

## EDITORIAL

**A SENSE OF RURAL MISSION:** Why do so many rural areas suffer from a lack of doctors, dentists, specially trained teachers, clergymen dedicated to a country ministry?

At a recent conference called by the Ontario Dental Association's Public Health Committee to consider the problem of providing dental service for rural communities, it was generally agreed that one reason why dentists flock to the cities is that they don't like living in the country. It was felt that graduates who had come from farms and small towns were likely to be more willing to practice in similar communities than graduates who had always lived in cities; so the Committee is trying to recruit more Grade XIII students from rural high schools to enter Schools of Dentistry.

It might be supposed that the young dentist looks for a city practice because he can make more money there; but the key speaker at the conference, Dr. Stewart A. MacGregor believes that money is not the great attraction. He reminded us that when Red Cross dental coaches were first put on the railroad to serve remote areas in the North, the salary to the dentist and his wife was \$6,000 and it was not difficult to find personnel. Now with the salary raised to \$10,000 it looks as if the coaches may have to be taken off the road. Dr. MacGregor said: "The city-bred boy can't be lured from the comforts of a city house and a vitrolite trimmed office."

But country-bred boys aren't applying for the work either. Even small towns in good farming areas, places to live that many of us would find very attractive, are going begging for dental service. The young dentist seems to want to live in the city — or he has married a girl who does.

Of course there are other reasons for the serious shortage of dentists in the country, but the growing rejection of rural practice in most professions gives us something to think about. It isn't only dentists we lack. The unequal distribution of medical service between our urban and rural population is a matter of concern to health authorities — as well as to the rural people who must travel long distances for medical care or sicken and die for the lack of it.

Can Women's Institutes do anything about this? One of our objectives is a more abundant life for our communities and most of our communities are rural — taking in farms, villages and small towns. We are interested in our young people, in their education and their choice of vocation. And sometimes we feel badly that those who like the country and could give a great deal to it, have to go away because there is no place for them on a farm. Do we forget that there is still a way for these boys and girls to have a part in country life? That while mechanized farming will continue to require fewer men on farms, we are sorely in need of high-grade men and women in the professions and trades that serve farm people: teachers, clergymen, doctors, dentists, engineers, mechanics, technicians in various fields? In the boys and girls who leave our communities every year to train for these vocations we have a wealth of ability and promise; but how many of them will come back to work for rural people?

There are well-known exceptions. The boy who takes a degree in Agriculture may never have a farm of his own but he is almost certain to be serving agriculture in research or extension or teaching. The 4-H Homemaking Club girl who graduates in home economics is rather likely to be found later in rural extension work. Every religious denomination has a few clergymen — so few that their names are well known — so dedicated to a rural ministry that they have never a thought of a city pulpit. Such people are as truly a part of the rural community as if they lived on the land, and their contribution to the community may be even greater.

How can we get more of them? Perhaps in our homes and our Women's Institute relations with schools and vocational guidance personnel, we can do something to keep before our especially "rural minded" boys and girls, whatever occupation they choose, a sense of rural mission.

*Ethel Chapman*