THE RURAL COMMUNITY.

HOW TO PROVIDE FOR THE SPREAD OF RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL TEACHING IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

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My immediate consideration is, "What machinery may be discovered or invented for the conveyance of the ideals of this organization (The R. E. A.) to the people of smaller groups? There seems to be no dearth of concepts, nor a disagreement as to the principles of greatest worth in religious and ethical teaching. Its importance to the people of our time seems to be accepted. But the practical question now before us is, "How may these ideals be delivered to the people"?

Why should this organization, if it believes what it asserts, not undertake a definite and well-planned campaign to enlighten public sentiment in the more isolated communities of the country? If our ideas are true we are bound to propagate them. If they are true we must do more than read scholarly papers concerning them. Our theories are not good if they do not work, at least no one cares for them if we do not attempt to work them out in practical life. Remembering results in this respect, effected by similar organizations, such as the American Association of Charities, the Anti-Saloon League, the Child Labor Conference, and numerous others, I shall assume that it is both possible and practical to transmit our theories to the remotest community in this Republic.

The question of method is, therefore, in order. The question with respect to local communities may be worded as follows:

- (1) How to reinstate religious training in the home;
- (2) How to improve religious teaching in the Sunday school;
- (3) How to guarantee Bible reading and Bible teaching in the day-school;
- (4) How to reinstate religious life and renew ethical ideals in rural communities.

In general the various groups mentioned may be reached through the local press. Groups 2 and 3 may be reached through summer schools in the various States. Ministers may serve as carriers of our beliefs, and they may be trained and inspired for such activity through the theological seminaries, through various clerical gatherings both

local and State wide. Sunday-school teachers could be reached through the various State and local Sunday-school conventions.

If we follow the method pursued by similar organizations we shall co-operate with the agencies of a correlative nature already existing. Their machinery is at our disposal for the asking. I sometimes fear that we have failed to appreciate the efficacy of that word co-operation. It is the genius of our age. It has made America economically what it is. Corporations (almost the same word), criticise them as we may, have given to this country its economic success. *Might it not be feasible for us to have a standing committee on co-operation?* Many avenues for effecting closer relations with correlative agencies would present themselves to such a committee.

There is no problem which is more keenly projecting itself before the social consciousness and conscience today than that of the rehabilitation of rural life. The desertion of the country community by the men who have hitherto furnished the intelligence for the guidance of life there and the consequent deterioration of the productive resources of the country which has followed, have warned every economist of our time who has devoted his attention to a study of that problem. For, it is recognized that the country's wealth in the last analysis has come and is to come from the soil. The national government, has, therefore, taken up the matter with the most serious effort. The United States Department of Agriculture is spending millions of dollars and the strength of 5,000 men in repairing the waste places on the farm. State Departments of Agriculture, State Colleges of Agriculture, State Departments of Education, are exerting themselves to discover improved means of resurrecting the industries of sparsely settled communities. For, perhaps 85% of the citizenship, and far more than that of the stalwart strength and backbone of this Republic have come and will come from the country.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE COUNTRY DISTRICTS.

It is well that this nation has set for itself this serious task; for rural life must be made more economically profitable than urban life, if men are to remain in the country, and if it is to be repopulated. The first duty a man owes to himself, to his family and to society is to support himself and those dependent upon him. Nevertheless, I am bold to assert that economic productivity and profit hold in themselves neither the cause or the cure of the abandonment of rural life by the cream of its population. You may attach twice the rewards to the effort of rural life that you do to that of the city and men will still emigrate from the country. *Rural life must be made more human-*

ly interesting. The picked men who desert it are in search of the higher things of the spirit. They endure all the sacrifices of tearing up their homes that they may avail themselves of better social privileges and in order to provide for their children better training in mind and in spirit. So long as there are finer school houses, finer churches, and finer libraries in the cities, so long will men flock to those centers. So long as the country preacher and the country teacher are infinitely inferior to the city preacher and to the city teacher, so long will men remain disgusted with the one and suffer every privation to place themselves within easy reach of the other. So long as the best of literature and of art are not to be had in the country, so long will men seek them elsewhere. If the Religious Educational Association wishes to serve the country districts, it must discover a way of reaching them too with its ideals and its literature. And if this Association is to permanently affect the life of this section it must discover a way to enrich and renew the ideals of the rural community. Religion has not dealt fairly with the farmer. It has not, in my generation, found a way of pouring its best blood into his life. No one expects to find the good preacher in the country. No one thinks of sending the best of anything there. Even manufacturers are placing upon their inferior products, their remnants, and their waste products the label "for country consumption." If a teacher can not by any means secure a city position, she will *in extremis* accept one in the rural districts. And yet if the country did not replenish the cities with its native vigor the latter would perish with the dry rot within a generation. Why have we no plans for renewing the strength of this fountain from which we are continually drawing our nurture? President Roosevelt's Rural Life Commission had no difficulty in reaching the conclusion that the country church and the country school are the centers from which psychical helpfulness is to emanate for the people of these districts. If we are to serve these localities we must improve the sources from which they draw their spiritual sustenance.

Think of the increasing impoverishment of the country school, no books, no art, no periodicals, no music,—nothing to fire the imagination of him who has contributed more to the world through his constructive imagination than all the rest of the race. Add to that the anemic religious and ethical training, the impoverishment of ideals, and you leave his emotional life pauperized beyond endurance. For this and other reasons, rural life has lost its interest. It has lost its emotional outlet. History does not present a people who have long remained in an environment which forbade emotional expression. The

means for emotional activity among civilized peoples have been, literature, art and religion. The first two have rather generally been lacking among American rural communities and until recently the last named offered all that such people had left them. Since the decadence of religion in their midst nothing is left. I do not plead for an emotional religion, but merely remark that an absolutely unemotional one has not hitherto existed for any long period. It should be said further that a religion to a certain extent emotional has not been proven detrimental to all classes of men. If I plead for art and literature because they give an adequate expression to human feelings, why should I not so argue for religion? Shall we fail to love the highest and the best? If we are not allowed to give this expression to our affective consciousness may we not express it in lower levels? The fact is still indisputable that the plain men's expressive interests cower before a mechanical intellectualism. A reformation of the form of religion prevailing in rural communities may be necessary, but annihilation is not necessary. What do we mean by enriching rural life? Do we enrich it by robbing it of its motive? Something must be constructed which will furnish an adequate outlet for the emotions of man in isolated districts, his emotions must be rekindled, in order that he may appreciate the enjoyable and the interesting about him, in order that he may have a stimulus for social gatherings, even of the religious sort; in order that a more virulent feeling may stimulate willing to loftier undertakings in all directions. Without emotional expression the isolation of rural life makes that life an impossible life.

If, then, we recognize the tremendous importance of the entire rural problem, and if the lesson of co-operation with the existing agencies working toward rural uplift has been well learned, the realization of the ideals of this organization in rural communities will not be appallingly difficult. State Educational Departments are organizing around every school citizen's aid associations. Sometimes they are called patrons' leagues, and at other civic improvement associations. It will not be difficult to discover a point of contact with these leagues. The teacher may be reached through the State Department of Education, through the State Teachers' Association, through summer schools, and through the local citizens' leagues. There is no agency for the dissemination of newly discovered truth which quite equals the teacher. We teachers constitute the greatest brigade of tattlers discovered since the dawn of time. I have seen one hookworm address delivered at one summer school advertised among 600,000 people in six months. The principles advanced by the Religious Educational Association will

spread among the teachers more rapidly for the reason that as a class they are more universally religious than any other class of society. A speaker at the State Sunday-school Convention which met in conjunction with the University of Virginia Summer School last summer, asked that those of the 1,200 teachers present who were also Sunday-school teachers should raise their hands. Every teacher raised a hand.

We can render an extraordinary service in this hour of industrial awakening, of economic transformation, if we miss not our opportunity. Let us recognize that nothing is good for American life if it is not good for rural life. We must know that all great awakenings work upwards from the rural classes, before they are ultimately incorporated into the life of the nation. Our reconstruction of the spiritual life of this nation may seep downward from the academician, but it must again find its way upward before its concrete effects are really to take hold of humanity. It is well to clear up the confusion existing with regard to religious concepts, it is well to adjust our moral principles by the discovery of new symbols of communication which are more clearly adapted to our transformed civilization,—but the discovery and the enunciation are not enough. We must see to it that our ideals are concretely realized in the life of the average American citizen. After all it is not what we shoot, nor how many times we fire that count, but what we hit and how effectively.

Eighth General Convention

"The Home"

PROVIDENCE, R. I.

February 14-16, 1911