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ON

THE COUNTRY CHURCH

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Wilson, W. H. Don't breathe on the thermometer

Wilson, W. H. The farmers' church and the farmers' college

Wilson, W. H. Getting the worker to church

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Wilson, W. H. The girl on the farm

Wilson, W. H. How to manage a country life
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Wilson, W. H. "Marrying the land."

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Department of Church and Country Life, the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., 156 Fifth Avenue, New York.

“MARRYING THE LAND”

By WARREN H. WILSON, Ph.D.

THE man who graduates from an agricultural college goes home to his farm with serious purposes. Some day there may be so many scientific farmers that these purposes will become commonplace. At present they are so earnest that they are almost religious. The husbandman goes home nowadays to “marry” the land. He has enthusiasm and love for the tillage of the soil. He is in some respects like the ancient Hebrew who called Palestine a “holy” land.

He will find the church in the country the best expression of the actual prosperity of the farmers. It is not hard for a merchant to be deceived. When the price of land is so high that all the farmers are selling, he will say that the farmers are prosperous, but the church shows that such prosperity is false. When the country churches are doing well, the most careful study of agriculture in that

place will show that it is on a sound basis. For this reason a scientific farmer has business with the church, which is his thermometer of rural prosperity. It does no good to find fault with the thermometer. The only way is to warm up the community.

The young, scientific farmer, therefore, should open the eyes of the minister to the religious values of "better farming." It will be a good job to organize a farmers' club and get the minister and church officers into it. Make this club the nucleus to which skilled lecturers shall be brought for public addresses in the community on agriculture. Make this club also a centre for the study of the local problems of agriculture. No state college was ever formed which can teach from a distance the local problem to the people of that community. There is needed a distributing centre in the community which can look out on the local field of work.

Nothing will do a church more good than to become, in the country, a farmers' church. As soon as the minister gets to preaching to farmers and stops addressing his remarks to theological professors, the church will grow. A religious organization in the interest of agriculture may bring this about. Certain it is that the agricultural college graduate needs such an organization, as a local seminar in which he can teach the lessons he has just learned. Otherwise,

his neighbors may call him a "book farmer" and think no more of him.

Means should be devised in the local community to promote better tillage of the soil. In Texas, as I learned from a recent letter, the Ladies' Aid Societies in some Baptist churches are using the following method. Each year they hire a farmer to till some acres of his land for them. They pay him about fifteen dollars per acre. In his contract it is stipulated that the tillage of the soil shall be under the direction of the demonstrator from Washington. These ladies have cleared each year a handsome purse of religious pin money. They have also furnished an example of what can be done by science in contrast to tradition in a farming community.

Director L. H. Bailey, of Cornell, is no preacher, but he has come to say in these later years, "The soil is holy." If that is true, then agriculture should be undertaken in a prayerful spirit. After a while we may turn our prayers on some other of the concerns of life, but at present the man who has agricultural training goes home as a prophet. He should go in a devout religious spirit, consecrating himself to the welfare of the whole community. He cannot do this without expressing his belief in the common welfare, through the church, for worship is the highest symbol of community oneness.

Let the scientific farmer beware of a

selfish interpretation of his opportunity. He cannot by competition beat his neighbor, for his neighbor controls the conditions which fix prices. It is not science or special knowledge which gets a better price. It is the slovenly and indolent farmer who determines the price of apples, potatoes and oats. The only success, therefore, for the scientific farmer is in bringing other men to a high level. With them he can share the gains, which he desires, and without them he can share only the losses which they constantly suffer. His success will be attained only in the community success. This is why scientific agriculture is today a religious mission. The interest of one is the concern of all.

The purpose, therefore, of the graduate of the agricultural college should be the abolition of poverty in his community. He does not need to be told to make farming profitable. This is the initial factor in his success. Every man must burn his own smoke. He must not let anybody take care of him. But in order to make his own success permanent and honorable, he will find that he is engaged in the problem of the poorer members of the community with whom he can rise, and by neglect of whom he can only himself fall.







