The little town, especially in its rural relationships

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THE LITTLE TOWN
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ESPECIALLY IN ITS RURAL RELATIONSHIPS

BY

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NEW EDITION

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1927
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TO

SEVEN LITTLE IOWA TOWNS

OSAGE, CLEAR LAKE, GRINNELL, BLAIRSBURG,
TIPTON, MANSON AND AMES—ALSO TO
MACHIAS, MAINE
PREFACE

This book has grown out of the author's interest in rural progress. For a number of years, in common with large numbers of his fellow Americans, he has been thinking and talking—sometimes publicly—about this great problem. As his thinking gradually clarified he became aware that neither he nor the others were dealing adequately with the phase of American life which he knew most about by experience, namely, the life of the little town. There is a new wealth of impulse and inspiration for the dweller in the open country. Most of it is equally applicable to the little town. But the author does not feel that, in its present form, it would greatly encourage him if he were still living in such a town.

This book attempts to suggest in what infinite variety the gospel of rural progress applies to the little town. Country-life evangelists do not ordinarily regard it as any part of their business to address the town directly—unless to scold it. They treat it rather as an incidental, and indeed a trivial thing. The ruralist priest and equally the urban Levite have their own important business. They lend a glance to the little town's needs, but pass by on the other side. At most they only toss a casual word in its direction, to which the little town can only reply, "Did you speak to me? I am not conscious
of answering to your description. I do not recognize myself as coming under your classifications."

This book on the contrary aims first of all to address the little town mind directly. It proposes its solutions in terms of little town qualities and capacities. It tries to direct the deluge of civic good counsel and to apply its multitude of helpful suggestions in such fashion that the little town will have to say, "This means me."

Secondly, the book seeks to discover and release new motive for civic betterment. It does not expect the little town to improve simply because of intellectual conviction that it ought to be improved. There will be no adequate motive without new vision. In itself the little town is indeed incidental and largely decrepit and dying. But the author, for one, is convinced that in it lies most of the natural leadership for the betterment of the open country. The rural progress cause hangs on the fortunes of the little towns. Their interests need radical re-direction countryward. Let the town become rurally-minded and it will tap fresh streams of purpose and find vast re-enforcement for its own struggle. The big, romantic, beautiful country, the home of most of the American people, the cradle of its ancient virtues, the seedbed of social permanencies and strength, the source of daily bread for us all—the country is infinitely worth redeeming. But if the country, then also the little town, the country’s capital. Doubtless it can be saved only in the consciousness of its relationship to country interests. Reverently it must say "For their sakes I sanctify myself."

The author would hardly have ventured on just another civic improvement book. No originality is