FISKE GEORGE WALTER

THE CHALLENGE OF THE COUNTRY: A STUDY OF COUNTRY LIFE OPPORTUNITY

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Содержание

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Why does he want to leave his father's farm to go to the city? He ought to be able to find his highest happiness and usefulness in the country, his native environment, where he is sadly needed. Can we make it worth while for this boy to invest his life in rural leadership?

PREFACE

This study of country life opportunity and analysis of various phases of the rural problems in America has been written at the request of the International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations, particularly for their County Work and Student departments. The former desired a handbook for the training of leaders in rural Christian work and the latter a

textbook for the use of college students in Christian Associations wishing to study the fundamentals of rural social service and rural progress. It is the sincere hope of those who have asked for this book that it may bring to very many earnest young men and women, and especially in the colleges of the United States and Canada, a challenging vision of the need of trained leadership in every phase of rural life, as well as a real opportunity for life investment.

Being the first book in the field which makes available the results of the Thirteenth U. S. Census, it is hoped that its fresh treatment of the latest aspects of the rural problems will commend itself to general readers who are interested in the Rural Life Movement and the welfare of the rural three-fifths of America.

The author acknowledges with thanks the courtesy of the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions, the Macmillan Company and *Rural Manhood*, in granting the use of the cuts appearing in this volume.

INTRODUCTION

COUNTRY LIFE OPPORTUNITY

The glare of the city dazzles the eyes of many a man in

college. For a generation college debates, in class, club and fraternity, have popularized all phases of the city problem, the very difficulties of which have challenged many a country-bred boy to throw in his life where the maelstrom was the swiftest.

In recent years however the country problem has been claiming its share of attention. It has grown to the dignity of a national issue. The great Rural Life Movement, starting from the Agricultural Colleges, has enlisted the intelligent cooperation of far-visioned men in many professions. Thinking people see clearly that in spite of the growth of cities, the nation is still rural. Agriculture is still the main business of our people. The nation's prosperity still depends upon "bumper crops." The nation's character still depends upon country conscience. Not only is it true that most of our leaders in politics, in the pulpit, in all professions and in the great industries were born and bred in the country; the city is still looking to the country to develop in large degree the leadership of the future.

Were it not for the immigration tides and the continuous supply of fresh young life from the country, the city would be unable to maintain itself; it would be crushed beneath its burdens. For the city is the "Graveyard of the national physique." With its moral and industrial overstrain, it is the burial place of health, as well as youthful ambitions and hopes, for many a young person not accustomed to its high-geared life. The nervous system rebels against the city pace. In an incognito life the character crumbles under the subtle disintegration of city temptations. The young

man with exceptional ability finds his way to high success in the city; the average man trudges on in mediocrity, lost in the crowd – just a "high private in the rear rank," when he might have stayed in the country home and won a measure of real influence and substantial happiness in his natural environment.

Not only has the lure of the city drawn thousands of young people who were better off in their country homes, the real claims of the country village upon those young people have but timidly been uttered. Not only has the call of the city been magnified by artificial echoes, the call of the open country has scarcely been sounded at all. The opportunity of the city as a life arena has been advertised beyond all reason. It is time to talk of the life chance for stalwart young Americans to stay right in the country and realize their high privileges.

One per cent. of our young manhood and womanhood is found in college halls. They are in many respects the chosen youth of the land. A few are sent there by indulgent parents, but the great majority are there mainly because of personal ambition, the urge of a mighty impulse to make their lives count, and to get the best preparation for the work of life, wherever their lot may be cast. Yet selfishness is not the main element in this ambition. The truest idealists, the finest altruists are right here among these eager college students. In their four years of liberal training they are often reminded that the real motive of it all is "Education for power and power for service."

The subtle sarcasm "You may lead a boy to college but you

cannot make him think" is quite needless in most cases. It would be truer to say you cannot stop his thinking. Increasingly, in the later years of college life, the thinking takes the direction of life planning, the discussion of a real life-mission. Not only in the so-called Christian colleges, but even in the State universities, which are fast becoming centers of real religious life and power, the best men and women are now planning their future according to what they believe to be the will of God for them. Many have caught the vision of the possibility of genuine consecration in any honorable life calling, making it a life of genuine service, which after all is life's greatest opportunity. For such young men and women the question simply is: What shall this service be and where shall it be rendered?

The same problem of life investment is confronting the young men and women who are not in the colleges. Idealism is not at all confined to college halls. Wherever this book may find young men and women weighing seriously their great life question, may it help them to see the real opportunity offered them in the roomy fields of rural life and leadership.

CHAPTER I
THE RURAL PROBLEM

ITS DEVELOPMENT AND PRESENT URGENCY

I. The Problem Stated and Defined

Early in the year 1912, some five hundred leading business and professional men of the cities of New York state met at a banquet, under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association. During the evening it was discovered that nine-tenths of these influential city leaders had come from country homes. They were born on farms in the open country or in rural villages of 2,500 population or less.

Facts like these no longer surprise intelligent people. They are common to most cities, at least on our American continent; and herein is the crux of the rural problem. At great sacrifice for a century the country has been making the city. Doubtless thousands of incompetent citizens have been forced off the farms by the development of farm machinery; and the country was little poorer for their loss. But in surrendering to the city countless farm boys of character and promise who have since become the

city's leaders, many a rural village has suffered irreparably. To be sure this seems to be one of the village's main functions, to furnish leaders for the city; and it has usually been proud of its opportunity. It is the *wholesale* character of this generous community sacrifice which has developed trouble.

The rural problem is the problem of maintaining in our farm and village communities a Christian civilization with modern American ideals of happiness, efficiency and progress.

It is a problem of industrial efficiency, of economic progress, of social cooperation and recreation, of home comfort, of educational equipment for rural life, of personal happiness, of religious vitality and of institutional development for community service. Though the problem would exist independently of the city, its acuteness is due to city competition.

The fact that city leadership is still largely drawn from the country makes the rural problem of vital importance to the welfare of the city and in a real sense a national issue.

A Classification of Communities

The terms rural and urban, country and city, town, village and township are so variously used they cause much ambiguity. The last is primarily geographical rather than social. The word town means township in New England and nothing in particular anywhere else. The others are relative terms used differently by different people. For years the line between rural and urban was arbitrarily set at the 8,000 mark, but the thirteenth census has placed it at 2,500. It seems petty however to dub a village of

2,501 people a city! This is convenient but very inaccurate. There are 38 "towns" in Massachusetts alone having over 8,000 people which refuse to be called cities.

Cities of the first class have a population of 100,000 upwards; cities of the second class number from 25,000 to 100,000 people; and communities from 8,000 to 25,000 may well be styled small cities. The term village is naturally applied to a community of 2,500 or less. When located in the country it is a country village; when near a city it is a suburban village and essentially urban. When no community center is visible, the term "open country" best fits the case.

The disputed territory between 2,500 and 8,000 will be urban or rural, according to circumstances. A community of this size in the urban tract is by no means rural. But if away from the domination of city life it is purely country. The best term the writer has been able to find for this comfortable and prosperous type of American communities, – there are over 4,500 of them, between the village of 2,500 and the city of 8,000 people, – is the good old New England term *town*; which may be either rural or urban according to its distance from the nearest city.

In the last analysis the terms rural and urban are qualitative rather than quantitative. In spite of the apparent paradox, there are rural cities and urban villages; small provincial cities where the people are largely rural-minded, and suburban villages of a few hundred people whose interests are all in the life of the city. But in general, the scope of the term "country life" as used in this

book will be understood to include the life of the open country, the rural village and most country towns of 8,000 people or less, whose outlook is the sky and the soil rather than the brick walls and limited horizon of the city streets.

II. City and Country

How the Growing City Developed the Problem

We can almost say the growth of the city made the country problem. It would be nearer the truth to say, it made the problem serious. The problem of rural progress would still exist, even if there were no cities; but had the city not been drafting its best blood from the villages for more than half a century, we should probably not be anxious about the rural problem to-day, for it is this loss of leadership which has made rural progress so slow and difficult.

It is well to remember that the growth of cities is not merely an American fact. It is universal in all the civilized world. Wherever the modern industrial system holds sway the cities have been growing phenomenally. In fact the city population in this country is less in proportion than the city population of England, Scotland, Wales, Australia, Belgium, Saxony, The Netherlands and Prussia.

The present gains of American cities are largely due to immigration and to the natural increase of births over deaths, especially in recent years with improved sanitation, but for many decades past the city has gained largely at the expense of the country. Chicago became a city of over two million before the first white child born there died, in March, 1907. Meanwhile, in the decade preceding 1890, 792 Illinois rural townships lost population, in the following decade 522, and in the decade 1900-1910, 1113, in spite of the agricultural wealth of this rich prairie state. Likewise New York city (with Brooklyn) has doubled in twenty years since 1890; while in a single decade almost 70 % of the rural townships in the state reported a loss. The rural state of Iowa actually reports a net loss of 7,000 for the last decade (1900), though Des Moines alone gained 24,200, and all but two of the cities above 8,000 grew.[1]

Naturally in the older sections of the country the rural losses hitherto have been most startling. In the rural sections of New Hampshire Dr. W. L. Anderson found serious depletion from 1890 to 1900, "a great enough loss to strain rural society"; and the 1910 census reports even worse losses. The same has been only less true of the rural districts in Maine, Vermont, eastern Connecticut and portions of all the older states. The cities' gains cost the country dear, in abandoned farms, weakened schools and churches and discouraged communities drained of their vitality.

The Surprising Growth of Rural America

[1] This loss however was in the early half of the decade, as the state census shows.

However, in spite of this story of rural depletion which has been often rehearsed, the rural sections of our country altogether have made surprising gains. City people especially are astonished to learn that our country, even if the cities should be eliminated entirely from the reckoning, has been making substantial progress. The 8,000 mark was for years reckoned as the urban point. Counting only communities of less than 8,000 people we find that in 1850 the country population numbered 20,294,290; in 1890, 44,349,747; and in 1906, 54,107,571. If we consider only communities of 2,500 or less, we find 35⅓ millions in 1880; over 45 millions in 1900; and nearly 50 millions in 1910. The last census reports almost 53½ millions of people living in villages of 5,000 or less; or 58.2 % of the population.

It is obvious that in spite of dismal prophecies to the contrary from city specialists, and in spite of the undeniable drift to the city for decades, the total country population in America has continued to grow. Rural America is still growing 11.2 % in a decade. Outside of the densely populated north-eastern states, the nation as a whole is still rural and will long remain so. Where the soil is poor, further rural depletion must be expected; but with normal conditions and with an increasingly attractive rural life, most country towns and villages may be expected to hold their own reasonably well against the city tide.

We hear little to-day about the abandoned farms of New England. In the decade past they have steadily found a market and hundreds of them have been reclaimed for summer occupancy or

for suburban homes for city men. Even in rural counties where decay has been notable in many townships, there are always prosperous towns and villages, along the rivers and the railroads, where substantial prosperity will doubtless continue for many years to come.

A False and Misleading Comparison

Unquestionably a false impression on this question has prevailed in the cities for a generation past because of obviously unjust comparisons. Families coming from decadent villages to prosperous cities have talked much of rural decadence. Stories of murders and low morals in neglected rural communities have made a great impression on people living in clean city wards. Meanwhile, not five blocks away, congested city slums never visited by the prosperous, concealed from popular view, festering social corruption and indescribable poverty and vice. Let us be fair in our sociological comparisons and no longer judge our rural worst by our urban best. Let the rural slum be compared with the city slum and the city avenues with the prosperous, self-respecting sections of the country; then contrasts will not be so lurid and we shall see the facts in fair perspective.

As soon as we learn to discriminate we find that country life as a whole is wholesome, that country people as a rule are as happy as city people and fully as jovial and light-hearted and that the fundamental prosperity of most country districts has been gaining these past two decades. While rural depletion is widespread, rural *decadence* must be studied not

as a general condition at all, but as the abnormal, unusual state found in special sections, such as regions handicapped by poor soil, sections drained by neighboring industrial centers, isolated mountain districts where life is bare and strenuous, and the open country away from railroads and the great life currents. With this word of caution let us examine the latest reports of rural depletion.

III. Rural Depletion and Rural Degeneracy

The Present Extent of Rural Depletion

The thirteenth census (1910) shows that in spite of the steady gain in the country districts of the United States as a whole, thousands of rural townships have continued to lose population. These shrinking communities are found everywhere except in the newest agricultural regions of the West and in the black belt of the South. The older the communities the earlier this tendency to rural depletion became serious. The trouble began in New England, but now the rural problem is moving west. Until the last census New England was the only section of the country to show this loss as a whole; but the 1910 figures just reported give a net rural loss for the first time in the group of states known as the "east north central." Yet in both cases, the net rural loss for the

section was less than 1 %.

Taking 2,500 as the dividing line, the last census reports that in every state in the country the urban population has increased since 1900, but in six states the rural population has diminished. In two states, Montana and Wyoming, the country has outstripped the city; but in general, the country over, the cities grew from 1900 to 1910 three times as fast as the rural sections. While the country communities of the United States have grown 11.2 % the cities and towns above 2,500 have increased 34.8 %. In the prosperous state of Iowa, the only state reporting an absolute loss, the rural sections lost nearly 120,000. Rural Indiana lost 83,127, or 5.1 %; rural Missouri lost 68,716, or 3.5 %; rural villages in New Hampshire show a net loss of 10,108, or 5.4 %; and rural Vermont has suffered a further loss of 8,222, or 4.2 %, though the state as a whole made the largest gain for forty years.

These latest facts from the census are valuable for correcting false notions of rural depletion. It is unfair to count up the number of rural townships in a state which have failed to grow and report that state rurally decadent. For example, a very large majority of the Illinois townships with less than 2,500 people failed to hold their own the past decade, – 1,113 out of 1,592. But in many cases the loss was merely nominal; consequently we find, in spite of the tremendous drain to Chicago, the rural population of the state as a whole made a slight gain. This case is typical. Thousands of rural villages have lost population; yet

other thousands have gained enough to offset these losses in all but the six states mentioned.

Losses in Country Towns

New England continues to report losses, not only in the rural villages, but also in the country towns of between 2,500 and 5,000 population. This was true the last decade in every New England state except Vermont. Massachusetts towns of this type made a net loss of about 30,000, or 15 %; although nearly all the larger towns and many villages in that remarkably prosperous state made gains. This class of towns has also made net losses the past decade in Indiana, Iowa, South Dakota, South Carolina, Alabama and Mississippi, although in these last four states the smaller communities under 2,500 made substantial gains. This indicates in some widely different sections of the country an apparently better prosperity in the open country than in many country towns. Similarly in several states, the larger towns between five and ten thousand population have netted a loss in the last decade, as in New York State, although the smaller villages have on the average prospered.

The Need of Qualitative Analysis of the Census

We must not be staggered by mere figures. A *qualitative* analysis of the census sometimes saves us from pessimism. Someone has said "Even a *growing* town has no moral insurance." Mere growth does not necessarily mean improvement either in business or morals. It is quite possible that some of the "decadent" villages which have lost 15 % of their population

are really better places for residence than they were before and possibly fully as prosperous. It depends entirely on the kind of people that remain. If it is really the survival of the fittest, there will be no serious problem. But if it is "the heritage of the unfit," if only the unambitious and shiftless have remained, then the village is probably doomed.

In any case, the situation is due to the inevitable process of social and economic adjustment. Changes in agricultural method and opportunity are responsible for much of it. Doubtless farm machinery has driven many laborers away. Likewise the rising price of land has sent away the speculative farmer to pastures new, especially from eastern Canada and the middle west in the States to the low-priced lands of the rich Canadian west.[2] The falling native birthrate, especially in New England, has been as potent a factor in diminishing rural sections as has the lure of the cities.

"In the main," says Dr. Anderson in his very discriminating study of the problem, "rural depletion is over. In its whole course it has been an adjustment of industrial necessity and of economic health; everywhere it is a phase of progress and lends itself to the optimist that discerns deeper meanings. Nevertheless depletion

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[2] For the year ending March 31, 1910, 103,798 immigrants from the United States settled in western Canada, while only 59,790 came from Great Britain and Ireland. The wealth of the immigrants settling in western Canada during the five years previous to that date was estimated as follows. British, cash, $37,546,000; effects, $18,773,000. From United States, cash, $157,260,000; effects, $110,982,000. —*The Toronto Globe*, July 27, 1912.

has gone so far as to affect seriously all rural problems within the area of its action.

"The difficult and perplexing problems are found where the people are reduced in number. That broad though irregular belt of depleted rural communities, stretching from the marshes of the Atlantic shore to the banks of the Missouri, which have surrendered from ten to forty per cent. of their people, within which are many localities destined to experience further losses, calls for patient study of social forces and requires a reconstruction of the whole social outfit. But it should be remembered that an increasing population gathers in rural towns thickly strewn throughout the depleted tract, and that the cheer of their growth and thrift is as much a part of the rural situation as the perplexity incident to a diminishing body of people."[3]

Whereas the main trend in rural districts is toward better social and moral conditions as well as material prosperity, we do not have to look far to find local degeneracy in the isolated places among the hills or in unfertile sections which have been deserted by the ambitious and intelligent, leaving a pitiable residuum of "poor whites" behind. Such localities furnish the facts for the startling disclosures which form the basis of occasional newspaper and magazine articles such as Rollin Lynde Hartt's in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 83, *The Forum*, June 1892, the *St. Albans Messenger* Jan. 2, 1904, et cetera.

The Question of Degeneracy in City and Country

[3] "The Country Town," p. 76.

The question has long been debated as to whether criminals and defectives are more common in the city or the country. Dwellers in prosperous, well-governed suburban cities, that know no slums, are positive that the rural districts are degenerate. Country people in prosperous rural sections of Kansas, for instance, where no poor-house or jail can be found for many miles, insist that degeneracy is a city symptom! It is obvious that discrimination is necessary. The great majority of folks in both city and country are living a decent life; degeneracy is everywhere the exception. It would be fully as reasonable to condemn the city as a whole for the breeding places of vice, insanity and crime which we call the slums, as it is to characterize rural life in general as degenerate.

In view of the evident fact that both urban and rural communities have their defectives and delinquents, in varying ratio, depending on local conditions, Professor Giddings suggests a clear line of discrimination. "Degeneration manifests itself in the protean forms of suicide, insanity, crime and vice, which abound in the highest civilization, where the tension of life is extreme, and in those places from which civilization has ebbed and from which population has been drained, leaving a discouraged remnant to struggle against deteriorating conditions… Like insanity, crime occurs most frequently in densely populated towns on the one hand, and on the other in partially deserted rural districts. Murder is a phenomenon of both the frontier life of an advancing population and of the

declining civilization in its rear; it is preeminently the crime of the new town and the decaying town… Crimes of all kinds are less frequent in prosperous agricultural communities and in thriving towns of moderate size, where the relation of income to the standard of living is such that the life struggle is not severe."[4]

Stages and Symptoms of Rural Decadence

In his discussion of the country problem, Dr. Josiah Strong reminds us that rural decadence comes as an easy evolution passing through rather distinct stages, when the rural community has really lost its best blood. Roads deteriorate, – those all-important arteries of country life; then property soon depreciates; schools and churches are weakened; often foreign immigrants crowd out the native stock, sometimes infusing real strength, but often introducing the continental system of rural peasantry, with absentee landlords. Then isolation increases, with a strong tendency toward degeneracy and demoralization.

Where this process is going on we are not surprised to find such conditions as Rev. H. L. Hutchins described in 1906 in an address before the annual meeting of the Connecticut Bible Society at New Haven. From a very intimate experience of many years in the rural sections of Connecticut, he gave a most disheartening report, dwelling upon the increasing ignorance of the people, their growing vices, the open contempt for and disregard of marriage, the alarming growth of idiocy, partly the result of inbreeding and incest, some localities being cited

[4] Principles of Sociology, Giddings, p. 348.

where practically all the residents were brothers and sisters or cousins, often of the same name, so that surnames were wholly displaced by nicknames; the omnipresence of cheap whiskey with its terrible effects, the resulting frequency of crimes of violence; the feebleness and backwardness of the schools and the neglect and decay of the churches, resulting in inevitable lapse into virtual paganism and barbarism, in sections that two generations ago were inhabited by stalwart Christian men and women of the staunch old New England families.

Doubtless similar illustrations of degradation could be cited from the neglected corners of all the older states of the country, where several generations of social evolution have ensued under bad circumstances. In all the central states, conditions of rural degeneracy now exist which a few years ago were supposed to be confined to New England; for the same causes have been repeating themselves in other surroundings.

An illustration of "discouraged remnants" is cited by Dr. Warren H. Wilson. "I remember driving, in my early ministry, from a prosperous farming section into a weakened community, whose lands had a lowered value because they lay too far from the railroad. My path to a chapel service on Sunday afternoon lay past seven successive farmhouses in each of which lived one member of a family, clinging in solitary misery to a small acreage which had a few years earlier supported a household. In that same neighborhood was one group of descendants of two brothers, which had in two generations produced sixteen suicides. 'They

could not stand trouble,' the neighbors said. The lowered value of their land, with consequent burdens, humiliation and strain, had crushed them. The very ability and distinction of the family in the earlier period had the effect by contrast to sink them lower down."[5]

The Nam's Hollow Case

Ordinary rural degeneracy, however, is more apt to be associated with feeble-mindedness. An alarming, but perhaps typical case is described in a recent issue of *The Survey*. A small rural community in New York state, which the author calls for convenience Nam's Hollow, contains 232 licentious women and 199 licentious men out of a total population of 669; the great proportion being mentally as well as morally defective. A great amount of consanguineous marriage has taken place, – mostly without the formalities prescribed by law. Sex relations past and present are hopelessly entangled. Fifty-four of the inhabitants of the Hollow have been in custody either in county houses or asylums, many are paupers, and forty have served terms in state's prison or jail. There are 192 persons who are besotted by the use of liquor "in extreme quantities."

Apparently most of this degeneracy can be traced back to a single family whose descendants have numbered 800. With all sorts of evil traits to begin with, this family by constant inbreeding have made persistent these evil characteristics in all the different households and have cursed the whole life of the

[5] "The Church in the Open Country," p. 9.

Hollow, not to mention the unknown evil wrought elsewhere, whither some of them have gone. "The imbeciles and harlots and criminalistic are bred in the Hollow, but they do not all stay there." A case is cited of a family of only five which has cost the county up to date $6,300, and the expense likely to continue for many years yet. "Would you rouse yourself if you learned there were ten cases of bubonic plague at a point not 200 miles away?" asks the investigator of Nam's Hollow. "Is not a breeding spot of uncontrolled animalism as much of a menace to our civilization?"[6]

A Note of Warning

These sad stories of rural degeneracy must not make us pessimists. We need not lose our faith in the open country. It is only the exceptional community which has really become decadent and demoralized. These communities however warn us that even self-respecting rural villages are in danger of following the same sad process of decay unless they are kept on the high plane of wholesome Christian living and community efficiency. What is to prevent thousands of other rural townships, which are now losing population, gradually sinking to the low level of personal shiftlessness and institutional uselessness which are the marks of degeneracy? Nothing can prevent this but the right kind of intelligent, consecrated leadership. It is not so largely a quantitative matter, however, as Dr. Josiah Strong suggested

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[6] *The Survey*, March 2, 1912. "The Nams; the Feeble-minded as Country Dwellers." Charles B. Davenport. Ph.D.

twenty years ago in his stirring treatment of the subject. After citing the fact that 932 townships in New England were losing population in 1890, and 641 in New York, 919 in Pennsylvania, 775 in Ohio, et cetera, he suggests: "If this migration continues, and no new preventive measures are devised, I see no reason why isolation, irreligion, ignorance, vice and degradation should not increase in the country until we have a rural American peasantry, illiterate and immoral, possessing the rights of citizenship, but utterly incapable of performing or comprehending its duties."

After twenty years we find the rural depletion still continuing. Though New England in 1910 reports 143 fewer losing towns than in 1890, the census of 1910 in general furnishes little hope that the migration from the country sections is diminishing.[7] Our hope for the country rests in the fact that the problem has at last been recognized as a national issue and that a Country Life Movement of immense significance is actually bringing in a new rural civilization. "We must expect the steady deterioration of our rural population, unless effective preventive measures are devised," was Dr. Strong's warning two decades ago. To-day the challenge of the country not only quotes the peril of rural depletion and threatened degeneracy, but also appeals to consecrated young manhood and womanhood with a living faith in the permanency of a reconstructed rural life.

Our rural communities must be saved from decadence, for the sake of the nation. Professor Giddings well says: "Genius

is rarely born in the city. The city owes the great discoveries and immortal creations to those who have lived with nature and with simple folk. The country produces the original ideas, the raw materials of social life, and the city combines ideas and forms the social mind." In the threatened decadence of depleted rural communities, and in the lack of adequate leadership in many places, to revive a dying church, to equip a modern school, to develop a new rural civilization, to build a cooperating community with a really satisfying and efficient life, we have a problem which challenges both our patriotism and our religious spirit, for the problem is fundamentally a religious one.

IV. The Urgency of the Problem

A broad-minded leader of the religious life of college men has recently expressed his opinion that *the rural problem is more pressing just now than any other North American problem*. He is a city man and is giving his attention impartially to the needs of all sections. Two classes of people will be surprised by his statement. Many of his city neighbors are so overwhelmed by the serious needs of the city, they near-sightedly cannot see any particular problem in the country, – except how to take the next train for New York! And doubtless many country people, contented with second-rate conditions, are even unaware that they and their environment are being studied as a problem at all. Some prosperous farmers really resent the "interference"

of people interested in better rural conditions and say "the country would be all right if let alone." But neither sordid rural complacency nor urban obliviousness can satisfy thinking people. We know there is something the matter with country life. We discover that the vitality and stability of rural life is in very many places threatened. It is the business of Christian students and leaders to study the conditions and try to remove or remedy the causes.

A Hunt for Fundamental Causes

Depletion added to isolation, and later tending toward degeneracy, is what makes the rural problem acute. It is the growth of the city which has made the problem serious. If we would discover a constructive policy for handling this problem successfully by making country life worth while, and better able to compete with the city, then we must find out why the boys and girls go to the big towns and why their parents rent the farm and move into the village.

For two generations there has been a mighty life-current toward the cities, sweeping off the farm many of the brightest boys and most ambitious girls in all the country-side, whom the country could ill afford to spare. The city needed many of them doubtless; but not all, for it has not used all of them well. Everywhere the country has suffered from the loss of them. Why did they go? It is evident that a larger proportion of the brightest country boys and girls must be kept on the farms if the rural communities are to hold their own and the new rural civilization

really have a chance to develop as it should.

The Unfortunate Urbanizing of Rural Life

As a rule the whole *educational* trend is toward the city. The teachers of rural schools are mostly from the larger villages and towns where they have caught the city fever, and they infect the children. Even in the lower grades the stories of city life begin early to allure the country children, and with a subtle suggestion the echoes of the distant city's surging life come with all the power of the Arabian Nights tales. Early visits to the enchanted land of busy streets and wonderful stores and factories, the circus and the theater, deepen the impression, and the fascination grows.

In proportion to the nearness to the city, there has been a distinct urbanizing of rural life. To a degree this has been well. It has raised the standard of comfort in country homes and has had a distinct influence in favor of real culture and a higher plane of living. But the impression has come to prevail widely that the city is the source of all that is interesting, profitable and worth while, until many country folks have really come to think meanly of themselves and their surroundings, taking the superficial city estimate of rural values as the true one.

A real slavery to city fashions has been growing insidiously in the country. So far as this has affected the facial adornments of the farmer, it has made for progress; but as seen in the adoption of unhospitable vertical city architecture for country homes, – an insult to broad acres which suggest home-like

horizontals, – and the wearing by the women of cheap imitations of the flaunting finery of returning "cityfied" stenographers, it is surely an abomination pure and simple.

Bulky catalogs of mail-order houses, alluringly illustrated, have added to the craze, and the new furnishings of many rural homes resemble the tinsel trappings of cheap city flats, while substantial heirlooms of real taste and dignity are relegated to the attic. Fine rural discrimination as to the appropriate and the artistic is fast crumbling before the all-convincing argument, "It is *the thing* now in the city." To be sure there is much the country may well learn from the city, the finer phases of real culture, the cultivation of social graces in place of rustic bashfulness and boorish manners, and the saving element of industrial cooperation; but let these gains not be bought by surrendering rural self-respect or compromising rural sincerity, or losing the wholesome ruggedness of the country character. The new rural civilization must be indigenous to the soil, not a mere urbanizing veneer. Only so can it foster genuine community pride and loyalty to its own environment. But herein is the heart of our problem.

Why Country Boys and Girls Leave the Farm

The mere summary of reasons alleged by many individuals will be sufficient for our purpose, without enlarging upon them. Many of these were obtained by Director L. H. Bailey of Cornell, the master student of this problem. Countless boys have fled from the farm because they found the work

monotonous, laborious and uncongenial, the hours long, the work unorganized and apparently unrewarding, the father or employer hard, exacting and unfeeling. Many of them with experience only with old-fashioned methods, are sure that farming does not pay, that there is no money in the business compared with city employments, that the farmer cannot control prices, is forced to buy high and sell low, is handicapped by big mortgages, high taxes, and pressing creditors. It is both encouraging and suggestive that many country boys, with a real love for rural life, but feeling that farming requires a great deal of capital, are planning "to farm someday, after making enough money in some other business."

The phantom of farm drudgery haunts many boys. They feel that the work is too hard in old age, and that it cannot even be relieved sufficiently by machinery, that it is not intellectual enough and furthermore leaves a man too tired at night to enjoy reading or social opportunities. The work of farming seems to them quite unscientific and too dependent upon luck and chance and the fickle whims of the weather.

Farm life is shunned by many boys and girls because they say it is too narrow and confining, lacking in freedom, social advantages, activities and pleasures, which the city offers in infinite variety. They see their mother overworked and growing old before her time, getting along with few comforts or conveniences, a patient, uncomplaining drudge, living in social isolation, except for uncultivated neighbors who gossip

incessantly.

Many ambitious young people see little future on the farm. They feel that the farmer never can be famous in the outside world and that people have a low regard for him. In their village high school they have caught visions of high ideals; but they fail to discover high ideals in farm life and feel that high and noble achievement is impossible there, that the farmer cannot serve humanity in any large way and can attain little political influence or personal power.

With an adolescent craving for excitement, "something doing all the time," they are famished in the quiet open country and are irresistibly drawn to the high-geared city life, bizarre, spectacular, noisy, full of variety in sights, sounds, experiences, pleasures, comradeships, like a living vaudeville; and offering freedom from restraint in a life of easy incognito, with more time for recreation and "doing as you please." But with all the attractiveness of city life for the boys and girls, as compared with the simplicity of the rural home, the main pull cityward is probably "the job." They follow what they think is the easiest road to making a living, fancying that great prizes await them in the business life of the town.

Superficial and unreasonable as most of these alleged reasons are to-day, we must study them as genuine symptoms of a serious problem. If country life is to develop a permanently satisfying opportunity for the farm boys and girls, these conditions must be met. Isolation and drudgery must be somehow conquered. The

business of farming must be made more profitable, until clerking in the city cannot stand the competition. The social and recreative side of rural life must be developed. The rural community must be socialized and the country school must really fit for rural life. The lot of the farm mothers and daughters must be made easier and happier. Scientific farming must worthily appeal to the boys as a genuine profession, not a mere matter of luck with the weather, and the farm boy must no longer be treated as a slave but a partner in the firm.[8]

The Folly of Exploiting the Country Boy

An eminent Western lawyer addressing a rural life conference in Missouri a few weeks ago explained thus his leaving the farm: "When I was a boy on the farm we were compelled to rise about 4 o'clock every morning. From the time we got on our clothes until 7:30 we fed the live stock and milked the cows. Then breakfast. After breakfast, we worked in the field until 11:30, when, after spending at least a half hour caring for the teams we went to dinner. We went back to work at 1 o'clock and remained in the field until 7:30 o'clock. After quitting the fields we did chores until 8:30 or 9 o'clock, and then we were advised to go to bed

[8] The writer wishes to make it quite clear that he is thinking, in this discussion, merely of the boys and girls who *ought* to stay on the farm. Unquestionably many of them must and should go to the city. This book pleads merely for a *fair share* of the farm boys and girls to stay in the country, – those best fitted to maintain country life and rural institutions. Country life must be made so attractive and so worth-while that it will be to the advantage of more of the finest young people to invest their lives there. Every effort should be made to prevent a boy's going from the farm to the city, provided he is likely to make only a meager success in the city or possibly a failure.

right away so that we would be able to do a good day's work on the morrow."

No wonder the boy rebelled! This story harks back to the days when a father owned his son's labor until the boy was twenty-one, and could either use the boy on his own farm or have him "bound out" for a term of years for the father's personal profit. Such harsh tactlessness is seldom found today; but little of it will be found in the new rural civilization.[9] Country boys must not be exploited if we expect them to stay in the country as community builders. Many of them will gladly stay if given a real life chance.

The City's Dependence upon the Country

The country is the natural source of supply for the nation. The city has never yet been self-sustaining. It has always drawn its raw materials and its population from the open country. The country must continue to produce the food, the hardiest young men and women, and much of the idealism and best leadership of the nation. All of these have proven to be indigenous to country life. Our civilization is fundamentally rural, and the rural problem is a national problem, equally vital to the city and the whole country. The cities should remember that they have a vast deal at stake in the welfare of the rural districts.

The country for centuries got along fairly well without the city, and could continue to do so; but the city could not live a month

[9] Yet in a class of 115 college men at the Lake Geneva Student conference in June, 1912, a surprising number stated that they had suffered a similar experience as boys at home, though usually at times when the farm work was particularly pressing. One claimed that he had driven a riding cultivator by moonlight at 2 A. M.

without the country! The great railway strike last fall in England revealed the fact that Birmingham *had but a week's food supply*. A serious famine threatened, and this forced a speedy settlement. Meanwhile food could not be brought to the city except in small quantities, and the people of Birmingham learned in a striking way their utter dependence upon the country as their source of supply. The philosophy of one of the sages of China, uttered ages ago, is still profoundly true: "The well-being of a people is like a tree; agriculture is its root, manufactures and commerce are its branches and its life; but if the root be injured, the leaves fall, the branches break away and the tree dies."[10]

That far-seeing Irish leader, Sir Horace Plunkett, after a searching study of American conditions, is inclined to think that our great prosperous cities are blundering seriously in not concerning themselves more earnestly with the rural problem: "Has it been sufficiently considered how far the moral and physical health of the modern city depends upon the constant influx of fresh blood from the country, which has ever been the source from which the town draws its best citizenship? You cannot keep on indefinitely skimming the pan and have equally good milk left. Sooner or later, if the balance of trade in this human traffic be not adjusted, the raw material out of which urban society is made will be seriously deteriorated, and the symptoms of national degeneracy will be properly charged against those who neglected to foresee the evil and treat the

[10] Quoted by M. Jules Meline (Premier of France) in "The Return to the Land."

cause… The people of every state are largely bred in rural districts, and the physical and moral well-being of those districts must eventually influence the quality of the whole people."[11]

V. A Challenge to Faith

The seriousness of our problem is sufficiently clear. Our consideration in this chapter has been confined mainly to the personal factors. Certain important social and institutional factors will be further considered in Chapter V under Country Life Deficiencies. With all its serious difficulties and discouragements the rural problem is a splendid challenge to faith. There are many with the narrow city outlook who despair of the rural problem and consider that country life is doomed. There are still others who have faith in the country town and village but have lost their faith in the open country as an abiding place for rural homes. Before giving such people of little faith further hearing, we must voice the testimony of a host of country lovers who have a great and enduring faith in the country as the best place for breeding men, the most natural arena for developing character, the most favorable place for happy homes, and, for a splendid host of country boys and girls the most challenging opportunity for a life of service.

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[11] "The Rural Life Problem of the United States," p. 47.

Test Questions on Chapter I

1. – How would you define the Rural Problem?

2. – Illustrate how the growth of the city has affected the rural problem.

3. – Explain the terms rural, urban, city, town, and village.

4. – What misleading comparisons have been made between city and country conditions?

5. – In what six states has the rural population, as a whole, shown a net loss in the last ten years?

6. – To what extent has rural America grown in population the past half century?

7. – Describe the symptoms of a decadent village.

8. – Under what conditions do you find a village improving even when losing population?

9. – Discuss carefully the comparative degeneracy of the city and the country.

10. – Describe some of the stages of rural degeneracy.

11. – What signs of rural degeneracy have come under your personal observation and how do you account for the conditions?

12. – What evidences have you seen of the "urbanizing" of rural life, and what do you think about it?

13. – Why do country boys and girls leave the farm and go to the city?

14. – What must be done to make country life worth

while, so that a fair share of the boys and girls may be expected to stay there?

15. – How do you think a farmer ought to treat his boys?

16. – To what extent is the city dependent upon the country.

17. – Why do so many prosperous farmers rent their farms and give up country life?

18. – How does the village problem differ from the problem of the open country?

19. – Do you believe the open country will be permanently occupied by American homes, or must we develop a hamlet system, as in Europe and Asia?

20. – To what extent have you faith in the ultimate solution of the country problem?

CHAPTER II
COUNTRY LIFE OPTIMISM

I. Signs of a New Faith in Rural Life

THE FARM: BEST HOME OF THE FAMILY: MAIN SOURCE OF NATIONAL WEALTH: FOUNDATION OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY: THE NATURAL PROVIDENCE

This tribute to the fundamental value of rural life is a part of the classic inscription, cut in the marble over the massive entrances, on the new union railroad station at Washington, D. C. Its calm, clear faith is reassuring. It reminds us that there is unquestionably an abiding optimism in this matter of country life. It suggests, that in spite of rural depletion and decadence here and there, country life is so essential to our national welfare it will permanently maintain itself. So long as there is a city civilization to be fed and clothed, there must always be a rural civilization to produce the raw materials. The question is, will it be a *Christian* civilization?

Our opening chapter has made it clear, that if the rural problem is to be handled constructively and successfully, rural life must be made permanently satisfying and worth while. It must not only be attractive enough to retain *a fair share* of the boys and girls, but also rich enough in opportunity for self-expression, development and service to warrant their investing a life-time there without regrets.

The writer believes there are certain great attractions in country life and certain drawbacks and disadvantages in city life which, if fairly considered by the country boy, would help him to appreciate the privilege of living in the country. It is certainly true that there is a strong and growing sentiment in the city favoring rural life. Many city people are longing for the freedom of the open country and would be glad of the chance to move out on the land for their own sake as well as for the sake of their children.

In this connection the most interesting fact is the new interest in country life opportunity which city boys and young men are manifesting. The discontented country boy who has come to seek his fortune in the city finds there the city boy anxious to fit himself for a successful life in the country! In view of the facts, the farm boy tired of the old farm ought to ponder well Fishin' 'Zeke's philosophy:

> "Fish don't bite just for the wishin',
> Keep a pullin'!
> Change your bait and keep on fishin';
> Keep a pullin'!

Luck ain't nailed to any spot;
Men you envy, like as not,
Envy you your job and lot!
Keep a pullin'!"

In many agricultural colleges and state universities, we find an increasing proportion of students *coming from the cities* for training in the science of agriculture and the arts of rural life. This is a very significant and encouraging fact. It shows us that the tide has begun to turn. Rural life is coming to its own, for country life is beginning to be appreciated again after several decades of disfavor and neglect. Our purpose in this chapter is to discuss these matters in detail.

It is difficult to find a more comprehensive statement of the attractiveness of country life, in concrete terms, than this fine bit of rural optimism entitled The Country Boy's Creed:

THE COUNTRY BOY'S CREED

"I believe that the country which God made is more beautiful than the city which man made; that life out-of-doors and in touch with the earth is the natural life of man. I believe that work is work wherever I find it; but that work with Nature is more inspiring than work with the most intricate machinery. I believe that the dignity of labor depends not on what you do, but on how you do it; that opportunity comes to a boy on the farm as often as to a boy

> in the city; that life is larger and freer and happier on the farm than in the town; that my success depends not upon my location, but upon myself, – not upon my dreams, but upon what I actually do, not upon luck but upon pluck. I believe in working when you work and playing when you play, and in giving and demanding a square deal in every act of life."[12]

There are many contented country boys in comfortable modern homes and prosperous rural communities, who heartily assent to this rural confession of faith. "For substance of *doctrine*" many a man would frankly accept it after a more or less disappointing life in the city whirl. It is not difficult to find men who really regret that they left the farm in young manhood, now that country life has so greatly increased in attractiveness. "Farm life has changed a great deal," says one with a tone of regret, "since I left the farm twelve years ago. Machinery has been added, making the work easier; farming has become more scientific, giving scope to the man who does not wish to be a mere nobody. For the last few years there has been more money in farming."

Every year now at Cornell University, some men change their course from the overcrowded engineering to the agricultural department. This confession of a late change of heart about country life comes from one of the engineers who apparently wishes he had done likewise: "When I entered the university and registered in mechanical engineering, I had the idea that a fellow

[12] By Edwin Osgood Grover, the son of a country minister.

had to get off the farm, as the saying goes, 'to make something of himself in the world,' and that a living could be made more easily, with more enjoyment, in another profession. But now, after seeing a little of the other side of the question, if I had the four years back again, agriculture would be my college course. As for country life being unattractive, I have always found it much the reverse. The best and happiest days of my life have been on the farm, and I cannot but wish that I were going back again when through with school work."

City-bred Students in Agricultural Colleges

In reply to the question "Why are so many city boys studying agriculture?" a dean of a college of agriculture replied, "I think it is safe to say that a large number of city-bred boys are attracted to the agricultural colleges as a result of *the general movement of our cities toward the country*. The agitation which has caused the business man to look upon the rural community as more desirable than the city, leads him to send his son to an agricultural college in preference to other departments of the university."

This city-to-country movement is naturally strongest where the country-to-city movement has long been developing. The Massachusetts State College reports only about 25 % of its new students sons of farmers and 50 % of its enrollment from the cities. Yet even in the rural state of North Carolina, with 86 % in rural territory (under 2,500), the number of city boys studying agriculture in the state college is "large enough to make the fact striking."

In the College of Agriculture of the University of Illinois, there are 756 students enrolled this year. Eighty-one of these came from Chicago and 257 from other cities and towns above $5,000; making 45 % from urban centers.[13]

One-third of the agricultural students at the University of Missouri last year enrolled from cities of 8,000 or over, communities which formed 36 % of the state's population. In general it seems to be true that the proportion of city boys in the various agricultural colleges is approximately as large as the ratio of city population in the state; which indicates that city boys are almost as likely to seek technical training for country professions as the country boys are. In a few cases, as in Massachusetts, it is partly accounted for by the fact that the Agricultural College is the only state institution with free tuition. The breadth of the courses also draws many who do not plan for general farming but for specialized farming and the increasing variety of the modern rural professions. The facts clearly show that the city boys in state after state are seeing the vision of country life opportunity.

A study of the home addresses of American students at the New York State College of Agriculture, Cornell University, for a period of twelve years prior to 1907 shows 19 % from large cities, 34 % from small cities and towns, and 47 % from rural communities under 2,000. The proportion of city students is evidently now increasing, as indicated by this year's figures. Of

[13] Some allowance should be made for the possibility of students enrolling from a small city who actually live on a suburban farm.

the new students entering this year from within the state 57 % came from cities of 5,000 or over, 51 % of whom came from cities of 10,000 upwards. Making considerable allowance for the neglect to add "R. F. D." in registration, it is still evident that the splendid equipment for country life leadership offered at Cornell is attracting more and more young men and women from the cities.

Reasons for this City-to-Country Movement

Two months ago the agricultural students at the University of Illinois who came from cities and larger towns were asked, "What were the considerations which led you to choose an agricultural course?" Over two hundred gave their answers in writing. Love of country life was the main reason mentioned by 131; dislike for the city, 22; the financial inducements, 62; and, land in the family, 36. Farming was stated as the ambition of 167, teaching 21, experiment station work 23, landscape gardening 6, and other rural professions 15.

In a similar referendum at Cornell the city students mentioned many reasons for choosing their life work in the country. Among them were cited the love of nature and farm life, the desire to live out of doors, love for growing things, and love for animals, the financial rewards of farming, its independence, its interesting character and the healthful life it makes possible. Other interesting reasons given will be cited later in this chapter.

II. The Privilege of Living in the Country

Some City Life Drawbacks

Millions of people unquestionably live in the country from choice. They would not live in the city unless compelled to do so. A peculiarly amusing kind of provincialism is the attitude of the superficial city dweller who cannot understand why any one could possibly prefer to live in the country! Yet an unusually able college professor with a national reputation recently remarked that he could not conceive of anything which could induce him to live in the city.

With all the attractions of the city, it has serious drawbacks which are not found in the country. If country boys actually understood the conditions of the struggle into which they were entering in the city, more of them would stay on the farm. "I lived one year in the city; which was long enough," writes a country boy. The severe nervous tension of city life, the high speed of both social life and industry and the tyranny to hours and close confinement in offices, banks and stores are particularly hard for the country bred. The many disadvantages of the wage-earner, slack work alternating with the cruel pace, occasional strikes or lockouts, and the impersonal character of the corporation employer, coupled with the fact often realized that in spite of the crowds there are "no neighbors" in the city, reminds the country-bred laborer of the truth of President Roosevelt's words:

"There is not in the cities the same sense of common underlying brotherliness which there is still in the country districts."

A striking cartoon was recently published by the *Paterson* (N. J.) *Guardian* entitled "The City Problem." It represented "Mr. Ruralite" in the foreground halting at the road which leads down to the city, while from the factory blocks by the river two colossal grimy hands are raised in warning, with the message, GO BACK! On one hand is written HIGH PRICES; on the other POOR HEALTH.

With the recent improvement in city sanitation, which has perceptibly lowered the death rate, the city is physically a safer place to live in than it used to be; but slum sections are still reeking with contagion, and through most of the city wilderness the smoke and grime is perpetual and both pure air and clear sunshine are luxuries indeed. For most people the crowded city offers little attraction for a home. The heart of great cities has ceased to grow. The growing sections are the outlying wards and the suburbs, for obvious reasons. The moral dangers of the city where the saloon is usually entrenched in politics and vice is flagrantly tolerated if not actually protected help to explain the fact that a continuous procession of city families is seeking homes in suburban or rural towns where the perils surrounding their children are not so serious.

The Attractiveness of Country Life

It is evidently true, as Dean Bailey suggests, "Even in this epoch of hurried city-building, the love of the open country and

of plain, quiet living still remains as a real and vital force." The chance to live in the open air, to do out of door work and enjoy consequently a vigorous health, is a great boon which is coming to be more and more appreciated. "I intend to stick to farm life," writes a Cornell agricultural student, "for I see nothing in the turmoil of city life to tempt me to leave the quiet, calm and nearness to nature with which we, as farmers, are surrounded. I also see the possibilities of just as great financial success on a farm as in any profession which my circumstances permit me to attain." Another contented country boy writes, "I think the farm offers the best opportunity for the ideal home. I believe that farming is the farthest removed of any business from the blind struggle after money, and that the farmer with a modest capital can be rich in independence, contentment and happiness."

A variety of other significant reasons have been collected by Director Bailey from boys who are loyal to their country homes. Many speak of the profitableness of scientific farming, but the majority are thinking of other privileges in rural life which outweigh financial rewards, such as the fact that the farmer is really producing wealth first-hand and is serving the primary needs of society. "I expect to make a business of breeding live-stock. I like to work out of doors, where the sun shines and the wind blows, where I can look up from my work and not be obliged to look at a wall. I dislike to use a pen as a business. I want to make new things and create new wealth, not to collect to myself the money earned by others. I cannot feel the sympathy

which makes me a part of nature, unless I can be nearer to it than office or university life allows. I like to create things. Had I been dexterous with my hands, I might have been an artist; but I have found that I can make use of as high ideals, use as much patience, and be of as much use in the world by modeling in flesh and bone as I can by modeling in marble."

In spite of the common notion of the farm boys who shirk country life, there is a great attraction now in the fact that farming really requires brains of a high order, offers infinite opportunity for broad and deep study, a chance for developing technical skill and personal initiative in quite a variety of lines of work, all of which means a growing, broadening life and increasing self-respect and satisfaction.

The Partnership With Nature

Any briefest mention of the attractiveness of country life would be incomplete without reference to the nearness to nature and the privilege of her inspiring comradeship. Not only is the farmer's sense of partnership with nature a mighty impulse which tends to make him an elemental man; but every dweller in the country with any fineness of perception cannot fail to respond to the subtle appeal of the beautiful in the natural life about him. As Washington Irving wrote, in describing rural life in England, "In rural occupation there is nothing mean and debasing. It leads a man forth among scenes of natural grandeur and beauty; it leaves him to the working of his own mind, operated upon by the purest and most elevating of external influences. Such a man may be

simple and rough, but he cannot be vulgar."

As young Bryant wrote among the beautiful Berkshire hills, "To him who in the love of nature holds communion with her visible forms, she speaks a various language." Without an interpreter, sometimes the message to the soul is heard as in a foreign tongue; but the message is voiced again like the music of perennial springs, and others hear it with ear and heart, and it brings peace and comfort and God's love. In his beautiful chapter on this topic Dr. W. L. Anderson writes: "By a subtle potency the rural environment comes to be not the obtrusive masses of earth, nor the monotonous acres of grass, nor the dazzling stress of endless flowers, nor the disturbing chatter of the birds; but instead of these, hills that speak of freedom, a sky that brings the infinite near, meadows verdant with beauty, air vocal with song. Beauty, sublimity, music, freedom, are in the soul."[14] Surely the uplifting influence of nature is a wonderful gift to those who are fortunate enough to live in the country. It takes the petty and sordid out of life. It transfigures common things with beauty and fresh meaning, with the cycle of the seasons and ever freshness of the days. It brings to those who listen a quiet message of content.

Rural Sincerity and Real Neighborliness

Among the country privileges not often mentioned is the chance one has to live with real folks. There is a genuineness about country people that is not often found in crowded towns where conventionalities of life veneer even the ways of friends,

[14] "The Country Town," p. 185.

and where custom dictates and fashion rules and the very breadth of social opportunity makes superficial people, flitting from friend to friend, not pausing to find the depths in the eye or the gold in the character.

With fine simplicity, sometimes with blunt speech to be sure, our rural friends pierce through the artificial and find us where we are; honoring only what is worthy, caring nothing for titles or baubles, slow to welcome or woo or even to approve; but quick to befriend when real need appears, and having once befriended, steady and true in friendship, awkward in expression, maybe, but true as steel. To live with such country folks is to know the joy of real neighbors. To work with them takes patience, honest effort to overcome inborn conservatism, and a brother's sincere spirit; but when cooperation is once promised, your goal is gained. They will say what they mean. They will do as they say.

The Challenge of the Difficult in Rural Life

Since the invention of the sulky plow, the mowing machine and the riding harrow, et cetera, an American humorist remarked that farming is rapidly becoming a sedentary occupation! Drudgery has so largely been removed that it is probably true that there is no more "hack-work" or dull routine in agriculture than in other lines of business. But plenty of hard work remains the farmer's task. There is enough of the difficult left to challenge the strong and to frighten the weakling, and in this very fact is a bit of rural optimism. It applies not merely to farming but to country life in general.

Our pioneer days certainly developed a sturdy race of men. They lived a strenuous life with plenty of hardship, toil and danger, but it put iron into the blood of their children and made wonderful physiques, clear intellects, strong characters. This heroic training nurtured a remarkable race of continent conquerors fitted for colossal tasks and undaunted by difficulties. The rise of great commonwealths, developing rapidly now into rich agricultural empires, has rewarded the pioneers' faith and sacrifice.

All are thankful that the rigor of those heroic days is gone with the conquest of the wilderness. But few discern in the luxurious comfort of hyper-civilized life a peculiar peril. Our fathers, with a fine scorn for the weather, braved the wintry storms with a courage which brought its own rewards in toughened fiber and lungs full of ozone. To-day in our super-heated houses we defy the winter to do us any good. We have reduced comfort to a fine art. Even heaven has lost its attractiveness to our generation. Luxury has become a national habit if not a national vice.

Our food is not coarse enough to maintain good digestion. Our desk-ridden thousands are losing the vigor that comes only from out-of-door life. Exercise for most men has become a lost art; they smoke instead! What with electric cars for the poor man and motor cars for the near rich, walking is losing out fast with the city multitudes. Our base ball we take by proxy, sitting on the bleachers; our recreation is done for us by professional entertainers in theater, club and opera. In a score of ways the

creature comforts of a luxury loving age are surely enervating those who yield to them. Our modern flats equipped with every conceivable convenience to lure a man and a woman into losing the work habit and reducing to the minimum the expenditure of energy, are doing their share to take *effort* out of life and to make us merely effete products of civilization!

Modern city life, for the comfortably situated, is too luxurious to be good for the body, the mind or the morals. It dulls the "fighting edge"; it kills ambition with complacency; it often takes the best incentives out of life; it makes subtle assault upon early ideals and insidiously undermines the moral standards. We are fast losing the zest for the climbing life. We need the challenge of the difficult to spur us on to real conquests and to fit us for larger tasks.

It is the glory of country life that it is by no means enervated or over-civilized. Enough of the rough still remains for all practical purposes. Farm homes are comfortable usually but not luxurious. Rural life is full of the physical zest that keeps men young and vigorous. As Dr. F. E. Clark suggests, farming furnishes an ideal "*moral* equivalent of war." The annual conquest of farm difficulties makes splendid fighting. There are plenty of natural enemies which must be fought to keep a man's fighting edge keen and to keep him physically and mentally alert. What with the weeds and the weather, the cut-worms, the gypsy, and the codling moths, the lice, the maggots, the caterpillars, the San Jose scale and the scurvy, the borers, the blight and the gorger,

the peach yellows and the deadly curculio, the man behind the bug gun and the sprayer finds plenty of exercise for ingenuity and a royal chance to fight the good fight. Effeminacy is not a rural trait. Country life is great for making men; men of robust health and mental resources well tested by difficulty, men of the open-air life and the skyward outlook. Country dwellers may well be thankful for the challenge of the difficult. It tends to keep rural life strong.

Our rural optimism however does not rest solely upon the attractiveness of country life and the various assets which country life possesses. We find new courage in the fact that these assets have at last been capitalized and a great modern movement is promoting the enterprise.

III. The Country Life Movement

Its Real Significance

The modern country life movement in America has little in common with the "back to the soil" agitation in recent years. This latter is mainly the cry of real estate speculators plus newspaper echoes. The recent years of high prices and exorbitant cost of city living have popularized this slogan, the assumption being that if there were only more farmers, then food prices would be lower. This assumes that the art of farming is easily acquired and that the untrained city man could go back to the soil and succeed. What we really need is better farmers rather than more

farmers; and the untrained city man who buys a farm is rather apt to make a failure of it, – furnishing free amusement meanwhile for the natives, – for the work of farming is highly technical, and requires probably more technical knowledge than any other profession except the practice of medicine.

There are few abandoned farms to-day within easy distance of the cities. For several years it has been quite the fad for city men of means to buy a farm, and when a competent farm manager is placed in charge the experiment is usually a safe one. Often it proves a costly experiment and seldom does the city-bred owner really become a valuable citizen among his rural neighbors. He remains socially a visitor, rather than a real factor in country life. Conspicuous exceptions could of course be cited, but unfortunately this seems to be the rule.

The kindly purpose of well-meaning philanthropists to transplant among the farmers the dwellers in the city slums is resented by both! It would be a questionable kindness anyway, for the slum dweller would be an unhappy misfit in the country and escape to his crowded alley on the earliest opportunity, like a drunkard to his cups. Sometimes a hard-working city clerk or tradesman hears the call to the country and succeeds in wresting his living from the soil. The city man need not fail as a farmer. It depends upon his capacity to learn and his power of adaptation to a strange environment. The "back to the soil" movement is not to be discouraged; but let us not expect great things from it. The real "Country Life Movement" is something quite different.

One hundred and forty farmers in "five day school," the Ohio Agricultural College cooperating. A girls' exhibit in cut flower contest. A May pole dance at a township school picnic. One of the boys participating in corn growing contest. The winner of the strawberry growing contest.

Its Objective: A Campaign for Rural Progress

The back-to-the-soil trend is a city movement. The real country life movement is a campaign for rural progress conducted mainly by rural people, not a paternalistic plan on the part of city folks for rural redemption. It is defined by one of the great rural leaders as the working out of the desire to make rural civilization as effective and satisfying as other civilization; to make country life as satisfying as city life and country forces as effective as city forces. Incidentally he remarks, "We call it a new movement. In reality it is new only to those who have recently discovered it."

Its Early History: Various Plans for Rural Welfare

The father of the country life movement seems to have been George Washington. He and Benjamin Franklin were among the founders of the first farmers' organization in America, the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, established in 1785. There were about a dozen such societies by 1800, patterned after similar organizations in England. President Washington had an extensive correspondence with prominent men in England on this subject and made it the subject of his last message to Congress. He called attention to the fundamental

importance of agriculture, advocated agricultural fairs, a national agricultural society and government support for institutions making for rural progress.

Since these early days there have been many organized expressions of rural ambition, most of them only temporary but contributing more or less to the movement for the betterment of country life. There were over 900 agricultural societies in 1858 and these had increased to 1,350 by 1868 in spite of the setback of the civil war. Most of these were county organizations whose chief activity was an annual fair. Agricultural conventions were occasionally held, sometimes national in scope, which discussed frankly the great questions vital to farmers; and more permanent organizations soon developed which had a great influence in bringing the farmers of the country into cooperation with each other industrially and politically. Foremost among these were the Grange (1867), the Farmers' Alliance (1875), the Farmers' Union (1885), Farmers' Mutual Benefit Organization (1883), and the Patrons of Industry (1887). The Farmers' National Congress has met annually since 1880, and has exerted great influence upon legislation during this period, in the interest of the rural communities.

Its Modern Sponsors: The Agricultural Colleges

Important as these efforts at organized cooperation among farmers have been, nothing has equalled the influence of the agricultural colleges, which are now found in every state and are generously supported by the states in addition to revenue from

the "land-grant funds" which all the colleges possess. These great institutions have done noble service in providing the intelligent leadership not only in farm interests but also in all the affairs of country life. At first planned to teach agriculture almost exclusively, many of them are now giving most thorough courses in liberal culture interpreted in terms of country life. The vast service of these schools for rural welfare, in both intra-mural and extension work, can hardly be overestimated.

The Roosevelt Commission on Country Life

It will be seen that the country life movement has been making progress for years. But it really became a national issue for the first time when President Roosevelt appointed his Country Life Commission. Though greeted by some as an unnecessary effort and handicapped by an unfriendly Congress which was playing politics, the Commission did a most significant work. Thirty hearings were held in various parts of the country and a painstaking investigation was conducted both orally and by mail, the latter including detailed information and suggestion from over 120,000 people. The Commission's report, with the President's illuminating message, presents in the best form available the real meaning of the country life movement. It will serve our purpose well to quote from this report a few significant paragraphs:

"The farmers have hitherto had less than their full share of public attention along the lines of business and social life. There is too much belief among all our people that the prizes

of life lie away from the farms. I am therefore anxious to bring before the people of the United States the question of securing better business and better living on the farm, whether by cooperation among the farmers for buying, selling and borrowing; by promoting social advantages and opportunities in the country, or by any other legitimate means that will help to make country life more gainful, more attractive, and fuller of opportunities, pleasures and rewards for the men, women and children of the farms."

"The farm grows the raw material for the food and clothing of all our citizens; it supports directly almost half of them; and nearly half of the children of the United States are born and brought up on the farms. How can the life of the farm family be made less solitary, fuller of opportunity, freer from drudgery, more comfortable, happier and more attractive? Such a result is most earnestly to be desired. How can life on the farm be kept on the highest level, and where it is not already on that level, be so improved, dignified and brightened as to awaken and keep alive the pride and loyalty of the farmer's boys and girls, of the farmer's wife and of the farmer himself? How can a compelling desire to live on the farm be aroused in the children that are born on the farm? All these questions are of vital importance, not only to the farmer but to the whole nation." —*Theodore Roosevelt.*

Its Call for Rural Leadership

"We must picture to ourselves a new rural social structure, developed from the strong resident forces of the open country;

and then we must set at work all the agencies that will tend to bring this about. The entire people need to be aroused to this avenue of usefulness. Most of the new leaders must be farmers who can find not only a satisfactory business career on the farm, but who will throw themselves into the service of upbuilding the community. A new race of teachers is also to appear in the country. A new rural clergy is to be trained. These leaders will see the great underlying problem of country life, and together they will work, each in his own field, for the one goal of a new and permanent rural civilization. Upon the development of this distinctively rural civilization rests ultimately our ability, by methods of farming requiring the highest intelligence, to continue to feed and clothe the hungry nations; to supply the city and metropolis with fresh blood, clean bodies and clear brains that can endure the strain of modern urban life; and to preserve a race of men in the open country that, in the future as in the past, will be the stay and strength of the nation in time of war and its guiding and controlling spirit in time of peace."

"It is to be hoped that many young men and women, fresh from our schools and institutions of learning, and quick with ambition and trained intelligence, will feel a new and strong call to service."

Its Constructive Program for Rural Betterment

The Commission suggested a broad campaign of publicity on the whole subject of rural life, until there is an awakened appreciation of the necessity of giving this phase of our national

development as much attention as has been given to other interests. They urge upon all country people a quickened sense of responsibility to the community and to the state in the conserving of soil fertility, and the necessity for diversifying farming in order to conserve this fertility. The need of a better rural society is suggested; also the better safeguarding of the strength and happiness of the farm women; a more widespread conviction of the necessity for organization, not only for economic but for social purposes, this organization to be more or less cooperative, so that all the people may share equally in the benefits and have voice in the essential affairs of the community. The farmer is reminded that he has a distinct natural responsibility toward the farm laborer, in providing him with good living facilities and in helping him to be a man among men; and all the rural people are reminded of the obligation to protect and develop the natural scenery and attractiveness of the open country.

The Country Life Commission made the following specific recommendations to Congress:

The encouragement of a system of thoroughgoing surveys of all agricultural regions in order to take stock and to collect local facts, with the idea of providing a basis on which to develop a scientifically and economically sound country life.

The encouragement of a system of extension work in rural communities through all the land-grant colleges with the people at their homes and on their farms.

A thoroughgoing investigation by experts of the middleman

system of handling farm products, coupled with a general inquiry into the farmer's disadvantages in respect to taxation, transportation rates, cooperative organizations and credit, and the general business system.

An inquiry into the control and use of the streams of the United States with the object of protecting the people in their ownership and of saving for agricultural uses such benefits as should be reserved for such purposes.

The establishing of a highway engineering service, or equivalent organization, to be at the call of the states in working out effective and economical highway systems.

The establishing of a system of parcels post and postal savings banks.

The providing of some means or agency for the guidance of public opinion toward the development of a real rural society that shall rest directly on the land.

The enlargement of the United States Bureau of Education, to enable it to stimulate and coordinate the educational work of the nation.

Careful attention to the farmers' interests in legislation on the tariff, on regulation of railroads, control or regulation of corporations and of speculation, legislation in respect to rivers, forests and the utilization of swamp lands.

Increasing the powers of the Federal government in respect to the supervision and control of the public health.

Providing such regulations as will enable the states that do not

permit the sale of liquors to protect themselves from traffic from adjoining states.

IV. Institutions and Agencies at Work

Organized Forces Making for a Better Rural Life

When we consider the vast scope of the Country Life Movement in America and the variety of agencies involved, it greatly increases our rural optimism. The following list was compiled by Dr. L. H. Bailey and is the most complete available.

1. Departments of Agriculture, national and state.

2. Colleges of agriculture, one for each state, territory, or province.

3. Agricultural experiment stations, in nearly all cases connected with the colleges of agriculture.

4. The public school system, into which agriculture is now being incorporated. Normal schools, into many of which agriculture is being introduced.

5. Special separate schools of agriculture and household subjects.

6. Special colleges, as veterinary and forestry institutions.

7. Departments or courses of agriculture in general or old-line colleges, and universities.

8. Farmers' Institutes, usually conducted by colleges of agriculture or by boards or departments of agriculture.

(The above institutions may engage in various forms of

extension work.)

9. The agricultural press.

10. The general rural newspapers.

11. Agricultural and horticultural societies of all kinds.

12. The Patrons of Husbandry, Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union, and other national organizations.

13. Business societies and agencies, many of them cooperative.

14. Business men's associations and chambers of commerce in cities and towns.

15. Local political organizations (much in need of redirection).

16. Civic societies.

17. The church.

18. The Young Men's Christian Association, and other religious organizations.

19. Women's clubs and organizations, of many kinds.

20. Fairs and expositions.

21. Rural libraries.

22. Village improvement societies.

23. Historical societies.

24. Public health regulation.

25. Fraternal societies.

26. Musical organizations.

27. Organizations aiming to develop recreation, and games and play.

28. Rural free delivery of mail (a general parcels post is a necessity).

29. Postal savings banks.

30. Rural banks (often in need of redirection in their relations to the development of the open country).

31. Labor distributing bureaus.

32. Good thoroughfares.

33. Railroads, and trolley extensions (the latter needed to pierce the remoter districts rather than merely to parallel railroads and to connect large towns).

34. Telephones.

35. Auto-vehicles.

36. Country stores and trading places (in some cases).

37. Insurance organizations.

38. Many government agencies to safeguard the people, as public service commissions.

39. Books on agriculture and country life.

40. Good farmers, living on the land.

It is through the activity and growing cooperation of these various agencies that the new rural civilization is now rapidly developing. It will be the purpose of our next chapter to describe the process. Rural progress in recent decades has been surprising and encouraging in many quarters. Men of faith cannot fail to see that the providence of God is now using these modern forces in making a new world of the country. It may fairly be called a new world compared with the primitive past. Thus our rural optimism is justified, and we have increasing faith in the future of country life in America.

Test Questions on Chapter II

1. – What tribute to country life is inscribed on the Washington Union Station? It is a just tribute?

2. – Can you accept the "Country Boy's Creed"?

3. – Why are so many city boys studying in agricultural colleges? How is it in your own state?

4. – Discuss some of the disadvantages and drawbacks of modern city life.

5. – Why is country life attractive to you?

6. – What do you reckon among the privileges of living in the country?

7. – Discuss the real optimism you find in the "challenge of the difficult" in country life.

8. – How do you explain the "back-to-the-soil movement" from the cities to suburban and rural villages?

9. – Show how the real "Country Life Movement" differs from this.

10. – Mention some of the early plans for rural welfare in America.

11. – What part have the agricultural colleges had in the Country Life Movement?

12. – When did rural betterment first become a national issue in the United States?

13. – What definite rural needs did President Roosevelt mention in his message to the Country Life Commission?

14. – What special call for rural leadership did this

Commission voice?

15. – What do you think about the program for rural progress which the Commission proposed to Congress?

16. – What do you think about the proposal to establish a parcels post?

17. – In what special ways do the farmers' interests need safeguarding?

18. – Make a list of improvements which you consider necessary in the country sections you know the best.

19. – Name as many agencies as you can which are making a better rural life.

20. – On what do you base your faith in the new rural civilization?

CHAPTER III
THE NEW RURAL CIVILIZATION

FACTORS THAT ARE MAKING A NEW WORLD IN THE COUNTRY

Introductory: Rural Self-Respect and Progress

The faith of the country life movement is justified by the remarkable rural progress of the past generation. City life has been revolutionized by inventive skill, modern machinery, new forms of wealth and higher standards of efficiency and comfort; but meanwhile this marvelous progress has not been confined to cities. To be sure depleted rural districts, drained of their best blood, have not kept pace. But suburban sections in close partnership with cities have shared the speed and the privileges of urban progress, and meanwhile healthy, self-sustaining rural counties, scorning any dependence upon cities except for market, have developed great prosperity of their own and a remarkably efficient and satisfying life, even though population may have somewhat declined.

This is so radically different from the life of the past, we may justly call it a new rural civilization. It is distinctly a rural civilization, not merely because of its characteristics, but because

it is a triumph of rural leadership and the product of rural evolution, by fortunate selection and survival in the country of efficient manhood and womanhood best adapted to cope with their environment.

Thousands who failed in the country have gone to the cities, where it is often easier for incompetence to eke out an existence by living on casual jobs. Thousands of others have found better success in the city because they were better adapted to urban life. Often the net result of the migration has been profit for the country community which has held its best, that is, the country born and bred best adapted to be happy and successful in the rural environment.

Where you find the new rural civilization well developed, you find a self-respecting people, prosperous and happy, keeping abreast of the times in all important human interests, keenly alert to all new developments in agriculture and often proud of their country heritage. Because of this new prosperity and self-respect, ridicule of the "countryman" has ceased to be popular among intelligent people. The title "farmer" has taken on an utterly new meaning and is becoming a term of respect.

All this marks a return to the former days, before the age of supercilious cities, when most of the wealth and culture and family pride was in the open country and the village. To be sure in some sections of America this frank pride in rural life has never ceased. The real aristocracy of the South has always been mainly rural. Many of the "first families of Virginia" still live

on the old plantations and maintain a highly self-respecting life, free from the corrosive envy of city conditions, often pitying the man whose business requires him to live in the crowded town, and rejoicing in the freedom and the wholesome joys of country life. The hospitable country mansions of the South still remind us of the fame of Westover, Mount Vernon and Monticello as centers of social grace and leadership; and the most select social groups in Richmond welcome the country gentlemen and women of refinement from these country homes, not merely because of the honored family names they bear, but because they themselves are worthy scions of a continuously worthy rural civilization. They have never pitied themselves for living in the country. They do not want to live in the city. They are justly proud of their rural heritage and their country homes.

I. The Triumph over Isolation

Conquering the Great Enemy of Rural Contentment

The depressing effect of isolation has always been the most serious enemy of country life in America. Nowhere else in the world have farm homes been so scattered. Instead of living in hamlets, like the rest of the rural world, with outlying farms in the open country, American pioneers with characteristic independence have lived on their farms regardless of distance to neighbors. But social hungers, especially of the young people, could not safely be so disregarded, and in various ways the

social instincts have had their revenge. Isolation has proved to be the curse of the country, as its opposite, congestion, has in the city. The wonder is that the rural population of the country as a whole has steadily gained, nearly doubling in a generation, in spite of this handicap. Obviously the social handicap of isolation must be in a measure overcome, if country life becomes permanently satisfying. We are not surprised, therefore, to find that the new rural civilization has developed many means of intercommunication, bringing the remotest country districts into vital touch with the world.

Among the factors that have revolutionized the life of country people and hastened the new rural civilization are the telephone, the daily mail service by rural free delivery, the rapid extension of good roads, the introduction of newspapers and magazines and farm journals, and traveling libraries as well, the extension of the trolley systems throughout the older states, and the rapid introduction of automobiles, especially through the West.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.