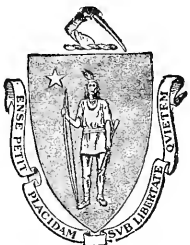


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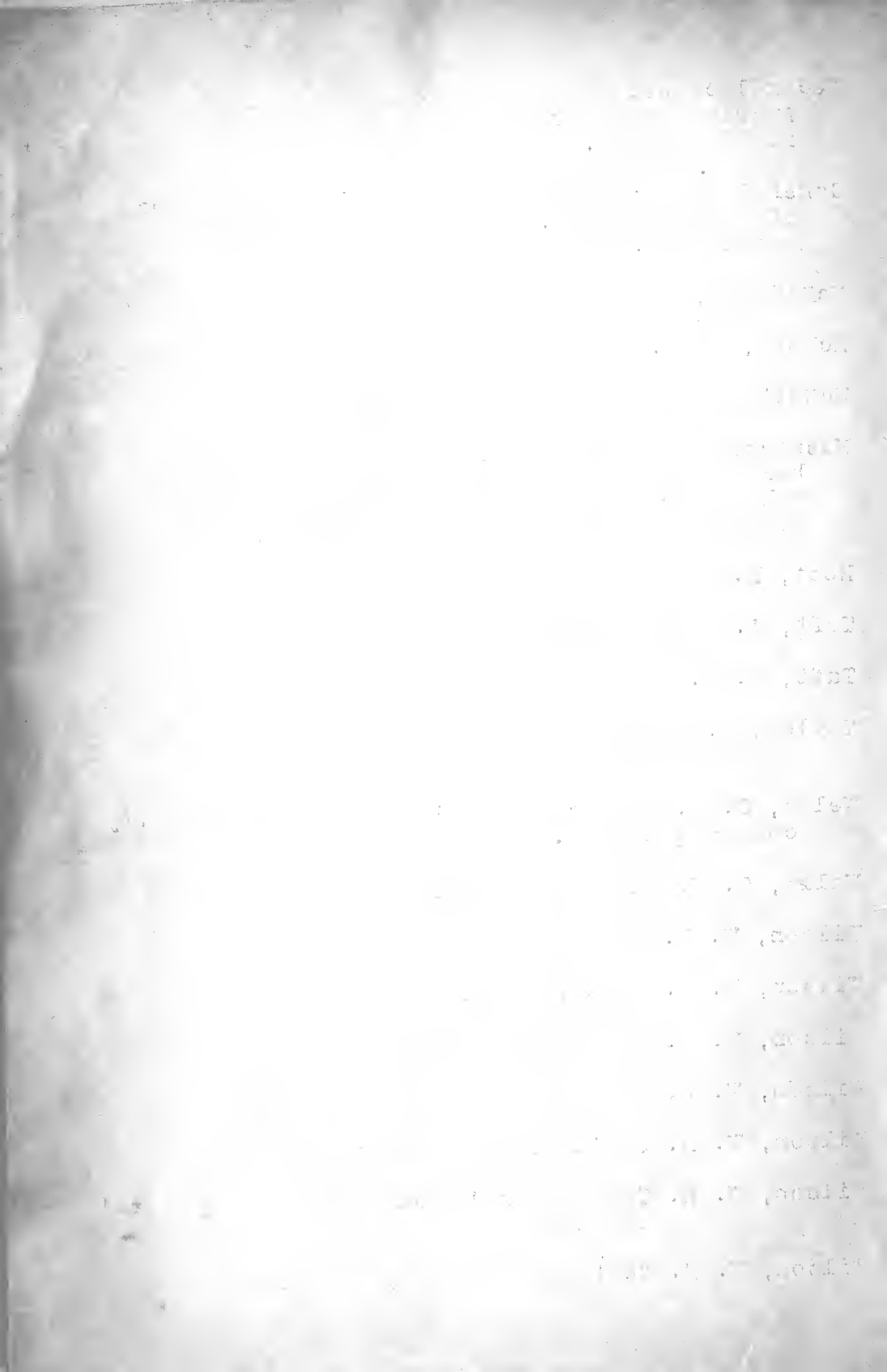
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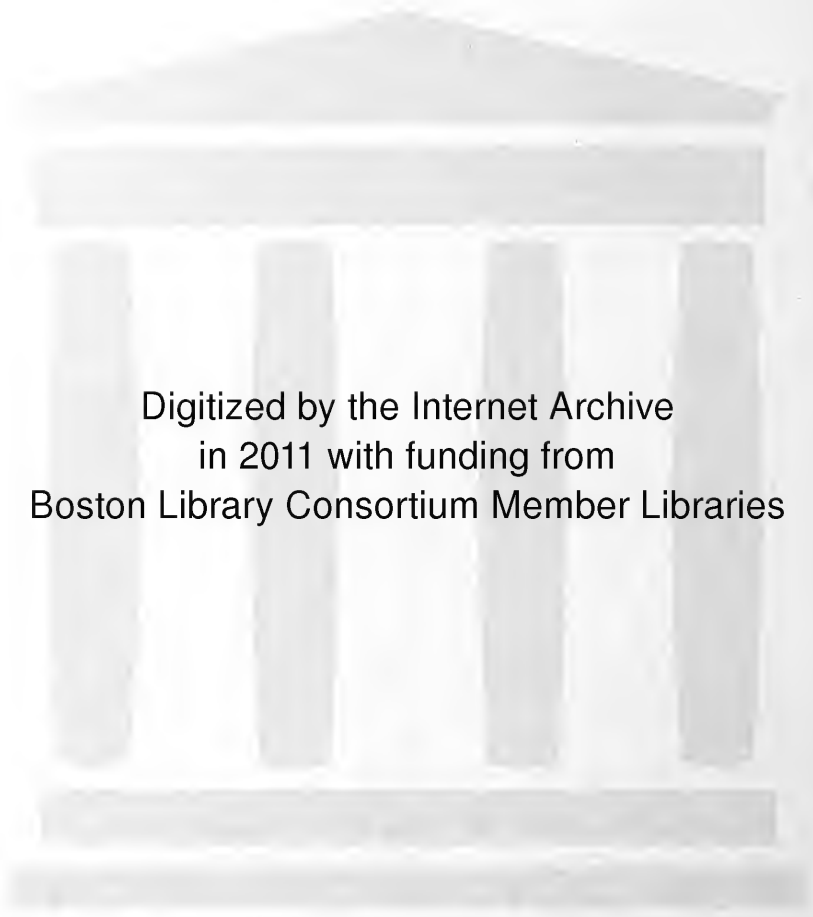
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NO NEED TO BE POOR IN THE COUNTRY

by Warren H. Wilson, Ph.D.

There should be none poor in a country neighborhood. Among successful farming people no one is poor. It is essential to good farming such as is handed down from father to son and grandson, that no one is poor in the community. There is something in the process of good agriculture which distributes a living income to everybody. The country has been the poor man's mode of finding an estate. I believe that farming offers this possibility to the poor in permanent promise for endless generations.

Poverty in the country is more terrible than in the city. It can be hid from no one. One's near neighbors in the country are nearer to him than kinsfolk. An old lumberman expressed this about the children of his shiftless neighbor. "Them children come into my house at breakfast and watch every bite go down my throat". The spectacle of poor neighbors has no screen over it in the country. Rural slums cannot be well hidden. Everybody in the community is dependent upon everybody else for the conditions of life, so that poverty in any household is a degradation and a detriment to every other household.

In good farming communities which have for generations got a distributed income out of the soil, there is no such thing as charity among the people of the community. Such a neighborhood acquires ways of mutual aid which have the assent of every one. They are like those instincts which cause people in the country to come together for a barn raising, to put out a fire, or doctor a sick horse. The man of small estate in the country is ready to save his neighbor's thoroughbred horse from the colic, and expects no pay for the service. He is likewise unashamed if when his own solitary animal dies his neighbor subscribes to purchase another horse. Country neighborhoods have an instinct of mutual insurance against the calamities of life. The exigencies of their struggle with nature teach them certain common actions on which life itself depends. Just as anybody in the community would sit up at night with a sick

horse or a sick man, so anybody in the community would expect from his neighbor that assistance which protects him against poverty, provided only a community spirit is cultivated and neighborly feeling is general.

This kind of thing is usually taught to a neighborhood by a church or by some early leaders who may themselves have passed away, but its influence is not confined to the church members or to the followers of that leader, as years pass. Neighborly action knows no doctrine. It cannot be organized, for it moves by instincts, not upon reason alone.

Of course a neighborhood is like a beehive. Foreign objects may get in sometimes and interfere, but the diligent feelings of the countryside will surround the intruder with a cell of wax and shut him out from controlling the neighborhood. I have known a summer hotel to have its own charities and its alien objects of benevolence, but the community, aside from these pitiful and artificial creatures, had none poor. Among the farmers there was no pauper, though the wealthy people from the city could not have a comfortable summer without somebody dependent upon their patronage.

There will always be people in every community who have little. Most people are incapable of saving money and very few have capacity to get rich, but everybody who is not defective can possess enough of productive land or tools to keep him from pauperism. This should be the ideal in every countryside.

The abolition of pauperism is possible in the country, and the church should set itself this ideal. How shall it be accomplished. By a steadfast policy and persistent teaching, not of thrift and accumulation, but of the value of self-respecting small property and by something more than teaching. The church in the country should inspire in the mind of every man in the community, the desire to possess enough to keep him out of want. This does not mean a store beside which he can live in idleness, but it means the tools by means of which he can thrive through diligence. The ideal for every man in the country community should be to possess productive land or tools, without fear and without admitting exceptions. The country minister should teach to everybody in the countryside a doctrine of industry, of productive work and of self-respect based upon the use of productive land or tools.

When accident comes to any member of the community the minister and his church should summon

all the neighbors to replace the property destroyed. The poor man's horse, his cow, his barn, his cobbler's shop or blacksmith shop constitute his protection against pauperism. If these productive tools be lost, he has no self-respecting means of living. If the acre upon which a widow subsists by diligent thrift be taken from her on account of debt, she must bow her head and beg. If her acre can be kept in her possession by an act of the countryside on her behalf, she will never need to beg. She may be sometimes hungry and may always be pinched, but she will never be a pauper.

The Christian religion is not a religion for paupers, but it has a great deal to do with poverty. The Christian churches are all of them historical records of the fight of a population against pauperism and want. The Christian churches have done pretty well. They are not poor any longer. Some of their members, if anything, are too rich. But they must not forget that the discipline of the Christian religion that is in the world to-day has been attained in the struggle against poverty. It has been a hard struggle, but it has been good. In the country community this struggle need not result in failure, as so often it does in the city. No one need be poor in the country. In the experience of contending with poverty the religious life of country people will be enriched, their neighborly feeling made tender and their conviction of the Kingdom of God made bright. As Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of God."

