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## Rural Depopulation Creates a Crisis in Ontario

**Rural Canada is Losing in Population and Hence in Social, Educational and Spiritual Advantages—A Picture of a Declining Country Life in Canada as Seen by a Country Minister, Rev. Jno. Macdougall, Grenville Co., Ont.—A Summary of His Investigations Published Recently in Book Form**

RURAL depopulation has reached such a stage in Canada that the problem must be resolutely faced—and faced now.

Rural depopulation in its development is akin to that most terrible disease, consumption. At first there is a slight cough, a little weakness, but no serious symptoms to cause alarm. Then the cough gets worse, the weakness more noticeable. Spasmodic efforts are made to check the disease, but neither the patient nor his friends are seriously alarmed. But if the disease is not resolutely taken in hand at this stage it is almost certain to result in suffering later; and perhaps death.

It is so with rural depopulation. It has proceeded so gradually and so quietly that few have realized what a terrible menace it has become. But a menace it is, a great enough menace to threaten our natural wellbeing. A knowledge of how far the "disease" has progressed has stimulated many to sound a note of warning. Recently the churches have taken up the question, and one of the most forcible expositions of the decay that is setting in in Canadian rural life is from the pen of a minister, the Rev. John Macdougall of Spencerville, Ont. And why is the Church interested?

### THE MORAL ASPECT

The people of Canada are so busy in promoting their own and the nation's material welfare, we are apt to forget that all of our national problems are not entirely economic in their nature. Some of our problems have their moral side as well. One growing problem in our national life that is both economic and moral in its various aspects, is the problem of rural depopulation.

Canada has vast areas of fertile land that should carry happy homes for a vast multitude of people. Instead of the healthy growth in rural citizenship that these fertile lands make possible, country districts are losing their people. Our population is huddling itself up in big cities and giving rise to that Old World difficulty, "the problem of the slum." It is no accident that these two problems, rural depopulation and slum growth, are growing up side by side. The one is the cause of the other. If we solve the one we solve the other.

Here we have the moral side of the situation. On the one hand we have homes so far separated that children with lots of room in which to play are without playmates. In the city we have thousands of children who have no place in which to play, except in the questionable environment of the streets. Neither condition is a healthy one for the growth of the moral and spiritual natures of our children. And scientists tell us that if the children of this genera-

tion have not the opportunity to play with each other in the grass, to pick flowers together, and drink in pure air, the result will invariably be degeneration in the next generation and in the next.

### THE CHURCH'S INTEREST

It is the moral side of this problem of rural depopulation that has at last aroused the attention of the churches and spurred them to action. While rural depopulation was considered only an economic question, the Church troubled herself but little with it. As a moral question, it is one of vital importance to the Church. In the last few years several denomi-

Mr. Macdougall in his book, "Rural Life in Canada," "76 young persons left my pastoral charge for cities of the West; a good proportion from among our best church workers. \* \* \* Some few years ago a young Spencerville farmer said to me, 'When my father bought out the land we are now working, he displaced 38 persons. We are four, with four constant hired help.' The change has meant no economic loss. While we were conversing he was on his way to Montreal in charge of two car loads of stall fed cattle for the British market, all for his father's barns. Farming had improved under consolidation. But what of the social loss where eight persons replaced 38?"

"There is one school district within the bounds of my congregation," Mr. Macdougall further writes, "where for four years past there have been but three children on the roll and for three months of last school year but one pupil was in attendance. Yet the school registers of 40 years ago show an average attendance of 45 pupils. What is the social significance of this fact?"

Mr. Macdougall does not believe that Spencerville conditions are exceptional. He believes that these conditions are representative, and he goes to the census for his proof. Here are some of the figures he deducts: During the last decennial census period Canada's population increased 1,833,523. Her rural growth was only 574,878, leaving an urban expansion of 1,258,645. She added 34.13 per cent. to her total population during the decade, but only 17.16 per cent. to her people in the country, as against 62.25 per cent. to the city.

Even in the prairies, which we are apt to regard as purely agricultural regions, the city population is increasing almost twice as fast as is the rural population. In British Columbia the rural population increased 100,318 in the decade and the city population 113,503. Manitoba, rich in still unoccupied land, won 70,511 for her farms and hamlets, but 129,892 for her villages, towns, and cities. When the previous census was taken, country people formed 62.4 per cent. of the total population of Canada. In the recent census they formed only 54.4 per cent.

### THE REAL RURAL PROBLEM

"But it is not from relative increases merely of city as compared with country that the grave rural situation arises," writes Mr. Macdougall, in his chapter on Rural Depopulation. "Our addition of 34 per cent. in a decade does indeed present serious problems of several kinds—in evangelization, in assimilation, and even in transportation. But it does not give rise to the rural problem. Nor does the fact that we added 62 per cent. to the city and but 17 to the country

### Let Us See Ourselves

Canadians are essentially optimists. We like to be boosters. We like to talk about the great resources of Canada. We can tell wonderful tales of unprecedented development. But in our desire to "boost," let us not lose sight of conditions as they really are.

Those of us who till the land, in particular, have little cause for optimism when confronted with the actual facts of Canadian development. These facts tell a story of rural areas drained of capital and population, of a decadent social life, and a declining country church. The situation is well summed up in the article adjoining. Every patriotic citizen may well think and ponder on Mr. Macdougall's deductions and observations. Suggested remedies will be dealt with in Farm and Dairy next week.

nations in this country and in the United States have appointed committees and established bureaus to investigate rural conditions. These investigators have not limited themselves to moral conditions only. They have found that economic conditions are at the root of the trouble and that the Church must lend its influence to the solution of the economic difficulties if it would solve the moral.

The result of the one of these investigations conducted by the Rev. John Macdougall, at the instigation of the Board of Social Service of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, has recently been published in book form. Mr. Macdougall's picture of conditions in rural life of Canada to-day, drawn from personal observations and from official statistics, is truly a startling one. The writer first tells of conditions in the country surrounding his own little village of Spencerville in Grenville county.

"Within a recent seven-year period," writes