

A Practical Application of Sound Gospel

A Country Community in Virginia Exemplifies a bit of Spiritually Inspired Co-operative Work, Based Upon the Precepts of the Golden Rule, with one of their Successful Compatriots, a Farmer, Stockraiser and Banker also Serving as Parson of one of the Most Successful Rural Churches in this Country

By George M. Rommel, in "The Country Gentleman"

THIS IS a story of applied Christianity. It is the story of a church conceived in the country, developed in the country and flourishing today in the country after nearly two centuries of growth, aged and traditioned, but alive, vigorous, strong and wholesome.

If you motor south into the upper reaches of the Shenandoah beyond Staunton, Virginia, you will be struck with the appearance of many large churches, not in town only but out where farmers live and work. They are not so numerous as to give an impression of denominational rivalry with a surplus of weak struggling congregations incompetently shepherded. Somehow these Virginia country people have focused their religious life and have adjusted their church resources to the needs of their communities.

These churches have a solid, substantial, dignified, with an air of comfort and prosperity like that of the farm homes around them. They are usually of brick and are surrounded with the graves of those whose work is done, with a Sunday-school house near by and not far away a manse for the pastor and his family.

These churches have a traditional and historical background. As America goes, they are old. The communities which they serve are not composed of shifting populations. They have sent their sons and daughter forth to conquer, but the seed stock has remained, strong and vigorous. Here Sam Houston was born and grew to early manhood before he set forth to Tennessee and later to Texas where he seized an empire for Anglo-Saxon civilization. Here stands the little blacksmithshop where Cyrus McCormick worked out his model of the reaper which was to change farming methods the world over. Yet the names of Houston and McCormick persist there today, respected and honored.

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The largest of these open-country churches in Virginia, the parent of others, is the New Providence Presbyterian Church in Rockbridge County. Founded in 1746, it has had but eight pastors in its 178 years of existence—an average period of service of more

than twenty-two years for each man who has preached there.

The first pastor served forty years and retired to Kentucky; the second and third died in service, one after twenty-two years, the other after thirty-eight years, and both are buried in the churchyard.

The present pastor assumed charge on October 1, 1909, and he has resisted more than one effort to call him elsewhere.

The allurements of the city do not

where, but it is about a normal budget, and of this amount over \$7000 went into benevolences, part of which was the entire support of a missionary in the foreign field. The people evidently believe in paying for their church work even if times are hard. That's part of the reason why the pastors stay.

But there is more, much more. The congregation pulls together. The people are careful in selecting their pastors and, when pastor and congregation once unite, ties are formed that it takes more than money to break.

Not long ago the people began to talk about a house for the Sunday-school and for other activities than those of worship. It was planned to erect a building to meet the needs of the church for the next one hundred years. It would cost about \$30,000.

Of course, some members of the congregation felt that this was a newfangled idea, that the old church building with a pre-Revolutionary date on its cornerstone had answered the purpose for more than a century, and so on.

But the people harked back to the time sixty years ago when the suggestion was first made to put an organ in the church. A minority led by one of the elders, Major McKemie, violently opposed putting into the church what old Scotchmen called "a kist o' whistles."

The major carried his fight as far as his discretion permitted and then rose in his place with this valiant acknowledgment of surrender:

"If you people are determined to worship the Lord with machinery, I want you to get a good one, and I will be the first to make a donation toward its purchase."

I have known elders to leave the church for less reason, but such has always been the spirit of New Providence. There has never been a split in the congregation. The Sunday-school house is being built. If the majority believes that the innovation is for the best interests of the congregation, and that it will make for more effective church work, the minority acquiesces.

That looks like practical Christianity, doesn't it? That's another reason why

AS AN EXAMPLE of what may be accomplished in any American rural district or community, where thrifty people are tilling the soil or raising livestock, to make life in the country the Utopia of human desire for happiness, the following story by George Rommel, in a recent issue of "The Country Gentleman," serves the purpose as an excellent illustration. In nearly every locality may be found men physically and mentally equipped to assume the leadership that is necessary to develop that state of solidarity that is the pivot to the successful community, where the well-being of all is considered essential to the well-being of the individual. The formula is not patented, but the specifications in the plan call for honesty and integrity and a full measure of faith. It may be possible to make these ingredients sufficiently strong to react perfectly against what is generally described as human frailties, without religious attachments in some form, but where these elements of correct living are spiritually inspired there is an added insurance that the mutual obligations will be carried out. The Rockbridge county community in Virginia that squares its relations according to the religious precepts of the community church proves this contention and is an argument in favor of injecting more religious qualifications in our American practices in citizenship.—The Editor.

seem to attract New Providence pastors. They have been scholars, orators, leaders of men—the kind of ministers rich city congregations are continually bidding for. They have all been imbued with a love of the country, but that alone does not account for such a remarkable record of congregational service.

Why do these men stay on the job? A preacher is human. He must earn his daily bread and save. The present pastor of New Providence Church and his good wife are raising nine children and giving them all college educations as fast as they grow up. He couldn't do that on the usual salary of a country preacher.

New Providence occupies a territory about ten miles square. The church has 640 members and last year its budget was \$10,000. That was not the banner year, because the farmers were hard pressed, as farmers were most every-