

**THE EVOLUTION OF THE
COUNTRY
COMMUNITY, A STUDY IN
RELIGIOUS SOCIOLOGY**

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The evolution of the country community, a study in religious sociology by Warren H. Wilson

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TO
MISS ANNA B. TAFT
WHO FOUND THE WAY OF
RURAL LEADERSHIP
IN SERVICE ON THE NEGLECTED BORDERS OF
NEW ENGLAND TOWNS

PREFACE

The significance of the most significant things is rarely seized at the moment of their appearance. Years or generations afterwards hindsight discovers what foresight could not see.

It is possible, I fear it is even probable, that earnest and intelligent leaders of organized religious activity, like thousands of the rank and file in parish work, will not immediately see the bearings and realize the full importance of the ideas and the purposes that are clearly set forth in this new and original book by my friend and sometime student, Dr. Warren H. Wilson. That fact will in no wise prevent or even delay the work which these ideas and purposes are mapping out and pushing to realization.

The Protestant churches have completed one full and rounded period of their existence. The age of theology in which they played a conspicuous part has passed away, never to return. The world has entered into the full swing of the age of science and practical achievement. What the work, the usefulness, and the destiny of the Protestant churches shall henceforth be will depend entirely upon their own vision, their common sense, and their adaptability to a new order of things. Embodying as they

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do resources, organization, the devotion and the energy of earnest minds, they are in a position to achieve results of wellnigh incalculable value if they apply themselves diligently and wisely to the task of holding communities and individuals up to the high standard of that "Good Life" which the most gifted social philosopher of all ages told us, more than two thousand years ago, is the object for which social activities and institutions exist.

In one vast field of our social territory the problem of maintaining the good life has become peculiar in its conditions and difficult in the extreme. The rural community has suffered in nearly every imaginable way from the rapid and rather crude development of our industrial civilization. The emigration of strong, ambitious men to the towns, the substitution of alien labor for the young and sturdy members of the large American families of other days, the declining birth rate and the disintegration of a hearty and cheerful neighborhood life, all have worked together to create a problem of the rural neighborhood, the country school and the country church unique in its difficulties, sometimes in its discouragements.

To deal with this problem two things are undeniably necessary. There must be a thorough examination of it, a complete analysis and mastery of its factors and conditions. The social survey has become as imperative for the country pastor as the geological survey is for the mining engineer. And

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when the facts and conditions are known, the church must resolutely set about the task of dealing with them in the practical spirit of a practical age, without too much attention to the traditions and the handicaps of an age that has gone by.

It would not be possible, I think, to present these two aspects of the problem of the country parish with more of first hand knowledge, or with more of the wisdom that is born of sympathy and reverence for all that is good in both the past and the present than the reader will find in Dr. Wilson's pages. I welcome and commend this book as a fine product of studies and labors at once scientific and practical.

FRANKLIN H. GIDDINGS.