

Off the Highroad



The Farm

Best Home of the Family
Main Source of National Wealth
Foundation of Civilized Society
The Natural Providence

These words, cut in the white marble over the entrances to the Union railway station in Washington, where hurrying crowds pass and repass every hour, express the nation's faith in the open country



To come upon a deserted farmhouse, sleeping in the sunshine, is like meeting a ghost by daylight

PART ONE

Picturesque But Lonesome

IN spite of the great growth of the American city, this country is still rural. Agriculture is the main business of Americans, and in it the country places its trust. And yet if every railwaystation in the land possessed an inscription similar to that on the cover of this book, the stream of youngpeople from the country would doubtless continue to answer the lure of the city.

"Yes, this place is pretty enough," replied the sixteen-year-old daughter of a New England farmer to the motor tourist who was contemplating the scene with enthusiasm. "But I guess you'd get tired of just *looking*," she added impatiently. "You'd want to do something once in a while if you lived here."

The son of the family would have made a different remark.

"There's no chance for a chap to get anywhere in the country," he'd

say. "Farming doesn't pay, unless you've got a lot of capital. And then the farmer cannot control prices. He buys high, and sells low. I'm going to the city."

And he goes. The young folks won't stay on the farm. To them rural life is bounded straight ahead by a limitless vista of unending monotonous toil. The daily program of "work, eat, sleep" leaves no time or energy for intellectual relaxation. A man who has plowed all day is too weary at night to read. And the old-fashioned rural recreations which were natural to country life have disappeared. The picturesque husking bees, apple cuttings, quilting bees, spelling matches and singing schools exist only in the pages of literature devoted to the days of our ancestors. So in neglecting the demands of youth, the country loses her best blood.

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Interest in rural life dates back before the women's land army invaded the fields and took over the destiny of the potato crops. It was growing long before people in the war zones were starving and looking to America for food and life. It existed before the slogan "food will win the war" ornamented the walls of restaurants and wheatless days became a habit. When George Washington and Benjamin Franklin founded the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture in 1785, they started the rural movement.

Back-to-the-soil is a city-coined phrase, and a city exodus is the direct outgrowth of life lived at too high speed and suddenly gone stale. But the real country movement is a campaign for rural progress conducted mainly by rural people. It rests upon a solid economic foundation. For agricultural prosperity, the backbone of our national prosperity and resources, is dependent on the contentment and happiness of the rural population. According to the United States Census in 1910 this population was 49,348,883 or 53.7 per cent of the total population of the country. It is distributed throughout all agricultural and village communities of less than 2,500 inhabitants.

Money Not Scarce

Scattered through the corn and wheat belts of the Middle West where farmers are prosperous and crops are large are found the most flourishing rural communities. But that the interest in religion has not kept pace with the acquisition of wealth is indicated by the fact that \$3,000 church buildings stand alongside of \$50,000 schoolhouses.

"What you need to develop there," said F. W. McConnell, in discussing the situation, "is the missionary spirit.

I addressed the Farmers' Meeting in Iowa one day. There were thirty men present, representing \$2,000,000. My appeal brought five dollars! That particular crowd of men paid \$300 a year for the support of the church. You see there is virgin soil out there, forty feet deep!"

This same spirit seems to exist in Missouri as well, judging from the following conversation:

"What are you going to give to the church this year, Bill?" one farmer asked his brother.

"Well, I reckon eighteen dollars 'll do. That's what father always gave," answered Bill.

You might think from this decision that money was a scarce commodity. But it wasn't. Both men were worth at least \$250,000.

Who Is to Blame?

"Father" forty or fifty years ago had been struggling under entirely different conditions from those of his two wealthy sons today. He was a pioneer to whom eighteen dollars represented a goodly sum. Father supported the church, not only financially, but by his presence every Sunday morning, attired in his best clothes and surrounded by his wife and eight children. But Bill and Sam grudgingly contribute eighteen dollars and consider their religious obligations fulfilled. So declining church membership and attendance at religious services becomes just as pressing a problem as lack of financial support.

At first glance it may appear that the farmer is primarily to blame for the discouraging side of the rural question. But this isn't true. The church must shoulder her part of the trouble, which may be traced in most instances directly back to lack of trained leaders. The great need today in rural communities is for better

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The Church in the mining community is confronted by a difficult task: how to make one church meet the religious ideals and standards of a score of different nationalities and temperaments

leadership. When the right kind of leader is on the job results are not slow in coming, as E. C. Reineke has demonstrated.

When Mr. Reineke first took charge of the church at Byron, Minn., he found that the attendance at Sunday school had dwindled to seventy-five pupils. The men were so scarce as to be conspicuous, four to eight representing the male portion of his Sunday morning congregation. The situation was discouraging enough, but he went to work to find a cure. First, he remodeled his church and worked out a community program. Now attendance at Sunday school has grown to 200, and fifty men may be depended upon for Sunday services. The community spirit started in the church spread over the countryside. Schools have been consolidated, electric lights installed in the village, and gravel roads put down.

In many of these communities the state or other rural or farm agency has assumed the leadership in the advancement of rural civilization, leaving the church far behind. To offset this situation Karl W. G. Hiller of Elgin, Nebraska, organized a Com-

munity Club. A Community House followed, with the result that local Christian leadership and community cooperation have developed to an unprecedented extent.

But the great tragedy of the prosperous rural community is the increase in tenantry. In many of the best agricultural sections, already half of the farms are occupied by tenants who are generally poor, uninterested in the advancement of the community and totally indifferent to the Church. The absentee landlord discourages road improvement, consolidated schools, good church buildings, and in fact everything that might lessen his income from the land. This advance of tenantry is responsible for many of the abandoned churches to be found throughout the corn belt.

Most of the open country churches and many of the village churches are served by absentee pastors. In other cases villages of three or four hundred inhabitants have three or four resident pastors of different denominations. So the present adjustment of church equipment and ministerial oversight in our smaller communities results in under equipment in some sections and

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over-churching in others. Out in Penryn, California, under the leadership of W. S. Kelley, the Baptist and Methodist churches got together and now the Methodist building is used for community purposes. Spanish, Japanese, and English all attend the moving pictures and applaud with equal enthusiasm when the heroine is rescued from the hands of the villain just before the train turns the curve.

That the question of Americanization is not entirely confined to the city is proved by the increasing immigrant element in rural communities. The Bohemians and Slovaks have spread 125,000 strong to Nebraska, while the Dakotas and Minnesota swarm with Germans, Norwegians and Swedes.

In spite of the popular belief to the contrary poverty is no longer a handicap to securing the best ministerial service in rural communities. In 1910 when 44 per cent of the population was agricultural 83 per cent of the wealth was owned by them. Today the economic readjustment due



In a certain rural community this schoolhouse was the only building available for church services. In order to reach it, one had to climb over or under a fence, and walk across several fields. Before long the School Board refused to let the preacher use this building any more, because the congregation tracked mud over the floor!



This church passed from the preacher to the painter and it now advertises signs for sale—itsself a sign of the weakening hold of religion on country life

to the war has probably brought a relative equality of wealth between rural and urban communities. Some farmers may be following the old traditions, planting their crops by the fullness of the moon, beginning nothing on Friday, and avoiding the iron plow for fear of poisoning the soil, but these men are exceptions. Most farmers have learned that tilling the soil is not a matter of superstition, but of science. And science pays. Yet the traditional belief that the best services can not be obtained because of the expense is keeping the rural church in the lowest grade in the estimate of church officials. This belief frequently drives trained ministers who would like to serve the country to "better charges" elsewhere, and prevents young men from preparing for the service of rural folk.



A boys' club, a gymnasium or the Boy Scout uniform might improve the appearance as well as the behaviour of these young imps

PART TWO

The Farmer's Short Circuit

BACK in the hill country, in the pine belt and among the mountain and desert regions of our land, farming is not so prosperous a business. The poverty of the soil and the awful loneliness of the land, where sometimes the R.F.D. man won't get along in a week are steadily driving the population away. The ones who remain wear a hang-dog expression.

"Our life," said a farmer in the dairy section of New York State, "is a short circuit between milking, the factory and the feed store. We go to the milk factory, deliver our milk, and receive a check. This we cash at the feed store in exchange for grain. And then we hurry home to begin milking all over again."

The religion of the farmer in such sections is overwhelmed and controlled by the economic conditions. One man said that he spent eight hours of every day milking. His wife brought his breakfast to him on a tray at six o'clock. He ate in the barn with the cows. "I am gray at forty," he remarked wearily. "But the cows have to be milked. And the milk has to be delivered Sunday just like every other day. What time do I have for church?"

The soil in many sections has practically been farmed out. To replace the lime or phosphates requires additional labor. Sometimes the minerals must be hauled twelve or fifteen miles over bad roads, and labor now costs

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from \$35 to \$50 a month and board for the man.

Often the farmers can't procure a laborer, even at that sum, for the thousands who have gone to work in munition plants and the others who have been drafted into the army have left a shortage of men. Years ago the families on these farms in the hills averaged six to eight or ten. Today they are much smaller. That is why rural institutions have broken up. And that is why our churches are empty.

In the hill sections many small communities are unable to maintain a pastor, or even to erect suitable church buildings. Yet these communities need leadership in the development of Christian civilization. And so the old circuit rider of earlier days is still in existence, jogging along on a horse over miles of rough country roads. One minister in Ohio served nine Methodist preaching points, preached in two Baptist churches and held a revival over in Kentucky all at the same time. Last year a pastor in Central Tennessee served twenty-one points. And a retired minister, nearly eighty years of age, at the present time has a circuit of sixty-four schoolhouses in Oregon.

In Brown County, Indiana, a young pastor who has had no educational opportunities beyond the high school is attempting to serve seven points with a membership scattered over 198 square miles of the roughest land in the state. For this strenuous exertion he receives the munificent salary of \$300, and no house-rent. But this young man is only getting experience, although he is paying a rather high price for it. As soon as a student appointment comes around the bend of the road he will go to college and train for a city pastorate. So again a rural community will lose a leader, nor is it the country's fault.

A list of the salaries of the rural

Methodist ministers would explain to those people who extol the advantages of country life why able men shun the field. Out of 10,518 white rural Methodist ministers in the United States thirteen per cent or 1,367 men receive, including parsonage, less than \$400 per year. Twenty-five per cent or 2,339 men receive, including parsonage, less than \$600 per year. The highest salary paid, including parsonage, is \$1,200, while the same amount is the minimum salary for the county Y.M.C.A. secretary. Thus, low salaries not only drive good ministers from the territory, but they also prevent the recruiting of trained ministry from among the graduates of colleges and theological seminaries.

The Minister Has to Live

Low salaries combined with the lack of trained men are also responsible for the increase in the number of supply ministers. In the New Jersey Conference the number of supplies has more than doubled in the last ten years. This condition is not confined to one conference. The Indiana Conference, where 22 supply ministers in 1897 had mounted to 87 in 1917, is another striking example. The Fall Conferences for 1917 left 2,439 charges to be supplied or 25 per cent of the total. The Spring Conferences with 21.6 per cent of the charges remaining to be supplied did not make a very much better record. Not counting superannuation there is 4.3 per cent of an annual loss in ministers. This loss is not met by the 3 per cent recruits.

It is in the less prosperous sections of the country also that all kinds of isms have full sway. One hears of dumbtonguerism, antiorganism, holy-rollerism, and Mormonism. Tents spring up over night and the whole countryside attends the services held under their white folds. The audience

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seems to find an equal amount of excitement in affecting dumbness, rolling in the sawdust, or contemplating the addition of a couple of wives. An emotional debauch is the result, culminating in a kind of ecstatic climax, when the population sits entranced, waiting, perhaps, for the end of the world.

Do not say, however, that these things are simply ridiculous. Such excitements, even the least worthy of them, are made possible largely by loneliness and a genuine if misguided desire for spiritual comfort. If the right teaching is given, in terms they can understand, these people, who are so often victims of their own emotionalism, will follow the truer light.

That religion should not cost anything is the belief of some people. Even in sections where the laymen can afford to have automobiles, and other modern conveniences, the minister's salary is kept low as a matter of principle—or discipline. This condition is influenced also by the existence in some rural communities of religious denominations which do not believe in a paid ministry.

There are several ways of getting next to the heart not only of the people but also of their problems. J. H.

Singleton of Dewey, Illinois, prepared himself for the rural ministry via a course of Agriculture in the University of Illinois. Boys' and girls' clubs are specialties of his pastoral work. That his agricultural knowledge has been put to good account is demonstrated by the fact that he is now the county leader. His work is recognized by the Commercial Club and Rotary Club of Champaign. This is one example of how a program of a modern rural minister is appreciated by the people and how the rural population may be vitally connected with the largest movements in local and national life.

When E. W. Thompson went to Granger, Ohio, he found the church sitting on the outside of all the rural activities, without even a look in. The community already had excellent farmers' institutes, Grange, County Y.M.C.A. and a centralized high school with a splendid gymnasium. He first succeeded in bringing the people together by a series of lectures, held in the church. Later he organized the Boy Scouts, and is now planning a community building. This minister hopes to serve the growing Roumanian population by having classes to teach them English



Rural schools are steadily being improved in buildings, equipment, and teachers. The rural church must improve correspondingly if it is to retain its leadership



Some of the new immigration that is rapidly overrunning the coke regions of western Pennsylvania

PART THREE

The Farmer and the Miner in the Same Pew

MODERN industry has crossed the city boundary and taken possession of many rural sections. The coal and mining camps scattered over the land, the quaint little fishing villages along the coast, the cotton mill towns of the South, and the mill towns of New England comprise these rural industrial communities. In addition to these types are the vacation resort villages, which lie sleepy and dull half a year, awakening to sudden life when the summer or winter season brings an influx of boarders.

The temporary nature of the mining and lumber camps, with their average existence of forty years, has a vital relationship to the church. A striking illustration of how this condition affects church building equipment is found in the Coke Mission in Western

Pennsylvania. A survey revealed the fact that there were 104 villages, representing a population of at least 70,000 people, that had no church buildings whatever within their limits. In many of these villages religious services were not permitted in schoolhouses except during about four months in the year when the school was dismissed. This condition is typical of mining camps everywhere in the United States.

In the rural industrial communities the problem of assimilation of the newer immigration into American ideals and standards of religious belief is most serious. In very few instances are the churches adapted to serve these industrial newcomers, and so they are mostly left to their own resources, which are far from religious.

Modern industrialism in some cases has adopted the plan of owning the residences of the employees working in the mines or factories. The public school, the church, and all other public buildings are also provided. The tendency is to make the church a union church open to representatives of any religious denomination. The company pays a large part of the pastor's salary, and is careful to select a man whose message will not interfere with the established order of industrial control. Such churches practically prevent any modern constructive program from being carried out by any trained community leader and often bar the door to Americanization.

Puritan and Portuguese

In marked contrast to the manufacturing and mill towns of New England are the little fishing villages that hug the coast. The typical old-fashioned houses are of two generations ago, placed close to the road, where the Portuguese fishermen rub elbows with descendants of the old New England stock. Kerosene lamps are still in use, and the light of the moon takes the place of street illumination.

"There is nothing to keep the young people," explained H. H. Crawford, of Westport Point, Mass., "unless they are content to fish. The older people make their living by fishing, supplying the needs of the summer people, and a little agriculture. When I went there nothing was being done for the social life of the young people at all. But we have taken that over,

and it is well cared for now by clubs, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and children's meetings."

People of all denominations attend Mr. Crawford's services.

"I have tried to make the program broad enough to appeal to every one in the community," he explained. "I want every individual and every home to feel that the church is there for him. The result is that people regardless of denomination have joined us."

The rural community, with all of its handicaps, is according to statistics the place where national leadership is born. From the fertile valleys of our agricultural sections, from the shut-in portions of our great highlands, from the broad expanse of our western plains, have come the men and women who have been America's real leaders. And from these sections they continue to come, in spite of the superior educational, religious, and business advantages of the cities.

Several years ago five hundred leading business and professional men of the cities of New York State met at a banquet. During the evening it was discovered that nine-tenths of these city leaders had come from country homes.

Pioneer days developed a sturdy race of men. The strenuous life, when a man fought nature for existence, put iron into his blood. Powerful physiques, clear intellects, and strong characters were the result. Country life, still retaining a few wholesome hardships, is great for the making of men. Our leaders will continue to come from rural districts.



The community center at South Athol, Mass., boasts a thriving community garden, cared for by the children of all the families and furnishing vegetables to the whole settlement

PART FOUR

The Cracker Barrel Committee has Disappeared

THE past generation has marked a new era in rural progress. Today 259,306 miles of telephone wire wind over the rural sections of the United States. The farmer's wife can take the sting from her loneliness by chatting with neighbors over household matters or hearing the latest country news. In the same way church socials are planned, the doctor summoned when illness occurs, and the daily market quotations procured.

Progressive farmers have also discovered that a bad road is a tax upon every ton of produce hauled to market. The cost of hauling over country roads is from 8 cents per ton mile on a broken stone road, dry and in good order, to 64 cents per ton on dry sandy roads, while the average cost in the United States due to bad roads is about twenty-five cents. The social effects of good roads are as great as

the industrial benefits. More social cooperation, better neighbors, and a bigger chance for the country church all follow the trail of the good road.

The day of the rustic farmer, who went to town once a week to dispose of his milk and eggs, collect his mail and get a shave, has passed. At the present time about 20,000,000 of our rural neighbors have their mail delivered by Uncle Sam's messengers at the front door. Letters, books, and magazines bring the activities of the globe to the loneliest farmhouse.

The automobile, which is often a toy in the city, is a thing of usefulness in the country. While the average village as yet cares little for it, the western farmer finds it almost a necessity. But more important far than the automobile are the railroads, steam and electric, which have served to develop the country communities,

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not only opening up whole sections for settlement, but also furnishing a market and a base of supplies.

While these modern inventions have been fighting the social isolation of the country, farm machinery has been bringing emancipation from drudgery. And the farmer himself has been growing more intelligent.

In 1889 the United States Department of Agriculture was formed. Since its organization this department has constantly increased in scope and

activities until at the present time its annual budget is more than \$26,000,000. Its work is largely that of research and coordination of the work of the various other agencies interested in agricultural development. This progress in agriculture means the survival of the best rural homes and the finest national ideals. To retain in the country a genuine Christian leadership and constituency is to assure a new lease of life to the Church at the cross roads.



It will take more than a beautiful view and plenty of fresh air to keep this enterprising young lady loyal to the farm



The pastor at Hubbelston, Mass., is carrying the Church out into the life of the community and one of his great achievements is the organization of the Boy Scouts

PART FIVE

Take the Church to the Farmer

"IT is through world-wide programs that you win," said the Rev. Walter H. Gould, of Cambridge, Vermont. "I can get the whole town out to a home talent play. We have got to put Christianity into all the community programs. Then it will get into the lives of the country people and percolate into their activities. We can't wait for our churches to be full. We have got to take religion out into the community and not wait for the community to come into the church."

Not only can the church be made necessary to the farm, but people can also be brought to realize that going "back to the soil" or staying on the soil need not entail undue privations in the way of recreation, companionship or church privileges. Nowadays the farmer is not marooned nine-tenths of the year; with telephones and automobiles, it is quite within the bounds

of possibility for farm-owners and workers to live in a community center and still keep their cattle, make hay, raise vegetables and wheat on a place at the edge of the village.

This plan is successfully working at South Athol, Mass., under the inspiration of Dr. E. J. Helms, head of the Morgan Memorial. This is a place where the city-tired worker can begin afresh, and where people with decreasing incomes and increasing families can find a solution for the H.C.L., that subject that has become almost unmentionable in polite society. Here are comfortable homes, a schoolhouse, a store, a rug factory for winter work, a power plant, a church, and, best of all, confidence and reasonable credit so that every man can buy his own home, rear his children and get something of the joy of living as he goes along.

Helping people and communities to

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a self-respecting religious life is the purpose of the Centenary Program for rural Methodism.

It is not the dream of a visionary, but a clear-cut schedule for meeting definite needs revealed by forty-nine rural surveys. This program touches every phase of the life of the people, and is designed to increase the religious, social, educational, and spiritual efficiency of rural America.

The Centenary is also a nation-wide educational campaign for increasing the usefulness of the ministry now in rural service. Work has already been started. Under the direction of the Superintendent of the Department of Rural Work of the Church training conferences are being held over the country. At these meetings different rural problems are presented and methods of solving them are found through discussion, illustrated lectures and demonstrations.

One of the biggest Centenary plans is the establishment of effective training schools for men and women in cooperation with our educational institutions. Such relationships are now assured at Illiff School of Theol-

ogy, Drew Seminary, and Garrett Biblical Institute. Negotiations are under way with a number of other colleges and theological seminaries.

The Centenary will supply the missionary aid which is necessary both in the prosperous and less favored agricultural sections. Even in communities that are abundantly able to care for themselves financially, there is need of supporting trained leadership until a standard of service which wins the confidence, respect and whole-hearted support of the community is reached.

In the Centenary program adequate salaries will be guaranteed to young men trained for service in the rural church. The old one-room structure will give way to buildings equipped for worship, religious education and community service. Churches intended for the use of the living will be divorced from the influence of the dead and placed at market centres where people come.

First and last the Centenary is a living proof of the nation's faith in the open country.

Centenary Plans for Rural Districts

The increase of efficiency of the ministry now in service

Cooperation with educational institutions for training leaders

The supply of missionary aid where it is needed

The increase of salaries of rural ministers

The erection of new churches equipped for community service

Facts Concerning Rural Life in the United States

IN 1820 one person in 13 lived in the city; today every other person is a city-dweller.

Eighty-seven per cent of the Methodist Episcopal churches are rural.

There are 10,518 white rural Methodist Episcopal ministers.

Thirteen per cent of these preachers receive less than \$400 a year.

In Western Pennsylvania there are at least 104 villages, representing a population of 70,000 people, which in May, 1918, had no church buildings whatever within their limits.

Absentee landlords are not very profitable to the Church.

There are 259,306 miles of telephone wire winding through the rural sections of the United States.

Twenty million people receive their mail through the United States rural deliveries.

The state of Illinois ranks first in value of farm property and first in available farm acreage.

The rural church "plant" is still essentially what it was fifty years ago, a preaching room and a vestibule.

To the eighty-seven out of every hundred Methodists who live in rural districts, the Government will give assistance through its system of Federal agricultural colleges, experiment stations, and the Department of Agriculture at Washington. That is what it was established for—for Methodists and everybody else to use, profit by and enjoy.

The spiritual care of the rural community still rests with the Church. The rural church is the expression of the social life of the people.

Advertisement

The Centenary Home Board Booklets

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A discussion of the problems confronting the Church in reaching
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Number Three

The Stranger Within Our Gates
A Study of the Americanization problem

Number Four

Broken Trails on The Frontier
A view of the work in remote border settlements

Number Five

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An inquiry into the rural situation in connection
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Price five cents each

Joint Centenary Committee

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