

THE REMARKABLE CONFESSIONS OF A COUNTRY PARSON

Actual Experiences of a Preacher Show Not Only the Hardships of Service, But the Lack of Business Principles in Some Small Congregations.



"The beginning of my life as a minister and of my experiences in country churches."

only for foreign missions, but for the support of pastors and all benevolences to... I had to make arrangements to get to my appointments. I had neither horse nor buggy, and it was impossible to reach the points by railroad. In fact, some of them could be reached in Winter only by "horse-back."

When in later years I came to investigate these questions out of ten years' experience in the country in the South, the Middle West, and the East, I found that about 90 per cent. of the boys in the country were impure and immoral and almost degenerates.

But there was no official to whom it was to be paid nor any one to see that it was paid. When the pastor made his monthly rounds the members paid him what they had to pay that month.

therefore bought a saddle and rode the horse to all my churches.

Of course I had to keep it out of that \$200 salary, supplemented by what I could raise on the farm. The cost of feeding the horse would be at least \$50 and the cost of the saddle was \$12. The saddle was made by one of the members, and he saw to it that I paid for it.

By and by we decided to hold a series of meetings. These meetings had been progressing a few days when one or two pistols fired off around the house during "meeting," harness cut up, horses turned loose and taps taken off of the axles of vehicles so the wheels would come off after being started.

In accordance with these plans, when the pistols were fired on that night I then and there stopped my sermon and said, without giving any names, that certain men with whom I already had an agreement would now be on the lookout and get the names of those guilty of any further acts of that kind; that they were to place themselves in position at different points around the church where I was to be held.

Here were 250 people in the five congregations paying that amount to their pastor as a weekly attend. This meant that each one was paying 80 cents per year for the support of the church. These farmers at this time had an income ranging from \$400 to \$1,000 each, yet they insisted that their pastor must live on an amount footing with themselves.

cent, of them belonged to that class. In the Synod of New York, which embraces all of New England, where most of the churches are Congregational, seventy-two per cent. are country churches and seventy per cent. conform to my experience with country churches. This gives us an estimate from one of the weakest Synods, Mississippi, also one of the strongest, New York.

The result of the correspondence was such that I concluded the Elder I had had spoken in my faith for I was appointed. On this understanding I prepared to sever my connection with the Lairdsville work.

The official expressed surprise at the suddenness of the arrival, but imagine our surprise when we learned that scarcely anybody knew of our coming! The surprise was still greater when I learned that the Elder with whom I had corresponded had not spoken by authority from the congregation at all. He had not even told the other Elders and officials of the church what he had done.

Well, it was a precarious as well as a very embarrassing position. Here we were already on the field and our household goods already shipped, and we were not wanted! What was to be done?

The matter was patched up, but having gotten into the pastorate under such conditions it was not to be expected that I would remain longer than a year.

My next work was a pastorate of three churches, Fairhaven, New Bethlehem, and Pleasant Valley. Again the negotiations for the change in the pastorate took place at Presbytery.

It is falling everywhere. Ask the leading members of any country church for the reason of this failure, and the answer will be: "So many of our best members have died or moved away." This answer will be true for the great majority of decadent country churches.

when it was known that Fairhaven boasted a membership of 185, New Bethlehem 50, and Pleasant Valley 50, a total membership of 285.

I finally found a house and let which would serve fairly well for the purpose and for that place. It could be bought for \$450. They laughed at me when I proposed that they buy it for a manse.

The financial authorities, if it could be said there were any, thought it ridiculous to try to do it without a cent in the treasury. But when I said I could easily raise the money they readily appointed me to manage the financial end of the matter. They thought that would not be, of course the money could not be obtained.

These other churches, considering that the congregation of the village was stronger than they, were willing to abide by its decision. Therefore when they received my letters telling them of my conversation with the Elder at the Presbytery and asking for their decision, they wrote me that they were willing to abide by whatever that church had done, supposing that the village Elder had truly represented that church.

My work continued here for two years, but by that time I was beginning to see the need of finishing my college course and of taking seminary training. It was but natural that during these experiences I gave much thought to the problems of the greatest of those problems being why the country church fails to reach the masses.

I have come to the conclusion that the great reason for this failure, and the answer will be: "So many of our best members have died or moved away." This answer will be true for the great majority of decadent country churches.

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