eight cans to the same place, and left free for other forms of cooperative effort the other three men, horses, and wagons; besides, they could have saved by cooperative buying of feed for the cattle and food for their families.

This is not an exaggerated case. It testifies to the great need in rural life of cooperation and organization in farm marketing, buying and production, which has led the Federal Department of Agri-

¹The Christian Advocate, November 6, 1913; see article, "Demonstrating Rural Progress," by G. F. Wells.

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culture to organize a new bureau for meeting this need under the direction of Professor Carver, who is so eminently fitted for such a task. It is our purpose in this chapter merely to outline the principles and policies required to effect in rural communities (1) denominational cooperation, (2) interdenominational cooperation, and (3) church federation.

DENOMINATIONAL COOPERATION IN RURAL LIFE

The old circuit system in the open country ceased to be a socializing agency after the close of the pioneer stage of rural development because it was based upon isolated units of population. The circular system, or the central parish plan, should supersede the circuit system in the open country to-day because it is best adapted for the new demands for cooperation in rural life. This will come about by a natural process of community-building after we have socialized the leadership in rural life, and other agencies of rural progress have been socialized.

We mean by denominational cooperation

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the cooperation of churches of the same denomination. I was in a town in Pennsylvania some years ago where there were fourteen churches of the same denomination in a population of forty-nine thousand. Several of these were so located that they were in destructive competition with each other, when they could have cooperated, or even consolidated, and served the entire community more effectively.

The same is true of many of the old "circuits" in the open country where the gospel, like the mail, is peddled around on the rural free delivery plan instead of having the people come together at some central point where they could be socialized and better served on a cooperative basis. This requires a plan of local cooperation under local leadership.

In the next place, it means connectional cooperation of the whole denomination through a statesmanlike policy of the home missions and church extension agencies, such as we shall outline in a later chapter. The socialized church cannot be successfully established in some rural communities without connectional aid from the

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whole denomination—first, in securing the proper kind of a building and equipment, and, second, in securing properly trained ministers to lead and trained men and women to assist.

Our recommendations for denominational cooperation in establishing the central parish plan are as follows:

1. Make a careful scientific survey of the rural field with reference to present conditions of need. Carefully locate the natural community centers and chart them on a map for the use of the interested groups of the denomination, local or general.

2. Outline the plans for a parish or neighborhood house and place of worship adequate to meet the needs of the whole parish, with the schoolhouses or chapels for preaching places marked and distances to the central building measured.

3. Secure an adequate appropriation of the home missions and church extension funds to supplement the local budget in "putting across" such a plan.

4. Fix a minimum salary for the rural minister and religious worker, as we do

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for the missionaries in the foreign fields, and as the County Work Department of the International Young Men's Christian Association is so successfully doing.

5. Examine candidates who are volunteers for this field as a place for life investment just as we do in other fields of religious work, and send out such only as are prepared. While it may be necessary to allow the man to choose his field, it is equally important that the church should insist on choosing the man for any specific task in any field.

Such a plan also involves the cooperation of the educational agencies of the denomination at large: (1) the theological seminaries should give definite courses in rural sociology and in rural homiletics, and in rural church economics; (2) study courses in the English Bible should be arranged with reference to the rural background of the Old and New Testament literature, and especially with reference to the rural-mindedness of the prophets and of Jesus; (3) courses in rural sociology in the colleges and schools of agriculture should be arranged so as to include the

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problems of the rural church; (4) the Christian Associations in these institutions should be induced to adopt courses for Bible study classes in their Association work during the college year.

INTERDENOMINATIONAL COOPERATION

This can be secured, in the first place, by those denominations that have similar forms of church polity and worship. This has been proven possible in Canada, in the mission fields, and in specific communities. Here the names of the denominations are slightly changed so as to eliminate the distinctive causes of difference which have ceased to have any vital significance, such as points of the compass, or matters of history or of psychology.

Another way is by a principle of *give and take* in neighboring communities. For example, in one of the Middle States there were two adjacent communities; in the one the Presbyterian Church was stronger and the Methodist Episcopal Church less strong, in the other community the Methodist Episcopal Church was the stronger and the Presbyterian Church not so strong.

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So an agreement was made to cooperate by consolidation in both places, using the surplus building for a community social center parish house, and the surplus funds for community extension work. Each denomination retained its own name and polity and both were stronger by the plan of change through cooperation.

Still another method is that of the biological law of *the survival of the fittest*, taking this law in its Darwinian sense of adaptation to environment. In such cases there is an agreement on the part of the denominational "overhead" organizations to give no home mission funds to support a church that is not prepared to do a community service, and merely wishes to prolong its existence as a matter of local denominational pride, when conditions have long since so changed that some sister denomination is better adapted to do the religious work of the entire community. This church so equipped is given the right of way by interdenominational agreement, and the others simply die naturally, and ought to, for the good of the Kingdom.

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CHURCH FEDERATION

This subject we will discuss more at length in the next chapter. It is difficult to secure because of the difference in religious ideals and in varying stages of civilization in different parts of the country.

Church federation will be brought about by the sociological law of associated activities. The first stage in social adjustment is that of conflict which later changes to toleration among equals in the social struggle, and toleration leads to sympathy, and ultimately sympathy results in pleasurable association of previously rival groups.

The value of church federation thus far seems to have been in preventing overlapping by rival denominations in new fields of church enterprise. There seems to have been a loss in some instances of new suburban towns where there is no church at all, because those most interested could not agree on the denomination best adapted for the new field.

The value of an overhead organization, like the National Federal Council of

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Churches of Christ in America, is that it leads to public discussion and the education of the social mind with reference to the need for federation; and, besides, it brings together in various commissions the leaders of the great denominations who shape the policy of these great bodies in dealing with any specific case of church federation that may arise.

Real federation will ultimately come from the mass of the common people who learn to work together in solving other problems of the community, and thus discover the economic waste of overlapping in meeting the *spiritual needs* of the community. The whole Rural Life movement, dominated by a religious spirit such as has pervaded it thus far, will greatly promote the cause of Christian federation among the rural churches, especially so if we can dominate its leadership by the same religious consciousness.

Again, I believe a broader definition of the kingdom of God on earth, which will include more of the real factors engaged in the work of human betterment in every field, will hasten this desired

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result. It is the duty of the rural leader to master for himself such a definition and to make it plain to those whom he leads; especially is this the duty of the country minister.

CHAPTER XI
THE CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION IN
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MOVEMENT

ANY work on the Rural Church movement would be incomplete if it left out of consideration the Christian Associations as a vital part of the movement. No religious leader in the Rural Life movement can study its plan of organization, talk with its leaders, and take an inventory of its achievements in so short a period since it was organized without being stirred by the thought of the possibilities for good in the church life of the open country of the County Work Department of the International Committee. What this institution is doing for the young men and boys in the country villages, towns, and farming regions the Young Women's Christian Association is beginning to do for the young women and girls of the open country.

The social function of this modern insti-

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tution as it applies to rural life is not unlike its function in other zones of human population, namely, to furnish a religious *binder* for all the useful and yet unmixable elements of Protestant Christianity. And some day I believe its function will be modified so as to include a wider synthesis of Greek, Roman, and Protestant groups of Christianity, and it is not too soon to begin to think of some such function to bind together the great ethnic groups of Judaism and other Oriental faiths, when they shall have learned the *redemptive purpose* of the Son of man.

Some years ago I met a man who was a manufacturer of cosmetics, who told me that beeswax was the "binder" of the unmixable elements used in making cold cream. Beeswax then cost forty-two cents per pound, and the endeavor of manufacturers was to discover some cheaper substance that would answer the same purpose as a "binder" and at the same time keep the combination of elements sweet and useful.

Now no one doubts the value of the great religious groups that are doing work

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in rural communities; but we all know that a greater work can be done when we get them all working in combination, so that old sores are healed and the whole complexion of society is changed and beautified. It may cost something to do it, but the results have justified the outlay.

Cheaper binders in cosmetics soon deteriorate and leave a bad odor to the whole mixture. So with some cheaper forms of church federation; unless based upon fundamental principles of *community service* and *trained leadership*, they often leave the community with a worse complexion, religiously considered, than before.

The population of our rural domain is becoming more and more heterogeneous in community groups as a result of the new immigration, and this includes even religious denominations from the countries of Europe with all their historic lines of cleavage and causes of antagonism.¹ It is therefore becoming more and more necessary that we have some form of organization in the religious life of these rural communities that can act as a binder

¹ See Shriver, *Immigrant Forces*, Chapter viii.

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and coordinator of all the religious forces of the community.

The Christian Association, in my judgment, has a special function for such a condition in the Rural Church movement, and is best adapted for the task of doing the religious work in the rural communities that no other agency is doing, or can do without adopting a similar program.

THE PRACTICAL POINTS OF ITS PROGRAM

1. It has taken essentially the parish plan in choosing the county as a unit of organization, and the natural community center as a base of operations. This gives the Association a base of operations that corresponds to the local and historic plan of developing a community plan of co-operation.

2. It insists upon *educated leadership*, choosing as a standard the college graduate or the university-trained man. And even he, in signing his contract of service, must agree to attend at least one summer school for practical training in methods of rural leadership.

3. It guarantees these men a *living*

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salary, and shows them how to get it, so that they are never at a loss to know how to finance any proposition they need to "put across" in their fields of work. They follow the method of Jesus in the instructions he gave to the twelve in his program for the country tour recorded in Matthew, "Search out who in it is worthy,"¹ which is advice the modern church leader in the country should follow to avoid entangling alliances with the village gossips.

4. It serves the needs of the men and boys of the whole community by organizing the recreational and play life of the boys and young men, by inspiring them in wholesome economic rivalry, as in corn-growing contests, in stock-breeding, in poultry-raising, and such like.

5. It bases its work upon *Bible study* and *prayer* for the individual boy and young man, as well as for the group in classes. During the summer school at Silver Bay last summer (August, 1913) sixty men in the County Work Department, like other groups, met for prayer and Bible study at six-thirty every morn-

¹ Matt. 10. 11.

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ing for two weeks. As a member of the faculty I *had* to go to save my self-respect.

6. It does its work not as a rival of the churches, but as a strong *yoke-fellow with* the churches; doing always those kinds of religious work that the churches *cannot* do, or *are not* doing. I attended the annual dinner of one of the County Associations in New England last October (1913) at which twelve of the leading country ministers of several denominations of the county were present and in sympathetic accord.

7. It looks after the physical life of the country boy and teaches him to observe the laws of health and physical development. It develops in a community a wholesome public opinion with reference to the sanitary conditions of the schools and public buildings; and creates a demand for public recognition of the value of organized play and wholesome amusements in public centers.

8. In all its public conferences and conventions the Association uses the great hymns of the church, gives place upon its platforms and programs to the great

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spiritual leaders of the church, and gives no man a second chance publicly to make a fool of himself who does not believe *in*, and is not in hearty sympathy *with* the great essential doctrines of the Christian faith. No man can stand before a great audience like those at Northfield or Silver Bay and hear that grand old hymn beginning, "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord," sung by nearly a thousand young men who are to be religious leaders in every mission field of the world, at home and abroad, and say again, "The Association *or* the church," but he is compelled to say, "This *is* the church at *work*."

WORLD FACTORS AT WORK, THE OUT- GROWTH OF THE CHRISTIAN ASSO- CIATION MOVEMENT

I give these factors without attempt at chronological sequence:

1. The Student Volunteer movement that enlists men and women of the colleges and universities and theological schools as volunteers for the foreign fields of missionary

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enterprise, with a pledge to *prepare* themselves as well as to *go*.

2. The World Student Christian Federation, under the statesmanlike leadership of John R. Mott and others, binding together in one splendid organized force the best potential, if not the actual, Christian leaders in the undergraduate body of the world's leading educational institution of higher learning. The momentum of this movement is already being felt in the Christian activities of the world, though the movement has had but time to get fairly started.

3. The Missionary Education movement which is educating millions of children in the Sunday schools, and other millions of young men and women in the societies of the churches in missionary zeal, in giving and in knowing their world neighbors. Its propaganda this year for the study of "Immigrant Forces" leading to definite action by the churches toward the thousands of aliens at their very doors, has made already a lasting impression upon the young people of the churches, and will lead to a goodly harvest in due time.

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4. The National Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, not yet fully coordinated with all of the denominations, but great in its possible outreach and with some splendid achievements to its credit, though handicapped in best opportunities by the very fact of the denominational consciousness of its constituent groups, which in time will be overcome by the development of the broader religious social consciousness through actual service, as has already become true of some of its subordinate groups, like the Social Service Commission, for instance.

This great federation was made possible by men in these denominations who had been trained in the Christian Association atmosphere of university, college, city, town, and open country where the Association idea was being worked.

5. The International Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association, and of the Young Women's Christian Association, with all their world-wide activities represented by coherently organized and intensely active departments, are in themselves a re-

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sult of the Association idea—the *binder* or coordinating factor in the greater Christian movement that is to make the kingdoms of this world (in spite of the discouraging facts to the contrary) the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

So I believe the Rural Church movement has already worked out for it, through these various agencies, the ideas of an achieving program for the church of the open country, which, when worked by trained leadership, supported by an adequate home missions policy, and an intelligent educational system, in cooperation with all other rural social forces, will be able to dominate the leadership of the entire Rural Life movement, and thus make our new rural civilization Christian.

CHAPTER XII
A SUGGESTED HOME MISSIONS
POLICY FOR THE RURAL
CHURCH MOVEMENT

THE field for church extension and home missions in this country includes three distinct zones of population, and presents three distinct problems for home missions boards to solve by statesmanlike methods of administration: first, the cities, with their congested quarters sometimes designated by that ugly term, "the slum"; second, the suburbs, with a tendency to strong social contrasts of population groups, such as the well-to-do, automobile-riding, golf-playing fringe, possessing more or less valuable estates; the asparagus-growing, lawn-mowing inner belt, who own their homes and bring up their children; and the scattered nuclei of "natives," and Negroes and foreigners, who are in most cases a drag to municipal progress, especially in improvements for public service, and in education; third, the open country, com-

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prising our vast rural domain with its splendid individualism incompetent (without leadership) for the task of building up a splendid rural civilization because of isolation of its population units, and the lack of social consciousness and organization. Each of these three zones of the national field needs a distinctively home missions policy, some of the chief points of which are common to all. But our task is to suggest a home missions policy for the third zone, which embraces over one half (fifty-three per cent) of the population of the United States, and the great resource fields from which the nation's industries and populous cities are fed, leaving a splendid surplus for exportation to other countries.

I wish to present the reasons for a home missions policy in the rural field, and to outline the policy we have to suggest.

THE REASONS FOR A DEFINITE HOME MISSIONS POLICY IN THE RURAL FIELD

In the first place, we are perhaps aware that the pioneer period of the rural do-

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main of this country is about past, and the method of the churches so successful in that period are no longer effective under the new conditions of the greater part of the open country.

It is also to be observed by those who are alert to the movements of our time that rural civilization in this country is being rapidly reconstructed, and that the Rural Life movement is gaining fast in momentum, so that whatever the churches hope to do in molding this new civilization they must do quickly before the forms are set, and the social organization of rural life under other agencies than leadership of the church becomes more or less fixed in character. Other agencies in the rural field are now being organized and socialized upon a community basis of cooperation. Even the Department of Agriculture of the national government has organized a department of rural organization and cooperation in farm production and marketing, and has chosen a distinguished economist and expert in the Rural Life movement, Professor Thomas Nixon Carver, of Harvard, to direct it.

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All the great leaders of the Rural Life movement admit that the country church is the most important factor in the solution of the problem of the betterment of our rural civilization.

In the second place, we have discovered by careful surveys in various parts of the country that the church is declining enormously in attendance in rural communities, and the membership is not increasing in proportion to the increase in population; and, in some sections, many rural communities that once supported a thriving church are now without religious services at all. (Eight hundred abandoned churches in Ohio, W. H. Wilson.) Gill and Pinchot, in their book on *The Country Church*, state as their serious judgment, after the most careful survey of the fields in scientific interpretation of the facts, "The great decline in church attendance in the open country is the most alarming fact developed by the investigation" (p. 18). And, to be more specific, they state that "church attendance in Windsor County (Vermont) fell off in twenty years nearly 31 per cent, and in Tompkins County

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(New York) 33 per cent, so that in the two counties together the attendance declined in proportion to membership in 71 churches out of 85" (pp. 15, 16).

The defeats of the church militant have never been due to frontal attack, even from the gates of hell—for "they shall not prevail against her"—but from her failure to guard the rear—or to hold the ground she has taken; so the hardest mission fields to-day for the church to adequately master are the lost home fields—the countries bordering on the Mediterranean, the downtown sections, and the stretches of our open country. None is more important and none so strategic as the lost rural domain.

In 1910 there were over 49,000,000 people living in rural territory and a little over 42,000,000 in urban territory. Only a little over 8,000,000 lived in towns (incorporated) of less than 2,500, while there were over 41,000,000 of people living in the open country. That is to say, there were nearly as many people in the United States dwelling in the open country as there were in the cities of over 2,500.

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In the third place, there is a growing demand for Christian leadership, adequate equipment, and social machinery, and a new educational policy in country life to-day. All leaders in the Rural Life movement are convinced that character is the basis of any permanent result in the reconstruction of our rural civilization. We believe that the leadership demanded and sought after should be Christian, and unless we as a church adopt an adequate policy in dealing with the situation now confronting the rural churches, the Rural Life movement will lose one of its essential factors, and other organizations will seize our neglected opportunity and master its leadership.

I had the opportunity last summer (1913) of lecturing on rural sociology and on the Country Church movement at two of the leading summer schools for rural leadership, the one at Cornell University, where ninety leaders from all parts of the United States were present, and the other at Silver Bay, where over sixty men engaged in the County Work Department of the Young Men's Christian

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Association were taking courses in training for rural leadership. While there was always manifest among these leaders keenest sympathy for, and spirit of cooperation with the country ministers, yet there was a general consensus of opinion from every quarter that the country church, as a whole, is suffering from an inadequately trained ministry, lack of equipment for its work and an inadequate educational policy for community organization in church enterprise.

There are many splendid exceptions to this somewhat depressing description of the situation which encourage us in suggesting a home missions policy in the Rural Life movement. There are many cases where the real leader, who loves the open country and the church, has succeeded in building up a whole community without the assistance of any home missions board.

But these are only exceptions. The fact remains that there is pressing need for a more adequate application of known methods of church work to the demands of human life in the open country.

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THE POLICY OUTLINED

In outlining a home missions policy for the Rural Life movement I am not unmindful of the faithful men on the boards of home missions who acknowledge the need of a change of method in administration, but are tied up by constitutional limitations in the law in the church to which they belong, or are prevented by the natural conservatism of those who have been accustomed for years to do things in a certain way and are incapable of a change, even when shown that their methods are useless so far as permanent results are concerned. For example, it would have been difficult during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, when one of the most successful secretaries of home missions and church extension was saying, "We're building three a day, dear Tom," to convince him or the church at large that during the same period, as recent rural surveys have proven, we were losing practically three a day, so the net result in church extension in some rural sections, as has been shown in Iowa, Colorado, Missouri, Ohio, Mary-

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land, and in New England, was on the minus side.

1. *Direct authority of overhead organization.* In the first place, I believe there should be given to a strong overhead organization in home missions the authority and responsibility to work out a policy of direct action in the fields of need so that there could be no ecclesiastical twilight zone, so to speak, where responsibility for results could hide away in the verbiage of annual reports. In other words, we must abolish the *pious pork barrel policy* of appropriating home missions funds in lump sums to Conferences, synods, dioceses, etc., to be divided up by the districts and subdivided into dribs to support inefficient ministers, or competing moribund churches, or chapels in already overcrowded communities; and we must adopt a more statesmanlike plan of adequate appropriations to needy fields where the rural survey has made known available resources, and a community movement has already secured trained leadership on the field to assure economic administration of a central parish plan.

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Apart from the above changes in the overhead organization, I would indicate four other factors of vital importance in a home missions policy for the Rural Life movement. Emphasis should be placed (1) upon *trained leadership* for the country church work; (2) upon a *social center parish* plan to supplant the old circuit system; (3) upon the *rural social survey* as an indispensable requirement for appropriations of money and the inauguration of new work in the rural field; (4) upon *Bible study courses*, in the *rural-mindedness* of the *Old and New Testament writers*, for the students in our colleges, who are looking toward the ministry in the open country.¹

2. *Adequately trained leadership.* In view of the new movement in rural education with the consolidated school under expert management by a college graduate trained for rural leadership, the State Farm Bureau and its extension work centering in rural communities, the keen graduate from the colleges of agriculture taking charge of farm management, and an educated woman

¹ See Chapter ii.

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taking control of the domestic science and home economics department in the rural high school; and, besides these, the County Work secretaries of the Christian Association building up whole communities upon the basis of the latest experiments in rural sociology which they have learned in colleges, universities and summer schools, for rural leadership, it becomes a matter of urgent haste that the home missions boards of the church lay supreme stress upon the education, training, and choice of religious leadership in the country churches. If as much money had been spent on training competent leaders for rural churches as has been spent on supporting men untrained and inefficient for the tasks, we would not have now such an appalling record of church decline in rural regions. While eighty-five per cent of our ministers were born and reared in the country districts, we have by our educational policy been unconsciously, if not at times deliberately, educating them away from the country until few strong young men and women, until recently, ever thought of choosing the country

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church or school as their lifework. In fact, our whole educational system in college, theological seminary, and public school, has been suffering from "urbanitis"; the city interest has swallowed up the country interest, and as a result our strongest men and women (with some splendid exceptions) have gone to the cities and large towns, and we have sent to the country churches in many cases the superannuates, the incompetents, or the novices, to guard and work this vast resource field of the Kingdom. In one of our Eastern States I asked some time ago a thrifty, up-to-date farmer how the church in his community was getting on, and this was his reply: "The man they have sent us this time hasn't get-up enough in him to eat our fried chicken." And I discovered in this same community that a clergyman of a sister denomination which has held the leading place socially in the country for a hundred years or more, was openly known to be addicted to the use of strong drink to excess.

We should seek for volunteers in home missions in rural life and organize them

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into study classes just as we have the volunteers for the foreign field and the city slums. Such leaders for the rural church field should be sought preferably in the colleges of agriculture among those who were born and brought up in the open country. They should have ability to sense and to perceive human needs, should possess a constructive imagination, so as to plan their work on a community basis, they should have engineering skill and tact in coordinating individuals and groups, so as to avoid social friction, and they should maintain a persistent purpose to win in a good cause. These are the essentials of all successful leadership. To illustrate the lack of ability to sense the needs of a rural community I give here the story of a young theologian who during his summer vacation was sent to supply a country parish in the hills of New Hampshire. Seeing the ground look somewhat bare, and thinking the need was rain, he prayed that the Lord would send copious showers upon the parched ground. After the service was over an old farmer walked up and said, "My brother, we had

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a good rain yesterday; what we need up here just now is not rain, but manure.”

3. *The social center parish plan.* In the next place, all home mission enterprises in country life to-day must be based upon a community plan of service. I prefer to call it *the social center parish plan*.¹ The reasons for this proposal are quite evident. The rural schools in all progressive States are being consolidated on a community plan; the Grange has its hall at some community center and the Christian Associations are organizing their work on this basis with the whole community as a unit.

Again, we discover the interesting fact from surveys that have been made in rural communities that where the greatest amount of home missions funds have been expended has been in towns where there are five competing denominations rather than in one-church towns where there is no competition, or in no-church villages where new work is needed. Also we have discovered that the denomination that was weakest in the pioneer period, when the old circuit system was

¹ See Chapter vii.

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most effective, is the only denomination now gaining in membership and attendance, while at the same time, in one important community, the denomination that was leading in 1870, is now gaining in membership by a smaller percentage than the other Protestant denominations, and has a less number of churches now than ten years ago. The former is organized on the central parish plan; the latter still uses the circuit system in rural communities. Space will not permit a detailed statement of the social center parish plan,¹ but we have furnished the facts and the plan which justify the adoption of this policy by home missions boards, namely, not to give to any church enterprise in rural life which has not a workable plan for service to the entire community in cooperation with all other legitimate forces.

Instead of trying to maintain the old circuit system which in many cases to-day simply means peddling the gospel on the rural free delivery plan, we should seek to establish in every natural community center a strong central parish that will

¹ See Chapter vii.

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attract the people from the countryside to a place where they can be adequately served on a wider community plan. Sunday schools can be held in the chapels or schoolhouses in remote places, and religious services Sunday evenings, conducted by the local preachers, elders, or laymen from the central parish, but all hold their membership in the central parish, where a well-trained minister can inspire and lead a whole community. One of the best examples of this plan now working is the Central Parish of the Presbyterian church of Hanover Township, Morris County, New Jersey, under the leadership of the Rev. R. H. M. Augustine.

4. *The rural social survey.* In the next place, we would suggest that the rural social survey be made the indispensable basis of all appropriations of home mission funds either for old, or for new, enterprises in the country districts. And not only so, but we must, by actual portrayal of the facts, produce a moral equivalent of the war spirit of the pioneer period. Such a policy has produced the student volunteer for the foreign fields.

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The results of the rural social survey, when properly presented, will furnish the basis for such an appeal as will enlist a new type of men for the task of redeeming our lost rural domain for the kingdom of God.

The character and function of the rural church and of the country minister must both be made to harmonize with the actual conditions discovered by the survey.

5. *Bible study courses in the rural-mindedness of the prophets and of Jesus.* Again, such a policy must include the adoption of Bible study courses based upon the rural-mindedness of the writers of the Old and New Testaments—especially that of the prophets and of Jesus. One reason for this recommendation, as has already been stated,¹ is the fact that the country folk are extremely conservative about adopting any new methods in church work unless they can be convinced of their scriptural sanction; and to win their support is the nub of the whole Rural Life movement so far as securing the cooperation and support of the country people is

¹See Chapter ii.

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concerned. Another reason for such study is that we find in the Scriptures the record of social surveys in rural regions that are in principles actual models for us to-day.

These are in my judgment the five points of emphasis in an adequate home mission policy for the church of the open country.

In addition to these I would like to see several scholarships in the Country Church movement established in all the Conferences, presbyteries, synods, dioceses, and other like ecclesiastical bodies for the use of *picked young men* to study the entire rural field under the direction of the theological seminaries of the church for the next five years, so that many of our best-trained men may be led to choose deliberately their life ministry in the open country, and thus help make the Rural Life movement Christian, and help the church at large to work out a home missions and church extension policy that will adequately meet the problems of our vast rural domain in which dwell more than half the good people of our beloved land.

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