

**THE NEW DAY FOR THE COUNTRY CHURCH.**

J. B. Gambrell, Editor.

A statement appeared in one of the Northern papers recently that throughout the whole country there are ten thousand evangelical churches closed and as many more on the ragged edge. This result has been brought about in divers ways. First of all, there has been a strong movement from the country to the cities, running steadily for two or three decades. This has naturally carried from the country places many of the most enterprising and vigorous people and thus depleted not only the country, but the country church. Much of this movement toward the towns and cities has been induced by a worthy motive. Parents have sought better advantages for their children than they can get in many rural communities, advantages of church and school as well as social advantages. This motive has not been wisely directed in many cases, but it has been very effective in transferring people from the country to the towns. The extent of this movement away from the country is hardly realized by even intelligent people. It is a natural movement, and one that can not be stayed except by influences deeper and more lasting than mere human arguments.

No intelligent person can contemplate the depletion of the country churches without deep regret, when it is remembered that the greatest number of preachers are country-bred, that the men now in control of the nation have been, for the most part, reared in the country. It must give us serious concern to think that the country places and the country churches, which have been the nurseries of American greatness, should give way to an order such as we have in the cities, where humanity is so often sacrificed to vulgar greed and show.

But the most thorough investigation into the conditions now obtaining throughout America bring to us an assurance of a better day for the country church. This better day is coming on as the result of many powerful influences. The multiplication of railroads brings the country nearer to the seats of commerce; the multiplication of interurbans is especially helpful to country life. Then we have the free rural delivery which is growing to enormous proportions, so that the farmer living even ten miles from the railroad reads the daily papers, or he can do it, as regularly as the denizen of the city. It can hardly be questioned, either, that the numerous organizations among farmers have had and are having much to do with raising the standards of living in the country. They tend to break up the isolation of the farmer; they promote the growth of fellowship among people having common interests, and the larger participation of the country people in the politics of the country is good. Almost anything is better in the country than stagnation.

Among the powerful forces operating to turn the tide back toward the country is the better rural schools. In some of the States of America a tremendous movement has gone forward looking to the elevation of the country schools to a degree hardly yet imagined in many places.

Then there is coming a feeling now even among the wealthy, that the only real rest and refreshment to be had is in a country home, so that business men have their homes in the country and do business in the city, many of them coming in on autos or on interurbans or by the regular trains. The

old-time feeling for the open air and the freer life and the better home life of the country is coming back to the American people. The time was a few decades back, indeed, up to the Civil War, practically all the aristocracy of the South lived in the country, and the same forces are at work now to rehabilitate country life. The movement is strong and growing stronger all the time and we may safely predict that we have come to a day for better things in the country, socially and every other way. Indeed, we have reached the point in many places where farming is considered one of the most intellectual employments people can engage in, and not simply drudgery, and where the country housewife may have modern improvements in her home. All of which is good and to be encouraged by every possible means.

Some things definite can be done to aid our country churches and to make them for an indefinite period as they have been in the past the nurseries of everything best in our civilization. But the country people themselves must come to an appreciation of their advantages. Every farmer ought to fall in with the government's plan for better farming and for the better handling of farm products. The general government has an enormous missionary force at work to elevate the farm life of the country. In order to have good homes well furnished, and for farm people to enjoy the comforts of life, farming must be made profitable. It has become so to a remarkable degree in these latter years, but still there is an enormous amount of crude work on the farm.

And then the rural communities must understand the advantages of good schools and be willing to tax themselves to have not only good schools, but good school houses and good equipments. They can do this by a financial plan. Let us take two communities occupying land of equal fertility. In one there is a noble school house, well equipped and everything to attract and help the teachers. There are wide-awake, progressive teachers in charge of the school, selected by the school board because they are wide-awake and progressive. Now, let us suppose that near this school house there is a church, not a cheap shack as we find in many places, scarcely fit for sheep and goats, but a tasty, roomy, airy, well-appointed church; and close by it a preacher's home. And to make the picture complete, we will suppose that this preacher is a wide-awake active man, intelligent, not only concerning certain lines of things touching his own special work, but a man of breadth of view, interested in the community, reading good papers, taking a profound interest in the intellectual and spiritual progress of the community, a tactful leader, especially of young people. And now you have a place where people of the right sort will wish to live and the land in that community will be worth twice what land in the other community with equal fertility, will bring on the market. Such a community as this is Churchland, Va., a little distance out from Portsmouth. The people in that community are wide-awake farmers; they have an excellent school building; they have a church that would do credit to a city of 10,000 or 20,000; a pastor's home, and an intelligent, thoroughgoing man for a pastor. Such a community will attract the best people, and it is in such a community that human life can come to its best. It must be confessed that what has been our strength in the past may eas-

ily become our weakness. Wasted opportunities and wasted strength always turn to weakness. But if the rural districts throughout the country, feeling the impulse of the broader and better life of the whole land, and stirred by a proper community spirit will undertake to better their church life and their school life, they will greatly improve their financial condition.

The true denominational policy is to direct strong currents of influence into the very heart of our country churches. Many of our ablest preachers ought to go the country places with a message of encouragement. The time is ripe for it. And all over the land in places not too far apart special efforts ought to be put forth to create intellectual and spiritual centers of influence to radiate around and lift up whole sections. It is a blind denominational policy that neglects the country. The boards of the denomination everywhere should look to the rural districts not only to evangelize them, but to give encouragement to the highest possible development. The old idea that when a community had held a good protracted meeting enough was done never had any reason in it, but it is utterly outgrown today. If we do not frame our denominational policies with reference to taking care of the country, then, to a distressing degree, we will lose out in the cities. All our springs are in the country and it is in the country places that we are to put forth strong and continuous efforts to broaden the horizon of our people and to prepare them for the noblest living whether it be in the country or in the town.

Beginnings have been made in many places, and wonderful progress can be made if there is an intelligent and persistent effort made to bring the country churches up to the best that their circumstances will allow. It is altogether a mistake to suppose, as an intelligent brother said to me recently, that you can get people converted in the country, but that is about all. The handicaps which have been on the country are passing away and people can not only be converted in the country, but they can be trained more and more. And again the highest and sweetest life in America will be lived in the country homes and will express itself in country churches.

**THE AGE OF CONVERSION.**

(United Presbyterian.)

The testimony of one thousand converted Sabbath-school scholars in the United States, Great Britain and Canada:

- 128 scholars converted at the age of from 8 to 12 years.
- 392 scholars converted at the age of from 13 to 16 years.
- 322 scholars converted at the age of from 17 to 20 years.
- 118 scholars converted at the age of from 21 to 24 years.
- 40 scholars converted at the age of from 25 to 60 years.
- 52 per cent by age of 16.
- 84 per cent by age of 20.
- 96 per cent by age of 24.
- 4 per cent at older ages.

**WESTERN RECORDER BREVITIES.**

A saint is a man of convictions, who has been dead a hundred years, canonized now, but canonized while he was living.—H. L. Wayland.

You may keep warm yourself by the fire you kindle for others.

God does not stop to work a miracle to convince the atheist, he says "fool" and passes on.

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