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as it does not yet embrace the truth of the past. As soon as you attain the positive aspect of your new truth you will find that the old view is only a prior stage of your own, of your new truth. It was merely the last station on the road to reach your present position.

Above all, we, conservatives as well as liberals, must be guided by an unshaken confidence in truth. If our God is not the God of truth, he is an illusion; let the illusion go. But if our God is the God of truth, let us not shrink from seeing even our conception of God change and grow and broaden. In a scientific age and in the minds of scientific men, the conception of God will necessarily be more scientific and more philosophical.

TRAINING RELIGIOUS LEADERS FOR CHURCH WORK IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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The country community a half century ago was a little world within itself; it was practically self-supporting. Within three miles of my home, when a country boy, was a grist mill, saw mill, harness shop, blacksmith and wagon shop, foundry, woolen factory, tannery and gun shop. The distillery was still there but out of use. There were the ordinary craftsmen such as the millwright, cobbler, hatter, tailor, carpenter, painter, stone mason and others.

The farmer conducted his farm, not to make money but to provide a living; he aimed to raise as far as possible everything his family would need, with a small surplus to trade for the necessary services of the craftsmen and for other necessities which could not be procured on the farm. Very little money was in circulation in rural communities. The country merchant could not pay cash for farm produce but would barter. It was often with difficulty that the farmer could secure enough currency to pay his taxes.

Means of travel were meager and uncomfortable; the roads were very poor and there were few occasions when one found

it desirable or necessary to travel outside of his own community.

While there were a few books, weekly and religious newspapers, the modern cheap magazine was unknown. The dime novel, unpopular with the heads of families, had a secret circulation in most neighborhoods.

The rural community had, under such conditions, to provide its own entertainment and social life. Bees and frolics, in which all the people in the community would join for work and play, were common. During the winter months the school house was the center of social life; singing schools, literary societies and spelling bees gave the young people an opportunity to meet and have a good time. Under these isolated conditions the country church was a great factor in the life of the community. Nearly everybody attended church. Not always perhaps to satisfy a hunger for religious instruction or to enter the sanctuary for the purpose of worship, but often no doubt because of the opportunity it offered for a little indulgence in social life—to meet and greet friends and get the news.

The pulpit had a mighty influence in moulding the lives of the young people. Their minds were unbiased and very receptive. The preacher almost held the destinies of the young people in his grasp. He could send the brighter boys, as he often did, into the ministry. He frequently was their teacher during their preparation for college. Parents sought his advice as to the future career of their children. He was the counsellor and advisor of his people concerning all educational and religious matters. He looked carefully after the religious instruction, visiting each family for the purpose of examining them on the Shorter Catechism and their growth in grace. The minister in those days was the natural leader in his community. He was often the only educated man. His calling was held in great respect. He took little interest in business affairs. He was dignified; his calling set him apart from his people and gave him a certain authority over them.

These were the conditions in the rural districts until within two or three decades ago. Since that time they have undergone a rapid change. The large factory located in the city has put the small country shop out of business entirely. All the small industries, except such as are necessary for immediate repair work, have disappeared from rural communities. Improved machinery on the farm has made it possible for one

man to do the work which a few years ago required the labor of several men. The rapid growth of the cities has created a demand for farm products. The farmer now must raise enough to feed not only his own family but his brother's family in the city as well. All farm products have now a ready cash value. This has made it possible for the farmer to select the line of farming which is suited to his taste and for which his land is adapted.

The carding mill, the blacksmith shop, the old grist mill and even the country postoffice have gone never to return. The school and the church still remain as old landmarks and too often they are but little more.

The rural community has within the past two or three decades undergone great changes economically, socially and religiously. In the newer order of things many of the old, substantial families, which stood for all that was good and wholesome, have disappeared, and tenant farmers have taken their places. The country has taken on the city's hurry and scramble for money. Farming has become a business and the farmer now tills his soil not merely for a living for his family, but to lay up money.

Free mail delivery, telephones, electric cars and automobiles have freed country life of much of its isolation and made it a place where the educated, refined, and indeed, anyone, might wish to live.

These wonderful improvements, together with the demand and consequent better prices for farm products, brought about a great agricultural awakening. It is moving rapidly forward. "Back to the Land" is the cry now heard on all hands, and agriculture is now the most popular word in the English language.

In this great onward movement in rural life, what part shall the country church play? Other agencies have moved rapidly while the rural church has seemingly moved but little. One who returns to his old rural neighborhood after an absence of thirty or forty years, will not feel at home until he reaches the old church. Here the changes will not be very marked. Very often he will find it dilapidated and forsaken; sometimes a new building has taken the place of the old one. The churches are, however, much the same as they were a half century ago. They are open on the Sabbath for religious services. At other times they are closed. They endeavor to

minister to the spiritual needs of the people, but do little for the educational and social needs of the community.

If the country church is to regain the dominating influence that it held a half century ago, it must meet the changed country conditions and serve the people in a new and broader field. It must revise its old belief that only spiritual and strictly religious matters are sacred, and that all social and business affairs are secular and have no connection with the church, and learn as the Christian world of today generally believes, that all wholesome play and honest toil are sacred; that they are necessary for the development of not only a sound physical and moral being but a highly religious being as well.

As other agencies which supplied social life and play to the young people in the country have largely disappeared, it is the duty of the church, even for its own sake, to minister to the needs of the community and meet the new demands and be aggressive along all lines.

The church should serve all the community; its building should be the center of not only the religious life but of the economic and social life as well. It should be the home of the Farmers' Club, the Good Roads Club and other farmers' organizations, and the center of the social life of the community. In the summer, ball fields, tennis courts and apparatus for the use of the younger children should be provided, and for the winter, if possible, a room for basket ball. The young people should be encouraged to hold amateur theatricals and sustain a good lecture course, a part of which should be music of a high order. If there is anything that cannot be held with propriety in a church, it is very doubtful if it should be held anywhere.

There is a great future for the country church if it can awake and take advantage of the great opportunity awaiting it. If it cannot, or does not, do this, other agencies will step in and do the work. If the country church was fulfilling its mission today, there would be no necessity for the Y. M. C. A. to extend its efforts, as it is doing in many places, into the country districts.

But who shall lead the modern country church? First, "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." These qualifications are not acquired but inherent, and should apply to all leaders.

It goes without saying that the country minister should have for this work the full college and seminary training. This should be the standard. He should have additional training in agriculture and athletics.

In addition to a genuine love for the country and country life, the pastor of a rural church should have some knowledge of scientific and practical agriculture. This knowledge may be meager at first but he must acquire it if he expects to get close to his people and secure their confidence. Some one has said that a country preacher should be a graduate of an agricultural college. If you will substitute such a course for the traditional classical course and add the seminary training, I would not object. I would care but little if his full seminary course was confined to a study of church history and the English Bible.

But even for country work the student will not go far astray in taking the regular college and seminary courses, provided he sets about diligently to add to this training a thorough knowledge of the great industry in which his parishioners are engaged. The young minister can acquire agricultural knowledge very rapidly. A half dozen books, two or three good agricultural papers and the bulletins which can be secured free of charge from the Department of Agriculture, Washington, and from all the State Experiment stations, will give him a very good start, and he will soon be able to tell his people some things about their business which they did not know before and they will set him down at once as a bright fellow.

I have in mind a minister who accepted a country charge. He was brought up in a large city and knew nothing about agriculture. By a diligent use of bulletins and books he was soon able to take part in the discussion at the Farmers' Clubs which, upon his advice, were held in his church. His knowledge of agriculture grew so rapidly that he was soon looked upon as an authority, and when a very wealthy man bought a large farm in his neighborhood and wished to develop it into a model farm, he employed this minister to act as superintendent. The minister accepted and now acts as an advisor for this large project, and his congregation made up of farmers seem to enjoy his preaching better than ever. He has been exceptionally successful in his work, largely due, I think, to the fact that he is in such close touch with his people.

There is nothing which appeals to young people, and especially boys, like athletics. They enjoy physical feats—some form of play which requires daring, force; a contest where there is a match of strength, agility and skill. The open-air games such as baseball, football, running, jumping and pole vaulting especially appeal to them. If the minister is able to organize and direct the boys and young men of his community in these things, he will establish a relationship which can be turned to good advantage along the various lines of church work. But the work is worthy of itself. An interest in athletics will displace amusements of a lower order; will develop a community patriotism and bring to the individual a physical pride which will have the tendency to make of him a clean, self-controlled, fair-minded citizen. A sufficient knowledge of the different games and sports to enable the minister to direct the young people, and the comradeship in these activities formed by being one with them, will make him an effective leader. He must throw off his coat and for the time be one of them.

The pastor of a half century ago was over his flock; the pastor of the present day must be one of them. He must touch the lives of his people on all sides; in their daily work, their social life, their joys and pleasures, not so much that he may bring them into the kingdom of Christ but rather because honest toil and social pleasures are already a part of his kingdom and should be kept on a high moral plane.

The spirit of co-operation has been growing in recent years among the different denominations of Christians, but what is needed is co-operation to the extent of eliminating a majority of the village churches throughout the country. It is very common for three or four churches of different denominations to be occupying a field which could be well served by one church, and three or four ministers, each preaching to a handful of people with no possible chance to increase their number to any appreciable extent. One strong church could do the work better than four weak ones. One minister could be well paid, the other financial obligations of the church met, and the extra ministers would be free to work in some other field where their services were needed.

How can the church cry out against national waste or preach conservation when often three or four men are assigned to do one man's work? The differences which seemed at one

time to make the various denominations necessary have largely passed away, and it would seem that the Christian spirit would prompt the leaders of the church, and all the members, to co-operate in consolidating the weaker churches so that greater efficiency can be attained and at a much less cost.

The brighter ministers are drawn to the cities, not so much because of larger salaries as because of larger opportunities. Any one of the three or four churches in a country village does not offer much opportunity to the bright young preacher who is anxious to make his life count for something. Be he ever so able and earnest, what can he accomplish in such a restricted field? Someone has said that the minister who chooses such a location does not enter a field of labor but enters a hole. Men would be more ready to fit themselves for country work if the fields of labor were larger and less restricted.

If the different churches were business or manufacturing concerns the owners would figure out some plan for consolidation. They could not, and would not, suffer such an enormous waste to continue. Shall our church leaders—those who are high in the councils of our churches and direct their management—permit this over churching to continue forever?

The Christian religion owes a tremendous debt to the country church. For centuries it has been the main source of the supply of ministers; I can recall ten who have entered this calling from the little country church in which I was reared. A large percentage of the strong pillars of our city churches received their early training in the country church. The entire church must come to the assistance of so vital a factor, and young men be induced to make special preparation and to settle in the country permanently. Their fields of labor must be made such that the very best trained young men will not hesitate to take up work in the country.

Realizing the vital importance of the country church to the welfare of the rural community, the institution—the Michigan Agricultural College—with which I have the honor to be connected, has, during the past two summers, held conferences for rural ministers. These have continued for one week. In the forenoon they listened to addresses by ministers who had been eminently successful in country church work. In the afternoon they received instruction in horticulture, gardening, poultry or some other line of agriculture in which they were interested. In the evening lectures by prominent rural work-

ers were given. We have invited them to bring their wives along, and in the afternoons have provided for the women, demonstrations in domestic science and talks on household management, flower and vegetable gardening, etc. This conference was attended each summer by about sixty ministers. The enthusiasm shown by those who attended and their cordial expression of satisfaction have convinced our Board of Control that the work should be continued for the present. Another conference will be held next July.

Ministers should not make the country church a stepping stone to a city charge. If a city pulpit is their aim, they will not become interested in country life and the country people will not become interested in them. Too many country pulpits are filled by men of this type and they wonder why people do not respond to their preaching. It is very important that the country minister have a real enthusiasm for country life. But to be enduring, this enthusiasm must be based on something more substantial than bright sunshine, birds and brooklets. There must be an appreciation of the soil and what its conservation and improvement means to our civilization.

The minister must understand that there is a country problem just as there is a city problem and he must be able to set his church to work to solve this problem. The work of the church should be so directed as to make the country community a better place in which to live. The better the religious and social life of the community, the greater will be the inducement for good families and worthy young men and young women to remain there and not move to the city. To swing the country church into line with the great economic and social movements is the task for strong men, for leaders who believe in the mission of the country church and who, after long and special preparation, are willing to devote all their energies to its upbuilding.