

**THE COUNTRY CHURCH AND THE
RURAL PROBLEM. THE CAREW
LECTURES AT HARTFORD
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, 1909;
PP.1-151**

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KENYON L. BUTTERFIELD

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AND THE RURAL PROBLEM**

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The Country Church and the Rural Problem

The Carew Lectures at Hartford
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1909

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INTRODUCTION

The country church faces a crisis. The agriculture of the nineteenth century was individualistic, extensive, even exploitative, and only toward the close of the period developed highly organized commercial aspects. During the present century American agriculture promises to be put upon an intensive and scientific basis, co-operation will begin to supersede individual bargaining, and the welfare of the rural community instead of the profit of the individual farmer will be more and more the point of departure in all discussions and movements for rural betterment.

The church, too, as it served the farming classes has been individualistic in its appeal. Its work has been one of extension; it has marched to the frontier with the frontiersman. It has even been exploitative of denominational pride and power. Undeniably it has done a great work. It has saved rural life for moral and spiritual ends.

But the country church, with occasional local exception, is not responding to the de-

mands which the new type of agriculture and country life is making upon spiritual forces, nor to the new social point of view that regards the rural problem as a unit. Under the old view the church had a distinct mission, to save souls, a mission apparently unrelated to the industrial or social conditions environing those souls. We see now that the rural problem is one question, with several notable aspects. These aspects are not unrelated to one another, but are correlated. One of these aspects is the religious, or spiritual. The church, as the guardian of the religious life, thus plays a part in a movement larger than itself.

We come then to the principle that the church is vital to the solution of the rural problem, because the things the church stands for are vital to a permanent rural civilization. Church and industry are intimately bound together. The rural church cannot thrive for long unless the agricultural business thrives. But on even higher grounds we see that the same principle applies. The church is but a means to an end. It is a servant of human welfare. In so far as business prosperity, education, social life make for human welfare, just so far are they allies of the church.

The crisis in the country church consists in the question, Has it the power to meet the new demand, so utterly different from the old in many essential phases, although the same in respect to the abiding needs of the human heart?

It is the conviction of these fundamental ideas, namely, the unity of the rural problem, the absolute necessity of utilizing the church in solving the rural problem, and the need of a new point of view on the part of the church if it is to do its part in solving the problem, that has led to the present volume. It is hoped that it may be an encouragement to pastors already in the rural field and an incentive to virile young men who love a hard but great task, and indeed may be of interest to public-spirited and thoughtful laymen in the rural churches.

It may be well to say that this book comprises a series of lectures, with all the limitations as to illustrative details, scope, and volume that such a lecture course involves. It is not, therefore, intended to be an exhaustive treatise upon this new but vital theme. Nor is it designed as a practical guide for clergymen in the details of parish work. The author has

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endeavored merely to touch the most significant aspects of the problem of relating the church to the general movement for rural betterment.