

George Gerberding

**The Lutheran Church
in the Country**



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The Lutheran Church in the Country

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The Lutheran Church in the Country

*A Study. An Explanation. An Attempted
Solution.*

By George H. Gerberding, D.D., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF NEW TESTAMENT CONVERSIONS, THE
LUTHERAN PASTOR, THE LUTHERAN CATECHIST,
PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES, THE WAY OF SALVATION
IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH, THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF
PASSAVANT.

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Dedication

To
The Cause Of A Hearty, Healthy, Living Piety,
Which Springs Not From Superficial Sentimentalism,
Or Occasional Emotionalism;
A Piety That Grows Out Of A Correct Understanding,
A True Appreciation And A Prayerful, Diligent Use
of The Christ-ordained Means Of Grace,
This Book Is Dedicated
By The Author.

All Faithful Country Pastors
Who Love the Country;
Who Love Country People;
Who Love the Country Church;
Who Appreciate its Importance;
Who Believe in its Possibilities;
Who Believe that Lutheranism will Survive in the Country
Because It Is The Fittest;
This Book is Affectionately
Dedicated

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Dedication

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Preface by Lutheran Librarian

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A Note about Typos [Typographical Errors]:

Over time we are revising the books to make them better and better. If you would like to send the errors you come across to us, we'll make sure they are corrected.

Preface

SOMEONE HAS SAID:

“If it were not for the stream of fresh, pure, uncontaminated blood flowing into them from the country the cities would rot in their own iniquity.”

We are sorry to be compelled to believe that this is true. But the good, pure and purifying blood does not all come into the city from the country districts of our own land. Many of the much maligned “foreigners” from the country districts of the old world are a saving salt of no small insignificance.

This book wants to help the reader to understand country people and to appreciate the worth of country character. It desires to help the country pastor to remove what hinders and hurts country character. It would fain assist him to get a right understanding of his community and to use his church for its uplift. It hopes to contribute toward the saving and strengthening of the Lutheran Church in the country.

The country problem is peculiar. Its solution is difficult. The work is often depressing. The Lutheran pastor needs a better understanding of the situation.

Much has been written on the country church problem by men outside of our church. We can learn from these writers. We have used them in preparing this book. But there is much in them that we as Lutherans cannot use. After all, we are different. The Lutheran Church has principles, doctrines, conceptions, methods, and a spirit that are all her own. We need to look at the country church from our own viewpoint.

The problem is not as acute among us as it is among others. But there are clouds and rumblings on our church sky also. In some spots the Lutheran

Church is also declining in the country. If we do not study the situation and guard against the dangers then we also will have to suffer. Forewarned is forearmed.

Our prayer is that this book may assist and encourage our country pastors. Their work is important. Their opportunities are great. Their sky is big with promise. God bless them.

The Old Church Back Home

Dear are mem'ries of youth, and 'mongst others,
Dear the cross-roads church near the old farm.
Where the faith of our fathers and mothers
Oft found voice in its infinite charm;
Where from miles 'round the people assembled,
Feasting faith on the fat of the Word;
Where the air when they praised fairly trembled;
Where they hushed for the voice of the Lord.

There the preacher hurled Law at the sinners
And gave Gospel to hungry and poor,
Feeding babes with the milk as beginners
And strong meat to the strong and mature;
Oft as pastor to Jesus appealing
E'er to shepherd the newly cleansed lamb;
Often leading the sheep for their healing
To the Body and Blood, their lone balm.

But the years have wrought change, more's the pity!
Till the flock, goodly then, is now few;
For the folk flee the farm for the city,
And a cross-roads church failure seems due.
There the pasture was sweet, with sweet waters,
And the Shepherd's sweet voice called the sheep;
Yet the old fathers' own sons and daughters,
Unconcerned, let their consciences sleep.

Thus myself, who with shame and contrition
Here confess me unfilial found.
Yet the old church has still a blest mission,

To work weal for the folk miles around.
As for me, let me deem it dear duty
To help as I'm able and ought,
That the old church may bloom with new beauty,
And the faith of our fathers be taught.

– Alfred Ramsay, D.D.

Part 1. The Importance of the Country

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. . . .

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: and man became a living soul. – Moses.

1. Man's Relation to the Soil as God Made it

THE SOIL was made by God. As it came from the creative hand it was free from hurtful seed or growth. It did not exhale poisonous vapors or gases. It was good. It was clean. It was fruitful. It was made to be the happy abode of happy mankind. For this God had fitted and suited the soil.

After God had prepared the earth for man God formed man out of the soil. The soil is the material out of which God made man's body. The soil is the source from which man's body came.

This old truth of God's own creation story has been corroborated by one of the youngest of the physical sciences. Chemistry has demonstrated that every substance that is found in the human body is found also in the soil.

On his physical side man is related to the earth on which he walks and lives. He is of the earth, earthy. The earth is his mother. Brutus was not so far wrong when, told to kiss his mother, he prostrated himself and kissed the earth. In a real sense it is "Mother Earth."

The earth is a good mother to man's physical frame. She supplies, directly or indirectly, all his wants. Is he hungry? Her grains, her fruits, her earth-nourished animals furnish him his meat in his season. The good mother has enough for all if her children will only take the necessary trouble to get it from her. Is he thirsty? The waters that bubble up from her springs, that are drawn from her wells, that ripple down from her mountains, burst forth from her rocks, flow out in her streams, or lie ready in her seas, quench his thirst. The juices, distillations and concoctions from her fruits, flowers and grains yield the more tasteful and delicious drinks. Is he cold? Would he protect himself against frost and icy wind? Would he cover his nakedness or adorn his body and make it a thing of beauty in his own eyes and in the eyes of his fellows? The flax and the cotton and other products of nature are at his service. Or, if he prefer, the wool and hide and hair and feathers of earth-fed animals are at his disposal.

Does he want further shelter where he may retire and rest and feel secure against the unfriendly elements and other forces or dangers? Mother earth has material out of which and with which he may frame for himself a shelter, a dwelling, a home. Does he need heat for more comfort or for making his foods more palatable and healthful, or light that he may see after the darkness falls? Mother earth again is ready to provide for these wants also.

Does he realize that it is not good for him to be alone, does he have desire for sex, for mating, for a companion in his home? Even here, living, earthy bodies are ready for him.

And when at last this poor, earthy body must weaken and die, the good mother opens her bosom, takes in her child, wraps him around with herself and so gives him his last cool, quiet bed. Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Is it any wonder that man loves the soil, the source from which he comes? No, it is no wonder. It is but natural. There is a mystic tie between man and material nature. And doubtless this explains why we all desire a piece of ground that we can call our own. For this reason we feel more important, we get a greater self-respect, we have a new and more comfortable feeling when we are owners of something that is real – real – estate.

This also may explain the danger of this otherwise laudable desire of becoming a real owner of realty. The danger lies in the fact that this desire so easily and so often becomes insatiable. So often the owner of land becomes more and more greedy and grasping for more and ever more land. The more he has the more he wants. It is the yielding to this desire, the gratifying of this powerful passion that has brought untold misery, sorrow and suffering into the world.

King Ahab was a rich man. He had a big farm, a royal estate, but he and his wife coveted his neighbor's vineyard. The desire grew into a passion, and the king and queen became murderers to get that vineyard. There have been many like them. This inordinate and sinful desire for more land has brought about one of the serious problems of the country church, as we shall see.

Man's love of land and of what comes from or out of it may also explain his deep desire for the precious metals and minerals that are hid in the bowels of the earth. The silver, the gold, and the precious stones; the money and the jewels made out of them: oh how they are loved ! And how the love grows into a powerful, an overpowering passion that robs man of all that is kind and good, hardens and turns him into a veritable fiend.

Truly here is a philosophy. It is the philosophy of the old Book. It is a philosophy that explains much. Man, on his physical side, is related to the earth. He loves the earth. This love may become a snare that will entangle and enmesh him in temporal and eternal ruin.

“Neither shalt thou covet thy neighbor's house, nor his field.”
“They covet fields and take them by violence.” “The love of money is a root of all evil.”

2. Man's Relation to the Soil as Sin Made it

MAN'S BODY is not all of him. He is more than body. God's work was not finished when He had made Adam's body out of the dust of the ground. God breathed into his nostrils. God – breathed! God breathed the breath of life into man.

Here, then, is another element put into man. This new element is not of the earth earthy. Here is a part of man that is from heaven. It is from God. It came out of God into man. What a thought! If on the one side of my nature I am related to the ground, on the other side I am related to Heaven. I came forth from God. If one side of me is earthy, another side of me is heavenly. And man became a living soul. And so God created man in His own image: in the image of God created He him.

But this man, dichotomous, that is, made of two parts, fell into sin, lost his first estate and became a sinful being. As the race was in Adam, the race fell in him.

In Adam's fall We sinned all.

And when the crown of creation fell, creation itself was affected. Man's relation to creation was changed. God decreed, "cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground. For dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return."

And so Mother Earth became hardened against her offspring. Instead of bringing forth freely only that which was agreeable and good for man, she

began to produce her ever recurring crop of thorns and thistles, her noxious and poisonous weeds, her exhalations of fever, her microbes of death.

Poor man! If the Eden that he lost was like the Eden that through the Second Adam can be regained, then there was “nothing to hurt in all God’s holy mountain.” But now the forces of nature had become hostile. Now he must toil and sweat to wring a scanty sustenance from an unwilling soil. Now in addition to his vegetable foes and earth’s oftentimes hurtful breath, there are a thousand insect pests, there are tempests and droughts, there are floods and fires, with famine and pestilence in their wake. All because of sin.

But fallen man still clings to fallen earth. He must. He cannot subsist without it. He still loves land and what he can get from its surface or dig out of its mines. Too often land-love and gold-love are his ruin for both worlds.

For too many, on the other hand, the privation and the toil of the country are too much. They want an easier life. They would fain find a living with less of sweat of face or of brain. They would run away from the curse of sin.

For this they forsake the land. The elders sell or rent the farm and retire to the town or the city. The young tire of the exactions of Mother Earth and go where they hope to make a more comfortable living with less hardship and more pay. So they flee the farm and flock to the city. They imagine that the city will be a more kindly master. They ignore the hard fact that tens of thousands who had bread enough and to spare in the country home perish with hunger and go down to ruin in the great city.

So farms are deserted or rented, country districts degenerate and counties and states lose in population. The country church suffers because there are not so many people to go as in former years. Among those that are left life is harder, the spirit is more bitter. Rebellion against Providence and alienation from the church abound. And so the country church suffers more than ever. Of all this, more is told further on.

But the country is still the foundation of national and social well-being. The city is dependent on the country. Those who forsake the soil cannot live without it. Should the country fail to produce whence would the dwellers of the city get to consume? The cities of India and China are decimated from

time to time with the untold horrors of famine because the rural regions fail to produce the needed crops. The dwellers in the city need to appreciate more highly the toilers in the country. Our government cannot do too much for the farmer. The farmer needs all the help he can get to encourage him to do better work and to get better returns. The state dare never say of the farmer, I have no need of thee. It will be a sad day for the people of the city and of the state when the country and its agriculture deteriorate. If the city is built up at the expense of the country, if the country is drained of its best blood to make the city strong, then the woes must fall.

And if the country church must weaken, if its blessed influence must withdraw from the hearts and homes and lives of those who dwell around her temples, the ruin of the rural regions must come on apace. If the country church must die, if its communities must heathenize, then will the desert return, barrenness, waste, and desolation will replace the erstwhile happy land and happy homes. And what then of the common weal of the city and of the state?

The country is important. It needs to be made more and more prosperous. Every citizen of our great nation is dependent on its welfare. All have a deep interest in its prosperity.

In the best sense of the word the country cannot prosper without the church. The church cannot fulfill its mission in saving the nation without saving the people of the country. She needs to save them in the broadest sense of the word. She needs to save them from sin and all its baleful consequences in this life. She needs to save them for righteousness and true holiness here. She needs to show the truth, the realness, the pragmatic value of the promise of the life that now is. She needs to make men, women and children holier and happier in their everyday life. She needs to enrich the heart life, the home life, the community life. She needs to make the life in the country and in the country town more worth living.

And all this without forgetting for a moment, the promise of the life that is to come. Her children are never to forget, must ever keep in mind that the very best that even a child of God can have in this world is not to be compared with the things that God has in future store for his children. The richest and happiest life in this world is but a feeble foretaste of the world to come whereof we speak.

We need to understand the church in the country, her mission and her possibilities.

Part 2. Conditions in the Country

“This is the place, stand still my steed,
Let me review the scene
And summon from the shadowy path The forms that once have been.”

– LONGFELLOW.

“Go to thy birthplace and if faith was there
Repeat thy father’s creed, thy mother’s prayer.”

– HOLMES.

“Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter
Feelings lie buried that Grace can restore; Touched by a loving heart, wakened by
kindness, Cords that were broken will vibrate once more.” ::: { .author } – Bishop
Doane.

“Ring out the care, the want, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times, Ring out, ring out my mournful
rimes But ring the fuller minstrel in.” ::: { .author } – Tennyson. :::
“Give me neither poverty nor riches
Lest I be full and deny Thee and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be
poor and steal and take the name of my God in vain.” ::: { .author } –
Agur.

“Oh ye hypocrites, can ye discern the face of the sky, but can ye
not discern the signs of the times?” –Christ.

...

3. Economic Conditions in the Country

WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND the country church without understanding country conditions. The psychological, the social and the spiritual conditions all are more or less dependent on the economic condition. This is a truth too often forgotten and ignored by studious and scholarly theorizers. After all the speculations and discussions of centuries conditions far more than theories make up the content of life. Lutheran scholars and theologians rightly love the sound scriptural, satisfying and saving doctrines of their church. The writer of this yields to no one in his ever-increasing appreciation, admiration and love of the Lutheran theology. But he is also impressed more and more with the stubborn fact that the every day conditions under which people live their every day life have much to do with the reception and practice of what the church teaches. The seed may be perfect, but if the soil is a solid foot-path or wagon road, if the soil is a shallow layer over a substratum of rock, if the soil is filled full of the seeds and roots of noxious thorns and thistles there will be no crop from the best of seed. The soil needs to be studied, treated, and made fit for the good seed.

What then are some of the general economic conditions of the dwellers on the land around the country church? The United States census of 1910 informs us that at the time of its taking four out of every ten farmers of our nation were renters. What seems at first sight as a strange fact is that the proportion of renters is smallest where the soil is poorest and is largest where the soil is richest. But on second thought this is but natural. In proportion as the soil is productive does the owner make and save money. And so with good management he becomes independent, rents out his farm and moves to the town or city as a retired farmer. In proportion as his soil is unproductive is he retarded from reaching this coveted goal, but must continue to dig a bare living from his stingy acres. In the wealthiest farming states of the middle West fully fifty per cent, of the farmers are renters, and

the counties in these states that have the richest soil have the largest proportion of renters.

These renters are not rooted in the soil. They have no interest in the farm except to exploit it for the money they can get out of it. The buildings may run down more and more. The soil may become more and more impoverished. The appearance of the home and farm may become more and more dilapidated and forlorn. The tenant as a rule is not worried with these things. It is not his own home. All he wants is immediate returns in money. He is constantly on the lookout for a farm on which he may do better for himself. He is ready to move at any time. Sitting thus loosely and uncertainly in his residence he has no neighborhood interest. Economic and social development of the community have no interest for him. Why should he contribute time, effort or money for public roads, public schools or churches? He may not be here next year. He is of little economic value to the community. And if the community is largely made up of this sort of dwellers it certainly is a dreary place to live in. Even from an economic viewpoint its situation is deplorable. It cannot be progressive. It is barren of promise as long as conditions remain as they are.

Professor Thomas Nixon Carver, an expert authority on country conditions, has this to say on the rural renter problem:

Next to war, pestilence and famine, the worst thing that can happen to a rural community is absentee landlordism. In the first place, the rents are collected and sent out of the neighborhood to be spent somewhere else: but this is the least of the evils.

In the second place there is no one in the neighborhood who has any permanent interest in it except as a source of income. The tenants do not feel like spending any money or time in beautifying or in improving the moral or social surroundings. . . Their one interest is to get as large an income from the land as they can in the immediate present. Because they do not live there, the landlords care nothing for the community except as a source of rent and they will not spend anything in local improvements unless they see that it will increase rent. Therefore such a community looks bad and possesses the legal

minimum in the way of schools, churches and other agencies for social improvement.

In the third place, and worst of all, the landlords and tenants live so far apart and see one another so infrequently as to furnish very little opportunity for mutual acquaintance and understanding. Therefore class antagonism arises and bitterness of feeling shows itself in a variety of ways. Where the whole neighborhood is made up of a tenant class which feels hostile toward the landlord class evasions of all kinds are resorted to in order to beat the hated landlords. On the other hand the landlords are goaded to retaliation and the rack-rent system prevails. Sometimes the community feeling among tenants becomes so strong as to develop a kind of artificial 'tenant right' which is in opposition to the laws of the land, and the laws of the land are then made more severe to control the 'tenant right.'

Such a tenant population, without lands or homes of their own, becomes migrative, shiftless and poor. Life is robbed of all charm. The things that should lighten the labors of the home are absent. The things that should brighten the life are not found. The clothing is cheap and shabby. The house is bare and unattractive. Flowers do not grace the outside and what should be a lawn is a wilderness of weeds. The man on the outside must toil with primitive, defective and dull tools. His labor is tenfold more laborious and tenfold less productive than it would be with the latest improved tools and machinery. In many places he does not even own the tools and animals on the place. In these cases his interest in them is still less.

On the inside the wife must drudge through her daily round without the modern laborsaving and comfort-bringing furnishings. As best she can she must go through her dreary tasks with no outlook of hope or betterment. The things that should lighten, brighten, beautify, develop and enrich every woman's life are not for her. And so all noble ambition in father and mother either dies out or they arrange to leave the country and try the town or city.

They reason that life cannot be much worse, and should it be even harder there will be compensations in being able to break up the deadly monotony,

to find some diversion or excitement, or at worst, to have fellowship in life's sorrows.

And what of the young people that grow up in such country hardship and poverty? Is it not the most natural thing in the world that they should make up their minds quite early that they and their future families are not going to live like poor father and mother live! They too plan for the promising life in city or town.

And so the depletion of the country goes on apace. Not in all places alike. The above dark picture does not describe all rural communities. We are glad to know that there are many bright exceptions. Of these we shall speak in other chapters. But that the sad conditions set forth above prevail all too widely, and often in our best and richest regions, is demonstrated by the following facts:

Over twenty years ago Dr. Josiah Strong, who always knows whereof he speaks, affirmed that nine hundred and thirty townships in New England were losing in population. Six hundred and forty townships in New York, nine hundred and nineteen in Pennsylvania, and seven hundred and seventy five in Ohio were likewise losing. On these facts of his own gathering he commented thus: "If this migration continues, and no new preventing measures are devised, I see no reason why isolation, irreligion [CONTEMPT OF RELIGION], 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."

In the decade preceding 1910 the rural townships of Illinois lost eleven hundred and thirteen in population. During the same time seventy per cent, of the rural townships of New York registered a loss. Worse losses are reported from rural New England. While Des Moines, Iowa, during that decade gained over twenty-four thousand and every city of over eight thousand in that state grew, that rich state as a whole lost seven thousand! Rural Indiana lost over eighty-three thousand; rural Missouri over sixty-eight thousand.¹

Here, then, are some big problems for the church in the country. The church cannot live and prosper in a community whose inhabitants are

deteriorating financially and morally. The church is ever dependent on the home. Where the home demoralizes the church life must suffer. The church cannot grow where the population is diminishing. The church must look these problems in the face.

1. For the facts and figures here stated we are indebted to G. Walter Fiske's illuminating and comprehensive book, "The Challenge of the Country."↩

4. Psychological Conditions in the Country

The Rural Mind

WE ARE STUDYING conditions in the country. We have looked at the economic situation. That situation has its influence on the people who dwell where it obtains. The old saying that human nature is always and everywhere the same is true. Fundamental human nature does not change. Its manifestations, its habits, its activities, however, do vary and change. Humanity is influenced by environment. People are modified by their surroundings. Environment does make great and lasting changes in the life, habits and character of people. These changes are not sudden. They often come slowly. Those who are affected are often unconscious of it. Evil communications corrupt good manners. Companionship is a mighty molder of men. When cultured and refined people through misfortune or bad habits drift into the slums and live there for years, almost inevitably they and their families are changed. They naturally absorb the social mind of the slum in which they live. Long term prisoners come out with minds and characters different from those that they took into confinement.

We would not be understood, however, as believing or teaching that every one is fated to be fashioned by his surrounding. Man has a will. He can change his environment, rise above it or get away from it. Above all must we bear in mind that the grace of God can enable one to remain bright among the dull, to remain clean among the unclean, to be and remain morally strong in the midst of moral degenerates. We do not subscribe to the deterministic or fatalistic philosophy that makes of man a helpless slave to either his heredity or his environment. We believe in a psychologically free will and in a theological freedom, conditioned by the acceptance of the

means of grace. But with all this we acknowledge the powerful influence of environment.

Country life has an environment that is all its own. It is totally different from the environment of life in the city. It molds and makes habit and character. It produces a rural type, a rural mind.

Those who have been reared in or lived long in the country are apt to acquire the habits and manners of their neighbors. These habits of mind and spirit become more and more fixed. While they vary more or less with locality, the underlying traits are much the same the land over. It is of vital importance that we understand the rural mind and character.

The dweller on the land lives in close contact with nature. As he is dependent on nature he needs to understand her. To understand he must needs observe and study her. He is perforce a thinker. He notes the processes of nature. He observes that her operations are slow. He cannot force her to abandon her course. Her times and seasons are relentless. Her weather is inexorable. Her moods are merciless. She pays no heed to his needs, his comforts or his greatest desires. There is a majesty of calmness in her light heed of human weal or woe. The farmer must realize his dependence, his helplessness, his insignificance over against that nature in which he lives and labors and on which he depends. Her smiles and her tears, her songs and her sighs, her sun and her storm are all independent of him.

If he is an earnest thinker he must see that there is a disturbing element in nature. Her killing cold, her burning heat, her destructive storms, her perennial pests all show that there is something wrong. In his daily struggles against all these foes he must ask, Why is it thus? If he reads and ponders the old story of the fall, of sin, of its effects on the whole material creation, if he hears these things rightly explained in his church, he has the only explanation that really explains. It gives him food for his quiet meditations. It rests and satisfies his inquiring mind. The unbelieving farmer has no such explanation, no such understanding, no such satisfaction.

Meantime his quiet meditative life, his discipline in watching and waiting, his need of conquering hindrances, of beginning over and over again, of hoping where he sees no hope, of trusting in Him who is above

nature and rules over her, all this is calculated to make him patient, quiet, calm, believing that all is well or will be well.

Life in the country tends to make man conservative. The farm-dweller likes the old. He is inclined to be suspicious of the new. He is a traditionalist. The old ways of thinking, the old ways of doing, the old traditions, the old beliefs, these appeal to him. What was good enough for his forefathers is good enough for him. Newfangled fashions and ways and notions are fraught with mischief if not with sin. It is hard to convince him that the world moves, that times change, and that, in a good sense, we ought to change with the times.

The countryman is hard to change. His unreasoning conservatism is often an injury to himself. If he is bad he seems to want to remain bad. His wrong notions do a grievous wrong to his wife and children. Many a poor woman in the farm-house is a prisoner, a drudge, a slave, because her husband is stingy, does not believe in beauty, in even harmless recreation, in the dress that a good woman craves, in improved and labor-saving house equipment. She is a martyr to his senseless conservatism. No wonder that the children run away from such a father as soon as they can. But the hopeless wife must stay. Should we not run away also?

If, however, our farmer is a good man, if he is properly instructed and enlightened, then his conservatism is a valuable virtue. Lack of conservatism, lack of balance, impulsiveness and flightiness are weaknesses of our age. We sorely need well-balanced, right-motivated, and wise conservatism. To throw away all that is old for no other reason than that it is old is as foolish as to love and to hold on to the old for the same reason. The wise and judicious conservation loves the old only when it is good, and as long as he finds nothing better. If the country man is possessed of such wise and good conservatism he is a valuable citizen, and ought to be a good churchman. Such men can be relied upon. They can be tied to. The church needs them. The true pastor uses them. They make good Lutherans. The Lutheran Church, in proportion as they understand her, appeals to them. She satisfies them.

The dweller on the land, living apart from the multitude, spending most of his waking hours with no companion but himself and nature is apt to become a pronounced individualist. The individualist easily becomes

selfish. The selfish man may become a danger to his family, his neighborhood and his church – if he has a church. The selfish man is a bad man. His selfishness opens the door to various vices. As selfishness is the most pronounced manifestation of sin, all men have more or less of it. The selfish man knows how to appeal to the sub-conscious selfishness in others. As he is himself a surly, an unhappy man, and as misery loves company, he wants others to be like him. He is in danger of becoming a leader, a “sir oracle” at the country store, at the town, school or church meeting. He is a heart-sore to many a country parson.

As the dweller in the country, unless he be a hired man, is his own boss, there is often a temptation and a tendency to laziness. Where this is yielded to we find the slipshod, happy-go-lucky unsuccessful farmer. His shiftlessness, and thriftlessness make and keep him poor. Unless he inherits it, or marries it, he does not become a land-owner but is a renter. He blames his poverty on the soil, the climate, the weather or the government. He also is often a loafer, a talker who loves to air his grievances in public places. He is a poor husband, an unfortunate father, a profitless citizen, an unworthy churchman, a detriment to the community. At heart he also is selfish. He also is an individualist. His philosophy of life is too often listened to in the country. He is a poisoner of the minds of youth. He is often found in the open country. More often in the country town.

Because the farmer is prone to be an individualist he is often stubborn and impatient of advice. He prides himself in his own opinions, and refuses to be enlightened. His opinionated narrow stubbornness is a barrier to mental development. He is joined to his idols. Only the grace of God can renew and change him.

Because of individualism we find such bitter feuds in country communities. We find the hard, relentless and unforgiving spirit. We find husbands and wives, parents and children, neighbors and church-members who do not speak to each other for weeks, months and even for years. We find feuds and factions among relations and in the country churches. Many a country church has been wrecked and ruined by such unrelenting, unforgiving, bitter, vengeful feuds and factions.

Surely the country is a good place to study human nature. Here we find it in its native crudeness. Here it is unconcealed by the arts of insincere

etiquette. Here the so-called white lies of polite society have not yet done their deceiving and destructive work. Here men have not yet learned or adopted Tallyrand's pernicious principle that human speech is given that man may use it to deceive his fellow man. Here is naked, native human nature.

But for this very reason, that there is less concealment of the true self, less artificiality, less hiding of motive and intent, because all is more open and above-board, because the heart, the spirit, the life can be known, the country presents a more hopeful field for Christian endeavor.

With all their individualism, with all their peculiarities and eccentricities, country people present a most inviting field for the church. The farmer loves to meet and get acquainted with a manly man. He has neither time nor use for an upstart, for a sham, for a conceited pretender. He is open to manly approach. His confidence needs to be won first. When once his confidence is won he is eager and ready to learn. He wants something to think about, to talk about, to take pride in, to be satisfied with.

On account of his meditative tendency he is open to the deeper truths of revelation. When once he comprehends, apprehends and experiences the great vital doctrines of sin and grace they are to him the pearl of great price. He is a most promising subject for the Lutheran Church. Her teaching and her appeal appeal to him.

5. Social Conditions in the Country

IN THE COUNTRY the homes are more or less isolated. Miles of distance often separate the families. The roads and gates between the homes make access and intercourse more or less difficult. Man cannot talk over the news and topics of the day with neighbors in the same block, across the street or on the same front porch. Women cannot run in for a chat next door or gossip over the back fence. Children cannot play with others on the front street. The sounds of their laughter or shouting do not come into the open window. The neighbor's song or phonograph or piano is not heard. With the exception of nature's sounds all, outside of the family voices and sounds, is stillness. Outside of the family many days and weeks may be spent without seeing another face or hearing another human voice. The frequency or infrequency of this depends on the social or unsocial spirit of the family. Some families get all the sociability that is good for them. Others are veritable hermitages. A stern, surly, selfish, unsocial head of a house may practically isolate or imprison his family.

At best the isolation of a farm home is a characteristic of life in the country that needs to be studied.

The farm family should have a well developed social life within itself. This is all too frequently made impossible by greed and overwork. Where every member of the household day after day works to the limit of physical exhaustion sociability dies out. In such homes people have neither time nor inclination to be civil. They are too tired to talk. Words become few and hard. Sympathy, affection and kindness cannot thrive in such an atmosphere. Such overwork is a serious sin. It flourishes in farm homes.

The most grievous sin is against the wife and the growing children. To the sin against the wife we have referred before. Many farm-wives die or go

insane from tread-mill toil and loneliness. Their unsympathetic, greedy and hard-hearted husbands make martyrs of them.

The children are overworked. Much is written and said against child labor in mill and mine and factory. The protest against such inhuman cruelty cannot be too loud. The guilty employers cannot be pilloried, censured and execrated too severely. But what of overworked children on the farm? The long hours in field and garden and barn, the everlasting chores after the long day's work ought to be done, the exposure to wet and cold and heat, the scant home comforts, the absence of time and opportunity for play – oh the unspeakable sadness of a joyless childhood! The crime of robbing children of what God wants them to have! It is a sin that abounds among farmers. No legacy left behind for such children can ever atone for the robbing of childhood joys. Among the very best legacies that parents can bequeath is the memory of a happy childhood.

The home life on the farm could and should be the happiest of all. It holds a high place in the literature of all lands. Art has given it a unique charm. The pictures, the stories, the songs of the country home have been the delight of all ages. We all linger over and love them today.

In the right kind of a country home the husband and wife are loving partners. Both work but neither overworks. Their interests and their joys are shared with each other. They miss each other when separated. They love each other's society. There are no secrets between them. In their social hours with each other they talk over their separate and their common interests. Each is a helper to the other. Each consults the needs and desires of the other. Each tries to make the life of the other richer and happier. Each rejoices in the other's joy. Their social life with each other is a happy life.

Such parents are also companions to their children. The mothers and daughters are inseparable. The father is the best chum for the boys. All love each other's society. The parents provide games, plays and all sorts of amusements for the little ones and often play with them. There are clean, wholesome and interesting books and papers for the older ones. These are read by parents and children and are talked over with each other. There is music in the home. Girls and boys are given lessons. Art is encouraged where there are talent and taste for it. The girls are instructed and get practice in the domestic arts as well as in fancy work. The boys have rooms

and places for useful and interesting pastimes. Tools, printing presses, electrical appliances are furnished and their use encouraged. And so the home is a happy society. It has a rich soul-life of its own.

In such a home there is an absence of that rather low and common conversation that characterizes so many country families and neighborhoods. In the model home all the inmates can and do discuss great thoughts and great interests. In too many places the talk is about the neighbors' faults, misfortunes and peculiarities. The family group and other groups seem to gloat over accidents, sufferings, calamities, and gruesome things of all kinds. Sickness, suffering, death of man or of beast are rehashed and rehearsed with every dire detail. Other people's mistakes, weaknesses, faults, falls and sins are exposed and gloated over. The mind is kept full of sad and often repulsive pictures. The soul is dwarfed and degraded. Life is narrowed and impoverished. What a sad and sinful social life to live.

But even where the highest and best social life obtains in the family there is need of a neighborhood life. A model family may become too much self-centered. This would breed egotism, pride and narrowness. As no individual, so no family ought to live to itself. Each family and each member of every family has a social obligation to his community. In this respect also there are frequent failures. There are communities in which little if any neighborhood spirit exists. The neighbors seldom meet. Some of them never, unless a funeral should bring them together.

In the more olden time neighbors could not do without each other. There were frequent occasions that brought them together. Barn or house-raising, huskings and threshings demanded the men. The women went along to cook. And so days were spent in working together and eating together. There was a great social value in these meetings. Such days were often finished up with parties for the young people. Where nothing wrong was engaged in such assemblings of the youth of a community were a good thing. Young people, if they are not to become abnormal, need to get together. In the long and more leisurely winters there were quiltings for the older women, spelling bees, debating societies, singing schools for all. In many places there were and are grange and neighborhood picnics, reunions and old home weeks in the after harvest season.

Many of these social events we are sorry to say are now out of fashion. Their absence is a distinct loss to country life.

As remarked above, the normal soul craves society. This is especially true of the young. Even in the adolescent period the boy wants his gang and the girl wants her set. It is a craving of the nature as God made it. In proportion as this social craving is unsatisfied in the home, in proportion as the neighborhood does not furnish sufficient occasion for wholesome social satisfaction, in that proportion will the youth seek gratification elsewhere.

The growing boy on the farm and more so in the country town will find other boys who feel like himself. The gang will get together.

If there is no good place with a pure air and healthful recreation, he will meet others in the livery barn, in the pool room, or in the saloon. Society he craves, his nature cries out for it. Society he will have. Here is a family and a community responsibility.

And the sexes will get together. They must get together, God made them for each other. Happy is the home that makes provision for and encourages the young men and the maidens to meet together in groups as well as in pairs. Unhappy the parents that force their children to steal away to find the companionship they crave and have a right to have.

The father should also frequently take wife and children to the city. A day of pure recreation is a blessing which will brighten many monotonous days on the farm. Why should not the faithful and industrious people of the farmhouse take periodic outings to attend great gatherings, to spend a day at the state or county fair, to see the best show, to witness good moving picture plays, and to hear the best music? The fact that there are so many low and degrading amusements does not prove that all amusements are bad. There are enough good ones that are instructive, uplifting and ennobling. It makes life richer and better to see, hear and engage in them. Fewer of the best young people would forsake the farm if the monotony were thus periodically broken up. It would also enrich the social life. It would furnish new view-points and outlooks for life. It would furnish food for thought and conversation. The social life on the farm need not be monotonous. It ought not to be a perpetual drudgery. It can be made the brightest and happiest life in the world.

The modern improvements, the rural daily mail, the telephone, the trolley car and the automobile are all aids in these directions. All have their temptations, all can be abused. The mail can be used and is used to bring trashy, dangerous papers. The telephone may be used for eavesdropping and hurtful gossip. The auto may take people away from church to dangerous and bad places.

The country needs to train stronger moral characters than were needed in the good old times. The more diversified life becomes the more do temptations multiply. The more these temptations are resisted and overcome the stronger does the moral character grow.

The modern conveniences can and ought to be used for the improvement of the social life. There ought to be more friendly visiting, more heartening and helpful neighboring. There ought to be more cooperating in every way. For all this the modern conveniences furnish opportunities that our forbears did not have.

Of the relation of the school and church to the social life we shall speak further on.

6. The Educational Conditions in the Country

"'Tis education molds the human mind
Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined."

THE EARLIEST SCHOOL is the home. The first teacher is the mother.

What Napoleon said of Prance is true of every land: "The greatest need of France is mothers." This is eminently true of America.

In the ideal home, described in the former chapter, the children will be properly trained and educated from infancy. The preparatory work of the home will make it easy for the teacher of the public school.

The country school depends on the school trustees or the school board of the district. District supervision and control is a serious weakness and handicap. Horace Mann declared the law which established the district system "the most unfortunate law on the subject of common schools ever enacted."

The average farmer is the traditional enemy of the tax collector. As of old the publican is hated in the country. Publicans and sinners are still classed together. Stingy and ignorant people look upon taxation as robbery. Their one great desire and effort on the subject is to reduce and as far as possible to escape taxation. There can be no public school without a public school tax. The efficiency of the school is largely dependent upon the liberality of the tax.

The farmer gets his money slowly and by hard labor. He parts with it reluctantly.

"Lower taxes" is a familiar country cry. A school district in selecting its trustees or directors will too often look for men who will scale down the tax

rate. And so the least progressive and the stingiest men often get the management of the school. Such miserly men, short-sighted as to what is the highest secular good, blinded by the love of money and utterly unable to appreciate the value and importance of a broad and thorough education, will favor the cheapest building and equipment. Adaptation, comfort for teacher, pupil and the public, beauty and modern equipment will be sacrificed to cheapness. The cheapest teacher will be sought for and selected. The shortest term allowable will be favored. And so the poor children and the poorer teacher are at the mercy of the ignorant, narrow, hard-fisted trustee or director. Small wonder then that the country school is so often a disgrace to twentieth century American civilization. No wonder that the school is so poorly adapted for the uplift and enriching of country life.

With the shabby, untidy and unsanitary buildings and grounds, without good blackboards, maps, charts and pictures, innocent of free stationery, using the cheapest and most antiquated text-books, unhygienic as to light and ventilation, uncomfortable and unattractive in every aspect, what can be expected from such untoward equipment? With teachers of meager and defective training, with a motley multitude of all grades to be taught in one such ill-adapted room by one teacher, with a school year all too short for efficient work, what can be expected in the way of elevating the rising generation? Such unhappy situations are by no means universal in the country. But they are far more common than most of us imagine. We are glad that they are being frowned upon more and more and that there is an insistent demand for betterment.

What the country at large needs is to get the power of administration out of the hands of the unfit district directors. These directors need to be restricted and directed from above. We cannot have enthusiasm, efficiency and a proper school spirit under conditions that are a disgrace and ought to be outlawed. Districts need to be regulated by townships, these should be subject to the county and this again to state control. We look forward indeed to ultimate national standards, and national regulation. Compulsory school laws must also become national. The compulsion must come from above.

We rejoice in the spread and growth of the central district high school. These consolidated schools, with free transportation of pupils in comfortable, covered conveyances are a great boon to the country. They compel the building of good school houses and they compel good roads.

With the popularity of the automobile in the country will come further convenience and comfort. These schools bring the youth of the larger district together. They put an end to the ignorant, narrow and hurtful provincialism. They are powerful aids in fostering a healthful community spirit. They ought to make the old time spirit of suspicion, bitterness and feud, bred by isolation, a thing of the past. They tend to embellish and enrich the life in the country in every way. It goes without saying that everything depends upon the professional efficiency and moral and religious character of the teachers. No unbelieving, scoffing teacher ought ever to be allowed to teach in the public school. If the teacher of the public school, as an employee of the state, cannot be allowed to teach religion, he certainly should never be allowed to teach or to voice hostility to the Bible and its religion.¹

The moral character of the drivers who haul the pupils back and forth needs also to be carefully watched. No man of profane or unclean lip or life, no man of intemperate habits should ever be employed. The crowded, covered wagon may become a breeding place of impurity. And here we might note in passing that vice and inequality often become epidemic in a country district. The writer of this has personally known of several country schools where impurity became so common that it was common rumor that all the pupils were impure.

Another matter that deserves serious attention is that the country should educate for country life. Too often the teacher and the textbook bring and keep the ideas and ideals of the city before the pupils. The city with its attractions, its ways and its life, is constantly kept in view. The stories, the illustrations, the examples in Mathematics are all given in the terms of the city. They echo the city's surging life. They drum into the children stocks and bonds and commerce, instead of dealing with soil and silo, dairy and live stock.

The teachers bring to the country the manners and fashions and styles of the city. They are in the country against their will. The country school is to be a stepping stone to the city school. Their talk is patronizing if not belittling toward those who must spend their life in the lonely and dreary country. Enamored of city life they reflect its attractions and its lure. The power of suggestion works easily and surely. The city and city life is thought about, talked about, dreamed about. The desire and aim to get away

from country dullness and drudgery to city interest, excitement and an easier life take full possession. And so the country school trains the young away from the soil. The country school becomes an agency to stimulate the away from the land movement. The country school tends to depopulate the country.

Country people want their children to like the country life. They have a right to expect the school to promote this country love. It will never be promoted by teachers who have the city fever. The country school needs to be made so attractive and so remunerative that it will draw the best of teachers. These ought to be native to the soil, to the manner born. They ought to understand and appreciate the best that is and ought to be in the country life. They need to have a vision of the possibilities of life on the land, a vision of their own high privilege of bringing this to pass.

Normal schools are needed that will train country-bred boys and girls to become country teachers. Such normals should promote rural interests and rural ideals, country sense and country sympathy. Their graduates ought to be in sympathy with and ought to know the ideals and theories of "The American Rural School," by H. W. Foght. They ought to know the writings of O. J. Kern and of Mabel Carney. They ought to know the science of agriculture. The good rural Normal will work hand in hand with the agricultural college and experiment station. Its graduates will become enthusiastic for making country life what it ought to be and what it can be.

In their schools good teachers will instill love for the country and country life. Their talk will be of flowers and plants and trees and birds and animals and pets and live stock. They will teach the chemistry of soils, and scientific preparation and culture of the soil, scientific fertilizing, scientific matching of seed and soil. They will teach the biology and botany of seeds and plants, the soils and fertilizers and culture they need. They will teach the zoology of farm animals, their rearing and their care. They will teach the architecture of the farm house and other farm buildings, the home conveniences and furnishings needed and how to use them. Domestic science will have a large place in their teaching. The laws of hygiene will be made clear and driven home. Landscaping and the beautifying of the home on the inside and on the outside will be explained and impressed.

Such teachers will be a great aid toward improving the economic situation in the country. They will gradually improve the rural social mind. They will aid greatly in enriching the social life of the community.

They will encourage the making of the school house an intellectual and social center. They will encourage extension lectures from the state university, the agricultural college and the experiment station. They will encourage farmers, breeders and poultry men to take short winter courses in agricultural colleges. They will constantly preach and impress the value of higher education. They will use every endeavor to show the farmer fathers that a liberal education is the best legacy they can leave to their sons and daughters. From their school-districts many boys and girls will go to college and university. Doctors, lawyers, professors and preachers will spring forth from their communities, all inspired and started by their teachers in the country schools.

Next to the minister of the Gospel, the church-school teacher, the deaconess and the Christian social service and inner mission worker, the country school teacher has the richest and most promising field for the service and uplift of humanity.

Over one-half of the people of the United States still live in the country. The purest, the host, the richest red blood is still there. The bulk of the best brains is still there. And the best moral fiber is still there. A few years ago five hundred leading business and professional men sat down to a Y. M. C. A. banquet in New York. A census was taken during the evening and it was discovered that nine out of ten of the men of affairs and of power in the city were born and bred in the open country or in the country town. A canvass of one hundred men in a great city showed that eighty-five of these bankers, lawyers, merchants and journalists were brought up in the country. City pastors testify again and again that their most dependable members were brought up in country churches. It is claimed by those who have studied the subject that "at least seventy-five per cent, of the men and women of influence in church and national life were born and reared in the country". "Country bred men have dominated our entire civilization." John E. Mott says, "The cities cannot be relied upon to furnish the Christian leaders of the future. The work in the country districts must be carried on with efficiency and power in order to insure the raising up of sufficient Christian forces to cultivate the city fields." Doctor Gunsaulus claims that Chicago's

twelve greatest preachers, eighty-six of its leading physicians, eighty-one of its greatest lawyers, and seventy-three of its one hundred best engineers, all came from the farm. It is a well-known fact that a large proportion of ministers were country boys.

What a field for the country school-teacher. What a field for the country pastor.

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1. For a fuller discussion of this subject see my “Problems and Possibilities,” pp. 110-114.↩

7. Religious Conditions in the Country

WE HAVE SEEN that the rural mind is inclined to be meditative, serious, religious. The country man should naturally draw toward the church. The church that has a message should appeal to him strongly. It should be full of men.

In the recollection of those now living such was largely the case. Nearly everybody in the community was a church-goer if not a church member. In New England the ringing of the bells of the plain, square, roomy meeting houses emptied the farm homes for many miles in every direction. The roads were crowded with great wagon loads of people of every age. Others came on horseback and many walked their weary miles on dusty or muddy highways. The ample church-grounds, with their long rows of sheds, presented an animated and an edifying sight. The quiet happiness and peace on the faces of the gathering or departing worshippers all seemed to say, "I was glad when they said unto me Let us go into the House of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates Jerusalem." "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand." "I would rather be a door-keeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

The Puritans of New England for several generations were great church-goers. The Scotch-Irish set great store by the church and the Bible. Their country settlements were characterized by strong churches, deep devotion, and sturdy defense of their religion. The Presbyterian church from the beginning was strong in the country. The Methodists, while not neglecting the country, were more like the Roman Catholics and Episcopalians in their early and constant appreciation of the city and the growing town. It is hard to find a town of any size, outside of those that are populated by foreigners, in which there is not an aggressive Methodist church. In all the largest cities

they are strong. They are not a strong church in the open country. The Baptists in this respect are like unto the Methodists, except that they have a greater tendency to colonize in the country. Of the Lutherans we shall speak more specifically later on. Suffice it to say here that they are on the whole the most rural of all Protestant churches and are maintaining their strength and growth in the country better than any other church. In this chapter we are looking into the general situation as it exists in the open country and in the country town.

Outside of the Lutheran settlements the situation is positively alarming. A sad change has come over the country churches of our land. In the better olden times in the country the man that did not go to church was looked down upon and was made to feel that his attitude to the church brought upon him more or less of public odium. He was more or less ostracized, and either had to flock by himself or be constantly on the defensive.

It is not so now. In many sections the case is reversed. The pendulum has swung to the other extreme. A startling change has come. The situation is serious. A blighting heathenism is spreading over our land. It is high time that American Christians look the facts in the face. And facts are still stubborn things. Soft and smooth sayings cannot blot out facts. A visionary optimism will not change things. There is a horrid hurt on our Christian civilization. It cannot be healed with salves and ointments. There must be first of all a rigid and unsparing diagnosis. Surgery and cauterizing and purging are needed.

For the diagnosing of the case the Presbyterian Church has rendered an invaluable service to American Christianity. She has commissioned a number of experts to make religious rural life surveys. These surveys were made by trained specialists. They have cost much time, labor and money. They set forth the present religious situation in representative sections in different parts of the land. Their disclosures are accurate, instructive and startling. We have examined a goodly number of them. We are indebted to them and to books that deal with the country church and that draw from these surveys for our facts.

We look first to old New England, in many respects the cradle of our free institutions and of American church life. In the year 1900 the Governor of New Hampshire issued a proclamation which set forth the religious

destitution in certain New England communities and summoned the people to observe a day of fasting and prayer. When the governor was widely criticized for his "pessimistic" proclamation Rollin Lynde Hartt published a series of articles in the Outlook in which he established and justified the contentions of the governor. He stated that there were two hundred and eighty-two pastorless churches in Maine at that time, and that some of the deserted churches were serving as cheese factories, road-houses and dance-halls. Ashenhurst, who gives us these facts, says: "The extreme examples of religious destitution indicate a tendency and a peril. Practically the same conditions are said to exist in Vermont and in large sections of rural New York. In 1910 a New England church association investigated the general situation. The report affirms that outside of a radius of two or three miles around the towns of New England a practical heathenism is in full sway. One lone minister, the pastor of the only Protestant church for many miles around had a little band of women and two men in his church. Our periodic literature in recent years has teemed with delineations and lamentations on the sad situation of the church in New England. New England can be saved from heathenizing by nothing else than the old Gospel of Christ. We are glad to know that the old Church of the Reformation, with the old faith that made the Reformation, is crowding into the farm homes and cities of New England. Thousands of soul-hungry, blue-blood Yankees will yet find satisfaction, salvation and service in the incoming English Lutheran Churches.

Turning now to the Middle West we look first at the pivotal state of Ohio. Here New England Congregationalism made its second stand, modified and tried to re-adapt its theology and started out anew for the winning of the West. Here English Lutheranism made such a promising start under the sainted Dr. Greenwald and later by Dr. Ezra Keller. Here Scotch-Irish Presbyterianism planted its early colonies and institutions of Learning. Here the country church was strong and big with promise. And what is the country condition today? In a religious survey of nineteen counties out of fifteen hundred and fifteen churches it was ascertained that one-third were increasing. Of the other two-thirds a comparatively small number were holding their own. The rest were dwindling in numbers and influence. In a district of one hundred square miles, by actual count, less than four per cent, of the people were communicant members of any church. Eight hundred abandoned churches were counted. The author of

“The Survey Bulletin” writes: “Of all these one thousand five hundred and fifteen churches at the present time slightly less than one-third are growing. The remaining two-thirds have either ceased to grow or are dying. The decline of the farmers’ church is the most striking fact to be recorded. Those churches upon which the farming population is dependent show no rapid changes and the most marked signs of decadence. Of the open country church not quite one-fourth are growing. The study of county after county compels the conclusion that where other things are equal, the larger the proportion of farmers in the membership of the church, the smaller chance does the church have to maintain itself with its strength unimpaired. The farmer today is our most difficult church problem.”

In Indiana conditions are if anything worse. Indiana has been called “the state of sects and insects.” Here the most extreme, most radical and most ignorant revivalist, immersionist and sanctificationist sects multiply and carry on their wild and irrational propaganda. They leave whole sections of burnt districts in their trail. In these burnt-over sections ignorant unbelief as well as coarse and unblushing vice often abound.

Harlan N. Freeman in “the Kingdom and the Farm” page 77, says: “The Presbyterian Survey in Indiana discovered in Marshall County that of the ninety-one churches, thirty-seven per cent, were growing, twenty per cent, were standing still, while forty-two per cent, were losing ground. The same conditions of decline, with variations, were found in Davies and Boone Counties.”

A recent issue of “The Standard,” the organ of the Disciples (Campbellites), devoted twelve pages to a discussion of their country church problem. Out of seven hundred and ninety-six churches in Indiana, one hundred and ninety-eight had preaching once a month, two hundred and twenty-five have no regular preaching, and thirty-five are abandoned. In one district there are thirty-six churches and only six pastors. In another forty-one churches and seven pastors. And Indiana is the banner state of the Campbellites!

The Presbyterian synod of Michigan recently reported one-third of all its churches vacant. The Baptists of the same state reported a great falling off, a loss of one thousand members.

In the state of Illinois there are forty towns of from two to eight hundred inhabitants that are without a church of any kind. In the whole state seventeen hundred churches have been abandoned in a few years. A survey of forty-four communities in the corn belt of the state where

“King Corn’s armies lie with flags unfurled,”

two hundred and twenty-five churches were examined. Of these seventy-seven had grown in the last ten years, fifty-six had lost in membership and forty-seven or nearly one-fourth had been abandoned. In this district the summing up of the situation shows that one-third of the churches, counting both town and country, are growing, and two-thirds are dying or dead.

In Missouri a survey of three counties showed more than half of the churches losing in membership. Twenty-one churches were found abandoned. In a single township of five thousand inhabitants only three hundred people are connected with any church. In the whole state seven hundred and fifty churches have been abandoned.

The above are typical examples from the better part of the nation. Outside of the sections where the German Lutheran and Scandinavian settlers abound, the situation becomes worse and worse the farther west we go. It has often been said that west of Iowa and Minnesota there is no Sunday and west of the Dakotas there is no God! Sixty per cent, of the people of America are rapidly heathenizing.

In an address made before the Connecticut Bible Society the Rev. H. L. Hutchins, who had spent many years as a colporteur [BIBLE AND NEWSPAPER SALESMAN] in the rural sections of that state said, in substance, of the districts where the churches were dying or dead: “The whole aspect of those communities is disheartening. The people are ignorant and have no ambition to be anything else. Vices increase and become more and more open and flagrant. Immorality is unashamed. There is an open contempt and disregard of marriage, an alarming growth of idiocy, the result of inbreeding and incest. Cheap whiskey is omnipresent, violence and crime more and more frequent. There is an inevitable lapsing toward paganism and barbarism.”

Such is the country where God is not. There are hundreds of localities like that. We know some of them. Does not the reader recall some such places! There Christ is not wanted. The voice of His Bride, the Church, is not heard.

Part 3. Causes of Country Conditions

Because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot I will spew thee out of my mouth. – Jesus,

There is less practical discouragement in the opposition of bad people than in the inertia of good people. – Dr. Boyd.

For my people have committed two evils: They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. – Jeremiah.

Because when they knew God they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their reasonings and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they became fools. – Paul.

And we know that we are of God and the whole world lieth in the evil one . . . Little children keep yourselves from idols. – John.

8. Causes Of Church Decline

THAT THE DECLINE of the country church is widespread and alarming can no longer be denied. Our Lutheran Church is as yet the least affected. Of this we shall speak more fully in subsequent chapters. We are

devoutly thankful for the fact. But our country people and pastors are of the same sinful stock as others. They are influenced, even as others, by condition and environment. They are subject to country temptations as are their neighbors. What has happened to others ought to be a warning to us. We Lutherans ought to know our dangers. We cannot effectually guard ourselves against them unless we know them. It behooves us to inquire and search diligently for the causes of country church decline.

It will not do to brush aside the subject by saying that it is enough to know and admit the sinfulness of human nature. It is true that the carnal mind is enmity against God and that men love darkness rather than light. The country heart is as sinful by nature as is the city heart. But this fundamental fact does not explain the threatening change that is going on in the religious life of the country. People had the same sinful nature in the better days when the country churches were full of devout worshipers. There are things that encourage sinful nature and promote its development. There are things that discourage and curb the growth of sin.

The economic situation of the country undoubtedly affects the church. Where there is thin naturally unproductive soil and slip-shod unscientific farming together with improvident management, the community is poor, discouraged and depressed. People brood over their poverty, become fretful and rebellious and are hard to interest in higher things. It is a short step from rebellion against God to rebellion against the church. When such apathetic and phlegmatic people are invited to church they frame all sorts of excuses. They have no time, no clothes, no conveyances. The true reason is they are bitter and don't want to go.

Absentee landlordism is a misfortune to a community. To be stable, to have a neighborhood interest, a social mind, a desire for public improvement and common weal, a community needs permanent homes and residents who expect to live and die where they are.

Renters are not so. They are not rooted to the soil. Their dwellings are not their real homes. They are ready to move whenever they think they can make a better bargain. They have little if any interest in the community. It is hard to interest them in the church. A community of renters is a hard place for a country church. The increase of tenant farming is a contributing cause to the decline of the country church.

Ignorant and unscientific farming makes the soil poor, whether the farmer be owner or tenant. Such farming makes a community poor and is a serious drawback to the church. In short, whatever tends to make life hard and unproductive is a drawback. Overwork is a drawback. Lack of material comfort brings unhappiness. An unhappy heart or home or community is a discouraging field for a church.

The psychology of the rural mind is a church problem. The individualist is hard to interest in the group, even if that group is a church. He is apt to be suspicious of all who do not share his views. He is stubbornly opinionated. If for any reason he is suspicious of church people or of pastor he is hard to move. Living and working with nature day by day he knows and notes that nature knows no mercy. Nature never forgives. Possibly this is an explanation of the unforgiving spirit so common in the country. This spirit is productive of faction and feud. This spirit is a serious problem for the country church. It has held back many a country church. It has weakened and killed many.

The farmer and his wife and children all earn and eat their bread in the sweat of their brow. With a large proportion of them their money comes slowly and with hard, long labor. A natural tendency is to hold fast to what he toils for. The farmer as a rule is less liberal in giving than others. He often becomes a miser. As no church can be kept up without money he suspects that the church is after his cash. He dreads the cost of church membership and refuses to become a member. If such an one is a member he is apt to oppose every forward movement that requires money, and all missionary effort. And so he is a drawback to the church.

It follows as a matter of course that when people with these or other unfavorable traits move to the country town they present a church problem there. A town made up largely of retired farmers is proverbially non-progressive. It is hard to make a church aggressive, progressive, and generally efficient in such a town. It has all the drawbacks presented by the rural mind.

The social situation of the country is frequently a hard problem for the church. The daily toil and family isolation may turn the family into unsocial hermits. When they settle down to this it is hard to get them to church. On the other hand, the monotony and drudgery may create a wild desire for

diversion and excitement. Saturday night and Sunday bring opportunities. The country towns are always crowded on Saturday afternoon. The picture shows, plays, pool rooms and saloons reap their harvest on Saturday night. The farmers' Ford automobile furnishes the easy transportation,

Sunday is the day for visiting and courting. These diversions become such a habit with many people that it is next to impossible to get them to church. They afford a standing excuse for many families. They must visit or receive and entertain visitors. And so the social situation presents a problem and is if not a cause, at least an explanation of the decline of the country church.

We realize, however, that while all these country conditions make church work difficult they are not fundamental. In many cases they can be changed and overcome. The country church can be made to grow in spite of these drawbacks.

For the real causes of the decline we must look deeper. We believe that we shall find them in the school and in the church herself.

A change has come over the world of education. There is a change in the content and spirit of the text books. We take down our old readers and spellers. We recall the head line copy of the old writing book. In the readers many lessons were extracts from the Bible, others were appreciations and eulogies of the Bible. Still others were warnings against the neglect of or encouragements to the use of the Bible. Many were the stories, the poems and the "pieces" to speak, all exalting the Word and its teachings. The illustrations in reader and speller were often Bible pictures. The "copies" in the copy-books were often sentences from, sayings about, or encouragements to learn and follow the Bible. Even the "Examples" in mental arithmetic often dealt with Bible subjects. The "three R's" were more or less colored by the Bible. It is not so now. We look in vain for anything of the kind in the text book of today.

The whole atmosphere of the state schools of today is irreligious, if not anti-religious.¹ Text books and teachers are permeated with anti-Christian sentiments. The science taught is Darwinian materialism. The psychology is pragmatistic. The philosophy is Hegelian. The sociology is Spencerian agnosticism. There is no place left for revelation or miracle. The supernatural is eliminated. All is pure naturalism and often pure animalism.

Such are the educational principles and such the spirit in the state normal schools in which the country school teachers are trained. Those who do not have a clear and positive Christian training, a well-established Christian character and a scriptural personal experience before they enter the normal are often carried away with the prevailing stream of unbelief.

They come out to the little red school house on the hill to teach the boys and girls of the farmers. If the teacher is an unbeliever the fact will be more or less apparent. It may not express itself in open opposition to church and Bible. But the teacher creates an atmosphere. The personality speaks. Unconscious insinuations creep into explanation and conversation. At best the pupils see that the teacher pays neither attention nor respect to the church. The teacher advises the next higher school. The teacher's advice generally goes. He selects a school library, advises what books should be read, becomes a social adviser and leader. The influence is all against the church. The seeds of indifference to the church and of general unbelief and worldliness are implanted in the school. The same sentiments and the same spirit are infused into the social mind of the youth in the community. And the church finds herself in an unfriendly if not a hostile atmosphere. Here is a direct and potent cause of the decline of the country church.

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1. See "Problems and Possibilities," page 122 ff. [↩](#)

9 - Causes of Church Decline (continued)

JUDGMENT MUST ALWAYS BEGIN in the house of God. The church needs most of all to examine herself. In how far may the causes of church decline lie at her own door? Shall we not look here for the fundamental cause?

We are not yet speaking of specifically Lutheran conditions and causes. To these we shall come later. On many points, however, we Lutherans are as guilty as others. When we probe for general causes it behooves us to be honest with ourselves, and constantly ask, are we not also guilty here?

One mistake as to a ministry for the country is that so many church boards, church officials and church schools have harbored the idea that any kind of a minister is good enough for the country. Preachers for the country are not supposed to need as much preparation as preachers for the city. Short-cut schools and short-cut methods are deemed sufficient for the country pastor.

In an investigation of the country pastors in New England it was discovered that nearly one-half were without a full college education, only twenty-five per cent, were seminary graduates and “seventy-five per cent, were lacking in efficiency from inadequate educational equipment.” Prof. G. W. Fiske, author of “The Challenge of the Country” says on page 198 of the book: “As near as can be determined about twenty per cent, of rural ministers the country over are educated men; though probably ten per cent, of them have had a full professional training.” Truly a startling statement! In the middle west and on to the west coast graduates of the Moody Bible Institute are trying to serve country pastorates. A large proportion of them are dismal failures.

We have seen that country people as a class are serious and thoughtful. They think patiently and deeply on the problems brought before them. They are full of hard questions. They are drawn toward the man who can sit down and sympathetically and intelligently enter into their difficulties and help them to a way out. They will go to hear such men preach. If the preaching enlightens, instructs, answers questionings of their own minds and satisfies the deeper yearnings of their earnest souls these men will be won. But this requires educated ministers, men of broad culture, clear thinkers as well as men of tender sympathy. The minister needs to understand the individual and the social psychology of the country mind. He needs to have an intelligent grasp of the problems peculiar to the country. He needs special training along these lines. A mere exhorter, be he never so earnest, will not and can not satisfy the serious, thinking men of the country. They want a spiritual guide who can understand, enter into and sympathize with their perplexities and can patiently show them the true solution.

And withal, the farmer wants a minister who knows and loves the country. The country pastor needs to be much in the homes and fields of the people. He ought to be able to talk intelligently on soils and culture and fertilizing and plant and animal pests. He ought to know about horses and hens and hogs and cattle. He ought to be able to show how labor can be lightened in field and barn and house. He ought to be able to show how country life in the home and on the farm can be made more comfortable and more happy without impairing its efficiency and profitableness. All this by no means as a substitute for the spiritual side of his private and public ministry but as an aid to it.

We recall a scholarly and deeply consecrated young German pastor in the country. He had a rationalistic and skeptical neighbor whom he had not been able to get to come to church.

One day the preacher found the farmer sitting on a fence and looking intently over a field. The pastor took a seat at the farmer's side. The farmer confided that he had been in a deep study as to what to do with that particular field which had disappointed him for several years. The preacher informed the farmer that the field needed specific treatment. The soil was peculiar, it needed deep plowing, more frequent and deeper cultivation and a certain kind of fertilizer that would supply what was lacking in the soil. The farmer listened with open mouth and ears. He afterwards expressed his

surprise to a neighbor that that young snip of a preacher had really instructed him in farming. Before long that farmer brought his family, a wagon full, to church. The pastor won the family by winning its head. As he told us “he had to begin with manure.”

Have our colleges and seminaries trained such men? Have we not all too often held up the city pastorate as the ideal, and the country pastorate as a temporary make-shift and a waiting place for a city call? Insofar as the Seminary has taken such a position it is responsible for country decline. It is time for our seminaries to change. They need to realize that as goes the country so goes the city. The blood from the country has been the saving of the city. If the country salt loses its savor wherewith shall the city be salted?

Because such a large proportion of Seminary graduates have gone out unwillingly into country work, with a prejudice against it we have the sad fact of short pastorates. The short pastorate is a calamity anywhere. But especially in the country where it takes time to get acquainted and to win confidence. The abounding short pastorates are a prolific cause of country decline.

Because so many ministers have an aversion to living in the country we find such a large proportion who do not live among their people but have their homes in the distant town. Dr. Wilson, of the Presbyterian board of home missions, who speaks with authority, affirms that of their one hundred and ninety-two country ministers in Missouri only two live with their people in the open country. One of the Ohio Surveys claims that only six per cent, of the country churches of that state have resident pastors. The statement is made that “mail order preaching is killing the country churches.”

The absentee pastor cannot be the seelsorger [PASTOR] that his church and community need. How can he be a fisher of men, fishing for every unchurched soul within reach of his parish? How can he, as a good under-shepherd “know his sheep”, know them by name, and be known of them? How can he feed his sheep and feed his lambs? How can he know when a sheep or lamb is going astray and is in danger of being lost, or is lost! How can he go out after the lost, every one of them and seek until he find them? In so far as he does not constantly, patiently, persistently and prayerfully do all this he is a faithless shepherd if not a hireling. We cannot understand the

conception of the pastoral office work and responsibility of the pastor who does not live among his people. Absentee pastors are guilty of promoting the decline of the country church.

Preaching on secular subjects is another cause. The man who preaches on the need and benefits of the Grange, on good roads, better markets, and more favorable shipping facilities for farm produce; the man of God who discourses on the possibilities of the gasoline engine, the motor truck or the best method of fighting the corn aphid or wheat rust or peach borer or plum curculio or pear blight or San Jose scale or cattle tick or foot and mouth disease or any other such secular subject had better quit calling himself a minister of the Gospel. The man who uses the sacred desk for spinning out his speculations on rural recreation and country cooperation had better step down from the pulpit and seek a place on the chautauqua platform or on the extension lecture force of the agricultural college. As we have seen, it is a good thing for the pastor to be informed on all these and kindred topics. He ought to be able to talk intelligently on them to his people as he goes from house to house – provided always that he does not let these subjects crowd out his spiritual, personal, seelsorger messages. It may be a good thing also for him, if he is thoroughly competent, to lecture on week nights in the school house or elsewhere. But to make these things the staple of his preaching is to be recreant to his trust. This does not mean that he should not bring them in as matter of illustration and application. Happy is he who is apt in so doing. But he dare not use them for dispensing with the Gospel. The old German Rationalists did so and nearly killed the country church in Germany. Such preaching will kill the country church in our land also.

Another kind of preaching that is treason to God and killing to the country church is the preaching of the new, liberal theology. This theology has spread from the city to the country. It boasts itself of having broken the fetters that bound it to a dead past. It is free from all tradition. It scoffs at creeds and confessions of faith. Its children's minds are not to be hampered or darkened by gloomy catechisms. It has thrown away the old doctrines of sin and native depravity. Man has within himself all the potencies and the powers to make him what he ought to be. All he needs to do is to evolve his better self out of himself. With his own inherent strength and reason he can make of himself all that he ought to be. Modern education will soon bring in a new race. Ethical culture will make a new civilization. Those who still

trouble society with violence and crime are the victims of wrong breeding. They are defective without any fault of their own. It is unworthy of this age to punish them. They are to be pitied. They need treatment and cure in hospitals. Their maladies will soon be better understood and will then be eliminated by the beneficent regime of specialists. Eugenics will prevent the births of other defectives. When once the new teaching gets full sway all will be well-born and there will be no more hurtful environment.

Such inane stuff is being preached from thousands of pulpits. The old Bible doctrines of inherited sin, of the corruption of human nature, of its utter inability to change or save itself, of its crushing guilt and certain doom if left to itself, these age old beliefs are held up as relics of dark ages and are not so much as to be named by the cultured sons of the twentieth century.

Since there is no sin in the old sense man needs no Savior. Every man is his own Savior. Good example and good teaching are beneficent and uplifting. The world has always had such encouraging and helpful exemplars. Jesus of Nazareth was one of them. The idea that he was virgin-born is too silly to be laughed at. He was divine, was the Son of God in no other sense than this, that you and I all can be divine, sons of God even as He was. He was ahead of his time and died a martyr to his teaching. He set us an example that we also should be willing to sacrifice ourselves for the uplifting of humanity. The idea of a vicarious atonement is too abhorrent to mention.

King-craft and priest-craft have kept men in ignorance in the past in order that the strong might exploit the weak and that the smart might live riotously from the labors of the ignorant. The exploiters have fooled the people by making them believe that if they would be submissive and work hard they would get an easy and a happy place in Heaven.

But such fables we no longer believe. We are now using our science and our effort here to make this world and our life here a heaven. Our social science and social service will soon make everybody good and happy. As to a future life, we don't know. We are too busy making this life worth living for all. We should rather wear diamonds in Chicago than jewels in Heaven.

Such is the stuff that is doled out in many of the depleted churches in the country. It is no wonder that the lodge is supplanting the church. No wonder

that the country is heathenizing. History is only repeating itself.

Part 4. The Lutheran Situation in the Country

The patriotic American who thinks of the life of the nation rather than of the individual will, if he looks beneath the surface, discern in this God-prospered country symptoms of rural decadence fraught with danger to national efficiency. – Horace Plunket.

Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people that I may discern between good and evil. – Solomon.

The children of Issachar were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do. – First Chronicles.

10. Lutherans And Land

AS A CLASS our Lutherans love the country. A large proportion of them live in the country. No other church has so large a proportion of her membership in the country. It is doubtful also whether any other church has as large a ratio of land owners. Lutherans are a thrifty people. They hate debt. They are averse to paying rent and interest. They have a consuming ambition to own their homes. If they start as land renters they end as land owners. Their quiet conservative character makes country life agreeable to them. They are adapted to the soil. They make good farmers and gardeners. They succeed where others fail. Thousands of farms, abandoned by Yankees have been bought by Lutherans and been made to yield like the

gardens of the gods. Rural New England is being rehabilitated by thrifty Lutheran homes and families. Lutheran farmers made Eastern Pennsylvania rich. They have been the makers of the prosperous districts of the Middle West. They planted prosperity in the newer states of the great West. They are a powerful asset to the states in which they are strong. They are getting rich.

It is a matter of absorbing interest to study these people. America and Americans need to understand them. They can learn many needed lessons from them. To understand them means to appreciate them.

The earliest Lutheran immigrants did not come to America from love of adventure or from love of gold. They were driven from their fatherlands by persecution. The Dutch who settled New Amsterdam and laid the foundations of the Empire State with its colossal city were driven from Holland by religious oppression. The palatines who became the famous so-called thrifty "Pennsylvania Dutch" who made the Keystone State so prosperous came for conscience's sake. Like the Pilgrim Fathers they wanted freedom to worship God. The Salzburger, who colonized in Georgia, whose deep spiritual life made such an impression on both A. Vesley and Whiten* and who thus indirectly contributed to the good that was in early Methodism had been banished from home and homeland because they prized their evangelical faith above all earthly possessions. Several generations later the Germans who settled on the banks of the Mississippi and made the mighty Missouri synod were also moved by love of religious freedom. They too wanted liberty of conscience.

Thousands of Scandinavians also have come to America because they did not like the spirit and conduct of the state church in the homeland. They all appreciate a free church in a free land.

The Lutheran Church in America is the only church whose pulpits and professors' chairs are free from negative critical teaching and tendency. The so-called New Theology finds no advocate in our churches or schools. No Lutheran synod will tolerate as a member any teacher, preacher or professor who voices a doubt as to the integrity and inspiration of the Scriptures as God gave them. In all our pulpits and schools the teaching as to God's revelation rings clear and true. No note of doubt is heard. We preach faith, not doubt.

Our country churches therefore are free from the baleful blight that is killing so many others. To the dangers in other quarters we referred in the last chapter. This needs to be repeatedly emphasized. It will not be out of place here to add a quotation of what we wrote elsewhere:

“Under the garb of science, philosophy, reason and the larger light, unbelief now comes into the homes and churches in the pretended literature of religion, in the periodicals and helps of the Sunday-school and in religious and church journals. It teaches in the Sunday school, preaches in the pulpit and speaks from the professor’s chair. Church colleges and Seminaries are permeated with sugar-coated poison.”

As a result large masses of cultured people, who claim to be friends of Christianity and even members of the church no longer believe that God has given us a real revelation of Himself, of His truth and His Will, and that He raised up and inspired certain men to record this revelation and that we have it in the old book the Bible. As there is no inspired revelation there is no miracle, no special providence, no place for prayer. The supernatural is eliminated as unworthy of belief in this enlightened age. Everything is natural and has come to be what it is by natural evolution. Hence there is no sin, no need of a divine-human Redeemer, no condemnation of sin and no future punishment. These theories, dressed out in plausible form and set forth in pious, beautiful and loving words are deceiving the very elect and are threatening to disintegrate a large part of Reformed Protestantism.

The great Lutheran Church in our land is not troubled with such rationalistic belief. She has met that old foe in the old state church. She knows the enemy, his wiles and his danger.

She will not tolerate him within her bounds in this free land. And this not because she is blind or credulous. She has produced the most scholarly students in the world and the keenest critics and expositors of her sacred books. The deepest research into these questions has been made by the sons of the Lutheran church. She has sounded and sifted these troubles and has come out satisfied. And because of her patient, painstaking and prayerful research and investigation: because she has been through the testing and come out of it convinced, content and joyful in her faith, therefore she is,

“no longer tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

“The Lutheran Church has a theology of her own. It is distinct and peculiar to herself. It is set forth officially in her creeds and catechisms. She loves the doctrines there set forth. She has never felt a need of creed revision. The truths of her theology can be preached. Wherever they are clearly and warmly presented they win adherents. Thinking people outside of our church are gradually finding out that the old Church of the Reformation has a theology that satisfies both head and heart.”¹

Such a church, with such a message set forth in simplicity and earnestness commends itself to country people. It gives them food for thought and satisfies their longing. It is what they need and are waiting for.

The Lutheran Church cannot favor and does not want union with churches of another faith and another spirit. She cannot go into an amalgamation or federation with such alien churches in the country town. But she is drawing more and more from those who have dropped out or are dissatisfied in the loose, liberal, wavering or fanatical churches around. The Lutheran Church will live in the country and in the country town when the others are dead. The better people of the dying and dead churches will find a comfortable and happy spiritual home in the Lutheran Church. The day is fast coming when the Lutheran Church will regain from others more than she ever lost to them.

Lutheran farmers all over our country are rapidly growing rich. This is especially true of the great Mississippi Valley and its tributaries. It will be true also in the Pacific Coast states. As we have noted, Lutherans are always pious toward land. They know the character of good soil and they generally find it. They can also make what others call poor soil rich. They are leaders in scientific farming.

Young Lutherans are crowding the agricultural schools all over the country, but more especially in the West. These are the sons and daughters of the erstwhile sturdy and struggling pioneer. The early settlers cheerfully and patiently endured the hardships and privations incident to the hewing

out of homes in the forest, on the prairie or in the jungle. They and their sons are becoming the independent lords of the land. They have their sections of acres, palatial homes, flocks and herds and tenants and touring cars. One of these Lutheran lords of the soil recently gave to each one of his eight children a section, i. e., six hundred and forty acres of the richest and best improved land. Such Lutherans will soon be counted by the thousand.

Then what of the country church in their midst! Will worldliness, luxury and dissipation increase and make them forget their church? or will they remain loyal and consecrate their wealth to the church, her interests, operations and institutions?

Surely the land-love and land-prosperity of such people, with such admirable traits and characters, made what they are by the dear old Lutheran Church, ought to safeguard and promote the country church in their midst.

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1. See "Problems and Possibilities," pp. 11-13, also 23, 24, If.↩

11. The Lutheran Situation Today

A Bundle of Letters

THERE IS NO OTHER PROTESTANT CHURCH in America so harmonious in its creed, so unanimous in its belief and teaching as the Lutheran Church. With the exception of one large body which has tried to bring an alien doctrine, a doctrine that does not fit in, into our theology,¹ there is a remarkable unity in the official declarations and demands as to our teaching. There are some differences as to the seriousness in which the official declarations are received and the consistency with which the principles are carried out. We are hoping and praying for a better day along these lines. Insincerity and inconsistency as to Lutheran teaching and Lutheran practice have hindered and hurt the Lutheran Church in the country.

Our church practically covers the North American continent. She is the third largest Protestant church and is growing in ratio of membership more rapidly than any other. If her ministry could everywhere have and represent the right spirit and the right activity our great church would rapidly forge to the front.

We are divided into many synods. It is wrong to call our general bodies or our synods denominations. They are all Lutheran. We may call them separate bodies or divisions of Lutherans, but they are not denominations.

Divisions or synods and groups of synods or general bodies are caused partly by difference of nationality and partly by geographical location. True, some of them differ from others in spirit, in practice and in tendency. But

with the above-named exception there is no difference in the officially accepted doctrine.

All the synods have large constituencies in the country. The Lutheran Church no doubt has a larger country membership than any other. What is the present day status of the Lutheran Church in the country?

We have tried to get an intelligent and a correct view of the whole situation by years of personal observation and by interviews with country pastors. We have written questionnaire letters to well informed men in different synods and in different parts of the country. Every Lutheran who is solicitous for the future welfare of his church wants to know and needs to know these things. We want to enlighten and help all such Lutherans.

We know that in Eastern Pennsylvania our church is strong in the country. She might have been the strongest of all in the country and in the smaller towns if she had always been as alert, earnest and aggressive as she should have been. We do not desire to write down accusations. But we do fear that too many ministers have lacked in earnestness of heart, in consecration, in devotion to their work. There have been all too many who have been content with performing the duties demanded in the contract in a cold, mechanical and perfunctory way. There has been too little personal work, too little earnest heart to heart talk of the inner life, of the soul's personal relation with God, of beseeching every one and warning every one night and day with tears. Too little true seelsorge.

The pastoral charges have been too large in many places. The spiritual life cannot be rightly nourished with one or two sermons a month. Union churches have been a calamity in many sections. We are glad they are coming to an end. There have been and are too many absentee preachers. They live in the town and serve far away in the country. Of the evils of this arrangement we have already spoken. Conscientious Lutheran pastors ought to examine themselves. They ought to consider seriously and earnestly whether such an arrangement can be in harmony with the Lutheran idea of the office and call of the minister, with the Lutheran idea of real and faithful seelsorge. Why have so many fanatical sects, sects that are less evangelical but more evangelistic than the Lutherans, sprung up and grown strong in the Lutheran sections of Eastern Pennsylvania, as well as in hundreds of other places? There must be a reason. It is our abiding conviction that where there

is the right spiritual life and work on the part of Lutheran pastors, these defective sects can get no significant hold in Lutheran communities.

In rural Eastern Pennsylvania and all over our land the greatest need of the Lutheran Church is a better equipped and a more spiritual ministry.² The Lutheran Church is not what it ought to be because country pastors are not what they ought to be.

But we believe there is a better day coming in Eastern Pennsylvania also. We believe that all our seminaries are insisting more than formerly on spiritual experience and consecration as the prime requisite for an effective and efficient ministry. We would fain believe that conditions are improving in the rural East.

We have before us a hopeful letter from an East Pennsylvania minister. While he admits the drawbacks and dangers he believes there is general improvement and progress in the country churches. He admits that the trolley cars, the autos and telephones bring many to church, but they also keep many away. He deplors the abounding practice of Sunday visiting and Sunday excursions. He intimates that the problem is serious and needs to be studied. More earnest country work is needed.

We have another letter from a prominent and influential minister in the Joint Synod of Ohio. He knows the churches in his Synod as few men do. Speaking in general he says that the country church problem is not serious in his synod. Many of the strongest, most progressive and liberal churches in the synod are rural. The people are largely prosperous. In many places the local church suffers because the ambitious young people go to the city. In such congregations the most faithful and earnest pastor cannot prevent a decline. But when the departing members of such a church find their way into a Lutheran Church in the city and become active there the depleting Of the country church is still contributing to the growth of the Kingdom of God.

He admits that there is often a local decline. Sometimes it is caused by a lack of such material as Lutherans generally draw from.

“The most prolific cause of decline in city as well as in country is an incompetent and un-spiritual ministry. I find country churches that

are spiritually barren. There has been no growth in intellectual breadth and sympathy.”

“Too often the German church will fight the English with a persistence worthy of a better cause. The young people become alienated and the Reformed churches fatten on Lutheran blood.” *
“Country churches suffer also from too frequent pastoral changes.”

“In the most numerous class of country congregations nothing has been done to supply; the social wants of the people which are more pronounced in the country than in the city. For this reason the young people bid fair to become alienated. And yet it should be easier; to hold the young people in the country than in the city.”

“The congregation should be imbued with a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the neighborhood. I have seen congregations become spiritually barren because they had lost the esteem of the best people in the community. Immoral men were in the lead in the congregation, scandals were rife, and the moral tone was low. Such congregations deserve to decline. There was a previous decline of spirituality.”

We have quoted the substance of our dear friend’s letter. It has much food for thought and serious self-examination.

We turn next to the sunny Southland. We have an informing letter from the enthusiastic and aggressive Secretary of the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension of the United Synod of the South. He says,

"During my two years of service as Secretary of the Board I have traveled about seventy thousand miles. I have visited practically every section of the South where our church is found. Hence I think I can give you reliable information.

My answer to your question as to whether the Lutheran Church in the country is declining I answer with a positive No. Our church in the South is nine-tenths rural. We have comparatively few congregations even in towns of twenty-five hundred. I have found a

few localities where Lutheran practices, such as catechization, liturgical worship, confession and absolution, preaching of pure doctrine, etc., have been abandoned. At such places our church languishes and in a few congregations it is threatened with extinction.

"Otherwise there is no decline. The country church is taking on new life. Modern improvements, such as mail facilities, better roads, better schools, the telephone, the increased value of farm products have made rural life more attractive. It is an industrial way the farmer is on top. It is strictly not true that our rural church is going to the dogs. As proof look at our church schools, our home and foreign mission work, our church paper, all projected and supported by a rural constituency.

"The exceptions only prove the rule. The decline is serious in a few instances I have met with. A return to strictly Lutheran practice, catechetics in particular, will save the day even in the exceptional places."

We are glad indeed to publish this letter. We have had for a long time a warm interest and a great admiration for the wonderful work, the heroism and the optimism of our church in the South. The letter ought to be a tonic for every country pastor.

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1. See "Problems and Possibilities," pp. 164-168.↩
 2. Read over carefully "Problems and Possibilities," pp. 46-56, also "The Lutheran Pastor," pp. 58-68, and the whole of chap, vii with a careful reading of all the scripture references.↩

12. The Situation And Letters (continued)

THERE ARE between two and a half and three millions of Scandinavians in America. Nearly half a million are Danes. Reserving the larger sections of Scandinavians for later consideration we here* survey the children of Denmark. These are not so well-known by American Lutherans as are the more numerous Swedes and Norwegians. They deserve to be better known. They are an interesting people with an intensely interesting history. Their achievements in the development of education in and for the country, as well as their bringing in of a peculiar type of country life and country prosperity have arrested and drawn the attention of the leading students of the country life movement and of education for the country life.

The one Danish man now so prominently before American educators is Bishop Grundvig. He certainly was a remarkable man, a many sided genius, a character made up of contradictory elements. A wonderful scholar, he warned against too much book-learning. A pietist by experience, he impressed an idealistic intellectualism on his scholars. An opponent of the reigning rationalism, he opened its floodgates by repudiating confessional Lutheranism. An enemy of destructive biblical criticism, he gave a deadly blow to implicit faith in the Bible, by practically subordinating it to the Apostles' Creed. An enthusiastic supporter of Danish nationalism, he repudiated the state church and contended for the separation of the church from the state. Truly a medley of mixtures.

This remarkable man is having a great influence in country life circles among us. He gave a powerful impetus to the movement for a more remunerative and a happier country life in his own land. He founded the best country high-school system in the world. He demonstrated that a true cultural education is fundamental to and promotes a worthy vocational

training. He arrested the exodus from farm to city and brought in a real and satisfying back to the land movement.

Unfortunately he divided the Lutheran Church in Denmark and created the Grunvigian party. He thus indirectly became the cause of the division of the Danish Lutherans in America. There are two Danish synods. The one adheres to the teaching of Grundvig. The one synod is the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The other is the United Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The people in both of these bodies, as well as the large number of Danish people who are not gathered into any congregations, all brought with them from the old world a love of country life. They also brought with them the ability to make farming pay. They are among the most prosperous farmers of the great agricultural states of the West. Their church work in the country is good. What they need is a more earnest and persistent effort to gather in the unchurched that are so numerous and are heathenizing in this Christian land.

We quote from a prominent pastor and educator among them:

“Our work in general has the best results in the country churches. One reason for the prosperity of our country work is that we are organizing it into smaller parishes. In settlements where we formerly had two pastors we now have ten. Our people take to the country life where opportunity is given.”

Our hope is that with the improvement of their colleges and seminaries and with the appreciation of the need of English and their more vigorous effort to meet this need they will become an important factor for our Lutheran cause in the great West. We also hope that by and by their divisions will be healed and that they will work together for the ingathering and upbuilding of the spiritual life of the thousands of their people who have not become active members of their congregations.

For a general view of the country situation in the aggressive and enthusiastic General Synod we turn to a very instructive pamphlet on “The Lutheran Church and the Rural Problem,” by the Rev. Paul Harold Heisey, of Des Moines, Iowa. He says:

“There are some rural churches growing, some are standing still, some are dying and some are dead. This is true in face of the fact that probably the Lutheran Church is not suffering in rural decline as other denominations are.”

To the question, “Does the Lutheran Church share in what is known as the decline of the rural church?” Professor R. B. Peery answers: “Yes, decidedly.”

Dr. Yarger, then president of the General Synod, says:

“The Lutheran Church shares slightly in what is known as the decline of the rural church. In the last twenty years our General Synod has lost, I would say, about twenty churches in that way, not all in the open country but in small towns of a few hundred inhabitants.”

Dr. S. J. McDowell answers,

“She does, but possibly not as greatly as some sister denominations, because our people, especially those of foreign birth or ancestry are a rural people by preference.”

Mr. H. B. Gerhart answers:

“No, emphatically no!”

Dr. H. H. Weber:

“Do not think so.”

Dr. J. A. Clutz:

“Not to any great extent, so far as I am familiar with it. According to my observation the great majority of our country and village churches are quite flourishing, have good church buildings or are building better ones and are quite modern in their facilities and methods.”

The Swedish Augustana Synod deserves a serious study by all Lutherans. We have often felt that it would be a helpful experience for some of our German and near-German churches to come into closer personal contact with the Swedish and Norwegian Lutherans. Ever since we first came to know and appreciate these Scandinavian Lutherans we have felt drawn to them. They, more than any other Lutherans unite a doctrinal soundness with a deep spirituality.

There are still some foolish, superficial Lutherans who imagine that to be seriously concerned for confessional orthodoxy means to be endangered for spiritual life. There are still some narrow, cold, intellectual Lutherans who, because these good things have been abused by false and unsound fanatics, are afraid to emphasize awakening, conversion, experience, piety and the inner Spiritual life. They are afraid lest by emphasis and insistence on the subjective side the objective doctrine might suffer. Neither of these two types are good Lutherans. They ought to learn from the Scandinavians that a care for sound doctrine and an earnest insistence on and appreciation of a deep and growing spiritual experience belong together. Among our Scandinavian Lutherans we can see the union of the two exemplified and demonstrated. Not that all their members are all that they ought to be in these respects. But the two sides of true Lutheranism are emphasized and urged in their schools, in their conventions, in their preaching and teaching as well as in their private seelsorge much more generally than they are in other parts of our church. We all need to study them and learn from them. They can teach the rest of us many needed lessons.

We want to know the situation in their country churches. Of the Norwegians we speak in another place.

We have before us several instructive letters from leading Augustana Synod men. One of these has made country church life "a specialty both in theory and in practice." He knows whereof he speaks and he speaks with authority. He says:

"As to the question of country church decline I will say that there has been during the last years and is yet a noticeable tendency among our country churches to decline, or rather to decrease as to number in membership. With this decrease follows also a decline as to

efficiency, enthusiasm, financial strength and support of the general work.

"Among contributing causes are the rise in the price of land and the consequent removal to newer settlements in hope of better opportunities.

"A general disgust with the drudgery of the work in the country, dissatisfaction with social conditions, lack of legitimate recreation, poor schools and the tendency of our day to live too much for pleasure and an easy life. All this makes the city life look very attractive. Intermarriages with non-Lutherans and the proselyting work of the sects around us also hurt us."

Another valuable letter is from a wide-awake and well informed leader among the Swedes. He also knows his synod and the conditions that prevail. He is one of the younger professors in their leading school and is seriously solicitous that his church may understand the time and measure up to her opportunity and responsibility.

While admitting that there is a "tendency to decline" he speaks hopefully of the general situation. He writes:

"The Swedish Lutheran Church in the country is not declining. Even the older congregations are holding their own except in some lumber sections where the saw-mills are closing down and the population is scattering. Our young people are very loyal and seem to be satisfied to wait for "better times," while the language transition is taking place. And though the English is being introduced rather gradually, enough of it is being used to make them feel that their wants are being considered, while the interests of the old folks are conserved and their very natural prejudices are respected.

"Some years back there was quite a general desire and effort on the part of the young people of our country churches to move to the city. But they are learning very rapidly that the city does not offer all the advantages and the exodus is falling off proportionately. The 'best young people' seem to be quite contented to stay in the country and

in the smaller town, excepting of course the usual about equal proportion of discontented souls who hope to better themselves by a change.

“I think also that the western towns and farming communities have better church leaders, greater and more cheerful activity, a better social spirit, more local patriotism, better physical comforts and a larger healthier spirit than those of the average East.”

As contributing causes to whatever decline may be threatening the professor mentions:

“A spirit of worldliness a craving for sensuous pastime by a generation ill at ease, lacking in the poise and repose of a mind at peace, living on the fruits of a religious experience of the past.

“The language question, the solution of which is not quite keeping pace with the demands, nor even with the real needs.

“A one-sided orthodoxism in various forms and a slightly perceptible ebbing in personal interest and spiritual influence on the part of spiritual leaders. The distraction of mind and dissipation of energy in having too many irons in the fire. Loss of power in making wheels within wheels in the machinery. Lack of literature that ‘takes’ and lack of rational (not rationalistic) interpretation and practical application of scripture truth.”

“All this might be enlarged upon, but it tells the story. So far, however, we are keeping going, or are kept going, too much I fear by the momentum given by the living past.”

Surely the experiences of the Augustana Synod ought to give us all much food for serious thought. Ought it not to move us also to earnest heart-searching and repentance?

13. The Situation And Letters (continued)

WE TURN NOW to one of the most earnest, consecrated, progressive and prosperous bodies in the Lutheran Church. The annual conventions of this body are great mass meetings. They require the largest public buildings in the cities in which they meet. At their twenty-fifth anniversary in Fargo, N. D., they overcrowded the Billy Sunday tabernacle, vacated a short time before. They sit for ten days and seem to be sorry when all is over. Their district conventions are attended by hundreds even in the great cities. When they meet in the country the plow stands still in the furrow and the reaper in the field. It is not uncommon to have a thousand men, women and children attend. The laymen all have a voice and take part freely in the discussions.

The great United Norwegian Lutheran Church is probably the most rural of all Lutheran bodies. Ninety-five per cent, of the members belong to and worship in country congregations. And yet they are doing wonders. They are putting other Lutherans and even other denominations to shame by what they are doing for education, for missions and for mercy. The blessing of God is upon them. Their religion is experimental, hearty, consecrated, as well as soundly Lutheran.

We have before us a profoundly interesting portrayal of the country situation in that great body by one of its leading men, one who was born and brought up in it and who knows it from end to end. He says in substance among other things:

"In Illinois and Iowa some of our rural congregations are losing in numbers because many of the people are selling their farms and moving to the richer and cheaper lands in the Northwest and in Canada. They are getting rich. The tremendous material prosperity of

the last decade has not had a good effect on the spiritual life of our people. This is becoming a serious problem.

"Then, many of our parishes are too large. Where service can be had only every third or fourth Sunday it is not conducive to spiritual growth. We note in many places a decrease in attendance at the Lord's Supper – a very bad sign.

"Work among the young people is not as effective as it should be. They are not taught and encouraged as they should be to become church workers and leaders. We are often too conservative and overly fearful of adopting new methods of church work. We need more intelligent and intensive work along these lines. There is not as much of the old Lutheran type of piety. Naturally the type on American soil cannot be just the same as on Norwegian soil."

(The serious question is not so much as to whether it is of the same type, but rather as to whether it is of the same character, the same depth, the same earnestness, the same transforming power that makes its possessor live in daily heart communion with God, that fills the home life with the cheerful, happy atmosphere of spiritual life and joyful service, that makes the Word of God dwell richly in the heart and home, that manifests itself in all the intercourse and dealing with fellow man, that joyfully labors for and gives to all the interests and all the activities of the church.

The worldly prosperity of these good people is affecting, as it does everywhere, the type and character of their country people.)

"The fraternal orders are slowly gaining members among our people. This has a marked effect on their spirituality. It is an ill omen.

"The children are not all as thoroughly instructed in religion as they were in former times. The commercialized amusements in the smaller towns are generally bad.

(This is a serious problem with all country churches. The Lutheran Churches will have to reckon with it wisely. The question of furnishing something better needs to be seriously studied.)

“Then there is the language problem. This is often more perplexing in the country than in the city. It creates fields for our Home Mission Board at the very doors of our strong congregations.”

From this interesting survey of the situation in this great body of earnest Lutherans, we see that the country problem in general is not yet as acute among them as it is with many other Lutherans. The problem, however, will become more and more serious. They too need to study the problem, to look the future in the face and to prepare for it bravely and wisely. May this little book help them also.

One of the great good German synods of the Lutheran Church is the Iowa Synod. This synod was projected by the sainted Doctor Wilhelm Loehe after he found that he could no longer work with the Missouri Synod. A little band of Loehe's pupils were sent by him to organize a new German synod in harmony with his principles and spirit. The fathers of the synod were the Rev. Messrs. Grossman, Deindoerfer and the Fritschel brothers.

These men who organized the synod were confessionally sound and conscientious. From the deeply earnest and consecrated Loehe they had also imbibed a spirit of deep, vital piety. Their Lutheranism was more than a profession of confessional orthodoxy. It was this. It was *ex animo* sound in doctrine. But it was also a deep spiritual experience. And so this German synod, like the Scandinavian synods, combined confessional zeal with a living, inner experience and consecration. Their faith worked by love.

This spirit of sound pietism has characterized this great synod from the beginning. God has blessed this synod richly. Our hope and prayer is that in these days of growing worldliness this synod may retain and maintain the spirit of the fathers.

A minister born and bred in an Iowa Synod parsonage, now occupying a position of prominence and great promise, a man who knows his synod from end to end, has given us a most satisfactory inside view of the country conditions.

He informs us that a number of the oldest and once the strongest country churches are now in a sad state of decline. He mentions some of these venerable churches by name and says:

“Thus I could continue indefinitely. It is a fact that our country churches are declining. Our young men are leaving their homes to move to the town or to go west. Our farmers are growing wealthy. They buy all the land they can. Farms are much larger now than they were twenty years ago. With the aid of improved machinery they can till much more soil than they could in former years. So there is not land enough left for the younger generation, and the son who does not inherit the father’s estate must leave. Where there used to be from two to four farms there is now but one.”

"The church in the smaller town is on the whole more prosperous. We are losing in some places and gaining rapidly in others. The reason for the difference lies in the pastor every time. The pastor who uses English in all or part of his services as a rule builds up a strong congregation. He not only holds what is entrusted to him, but he gains new members without ceasing. On the other hand the pastor who puts language on the same basis with Lutheranism is feeding the sectarian churches in his town. Our synod is beginning to see these conditions and is taking the lesson to heart. Our young men are taking up the work in the language of the land in no half-hearted way. We now graduate classes from our seminary of which every member is able to preach in English as well as in German.

"To sum up: In the Iowa synod the church in the country is declining. This cannot be said in an unqualified sense of the church in our smaller towns. The causes are the usual ones: The lure of the city; the impossibility to buy the high priced land; the attraction of the cheaper land in the west, the south or Canada. A prolific cause, as we have seen, is the language question, especially in the small town.

"May I illustrate from my own experience? Not long ago I began to preach in a little town up the river. Until I came to gather up the sheep of our own fold, a Methodist had the field all to himself. I preach in both languages. I now have three times as many people in my audience as the Methodist has. If ‘the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity’ and is brought to the people in an intelligible way they will come to hear it.

“In my former charge where I labored nine years, using both languages and doing things in an American way, we have a congregation of ninety families with a fine church and parsonage. Formerly there was a little flock of twelve or fourteen families.”

And so it is the same old story. The Lutheran Church learns new lessons slowly and often reluctantly. Thank God she is learning. May this book help her to learn more rapidly and more effectually.

We take another backward glance to old Pennsylvania. This time we look to that part of the state which lies west of the Alleghenies.

This rural section is not as purely agricultural as the other sections referred to above. A large part of it is known as “the soft coal region.” The one large central city is smoky Pittsburgh. In former years practically all of the great iron and steel furnaces, foundries, factories and mills were crowded along the banks of the three rivers of Pittsburgh. In those days the coal fields were nearly all in Allegheny County. By and by coal was discovered in Westmoreland and other counties. Mining towns, with their unpainted shanties and general untidy and forbidding aspect sprung up like magic where formerly there had been nothing but peaceful, productive and happy farmsteads.

Coke ovens, mills and factories, all belching out their clouds of smoke and soot, followed. The face of the country and the character of the population changed rapidly. Foreigners from the Roman Catholic lands of the old world crowded in. They brought with them their ignorance, their coarseness, and their vices. Corporations and capitalists, instead of doing all they could to uplift them, too often exploited them and kept them down. As usual labor made the rich very rich and with all its toil and dingy home life remained poor. Capitalists will one day have to render a heavy account for not giving labor its rightful share of what it produces.

Capital will have to answer for the millions of children, robbed of the joys of childhood, forced to spend what ought to be the happy, laughing, singing springtime of life in sadness and gloom. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

And so a new face was put on the rural counties of Western Pennsylvania. Farms were despoiled, youth became restless. The lure of

ready and regular cash drew many to the towns and to the great city. The country school and the country church suffered.

One who is well acquainted with the condition of our rural Lutheran Churches in Western Pennsylvania writes:

“During the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century twenty-four leading country churches show a net increase of five per cent. During the first fifteen years of the twentieth century these same churches show a decrease of twelve per cent. During the former period the Sunday schools of these churches increased thirty-two per cent., during the latter they increased only six and a half percent.”

“We are glad to note that the life in these churches is not dying. During the former period there was an increase in benevolent contributions including everything not used for local support, of thirty-two per cent. During the latter period a further increase that ran it up to forty-one per cent.”

Our informant tells us – and he knows – that

“The country congregations have been the more ready to respond to the church for funds.”

He also writes that

“The larger proportion of students now in college preparing for the ministry are from the country congregations.”

He rightly calls the country churches “the base of supplies” and believes that the whole Lutheran Church needs to study her country church problem and to strengthen the things that remain that are ready to die.

As to the remedies he agrees with our contention throughout this book that the one, great, crying need is more consecration in the ministers, more persistent and enthusiastic personal work on their part, and especially better preaching.

“Then they, the preachers, need enthusiasm to win men. They must be conscious that they have what the men need, that they have goodly pearls. They need the enthusiasm of the salesman and insurance agent to have these men take these pearls.”

The ministers need to gather men and get others to help them gather men into adult catechetical and Bible classes. Men like to sit together, not to be quizzed and drilled like boys, but where they can talk back, express doubts freely, ask questions and draw out answers from the teachers and from others. If once these honest, thoughtful yeomen learn that they can get light on the questions on which they speculated between the plow handles or on the wagon seat, or the seat of the mower or reaper, or as they silently went about their chores, they will be glad to come to adult classes and get light and food for further thought. The country church needs the adult Bible and catechetical class.

And in the Pittsburgh synod as elsewhere, the country church needs to be made a factor in enriching the social and civic life of the community. Everywhere the country church should radiate kindness, neighborliness, community interest, fellowship and group enjoyment. The church should make the community life happier, purer, richer and better. She should shed over and through it all the Spirit of Him who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. From out of the church there must shine into the hearts and homes and social gatherings the joy and the hope of the world to come, whereof the sons and daughters of God do love to speak.

14. Summary Of The Situation

THESE VARIOUS VOICES from diverse divisions of the great Lutheran Church help us to understand our own country church conditions and problems.

The one outstanding hopeful fact is that the Lutheran situation is not nearly so alarming as is that of the other churches. To give but one example: In an Iowa district with a population of one hundred thousand there were about one hundred and thirty churches of the Reformed denominations. Many Methodist Churches are closed. Nearly one-half of the Baptist Churches are dead. An even half of the Congregationalist have deceased. One-fifth of the United Brethren, three-fourths of the Free Methodist, and four-sevenths of the Adventist Churches have ceased to exist. In the same district the Lutherans have established eleven congregations, not one of which has been given up.

The Lutheran stock came originally from the staid and conservative Germanic and Scandinavian lands. Their ancestry lived largely in the country. Their American descendants are used to country life. They know how to adapt themselves to country conditions. They are used to hard work. They are inured to hardship. They make successful farmers. Instead of exhausting they enrich the soil. Because they love the land they want to own it. The few that are renters soon become owners. But a small proportion retire to the town. One trouble is that they are insatiably land hungry. So greedy are they to buy ever more land that they stunt their own better impulses, become hard and unsympathetic and refuse to wife and children the relaxations and recreations they deserve. And so the industrious and frugal elders do not feel the craving for diversion and excitement that troubles the native Americans. The lure of the city is not so strong among our staid and stolid Lutherans as it is among others. Tenant farmers and

abandoned farms are rare among them. The church in their midst does not suffer so much because of a depleting population.

Conservatism is good, but ultra conservatism is bad. Many of our farmers are unreasonably and extremely conservative. What was good enough for their forefathers is good enough for them. They are opposed to innovations unless they are convinced that they will directly or indirectly save or make more money. On such grounds alone do they favor improved buildings, machinery and live stock. For these reasons labor-saving and time-saving devices and tools are purchased.

The poor wife is not considered a money maker. Her domain is non-constructive. She must worry along and wear herself out with the most primitive kitchen and house equipment. To give the men more time for money-making work she must bend her back to the breaking point in chopping and carrying wood and pumping and carrying in water. Though she has abundance of work in the house she must do the man's work of milking and churning, if not of feeding and working in the field. These things are unAmerican and ought not so to be, except in cases of temporary and dire necessity. The farm girls want no such drudgery in their womanhood. Who will blame them if they leave the farm for the city. The boys want no such a life for their future wives and they too go to the city.

These hindrances to country life and to the country church have been noted before. They need to be noted because our Lutheran farmers are prone to be guilty.

And the unfairness of many farmers in begrudging the family the kind of clothing that others get and that throws so much brightness into the life of youth, as well as the home embellishments and attractions so much loved drive the youth away.

The young people have a right to a pecuniary interest on the farm. They need to learn to earn, to use and to save their own money. The industrious young man has the right to his own horse and buggy or auto. We plead for a richer and brighter life for the children and youth on the farm, and for an opportunity to get a start for a home of their own on the part of the faithful children. These things also will help the country church.

Then there is also in too many places a lack of interest in neighborhood sociability. No provision is made to foster a community spirit. People do not get together socially. Neither church nor school house are used for public gathering. The district has no public hall and the village no rest room or recreation center.

There is no break in the dull, daily toil. It is a monotonous round of dread drudgery. The craving for sociability is not gratified. The call of the city, its lights and its life is heard. It strikes a responsive chord. The heart of youth answers. The lively and most promising of the young people flee to the city. The country becomes more dull than before. Enterprise lags. The church suffers.

As far as the country school is concerned, Lutheran communities fare better than many others. Taking them in the mass Lutheran people love education. They want their children to have at least a good common school education. As a rule they pay their school tax more willingly than they pay their road tax. Their over conservatism may fail to appreciate road improvement, but they are ready for school improvement. In the districts of the West where the population is largely Lutheran the country schools are the very best.

Lutheran farmers also favor and support academies and colleges. In the West they send a goodly proportion of their children to these church schools. The lack of school facilities and opportunities for education does not depopulate Lutheran communities as it does others.

As a class the Lutheran ministers in the country will probably average above those of other churches. As noted above in many country districts there are only too many uneducated or poorly educated ministers in the Reformed Churches. In some sections not one out of four has had a course in a theological seminary. Such so-called ministers preach thinking people out of the church. In the Lutheran Churches it is a rare thing to find a minister who has not had a full seminary course. Most of them were college graduates before they went to seminary. Our country churches are not suffering from ignorant ministers as many others are. People who go to the Lutheran Church get food for thought, insight into God's dealings with men, His means and methods of grace, His way of salvation. The Lutheran

preacher opens the scripture to his people. In this important matter our country churches are better off than many others.

While we have all too many absentee preachers among us also, we believe that our proportion is much smaller than that of many others. Such preachers ought to be the rarest exception. Country congregations need a seelsorger in their midst.

Many of our country pastors are too poorly paid. Among the Germans especially the salary is often shamefully small. We have often wondered how these ministers are able to feed and clothe their large families. It is praiseworthy in a minister to be willing to sacrifice for his people, his church and his Lord. All honor to the pioneer preachers who shared the hardships of the new settlers in the clearings and on the wind-swept prairies. All honor to the home missionaries who hunted up, visited and ministered to the lonely ones scattered so widely as sheep without a shepherd. The church at large has never fully appreciated the privations, the poverty, the hardships and the sacrifices of the traveling preachers who carried the word and sacraments to the lonely settlers. God has written them down in his book of remembrance. There are those who are doing such service today without promise of salary. They are carrying God's promises, his wine and his milk without money and without price. Many of these men deserve to be counted in among the noble army of martyrs. Their works do follow them.

But in the regular ministry God has ordained that they that preach the Gospel shall live of the Gospel. God has said of his ministers that the laborer is worthy of his hire.

It certainly should not be expected of a pastor who faithfully ministers to a parish of well to do farmers that he should be compelled to live upon a salary so meagre that he cannot properly clothe his family or provide them with the needed comforts in the home. Where the people are able to pay it is their bounden duty to give him enough to equip himself with the books and periodicals that he needs in order to keep up with the time. He and his family have a right to have music in the home and money for music lessons. He has a right to a salary sufficient to give all his children a good education. He has a right to provide against sickness, accident, death and old age in a

good life insurance company. To his well to do farmers he ministers richly in spiritual things.

They should gladly, liberally minister to him of their temporal things.

Our Lutheran farmers are not poor. If they are in the beginning they do not remain poor. But too many of them are selfish and miserly. They do not like to give. They have never experienced the joy of grateful giving. They pay their pastors a shamefully small salary. They thus cripple him in efficiency. They keep him from doing his best work. They hinder and hamper their church. The country church suffers because their pastor is so poorly paid.

For the same reasons the church building and grounds are often unattractive and shabby.

An ugly building does not attract. The building ought to be churchly, roomy, bright and well kept. A dilapidated "meeting house" in a wilderness of weeds will never attract the community. God made His temple the most beautiful building of the land. God loves beauty. He is prodigal with it. He scatters it over the face of nature in the flowers by the wayside, in field and in forest. He paints it in the sunset sky. He decks the mighty heavens in diamonds. His house in the country ought to be beautiful.

The road to the church ought to be the very best possible. There ought to be sheds for the horses, not for the members' horses alone, but also for the teams of the strangers and visitors.

All these things help the country church. They can be had. Where there's a will there's a way. The pastor needs to point the way and lead the people to walk in it.

The country church-yard should be a place of beauty and of peace. It should be kept neat, clean of dry grass and weeds, and a garden of the choicest flowers. What a disgrace to the church is a wilderness grave yard. It hurts the country church. All these externals count. A God who loves beauty counts them. They count in any community. Ugliness repels, beauty attracts.

Part 5. Counsels for Country Pastors

"To the Law and to the Testimony; if they speak not according to this Word there is no light in them. M – Isaiah.

"Thus saith the Lord: Stand ye in the ways and see and ask for the old paths, where is the good way and walk therein and ye shall find rest for your souls." – Jeremiah.

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men and cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive." – Paul.

"Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." – John.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts they shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto f ablest ' – Paid.

"For the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears/ ' – Paul.

15. Right And Wrong Remedies

AS WE HAVE SEEN, the spiritual situation in many large areas of the open country, is certainly serious. A heathenizing process is going on. In many country towns the same dangerous tendencies are at work. There are serious problems before the American country church. If the critical conditions are not faced and rightly remedied, then woe be to our land.

The attention of the better part of the Reformed churches is being aroused. The alarm has been sounded. The surveys are a trumpet call to the Christian conscience. The literature on the subject is increasing with leaps and bounds. All sorts of remedies are proposed. Some good things are suggested. These we ought to consider. Many foolish things are recommended. These we must reject. We Lutherans also should ask: "Watchman, what of the night?"

We are grateful for the assurance that our situation is not nearly so serious as is that of others. But there are signs and omens in our sky also. We do well to know our dangers. We do better when we safeguard ourselves against them. We do best when we make future dangers impossible.

In the secular, sociological and Reformed church literature, one of the prime agencies urged for saving the country church, is the preaching of sermons that will show how farming may be made more profitable. The pulpit is to be turned into a platform to teach agriculture. The gospel of intensive and scientific farming is to take the place of the old time preaching of sin and grace, of redemption and salvation, of soul saving, and life cleansing. Instead of going to church to be made wise unto salvation, to be made holier and happier, men are to go to church to regenerate the soil and the live stock. Preachers are to restudy and reintroduce the message of the German Rationalists of a century ago. They, with their worldly wisdom, preached the country churches of Germany empty. These American fools are to bring back their old, empty, unsatisfying message and preach our country churches full!

No, no, we agree with our Joint Synod friend quoted above when he says: "To teach agriculture and farm life from the pulpit is bosh and nonsense. There would be as much sense in preaching strategy and ballistics to a military congregation." The Lutheran preacher must still preach the preaching that God commands him.

This, however, does not mean that ignorance of country life and work is a virtue. Every good pastor ought to be interested in the things that interest his people. It is highly commendable in the pastor that he inform himself in the things that engage his people six days in the week. We earnestly advise every country pastor and every prospective one to master at least the elementary principles of the science of agriculture. If it is possible without injuring the duties of his calling he ought to take a short course in an agricultural college. Not that he should take such knowledge into the pulpit, except to use it in the way of illustration and application. But it would make him a more interesting friend and companion among his people. It would help him to commend life in the country. It would help him to keep some of his best young people from going to the city. It would give him more influence in advising parents to send their boys and girls who expect to make the country their home, to agricultural college.

It would make himself more contented in the country. If capable he might occasionally speak in the school house or public hall on a week night on subjects of interest to country life. It would enable him to bring good extension lecturers into the neighborhood. It would enable him to encourage and take part in farmers' institutes. Without interfering with the high and holy duties of his office he might thus do much to make the life of his people on the farm and in the home richer and happier. And so he would materially help to strengthen his country church.

Understanding the psychology of the rural mind, the preacher should ever warn his people lovingly and patiently, against the peculiar dangers to which they are ever subject. This he should do publicly and from house to house. In this way he might save some from settling down into that stubborn individualism, that stingy conservatism and that selfish unfairness to his family, so common among farmers. By saving them from themselves he might save them for his church and for his God.

Many absurdly foolish things have been written and are being preached to preachers all over the country as to the duty of the minister to furnish recreation for the community. Many self-constituted counselors advise the turning of the church into a playhouse, the making of the congregation a corporation for furnishing public amusement and the changing of the minister of the gospel into a clown who is to furnish fun for the whole country side.

To all such suggestions the Lutheran minister can give only an indignant and an emphatic No. He has too high an appreciation of his own holy calling and office. He has too sacred a conception of the mission of the church, which is the Bride of Christ.

And yet the true minister does have compassion on the multitude. He does realize the all too common monotony and drudgery of country life. He does bear in mind that our good God has given to all normal people a social instinct, a desire for society, a longing for the joys of social fellowship and recreation. The good pastor knows that these human impulses are especially strong in the young. He does want to make his people happier as well as better. He does want to check and weaken the lure of the city.

What can he do without lowering the dignity of his office or lessening his influence as a seelsorger?

He cannot turn his church, which has been consecrated for the worship of God, for the preaching of the word and the administering of the sacraments, into an amusement center. But he can work for a commodious parish house or public hall. Not as pastor of his church but as a citizen he can encourage halls for the public, with well selected libraries, reading, recreation and rest rooms. He can encourage and work for and get his people as citizens and neighbors to work for public gatherings, lectures, musicals, singing schools, spelling bees, literary and debating clubs and any other form of innocent and uplifting public entertainment, lie ought to be a nature-student. It would be a public benefit if he could and would give familiar public talks on birds and flowers and trees. The moving picture has immense possibilities within itself. It can be made a mighty instrument for entertainment and instruction as well as for moral and spiritual uplift. We hope the day is coming when every country community will have its own first class machine, with none but pure and elevating films. What a welcome weekly rift it might make in the otherwise monotonous life of the farm house. And why should not the country pastor encourage and help toward this and the other uplifting agencies? Let the church people, as citizens and neighbors, provide, encourage, manage and control the neighborhood joys and festivities. The right kind of social pleasures cannot be other than helpful to the country church.

16. Right and Wrong Remedies (Continued)

ANOTHER REMEDY for weakness and decline in the country church that is loudly and frequently urged is a merging of the various churches in a community into one. The attractive goal that is presented is one church instead of many weak ones. This strong church would be efficient in every direction. It could “hire” a high-priced, eloquent, drawing preacher. He and his family would cultivate culture and command influence. Needed lay-helpers, efficient social workers, Sunday school experts, soulful singers, and other serviceable attractions could be secured. And so everybody would flock to the one attractive, strong, central church. There would be no more stay-at-homes. The community would become prosperous harmonious and happy. Truly a fetching vision, a consummation devoutly to be wished for.

But can it be? And would it work? Aye, there’s the rub. Such Utopias have often been worked out on paper and word-painted on the platform. Where have they been practically realized without a sacrifice of conviction and devotion to the truth, without a lowering of the spiritual life?

We can conceive of cases where village and country churches ought to combine. There are churches that claim that distinctive doctrines are of no importance, that the things that divide churches are unessential, that it makes no difference what one believes, that after all, doctrines are mere opinions, that one opinion is as good as another.

On the ground of their own assertions such liberal churches are self-confessed promoters of causeless division. Convictions are wrong. Convictions they do not have. For baseless opinion they divide the body of Christ. On their own showing, all such liberal, broad, accommodating churches ought to welcome every opportunity to disband and merge with any neighbor church. If they are unwilling to do this they convict

themselves of insincerity in their boasting of charity for the " opinions" that prevail in the adjoining church. Where there is no principle at stake, where no convictions of truth need to be given up there ought to be church mergings.

In like manner the so-called churches that lay themselves out on some one idea and make a hobby of it, but differ in modes and methods only, have no valid ground for remaining separate from each other. Such are the immersionist sects, the holiness sects, and the wild revival sects. All immersionists ought to combine. So ought all holiness people. All extreme revivalists ought to be in one organization. And yet we often' find two or more organizations or groups of each kind in a small town or country community. When thus divided into warring bands that try to annihilate each other they are the most wicked sectarians of all.

Many of the Reformed churches, on their own showing, ought to unite with each other. Where it is only a name that is contended for, it should be willingly dropped for a stronger, more economical and more efficient community church.

All three of the above named possible mergers are desirable. They would help to solve the church problem in non-Lutheran communities. We are always glad to learn of such combinations, provided always that they do not weaken faith and spiritual life.

What should be the Lutheran attitude toward this proposed solution of the country church problem? Divisions and schisms among Lutherans are also sinful. Wherever there is a Lutheran Church that is hostile against another Lutheran Church someone has sinned, and is sinning still. It may be the fault of the people in one or both churches. It may be their ancestors that are to blame. The unhappy division may be an inheritance from a former generation.

On general principles it is wrong to erect a Lutheran altar against a Lutheran altar. We have seen three English Lutheran Churches within a stone's throw of each other in the open country. Such a situation is a shame and a scandal.

And yet there may be conditions that justify the planting of a new Lutheran Church where there is one already established.

The language question may make it necessary. Where the old church tenaciously holds on to a foreign tongue, will admit no English services and so robs the children and youth of having the Gospel in the only language which they can understand and where the youth is being lost from the church there an English Lutheran Church has a right to come. The saving of the children to the church is more important than the saving of a foreign tongue. Too many tragic facts establish this contention.

Along this line our Norwegian friends are facing a great opportunity and a great responsibility. When the coming great union goes into effect there will be scores of towns and communities where two or three of their churches are close together. Without hesitation or dispute one should speedily become an English Lutheran Church. If the Norwegians will not or cannot effect this happy change, then let them not complain if other Lutheran bodies plant English churches in these towns and so save the coming generation to the faith of the Reformation.

It may also be that there is in the town or neighborhood a church that is Lutheran in name only. It may be one of that unionistic type whose pulpit is open to teachers who stand for a faith foreign to that of the Lutheran Church, whose communion altar is open to those who deny the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's supper. It may be a church where distinctively Lutheran doctrines are kept in the background if not perverted to please the nonLutheran neighbors. Union revivals may be taking the place of careful catechizing. The whole spirit and atmosphere may be Eeformed instead of Lutheran. The pastor may be a member of a secret order and take part in the services and doings of a Christless lodge.

There may be in that church and in that community people to whom the Lutheran faith and worship and spirit and practice are very dear. To these people the Lutheran confessions and the worship and life that grow out of them mean something. They have conscientious convictions on these matters. They want for themselves and for their children a church which is Lutheran in doctrine, in practice and in life. They have a right to have such a church. It is their duty to get it. If they cannot make the church already there Lutheran in fact as well as in name, it is their sacred duty to establish there a church that can be for them a real spiritual home.

For these reasons it may be necessary to have more than one Lutheran Church in a small town or country neighborhood, but to erect altar against altar for motives of synodical ambition or pride or jealousy or rivalry is a disgrace and a sin. He is not a good Lutheran who puts his synod or organization above the Lutheran faith.

In the country and in the country town contiguous Lutheran Churches ought to unite wherever they can do so on a sound confessional basis. In many places this would solve a critical country church problem. A better understanding, a better spirit of unity, a closer and more happy cooperation, a federation that will federate, these are great Lutheran needs everywhere. They are especially needed in the country and village.

It goes without saying that the Lutheran Church cannot even consider any proposed uniting with neighboring Reformed churches. Such a movement is altogether out of the question. It need not be considered here.

17. Remedies (Continued)

WE HAVE ADMITTED all along that there is much wrong with the country church in general. The widespread interest, investigation and casting about for betterment are not without cause. There is cause for serious concern.

We as Lutherans do not want to close our eyes to the conditions. We also want to know where there is wrong and what it is. We are not worthy of our name as Lutheran Christians if we do not seriously try to right what is wrong.

But we are not ready to fall in with every proposed move for betterment. We believe not every spirit. We try the spirits. We prove all things. We know that our days are days of testing and sifting. We know that many false prophets and teachers and expedients and experiments are abroad. We know that the very elect are in danger of being deceived.

A new combination of Protestant leaders and churches has been organized. It is one of the greatest of its kind ever organized. It has wisdom and wealth at its back. It is closely related to and influenced by the Religious Education Association.¹ It is called the "Federation of the Churches of Christ in America." It is producing and circulating a large literature. It is giving much attention to the country church. One of its books deals with religious conditions in Vermont. Its joint authors are Charles Otis Gill and Gifford Pinchot. After describing the deplorable condition of the country churches, it recommends among other things the adoption of a social service program and a state-wide and country-wide organization among the churches for the promotion of the general social welfare.

Social service is to be the great panacea for all the ills that afflict the church in country as well as city. The emphasis is on the word Social. We used to speak and hear of the saving Gospel, it is now the social Gospel. We used to read of religious revival, it is now social revival. The church of the

past from the days of Christ, of the apostles, was concerned with the spiritual redemption of man; it is now his social redemption. Heretofore the redemption and regeneration of the soul was precious. Now it is social regeneration. Formerly the church had much to say of the world to come; her conversation was in Heaven. The church like her dear Master preached much of the Kingdom of God. She conceived it and set it forth as a Kingdom of Grace here, a kingdom within the hearts of God's children, a kingdom that is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. She taught that the Kingdom of Grace is fostered in the church and that it is the gateway to the Kingdom of Glory.

Now according to Rauschenbusch and his school the Kingdom of God is an ethical social order. It is of this world and for this world. It consists in social well-being. It is a Utopia where love and brotherhood shall reign and where social justice shall permeate all the relations of life.

It is the church's business and mission to build such a social and materialistic kingdom. She is to create a new social order. The old Gospel is to be set aside. Its place is to be taken by a philosophy of bread and butter and recreation. That bread is to be eaten without too much sweat of the brow. The salvation that man needs is a betterment of his environment. When this is done man will be as good as he need be.

The new social program is recently set forth in a drastic manner in The Northwestern Christian Advocate. Here it is in substance: "Besides visiting and preaching the country parson is to interest the people of the countryside in clubs. He is to tell 'Squire Andrews just why that roan calf is to be fed on baked beans for a year. He is to be a divinely commissioned busybody. He will organize the children to clear the village street of weeds. He will head the agitation against the deadly drinking cup, manage the baseball team, introduce a painless dehorner, survey Thompson's lower eighty, and arrange a vacuum cleaner exhibition. He is the beneficent genius of the country side. If Mr. Thompson's wheat runs only fifty-five pounds to the bushel and if Mr. Robinson ships a carload of hogs to market just after the price has dropped forty cents it is because they did not consult the man who is trained to save their crops as well as their souls."

In the new teaching sin is no longer a disease of the heart, a fault in human nature, a guilt that God must condemn; sin is social, it is a wrong

arrangement of economic social conditions. As Prof. Patten says: "Sin is misery, misery is poverty and the cure of poverty is income." The love of money then instead of being the root of all evil is the hope of society and its getting will save humanity. Oh, the lies that the human heart is prone to believe! Surely it is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

In the country the social propaganda wants more scientific and successful farming. It wants better roads, better markets, better prices for produce. It wants more sanitary and more convenient and better equipped homes. It wants less drudgery for women and children. It wants more diversion or recreation for the lonely toilers upon the land. It wants better schools and more attractive church buildings and services. We have acknowledged that all of these things are in themselves good and desirable. We most sincerely hope and pray that every country community and every dilapidated and straggling country town might have an effective awakening on the desirability and need of all such things.

But are they the remedy that will save the country church? Are our country churches to quit going to Christ and Paul for guidance? Are they to turn away from Augustine and Luther and Wichern and Harms and Passavant and listen to Ely and Peabody and Rauschenbusch and Shailer Matthews and Douglass and Faunce and such other rationalistic reformers who would cure the ills of the soul by satisfying the wants of the body?

We Lutherans know a more excellent way. We do not begin at the wrong end. We do not build the roof garden before we lay the foundation. We do not expect to gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles. Our first care is to have good trees, and only then do we look for good fruit. We want to make new men, and then we look to them to make new laws and bring in the new conditions.

But the new men need instruction. They need to be shown what the needs are and how they are to be remedied. The pastor himself often needs to be shown. He needs to know that his church has looked into all these social problems and has tried to work out a solution that solves. He needs to study Wichern and Fliedner and Loehe and Oberlin and Passavant and Ohl. He also needs to go back and study Luther's address to the Christian Nobility. Then he needs to apply the principles of the Inner Mission to his church in the country or small town.

He must always bear in mind that he and his church are not there to be served by the community but to serve the community. The church is the bride. Like her Bridegroom she came not to be ministered unto but to minister. Like Him she must have compassion on the multitude. In all their afflictions she must feel afflicted. She is to do works of mercy not in order that by so doing she may save herself but she does them because she has been saved. Her works are not works for merit, but works of grateful love. Because her Lord and Redeemer has loved her with an everlasting love and with loving kindness drew her to Himself therefore she says: What shall I render to my God for all His benefits to me?

The pastor and his people by thus serving Christ in His needy ones become burning and shining lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. By walking as children of light they become the light of the world. Others see their good works and are led to glorify the Father in Heaven. Such Christian social service is the church's credential. It is her powerful apologetic.

Let the pastor of the country church then preach sin and grace, law and Gospel, repentance and faith. By doing this with prayerfulness and all power he will bring men to true penitence and faith. They will thus become new creatures in Christ Jesus. The pastor will encourage the people and lead them to look after poor people in the community whether they belong to his church or not. As a matter of course no church member will be allowed to suffer for want of help. The sick will be visited and cared for both in and outside of the church. Neglected children will be hunted out and cared for. The out of the way will be evangelized. The pastor will preach in the school houses of the outlying districts. He will missionate in the neglected regions beyond. If a gypsy camp pitches near him he will take the gospel to these Godless wanderers on the face of the earth. If there is a lumber camp or a mining camp within reach the Word will be offered there. If a group of harvesters or railroad builders settle down for a time where he can get to them the living and life-giving gospel will be earnestly offered. He will take singers and teachers from his church with him to assist in worship and instruction. And so he and his people will be fishers of men. So they will go about doing good even as the blessed Lord did before them. So they will be doing inner mission work in the country. Such social service Christ will honor. A church that will thus be busy doing the Lord's work in the Lord's

way cannot decline. It will increase and abound yet more and more. The beauty of the Lord our God will be upon it. It will be a witness for good and for God that cannot be gainsaid. People will come to such a church and say, We will go with you because God is with you.

1. See “Problems and Possibilities,” pp. 137-147. [↩](#)

Part 6. Exhortation and Example

"Tis not a work of small import
The pastor's care demands;
But what might fill an angel's heart
And filled a Savior's hands.

They watch for souls for which the Lord
Did heavenly bliss forego:
For souls which must forever live
In rapture or in woe.

- Wesley.

So thou, Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore thou shalt hear the word of my mouth and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. – Ezekiel.

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow considering the end of their conversation Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever. – Hebrews.

Let prayer be the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening. – Matthew Henry.

18. Right Remedies

THERE ARE THOUSANDS of sincere, well-meaning and earnest Christians in the Reformed churches in every section of the country. They recognize and deplore the threatening change that has come over the church life of the country. They fear the impending heathenizing. They plan and pray for a remedy.

They have too much spiritual experience and earnestness to believe that the spiritual ills can be cured by economic, recreational or other secularly social improvements. They are convinced that spiritual evils demand spiritual remedies. In this they deserve our sincerest sympathy. They never have been clearly instructed in God's way in His sanctuary. They do not know that God has His own way of saving humanity and that His way of salvation is clearly marked out in His Word. Of this they are sadly ignorant. It has not been explained to them. This is their misfortune rather than their fault. Instead of denouncing them, we should feel sorry for them. We should use every endeavor to show them kindly, lovingly, patiently, a more excellent way. In their zeal, which is not according to knowledge, these good people are ready to take up and fall in with anything that promises relief and betterment. They are often imposed upon and inveigled into the fanatical sects that make a great show of earnestness. These immersionist and revivalist and sanctificationist sects are heretics as to psychology, as to pedagogy and as to theology. They burn the country over like a forest fire.

The good people who have too much common sense left to be drawn into the nets of the fanatics look elsewhere for salvation from the threatening heathenism. They build their hopes on a country wide revival of evangelical religion. They want all the churches to forget and lay aside their distinctive teaching and practice and unite for the one great purpose of reviving the spiritual life of the community. They are ready to work, to pray and to pay for such a revival. They want all to join in securing the best possible professional evangelist. They are willing to shut their eyes to the inconsistent and objectionable features of the campaign. If only souls can

be saved and the churches revived and strengthened then all will be well in the end. This is their great remedy for saving the country church.

The Lutheran pastor in the country and town is requested and urged to unite in “getting up” this community revival. He is assured that his church will share in the general benefit and prosperity that will follow. What is he to do?

If he is a true, a whole-souled, consecrated servant of Christ, he knows and deeply deplors the spiritual dearth in the community. He is conscious that the spiritual life in his own congregation is by no means what it ought to be. Like the prophet of old he cries: “Oh that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night because of the slain of the daughter of my people.” Or with the greatest of the Apostles he exclaims: “For many walk of whom I have told you before and now tell you even weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.”

Yes, his people too need an awakening, a true reviving. And there are many in his neighborhood who ought to be members of his church. Might not a general awakening, such as is planned, reach them also and bring them in? Shall he join in? He wants what other earnest Christians want, a more widespread and all-embracing spiritual interest.

But can he join hands and cooperate with his Reformed neighbors? He considers seriously their plans, their means, their methods. Shall he confess his own ministry a failure, so far as implanting and promoting spiritual life is concerned, and give way to a professional evangelist? Shall he confess that the method of making disciples which he has learned from Christ and which he has tried to follow is now out of date? Must the old way of making disciples by baptizing and teaching be given up! Shall he admit that the new evangelism which makes light of doctrine ignores the sacraments and appeals to feeling and to passion is better than Christ’s way? No, no! He cannot do this. He cannot at the request of even good and earnest people sacrifice that which makes the Lutheran Church Lutheran. To do so would be too big a step towards agreeing to merge his church into one central, nondescript union church without creed or catechism or conviction of truth. The Lutheran must remain consistently Lutheran even at the risk of being

misunderstood, misrepresented, and losing favor and friends in the community.¹

He recognizes the ills and the dangers of the country church and people. But the proposed union revival is not his remedy. What shall be his remedy? Is there no balm in Gilead? Is no physician there? He examines himself and his work. He cries mightily to God. He wants his own heart revived. He wants to put more life and energy into his work.

And so he resolves on his knees that he will do his preaching more with the demonstration of the Spirit and with power. He will lift up his voice like a trumpet. He will cry aloud and spare not. He will show Israel his sin, and the house of Jacob his iniquity. "The spiritually minded and consecrated minister will put heart-searching, even heart-breaking power into his preaching. He will preach with feeling and with unction. His preaching will make the self-secure and self-satisfied sinner uneasy, dissatisfied with self, anxious about his personal salvation. Where there is such preaching there will come requests for personal interviews at which the truest kind of private confession will take place. A pastor who never has persons deeply concerned about their own personal salvation knocking at his study door may well question himself as to whether his preaching is with power and with demonstration of the spirit. Our ministers need to study the great Lutheran preachers who were so wonderfully fruitful in bringing sinners to heartfelt repentance toward God and faith, real personal experimental faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."²

The earnest pastor will also resolve to do more personal and evangelistic work with the unchurched in his neighborhood, pray with them, speak to them most earnestly about their souls, beseeching them to be reconciled with God, warning every one night and day with tears.

He will put more life and personal application into all his work. He will not only baptize, but will explain its meaning and responsibility in relation to the spiritual life. He will not only teach and preach the true doctrine on the Lord's Supper but will more than heretofore insist on the need of heart-searching and penitent preparation for the right reception of the holy sacrament. He will put more life and personal application into his catechizing and emphasize more the need of heart preparation for

confirmation. And so he will with God's help revive and strengthen the country church and make it a power for spiritual good in the community.

1. On the whole subject of Revivals see chapters 23-27 in "The Way of Salvation in the Lutheran Church." [Lutheran Library edition available.]↩
2. Read "Problems and Possibilities," pp. 51-57. For a Revival experience of Dr. Passavant see, his "Life and Letters," pp. 135-138.↩

19. Right Remedies (Continued)

IN THIS LAST CHAPTER we want to reimpress the safeguardings and the remedies that Lutheran ministers in the country need to take to heart. Will the brethren pardon plainness of speech? Will they suffer this word of exhortation? We want to strike to hit. We want to hit to hurt. We want to hurt to heal. It is for the hurt of Joseph that we need to be hurt.

We have spoken freely and frequently of the urgent need of right preaching. It is written in one of our great confessions that “There is nothing that holds people to the church like good preaching.” Whoever does not lay the emphasis on preaching, whoever does not give the proper care as to whether his preaching is good is not true to the Lutheran confession, he is not orthodox.

But a greater than Melanchthon has said that “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. Preach the word, preach the preaching that I bid thee.” These are God’s exhortations, “If thou wilt not warn the wicked man in his wickedness he shall die, but his blood will I require at thine hands.” The minister must watch for souls as he that must give account.

We do not want to think that there are many of our preachers who are too lazy to prepare as they should, too lazy to do their best. All such will have a heavy account to give to God.

But we do fear that there are all too many whose preaching is intellectually cold. It is historically, exegetically and doctrinally correct, but it lacks heart-power. It does not bring the careless, easy-going sinner to a heartfelt sense of his guilt. It does not awaken the sleepy sinner to personal repentance. It does not have in it the heart comfort and encouragement that the sincere but timid, distressed in the faith need. The heart that is heavy, burdened, bowed down and crying for comfort and hope is not sent home from church lightened and lifted up into the peace of God. In this sad world

there are so many heavy hearts, more than we realize. Their faith is weak, their fears are strong. Yet their heart panteth for God as the deer panteth after the water brooks.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people saith the Lord. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem. Tell her that her sins are forgiven that her iniquities are pardoned that the Lord hath given double for all her sins.” It is the blessed privilege of the minister to smite that he may heal, to throw down that he may lift up, to break the heart that he may bind up the broken hearted, to comfort all that mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. All this he does by rightly, tenderly, feelingly preaching law and gospel, telling men, even weeping as he tells them, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ and that the end of such is destruction, and lifting the penitent into the peace of God. Such heart power is the great need of our Lutheran pulpit. The country church that has such preaching cannot decline. God always owns and blesses such preaching.

Another department of ministerial duty in which we fear too many of our pastors are derelict is private seelsorge. Lutheran pastors in the large state-church parishes of the old world are not expected to look after their people personally and individually. Preaching from house to house, watching for every individual soul as one that must give account, warning everyone night and day with tears, are not emphasized as every pastor’s duty in the state churches. Many of the great theologians and teachers of the church have declared themselves against going to see people except when sent for. Some of the old church orders take the same position.¹

These traditions of the old world, so comfortable to the flesh, have influenced and are influencing too many of our Lutheran ministers. Some of them seem to have the idea that it is beneath their dignity to run after people. They have not been trained to and they do not like to do personal pastoral work. They do not train their people to do personal work. They allow the more evangelistic but less evangelical churches to outdo them and to gain many people whom the Lutheran Church might have and should have had.

This is even more true as a rule in the country than in the city. Pastoral visiting is more laborious in the country than in the city. It consumes more

time and energy. Too many pastors dislike it and regard it as a drudgery. Hence they see their people only in church. The cold and careless are not admonished face to face. The endangered are not warned, the lost sheep and straying lambs are not sought until found. Those along the highways and hedges are not invited and compelled to come in. Thousands are left in a world unfriendly and hostile to God, and no man cares for their soul. We fear that there are hosts of them living in reach of Lutheran Churches to whom the Lutheran pastor never spoke about the needs and dangers of their souls. There are godless country homes near to our churches into whose door a Lutheran pastor never entered. Here is a crying country need. Here is a heavy pastoral responsibility. Here is a work needed far more than a so-called revival and far more effective than a spasmodic public excitement. Here Lutheran evangelism is needed. Our country churches suffer for the lack of it. Its absence makes many churches decline.

As agencies closely connected with and auxiliary to such personal visitation and work every country and city church also ought to have adult catechetical and Bible classes. These classes ought to be free conferences. Here the class members should be encouraged to bring and unload all their doubts and perplexities. Here they should ask the questions that trouble them. Here they should seek and find the needed solutions and answers. Here is an agency that Lutherans have not half appreciated. We have not utilized these adult classes as evangelistic agencies. Where we have them we too often preach down to them, and their doubts and difficulties remain unanswered. In such classes the people ought to ask far more questions than the teacher. When a teacher is drawing out more questions than he is asking he is doing his best teaching.

There are some people who have questions on their mind but are too timid to ask them in class. For such a question box should be at hand. This might be a further help to extend help where help is most needed. Every member of these classes ought to be always on the lookout to help to bring in others. And so the classes ought to be the fruitage of the personal and pastoral work among the outsiders as well as among the church people. They could and should be a power of good to the country church.²

One of the glories of our church is her custom of catechization. No other church has so good a custom. As a whole no other church in the world does

as much for the children as our Lutheran Church. The catechism is one of her crown jewels.

"We are happy in the conviction that the great majority of our ministers catechize their children. Not all are as painstaking and as thorough as they ought to be. Too many are superficial and hasty in their work. There are still some who are satisfied with a few so-called lectures, but lecturing is not catechizing.

A more common and a more serious fault, however, is a cold, schoolmasterly manner of catechizing. There is a sad lack of heart, lack of heartiness, absence of warmth, and absence of interest in the souls of the catechumens. Here also heart power, the power to draw the hearts of the catechumens into personal and experimental relation with the dear Savior is the great desideratum.³ The right kind of catechizing for the head, for the heart, for the life, for old as well as for young, is a wonderful help for the country church.

Another helpful agency that we mention is a good, live, interesting and attractive Sunday school. We Lutherans have the best Sunday school literature in the world. The Lutheran Sunday school is not an independent institution. It is a part of the congregation. It has been called the teaching department of the church. Its worship and all its literature are in harmony with the church. It does not train away from the church, but more deeply into the church.

It is graded according to the best principles of psychology, of pedagogy and of scripture. It is a school, a Bible school. Topped out with a Bible class, as advocated above, it can be and ought to be a powerful agency in and for the country church.⁴

The greatest need and the one most difficult to satisfy is the securing of the right kind of teachers for the Sunday school. We want teachers who can teach. We cannot be satisfied with mere attractive entertainers. We want our teachers to be living Christians and devoted members of our own church. We want them to know what to teach and how to teach.

The pastor is the head of his congregation. He is responsible for the teaching in his church. He is to be the teacher of the teachers. He is to teach them what to teach. He is to teach them how to teach. Where our graded

series is used he is to be master of the whole series. It will certainly drive him into a deeper and wider study of the Bible. This is good for him. He needs to have a good teacher training class. This class he ought to meet regularly and train thoroughly.⁵

He will also do all he can to establish and encourage Sunday school institutes and summer schools for teacher training. These will be a great help toward making his Sunday school effective. An efficient Sunday school is a mighty power in a country community.

A good Luther League will help to hold together and interest the young people. It can also be made a useful training school for intelligence in all that pertains to the church, her teaching, her history, her life and her activities. Out of a good Luther League will come Sunday school and church workers as well as candidates for the ministry of mercy and candidates for the ministry of the Word. The efficient country church needs a good live Luther League.⁶

All these agencies require a consecrated, energetic and ever active pastor. Every church problem in city or country is always, in the end a pastoral problem. The greatest need still is pastors after Christ's own heart.

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1. See "The Lutheran Pastor," chap, 18. The whole section on private seelsorge ought to be frequently and prayerfully gone over.↩
 2. See "Problems and Possibilities," pp. 61-64.↩
 3. Read over carefully pp. 30 ff., and chapters 12, 16, and 17 in "The Lutheran Catechist, also chapters 9-13," "Way of Salvation."↩
 4. See "Way of Salvation," pp. 55-68; "Lutheran Pastor," pp. 244-246; "Problems and Possibilities," pp. 52, 53, 103-107.↩
 5. To guide and assist in teacher training he and every teacher needs "The Sunday School Handbook," by J. R. E. Hunt.↩
 6. See "The Lutheran Pastor," pp. 246-248; "Problems and Possibilities," pp. 95, 96, 107-110. Every Lutheran minister needs the new, revised "Luther League Handbook."↩

Part 7. Inspiring Examples

Every noble work is at first impossible. – Carlyle.

There is no well-doing, no God-like doing, that is not patient doing. – J. G. Holland.

Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men. – Paul.

Let all things be done decently and in order. – Paul.

If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not. – James.

Never fear to bring the sublimest motive to the smallest duty. – Phillips Brooks.

What man has done, man can do. – Everybody.

They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever. – Daniel.

20. A Lutheran Pastor's Wonderful Work

ABOUT THIRTY MILES southwest of the famous city of Strassburg, on a plateau of the Vosges Mountains lies the land called the Steinthal. It is a part of Alsatia which in the time of which we write belonged to France. Since the close of the Franco-Prussian war it is part of the German Empire. Here a hundred years before that war lived and labored one of the great country pastors of his time. Here in a wild forbidding country, among a half savage people a young university bred pastor began a pastorate that was to last for sixty years. The story of those sixty years is one of the true romances of church history. It brings before us a wonderful career of a wonderful man of God. His life and work should receive the careful study of every country pastor. It would prove an inspiration to many a disheartened one.

The people of the bare mountain parish called themselves “Christians of the Augsburg Confession.” But there was little living Christianity among them. They lived largely by hunting and hog-raising. They were ignorant, rough and given to drink. They lived in poverty and in filth. Surely an unpromising field. Few of our seminary graduates would be willing to start in such a place. The parish had been served for several generations by rationalistic and worldly pastors. Under them the economic, the intellectual, the moral and spiritual life of the people had sunk lower and ever lower. A blessed exception was the young Rev. Johann Stuber. He was the immediate predecessor of Oberlin. While he lived Oberlin looked to him as a spiritual advisor. He had laid the foundations on which Oberlin so successfully builded.

The young Oberlin was hoping to become a chaplain in the French army. With this in view he had studied science and system and had accustomed himself to a rigid regime. While waiting for an appointment he was tutor in the family of a wealthy physician. Here he studied the principles of hygiene, sanitation and materia medica. He was unconsciously preparing himself for his many-sided work in the Steinthal.

Oberlin was a deeply spiritual man. While he was considering a call to the Steinthal he wrote out a most remarkable personal confession of his faith and experience. It reads like the journal of young Passavant.¹ This confession he renewed ten years later. The confession breathes a spirit of deep mysticism and pietism. It lays bare the inner life of the man. It marks

him as a man of deep devotion to his Lord. His correspondence with Pastor Stuber brings out the same personal traits. Stuber did him much good. He saw the danger of mixing in too many outside projects. We are tempted to give large extracts from Stuber's letters. We give space to only a few.²

“God will bless your faithfulness which shines out so lovingly in your letters. Only let us cling in faith to Him. You have, my young brother, far more than I have; an attractiveness before men. If only you keep on fearing God above all others and do not allow yourself to be drawn into too many projects, you can do much more effective work than I did. I want to impress upon you that one can get away from true Christianity even through good works. You have been converted. Now if you do not watch, if you do not keep close to God, if you depend upon your past conversion, if you cumber yourself with too many labors, too many anxieties, you may in neglecting a daily conversion, a daily intercourse with your God, a daily refreshing of the inner man, become so diverted, so cold, that even devotional exercises will separate you from God.” “The zealous young man is so easily tempted to say, ‘I am so busy helping others’ that he neglects the fostering of his own inner life. Therefore have I thought it well to warn you. The heart is deceitful and heavy as lead. It sinks down if it is not constantly drawn up. I find it deeply necessary that for the refreshing of our own hearts and for the constant rekindling of the spirit of Christianity within us we keep impressing upon ourselves the vital necessity of diligently using the Word and prayer. Out of the writings of the Apostles I must strengthen my spiritual life . . . The most important thing for you is that you care for the souls of your Steinthal people, make them good Christians and other virtues will be easily learned.”

That Oberlin took to heart these fatherly councils is manifest all through his active ministry. It would be an utterly false conception of the man to think of him as a minister who was mainly concerned for the temporal welfare of his people. He never put the temporal first. He never even dreamed of letting temporal well-being substitute Spiritual welfare. He always put the first things first. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” was a life principle with him.

That the first concern of his yearning and striving and working was that he might win the souls of young and old for Christ is manifest from his habits of prayer. Not only in the morning and in the evening but often through the day would he get on his knees and make intercession for the souls of his people. In his later years he had the habit of having his church register open before him when he knelt in private prayer. Then he would bring this one and the other one of his flock before his God by name and make special intercession for those thus named. Among his papers were found many pages of pious wishes for his flock. Members of his family testified that he would spend whole nights in pleading for his people and would cry out again and again: "Oh my congregation, My poor congregation!"

His preaching was mainly a clear exposition with earnest personal application and striking illustration from the experience of eminent Christians and from the daily life and work of his own country people.

His sermons were generally written out in full and memorized. When too much pressed for time to do this he would write out a full outline and preach freely from this.

In his catechetical instruction on Sunday afternoon he would speak like a child to children. His catechetical talks were full of striking and fascinating illustrations. His chief aim was to reach the heart and conscience and through them to move the will.

For a time he tried to have a conventicle for especially enlightened souls. After about a year he found that it created a tendency to spiritual pride and gave offense to those without the spiritual circle. When this became evident he openly confessed that the plan had been a mistake, dissolved the circle and discontinued its meetings.

In its place he started a weekly Bible hour to which he invited all who wished to come. Here he expounded and applied larger portions of scripture. This he did in a most familiar, frank and conversational way. At intervals he would pause, take a pinch of snuff and pass the snuff box through the audience. When he thought some of them were weary he would ask, "Children, are you tired? If you are we will stop here." Sometimes they would admit that it was enough for this time. More often they would request that he keep on a little longer.

He wanted a Bible in every house and wanted it used there. He persuaded the officers of the British and Foreign Bible Society to open a branch house in Waldbach. From here the French and German Bibles were distributed throughout his large parish.

Oberlin was a frequent and faithful visitor in the houses of his people. His were true pastoral visits. He would inquire into the use of God's Word, into the training of the children, and into the spiritual interests in general. He would kindly give instructions and admonitions on all these things. Often he would kneel and pray in the humble homes of his peasant people.

From the beginning of his work among them Oberlin took a deep interest in the education of his people. He saw the sad lack of good schools. His predecessor Shubert had made a heroic beginning. He had built the first respectable school building. Oberlin collected money from friends in Strassburg and built another in Waldbach. By and by he had a school house in every little village of the Steinthal. He himself was the soul of the system. He introduced competitive examinations with prizes for those who excelled. With the aid of his friends, added to his own liberal gifts, he established a circulating library in which every village had a right.

He had noticed that the children under school age were in need of attention. While the parents were at work in the fields and the older ones were in school the little ones were left without care or protection. Sometimes they were locked in the house. Most of the time they were left to roam and to take care of themselves. Oberlin saw that they were often in physical and moral danger. This gave him serious concern.

One day as he looked out of his window he saw his fifteen year old maid, Louisa Schepler, with a group of these neglected children around her. All seemed to be deeply interested. Louisa was teaching them games, telling them stories, and drilling them in verses of simple song. Oberlin watched this impromptu little children's school with joy. It was a kindergarten at work before Froebel was born. It was a Christian Kindergarten. The stories were Bible stories and the songs were hymns. Oberlin made up his mind to have just such a school in each village. Louisa Schepler showed the way. Eight other bright girls were soon secured. These "cadetted" under Louisa. She became the teacher trainer and soon there

were eight schools in operation. This was the origin of the Christian Kindergarten.³

In 1794 the National Convention of the French Republic recognized Oberlin 's Kindergarten. In acknowledging their recognition Oberlin writes: ' I It is now about twenty-seven years since I placed eight teachers in as many villages of my parish. They taught the little ones by means of pictures, stories, games, plays and songs. They also taught them to knit which up to that time was unknown in the region." In these schools the children learned of the dear Savior and the other great and good men and women of the Bible. The incidents related in this chapter bring out the deep spiritual character of Oberlin.

These essential characteristics of the man and the pastor are generally passed over in the books on the country church that hold him up as the model country parson. They dwell on the economic and industrial improvements that he introduced as if he had given his whole care and time to these.

We want to impress it clearly and deeply that Oberlin was first of all a man of God. He was a devout and consecrated spiritual guide. The secular interests that he taught his people were side-lines. In the midst of his week-day secular work, he was always a seelsorger. We want our country pastors to be helpful to their people in securing a richer home and farm life. But we want them to carry Oberlin's spirit into it all.

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1. See "Life and Letters of Passavant," pp. 63-77. [Lutheran Library edition available.]↩
 2. Our principal authority for the facts of this chapter is the German "Zuege aus dem Leben von Johann Friedrich Oberlin," by Dr. G. H. Shubert. Pilger Book Store, Reading, Pa.↩
 3. See the neat little booklet of the Rev. Dr. T. E. Schmauk called "The Christian Kindergarten."↩

21. Oberlin's Industrial and Social Leadership

OBERLIN KNEW that people who lived in poverty, dirt, and social degradation were not good subjects for the Gospel to work on. He also knew that ignorance is a serious hindrance to evangelization. He knew that ignorance, poverty and filth are breeders of vice and that economic degradation provokes moral degradation. He lived long before there was an organized Inner Mission or a social service propaganda. But he knew what is true in the fundamental principles of both. He knew that in Steintal he could not evangelize without bettering the community life on its secular and social side.

He also knew that such betterment always follows right evangelization. He knew that when poor and degraded people become Christians they rise out of their degradation and poverty. He knew that social well-being always follow spiritual renewal. But he also knew that those who have been living on a low plane socially needed to be shown how and to be helped toward a higher family and society life.

And still further, Oberlin knew that it is the bounden duty of every child of God to do what in him lies to help make the life of his neighbors more comfortable and happy. He expected all his people to be willing social service workers always, not that they might thereby be saved, but because they themselves had been saved.

He never for a moment cherished the shallow idea that to give a bath would make a clean heart; that to feed the hungry would satisfy the soul; that to clothe their bodies would make them fit to stand before God, and to give them better housing would mean a home and shelter for the spirit. Oberlin would scout the notion that to have eugenics prevail would do away

with the need of a new birth. He would never even have listened to the airy hopes and schemes of a Christless and Holy Spiritless social service.

But he did have a deep true Christ-like compassion for his poor degraded people. He did want them to have more worldly comfort, more leisure to learn, a brighter and happier life.

And so, without neglecting the care of their souls, he set out to educate the community in the ways of a better social life.

The people had degenerated into the most slipshod type of farmers. Their soil had become impoverished. They were one-crop farmers. They knew nothing of rotation or fertilizing. They cultivated potatoes. But the quantity and quality produced per acre had become lower and lower. The more energetic hunted game and fished. Those that were too listless for this and too lazy eked out a bare existence. Many were hungry all the time. A widow once earned a penny. She expressed her joy by saying that now she would be able to buy salt to eat with her potatoes.

The land was well adapted to clover, to grain, to fruit, but none of these was raised.

Oberlin preached improved farming first by example. He planted the fields of his glebe in berries, small fruits and orchards. These he cultivated, pruned, grafted, budded and fertilized. Spraying was not yet needed. In a few years he had a good variety of the finest fruits. His people wondered and admired. He showed them and helped them to do likewise. He imported potatoes for seed and taught the people how to cut them before planting and how to fertilize and cultivate. In a few years the better farmers had loads to take to Strassburg. He imported clover, flax, grain and vegetable seed. He showed his people how to raise them. He likewise imported good breeds of cattle and taught his people the principles of breeding and feeding. He taught them the value and use of manure. He taught them how to drain the swampy and useless lowlands and so make them the most productive parts of the land. For all this he secured the interest and help of the agricultural society of Strassburg.

He encouraged sheep culture and introduced the spinning of wool as well as of flax. He encouraged capitalists to come and erect cotton, linen and woolen mills.

As produce increased the need of roads to get it to market became pressing. Oberlin advised the building of good roads. The people did not know how. He surveyed the routes and then with his own shovel showed the group how to proceed. For days he thus labored with his own hands. By and by the whole section became known for its good roads and good farms. Oberlin was careful to have the best road to the church. The swampy places were piked with the abundance of stone which gave the valley its name. The good roads and better teams brought crowds to church. He taught and encouraged his people to build roomy stone houses with walled cellars for keeping their potatoes, fruits and other vegetables.

He saw the need of mechanics. He believed in raising a home supply. He sought out the brightest and fittest young men. He gave liberally of his own meager means and collected from his friends in Strassburg the needed funds to send the young men to the city to learn the various handicrafts needed in the country. He also had a young man educated to be the parish physician.

His own salary varied from two to three hundred dollars a year. With his own good management he got a goodly income from his glebe. He also had a private boarding school in one of the church's buildings, to which the rich people of Strassburg were glad to intrust their boys. In these ways he managed to get the money which he contributed so liberally for the various enterprises for the public good. During and after the terrible days of the French Eevolution the people of his parish were again impoverished. Oberlin announced publicly that there should be no compulsion in making the people pay their church dues. He wanted all this to be voluntary. Those who had little to give and those who had nothing to give were as welcome to all the church benefits as were the rich. He never believed in or practiced the taking of fees. As he said himself: " Among us, people who come into the world are baptized, confirmed, married and buried without cost so far as the pastor is concerned.

He had neither time for nor patience with laziness. When beggars came to the parsonage he would ask them "Why don't you work!" The answer usually was "We can't find work." He would say, "I'll give you work." He would put them to work gathering stones out of a field or breaking stone in a quarry. He instructed all his people to send all beggars to him. Ere long not one was found in the parish.

Oberlin did not teach agriculture or road building or handicraft from his pulpit. That was the place for the Gospel alone. During every slack season he had a Thursday afternoon meeting at which he instructed his people in the fundamental ideas that underlie these pursuits as well as in domestic science and nature study.

At these and other meetings he would often ask such questions as the following which were found among his papers after death:

"Do you and your whole family come regularly to church? Do you excuse yourselves because you need the time to gather berries or nuts? Do you do some work of mercy on every Lord's day? Do you help those neighbors who cannot go to church because they lack proper clothes to get what they need? Is your private and family life such as the church wants it to be? Does the love of Christ drive you to keep the peace with your neighbors and to make peace where there is strife? Do you keep your cattle from troubling your neighbors? Do you keep out of debt? Do you get fine clothes when you can't pay for them or owe other debts? Do you conscientiously do your part to keep the roads in good repair? Have you planted at least twice as many trees along the highways as there are members in your household? Do you attend the town meetings regularly? Do you train your children for God and send them to school regularly? Are you helpful to keep up the forest? Do you keep an unnecessary dog? Do you keep the manure from wasting? Here certainly is practical theology for the country.

Oberlin did all in his power to keep his people from going to law. He wanted every serious difficulty between neighbors fixed up by friendly arbitration. He organized a home-finding system in his parish. Orphans and neglected children, he said, are to be adopted by childless couples. He insisted that it was a duty and should be a privilege for the childless to take and rear homeless and helpless little ones. For every good word and work he urged cooperation. If a poor man's house or barn burned, if his horse or cow died, or if any other serious loss came the neighbors were expected to raise a public purse for the reimbursement of the sufferer. If the man of the house fell sick in seeding or harvest time the neighbors were to take turns in

doing the needed work. A beautiful community life was that in Oberlin 's parish.

Not every country pastor can do all that Oberlin did. It would be neither necessary nor advisable that all should try to copy Oberlin. Much, however, can be learned from him that will help to solve the country church problem. Let every country pastor carefully study that wonderful man and his wonderful work.

Then let him adopt and adapt whatever he can use in his changed situation. For this he will find many wise counsels and many good hints in Oberlin. Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good.

22. Other Inspiring Examples

IN CLOSING OUR STUDY of the Lutheran church in the country we call up a number of remarkable Lutheran pastors who worked wonders in country parishes. Doubtless a long roll of such country worthies could be made out. Numbers of them whose names are not writ large in the annals of the church on earth have their names written in Heaven. Long after they rest from their labors their works keep on following them and the church keeps on reaping the fruits of their sowing. For the encouragement of the quiet country toiler we name a few whom God will count when he comes to make up his jewels. Early in the nineteenth century a university bred young pastor took charge of a debt ridden and discouraged church in the little unknown and unnoted town of Kaisersworth. By working faithfully in and for his congregation, traveling widely to raise funds to pay the church debt, visiting and ministering to the souls of the prisoners in a neighboring town he caught a vision of what was needed and what might be done in his own out of the way corner.

Theodore Fliedner became the restorer of the New Testament deaconess work, built the first deaconess motherhouse, brought the first deaconesses to America, and laid the foundation for the great and blessed work of the Inner Mission which is one of the crowning glories of the Lutheran Church. A modest but deeply consecrated pastor started the whole movement in an obscure country parish.

In another part of Germany another man a few years younger than Fliedner after finishing his university and theological studies was tutoring and vicaring while waiting for a call. After waiting for a number of years a call came from an out of the way, unattractive country village. It made such an unfavorable impression on the gifted and earnest young preacher that he said he "would not like to be buried in such a place." But he was conscientious as to his vocation. After fighting down his own inclinations

he had to acknowledge the call to Neuendettelsau as God's call. He made that congregation one of the crown jewels of the Lutheran Church. He made that erstwhile unsavory town one of the holy places of Zion. It became a colony of mercy and from it went out streams to bless the American Indians and to make and to mould the Iowa Synod whose Missionary spirit has gathered, organized, and made spiritually strong hundreds of congregations in the country settlements all over the West. Wilhelm Loehe was a country parson. His life and work ought to be an inspiration to toilers in country churches when they are inclined to lament their "narrow sphere."

Born in the same year as Loehe, the son of a minister, graduate of a university, Ludwig Harms had to candidate for a number of years before he received a call from the farmer village of Hermannsburg in the Lueneburg heath. The "Plattdeutsch" farmers were a sturdy folk who attended church as a matter of course but were scarcely aware of the great mission and work of the church at large. The young pastor by his earnest heart-searching and convicting preaching brought about a religious awakening, a true Lutheran revival in the congregation. Then after his people had first given themselves to the Lord, Harms preached missionary privilege and missionary responsibility.

The result was that that congregation of farmers became the Hermannsburg Missionary Society, established a seminary for training missionaries, built a mission ship to carry the missionaries to Africa and put a new face on large sections of darkest South Africa and other heathen lands. See what a country church with the right kind of pastor can do. Study Ludwig Harms. Go and do likewise.

Coming to the American Lutheran Church we can make brief mention of but a few Lutheran country church pastors who made themselves and their churches important factors in our church in its works and development.

In the Virginia valley we find the remarkable family of Henkels, settled at New Market and making that village a landmark in American Lutheranism. Paul Henkel was pastor of a large country parish with the village church of New Market as its center. That hard working pastor with so large a parish found time to search out the scattered Lutherans in the regions beyond. He gathered many congregations and was the prime mover in organizing three synods. He compiled and edited the first English

Lutheran hymn book for our church in the South. He wrote and published the first English Luther's Small Catechism. Country pastors can do much for the church at large.

His son Ambrose became his successor in the parish. While pastor of the widespread parish he, with the assistance of other members of the Henkel family, translated the whole Book of Concord into English and supervised its printing on the primitive press owned by the family. What literary work our more leisurely country pastors might do without neglecting their parish duties. Not fewer but shorter pastoral calls, calls for spiritual counsel and uplift are needed. Oh the precious time wasted by long visits and big dinners in the country.¹

In 1842 the Eev. David F. Bittle, five years after he left the seminary, settled down to a country pastorate in Augusta County, Virginia. He noticed the lack of education and the absence of Lutheran schools. He started a private school and erected two log buildings which grew into Roanoke College.

In a country parish at Middletown, Maryland, Ezra Kellar was born and reared. His pastor encouraged him to get an education and instructed him privately to prepare him for college. When ready the young man walked to Gettysburg and arrived with fifty cents in his pocket. He worked his way through college and seminary, became a traveling Missionary in the Middle West, settled down in a country parish at Taneytown, Maryland. He could not forget the great need of an English Lutheran college in Ohio; worked out a plan, went back and founded Wittenberg College, of which he became the first President.

In 1848 a young German pastor whom student W. A. Passavant had found working in a tailor shop in Western Pennsylvania, and whom Passavant had encouraged and helped to prepare for the ministry, was doing editorial work in Allentown. The Rev. S. K. Brobst felt the need of a school for Lutheran youth. He persuaded a country pastor to come to Allentown and assisted him to start the school which afterwards became Muhlenberg College.

A pious German layman was found in a country congregation at Petroleum Center, Pa., by Dr. Passavant. Oil was discovered on his land. He agreed to set aside one-tenth of the income from oil for the Lord's cause. In

the spring of 1865 Louis Thiel, placed five thousand five hundred and five dollars in the hands of Dr. Passavant. With this nest-egg the Doctor founded Thiel Hall which became Thiel College.² Had there been no Lutheran congregation at Petroleum Center, as far as man can see, Louis Thiel would not have become the founder of Thiel College. A country church started Thiel.

For forty years the Rev. Mr. Bernt Muus was pastor of a country charge in Goodhue County, Minn. He was deeply interested in the welfare of his thrifty Norwegian people. He felt the need of a good Lutheran college. He agitated this among the other Norwegian Lutheran ministers in southern Minnesota. A few of these country pastors, under the leadership of Pastor Muus organized themselves into a close corporation, secured a charter, raised the needed money and started St. Olaf College, now one of the strongest, most advanced and most aggressive colleges in the West. Pastor Muus might have said, "I have enough to do to look after my large and widely scattered parish." But he had a vision. He was not disobedient to it. To him that wonderful United Norwegian Church owes much. St. Olaf is making the United Church a mighty force for Lutheranism in the West.

In the country town of Winfield, Kan., Mr. J. P. Baden was an earnest member of the German Church of the Missouri Synod. He saw the need of an English college. He founded St. John's English Lutheran College of Winfield. The country church made Mr. Baden. Mr. Baden made possible the college.

A group of Norwegian country pastors in the famous valley of the Red River of the North felt the need of a Lutheran college for the great crop of young Scandinavians. Together they planned and prayed. Out of all this came Concordia College, Moorhead, Minn. It is doing a wonderful work in saving a multitude of young Lutherans to their church and making them efficient to serve.

In 1861 the young Swedish pastor E. Norelius, whom Dr. Passavant had helped to a college education, was serving two churches in the towns of Red Wing and Vasa, Minn. In addition to his regular charge he was looking after the scattered Swedes in the many sparse settlements of the Upper Mississippi Valley. He cheerfully shared the privations and poverty of his people. With it all he started a private school. This school he nursed up and

rallied friends around it until it became Gustavus Adolphus College. While fostering his school and doing the work of an evangelist among his pioneer people he also founded the orphans' home at Vasa, Minn. What wonders one man can do in the country if he has the right faith in God and faith in God's people. Such faith and consecration God always honors. Such hope maketh not ashamed.

The Rev. Carl Swensson was pastor in the little town of Lindsborg, Kan. The country around him was full of thrifty, progressive Swedish farmers. Swensson felt that they ought to have a college in their midst. He was counseled and encouraged by Dr. Passavant. He founded Bethany College. He became the first president and held the office up to his sudden and widely lamented death. He impressed his own enthusiastic and optimistic faith on the school. It has been a wonder and a joy to the whole Lutheran Church. The child of a country church whose pastor had a vision. It called him to expect great things from God and to undertake great things for God.

While North Central Wisconsin was still mostly forest, while the Indians had their cabins and their tepees in the sheltered places and by the rivers and lakes an ox-team brought a family and its belongings into that region. There were occasional clearings in the woods with log cabins and pioneer Norwegian settlers. The ox-team was driven by the Rev. Mr. Homme. He settled on the site of Wittenberg. He gathered other settlers around him. He started and gave its name to the town. He hunted up the scattered settlers. He preached and catechized and ministered to the souls of all. Ere long he gathered several congregations and built log churches. He started a Lutheran mission among the Indians. The heart of it was a Lutheran school. He founded an orphans' home and later an old people's home which are today prosperous and blessed Bethesdas of the United Norwegian Church. He started a Lutheran Academy, which is today a Lutheran Indian school. There is also a Lutheran Indian Church there today.

Behold what one consecrated country pastor, with no original capital but faith in God and faith in God's people, can do!

Not many years ago the Rev. P. C. Wike, fresh from the Chicago Seminary, was pastor of the Colburn, Indiana, country charge. A disciple of the above mentioned Henkels, he believed in the Lutheran academy. He made up his mind that with the help of God there should be an academy in

Colburn. And as he believed so it came to pass. Colburn academy was established. It grew into Weidner Institute in Mulberry, Indiana. It has been a great blessing to scores of country boys and girls in its few years of existence.

We cannot begin to mention all the country parishes in which consecrated pastors have done great things for the Kingdom of God. God knows them. They are written down in His Book. Some day the book will be opened.

We want to give the last word to Dr. Passavant. We want him to make the last impression. He was himself the product of a country congregation. While a college and seminary student he organized country Sunday schools and congregations and canvassed in the Allegheny Mountains for the American Bible Society. His first charge was in the country. He always had a deep interest in the country church. During his pastorate of the First Church, Pittsburgh, he was a frequent weekday preacher in the country churches round about. It might be hard to find a country church within sixty or eighty miles of Pittsburgh in which he did not preach and in which he did not take a deep interest. Many were gathered and organized by him.

After he laid down his work as pastor of the First Church to give himself to the larger work of his many institutions he spent most of his Sundays, even up to his death, founding and helping country churches. The story of the founding and building of the Baden, Beaver County, parish, reads like a romance. It was a life-long custom to preach not only in his churches, but in all the school houses of each district. In this way he reached many along the distant highways and hedges. And what a seelsorger he was as he went from house to house, read the Word and kneeled and prayed with all. We cannot tell the story here. Every Lutheran pastor ought to study "The Life and Letters of Passavant." It will make a better man and a better minister of every one who reads it. The country pastor will find in it much inspiration.

Land, Land, hear thou the Word of the Lord.

And let us not be weary in well doing:
for in due season we shall reap,
if we faint not.
As we have therefore opportunity,
let us do good unto all men,

especially unto them who are
of the household of faith.

1. Study chapters 19, 20, and 21 in “The Lutheran Pastor.” [Lutheran Library edition available 2018.]↩
2. See “Life and Letters of Passavant,” p. 501 ff. Nearly all the institutions of learning started by Dr. Passavant originated in country congregations.↩

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