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The Bleeding of Britain

Our Annual Loss by Emigration: 300,000 souls.

Fifteen Millions a year in money.

What's to be done about it?

By the Editor.

(First published in June 1912)

The Emigration statistics are such increasingly distressing reading that even Liberal publicists are at last taking the matter up. For more than twenty years some of us have been hammering at the disastrous folly of leaving a rich old country to go to a new and poor one, and at last the 'practical men' are beginning to see that all the talk about empire and all the laudation of the 'pioneers' and 'adventurers' who run away from difficulties at home is proving, and is likely to prove, immensely hurtful to the Homeland, without any corresponding benefit to the new countries.

I have written and spoken so often and over such a long period against this anti-social movement of the population away from civilisation that I would now willingly avoid it. But the evil effects of it are so forced upon one's notice that I cannot forbear speaking out again. I have just returned from the North of Scotland, where I have been saddened to see the number of empty shops and houses built of the good granite; have been wae to hear of the continued exodus from a fine country, and to see all along the route the nakedness of the land as regards population. Every other day I see busloads of men and women, in the very prime of life and usefulness, being driven from the docks to the railway station, on the way from their German, Russian and Scandinavian homes to the frozen wilds of Canada. Sometimes I travel with these people across country on their way to Liverpool, and to be an hour in their company means that you cannot escape being impressed with their pre-occupation, their amazing pre-occupation with the idea that they are on the way to El Dorado. The idea that life can be economically different in one country as compared with

another, the simple faith that one can get away from the rent-taker, the profit-monger, the Black Coast who consumes without producing, who destroys without creating, who demands service without giving it – that idea is always painful to me.

How Many?

The latest statistics show that in the month of March no fewer than 39,442 British subjects 'left these shores for places out of Europe, declaring that they intended to take up permanent residence abroad.' In the same month, significantly enough, 5,250 persons arrived here from 'places out of Europe,' to take up 'permanent residence' in the United Kingdom, according to their own declaration. This reduces the loss for the month to 34,192. The summer months will probably show an increase in the March figures; but on the one hand the winter months are slacker in the emigration trade, at least so far as Britain is concerned, though the drain of Continental emigration would appear to continue all the year round. The annual loss of population to the United Kingdom will not be less than 300,000 human souls.

And let there be no mistake about the character of those who go. If the wastrels went we should have cause only for rejoicing. But ordinary observation satisfies one that the men who go are in some essential respects just precisely those whom we should be anxious to retain. The March figures show that the total loss was made up as follows: Males 23,573; females, 10,314; children under twelve, 5,555.

By comparison with other months, March showed a large proportion of 'females.' Usually the figure shows about three men to one woman. And they are young men and young women.

What do these figures mean? They mean that the Homeland, the centre of the Empire's life, the centre in a way of the world's life, is to be increasingly left to the old men and old women and children, the more virile portion of the population draining off to the colonies. These figures mean a loss of national wealth, a loss of national energy, a falling into the ways of old fageyism. For 300,000 is just about the amount of the excess of births over deaths, and with a decreasing birth-rate and this appalling drain of emigration, we shall doubtless soon see the population of England and Wales showing a decrease, as the population of Ireland has long done, and the population of Scotland is now doing.

At what cost?

If we take the low figure of 300,000 as representing the annual human loss by emigration, and put the consequent money loss at £50 a head (a safe estimate), we are losing £15,000,000 a year of trade for the home market. And it is not fifteen millions in one year and done with. It is fifteen million times fifteen millions in fifteen years. In other words, if the three and a half million people who have emigrated to South Africa, Australia, and Canada within the last fifteen years had stayed at home we should be richer in purchasing power by no less than 225 million

pounds; for, remember, it is not women who mostly go, and still less is it children who go. It is men in the prime of their lives and of their value to the community. Think of how much busier all our industries would be with 3 ½ millions of adult male wage-earners and wage-spenders in the country, to be housed, fed, clothed, warmed, shod and amused. Three and a half million is fully one-fourth of the entire wage-earning class. And it must not be forgotten that the children who left home fifteen years ago will now be men and woman, just as most of the 5,555 children who left in March this year will be men and women fifteen years hence.

Is it good to go?

But if it would be a good thing for us that these people should stay, is it a good thing for them that they should go?

One cannot see but that, outside of despotically governed countries, one civilised State is pretty much as good as another. What is perfectly clear is that if wages are high, prices must be in proportion, since labour is a first charge upon all commodities made or services rendered. If anything, prices will tend to be lower, and real wages will tend to be highest, in old countries, where the use of machinery and the organization of labour both inside and outside the factory or workshop have been carried to the highest point. Thus England is an older-settled country than Scotland, and wages are on the whole higher, while the cost of living is less, machinery and competition among capitalists keeping prices down, while organization among the workers keeps wages up.

The economic conditions of Britain are freer and more natural than those of any other country in the world. Protectionist States, including all our colonies, raise the cost of living in the interests of the rings and cartels who wax fat at the expense of the consumer, so that we have had the spectacle of the French and German working classes paying sevenpence a pound for beetroot sugar in the country where it was manufactured, while the same sugar was exported and sold to the Britisher at twopence a pound.

Australis.

Mr Henry Stead, writing from Melbourne to the 'Daily News' says:-

The Tariff makes all imports costly to buy; the high rate of wages ruling throughout the Commonwealth makes local products dear. Until this is realized, the newcomer is amazed to find he must pay such high prices for foodstuffs which are easily produced in Australia, some of which, indeed, she exports in huge quantities. It is galling, for instance to have to pay more for butter in Melbourne than he has been accustomed to pay for the article when it reaches London, 12,000 miles away.

About the only thing which is cheaper in Australia than at home is meat. The mutton is not very tasty: it sells at 6d a lb. The lamb is good and costs 7d the lb. Beef 6d; veal

5d: and pork 8d – all good meat. Fowls are, however, costly, running from 4s to 6s each. Jam, marmalade, tinned fruits, and soap are about the same price in Australia as in England.

Nearly every other foodstuff is dearer than at home – rice 4d the pound, flour 2d the pound. The 1 1/2 loaf of England sells for 3 1/2 d, common cheese 9d the pound, potatoes 2d to 4d the pound, lemons 3d each, cabbages 5d each, beetroots 5d each, milk 5d to 6d a quart, eggs 1s 3d a dozen (the very cheapest), lard 1s 4d a pound (and very poor stuff at that) candles 8d the pound, wood fuel 30 s the ton (and hard Australian wood is very heavy), and coal 30s the tone, the best of it much inferior to English coal. There is very little variety in the fish available in Australian ports; it is very expensive and very poor.

Rents are high in Melbourne, and still higher in Sydney. In both cities it is impossible to obtain a house; the rapid growth of Sydney, especially having kept the builders so busy that house-seekers gladly paid rent from the moment digging the foundations was commenced! A seven or eight room villa could not be got for less than £100 per annum, but as the rates here are paid by the landlord, that would mean £80-£85 at home. The laundry, too, is a heavy item in the household budget. Chinese or Japanese laundry will charge 2s for a tablecloth and 6d for a shirt.

How could it be otherwise? If Labour has to have a high wage, how shall the produce of labour be cheap? The capitalist is there to take his profit as well as here, and there as well he wastes money on advertising, sending out travellers, and all the other unnecessary costs of competitive commerce.

It is true that by means of wages boards and other slavery-regulating pieces of legislation the Australian workman enjoys relatively good conditions, but even this state of affairs cannot long endure without very much more fundamental economic changes than have at yet taken place. Australia is largely living on borrowed money. Mr Froude long ago pointed out that the people of Australia hugged the seaboard; that the interior of the country remained comparatively underdeveloped, the settlers having no liking for agriculture or pastoral work; that harbours and other public works were constructed with borrowed money and in excess of the requirements of actual trade and traffic. This feature of Australian public life has not altered for the better. New South Wales is now borrowing at the rate of £9,000,000 a year, and a few months ago the Sydney Bulletin printed the following piece of editorial candour:

During the year 1912 the Commonwealth went to the bad... to the extent of £14,000,000 solely through not doing enough work to pay for the things it wanted. This is to say, its exports failed, by that amount, to pay for its imports and the interest on its foreign debts. Either it didn't work long enough hours, or it didn't work hard enough during its hours of work, or too large a proportion of the community didn't work at all, or else the community insisted on living on an impossibly scale of lavishness. One or some of these explanations must be correct.

The fact probably is that Australia will never be much of a country for white men. Its climate consists of alternate devastating drought or disasterous floods, and the floods at least obtain in New Zealand as well. Anyhow, these lands cannot meet the elementary test of paying their debts. For an insolvent country to vaunt its advantages, while all the time it is borrowing money from the nations it professes to despise, is on the face of it above impudence – a sort of international confidence trick. A young man settled in one of these colonies – very likely Australia – in writing home to his father and mother for money, used to address them as ‘My dear pay-rents.’ Was that symbolical?

South Africa.

We hear much less of South Africa as a white man’s country, nowadays. There is no war to excuse. South Africa never was and never will be a white man’s country. There are beautiful spots in Natal and Cape Colony; but the veldt is naked, naturally naked; and with its torrid sun, its sudden floods, its unkindly soil scattered thinly upon on flinty bottom, its fevers and its plagues of ticks and other vermin, South Africa cannot hope ever to tempt sensible men from the more kindly latitudes of the green earth.

The fact that the aboriginal inhabitants were and are black shows what Nature would do with any race that settled there long enough. The thick skulls, woolly thatch, deep-set eyes, and greasy black skins of the Kaffir are Nature’s protection against the heat and glare of these naked plains and barren kopjes. The Boers have taken a touch of the tar-brush in the course of a few generations, and a few centuries more of South Africa, with little rejuvenating admixture of European blood, would see Brother Boer become a black man. Nature does not suspend her law of adaptation or her influence of environment to suit imperialist theories. National types have not been evolved by nothing. In spite of the constant stream of immigrants to the United States, the Yankee face, conical head, lank hair, and hairlessness, represent an appreciable approximation to the Red Indian type. Climate, water, the elemental properties of earth and air, are not negligible quantities in their influence on the stock. A black man’s country will remain a black man’s country.

Our Lady of Snows.

But Canada is the favoured field at present. Every Canadian settler becomes an emigration agent. A Scots friend settled in that land of seven months Arctic winter writes of how destitute the country is of the finer fruits of civilization. He has nothing but contempt for its shrieking unidea’d press. He calls it a ‘godless country,’ and inveighs against the persistency of the word ‘dollars’ in all conversations. While he is fully alive to the knowledge that everybody there is ‘on the make,’ and is not enamoured of the civilization thereby produced, he drops into a typical Canadian touch which, as Carlyle says, ‘is significant of much.’ Writing on the last day of March, when we were having rather nice weather in England, he says: -

‘Since the New Year the mercury has not reached the zero point, and for long weeks has been hovering around 1 degree and below. This of course, means that you do not care to go out more than is absolutely necessary, nor can you remain out for any length of time. ‘

No Saturday afternoon football there I reckon, and that’s a blessing anyhow. But after these blood-congealing details as to 18 and 20 below zeros the letter amusingly concludes:

Do you ever think seriously of coming out here yourself? There is a splendid opening for men of your profession. I am sure you would make good and, since this is a British colony, the sacrifice of principle would be but infinitesimal.

Making Good.

It is not ‘the sacrifice of principle’ one thinks about, but the tremendous sacrifice of comfort and pleasure. More than most people I can find my pleasure by the ingle nook. But with the temperature at 20 below I fancy there would be little enough pleasure even there. As to ‘openings’ for journalists, I should say it is all opening there. The field is wide, and from all I have seen, unoccupied. A public which is absorbed in the hunt for dollars is not the public for me. I find England and Scotland more than enough materialistic. It is the finer things of life for which one lives. I have enough food, clothes, house-room, thousands of books to read, abundance of good tobacco always handy, a pint of beer for my supper. The theatres and concerts are numerous, and the temperature never anywhere near 20 degrees below zero to prevent one going out at nights. When my work is done there is the ancient walled city of York, with its glorious cathedral, within an hour’s run. Beverley, with its minster and bells is the next station to Cottingham on one hand, and the next station in the other direction is Hull, where there are I know not how many theatres and music halls, besides an art gallery, a public library, and all the stir of a world-wide traffic with the uttermost ends of the earth to be sampled by the banks and quays and landing-stages of the mighty yellow Humber.

‘Make good!’ I have a garden behind both my home and workplace. I walk to my work past market gardens and a beautiful twelfth century church surrounded by immemorial trees and a lovely lawn between the tombstones. When The Gateway is off my hands I can and do break away to Oxford, Cambridge, London, Windsor, Warwick, Whitby, Kent, Chester, the Burns country or Aberdeen. I want to work with my hands among the beloved types and the beautiful books, to write and print my own articles and occasionally to harangue the lieges. All this I can do. I cannot conceive of any change of place that would not be a change for the worse.

One lives, not for bread and butter – he is a poor man who cannot get enough of that – but for the extras. Literature of the best, and leisure to enjoy it; music, good plays and good acting; friends who are not hungry for orders or money; a keen interest in

the passing show as reflected in a really good newspaper; pleasant surroundings in the country, but near enough to a great city to be able to run in for the shows; the romance of the old world as embodied in stone-and-lime, stained glass, the best orators, actors and musicians – that is my idea of ‘making good,’ and for me to go to Canada would be to make bad in every one of these respects.

A Matter of Taste.

This question of emigration is a matter of taste. For a great object one might be willing to go into the wilds of Canada for a year or two, as Macaulay went to India to revise the Penal Code. He was tempted by the two thousand a year, and after all India is an interesting country with an ancient civilization to it. With the savings of his four years’ exile he returned to England and settled down to write his history. That had been the programme, and one can understand a man going abroad for such a purpose. But to emigrate with the deliberate purpose of going into ‘permanent residence’ would be an appalling prospect.

England, with its green fields and blossoming hedgerows, its great forms that soar aloft in the quiet countryside amid the jackdaws in the elms and the warbling thrushes on the lawns; its stately homes that show how men might be housed; its creeping canal boats and its crawling wagon, with the driver sleeping under the tilt; its snuggling farmsteads and ribbons of yellow road running over the horizon’s edge; its orators, actors, singers, and musicians; its busy presses; the varied industries of its people; the individuality of its old towns on their old, man-clustered rivers; the wealth, ease and unending leisure and good nature of its people – there, and all the other long results of time are enough for me.

Some of my young men have gone to South Africa, some to Canada, to do inferior work in an inferior civilization. I could understand a provincial printer wishing to go to London, Edinburgh or Oxford to perfect himself in his business and to at least bear a hand in the doing of good work. But some of these youths went to a small border town in South Africa, where a small edition of a country press was printed off on a handpress by a couple of Zulus! The paper itself was pretty much of a collection of country gossip interspersed with advertisements (and blocks) of mangles, bassinets, mealies, tea and typewriters. One of them said he did not care as long as the money was good! As I said before, it’s all a question of taste – or the want of it. I happen to prefer civilization, good work, decent surroundings and a climate which neither bakes nor freezes one.

Adventure at Home

There are faults and cruelties enough in the old Homeland: but I shall not run away from the task of ameliorating them at the bidding of any man, and especially one who has gathered the wealth of many to himself and who is *not* going. Let the wastrels and wildbloods, or those who have ‘made a hash of it’ and need to start over again –

let them go (if they can no better!) to lands where the flowers have no fragrance, where the birds do not attempt to sing, or where the mercury hovers for months in the neighbourhood of twenty below zero.

‘Go away,’ says Midas. ‘This old country is no place for a man of enterprise and spirit to stay in. There is cheap land; yeas, there is free land, to be got in Canada.’ Under his breath Midas says: ‘You are growing old and a little wiser. You had better clear out before you grow too wise for me. There are plenty of young fools coming on, and they and the dotards and the women and children will serve my turn. You are not doing any good here; and if you wait much longer you will begin to think that I am in the way. Clear out and good luck to you; but hands off my little lot.’ I for one am not going, to leave him in undisputed possession.

What would have happened had Charles the First been a believer in emigration? Cromwell, Sir Arthur Hazelrig and other Parliament men of spirit, seeing the oppression and the struggle which lay before them, ought to run away from their duty. Seven ships lay in the Thames waiting to take them to the New World. In an evil hour for himself, but a blessed one for the country, Charles forbade the emigration! It cost him his head and altered the whole course of British history. The English Revolution, like the French Revolution, might have been delayed a hundred years if these seven king-quellers had been allowed to emigrate.

Robert Burns was on the point of taking ship for Jamaica when Dr. Blacklock’s praise of the Kilmarnock poems reached him and made him stay to serve Scotland and humanity. Had he gone, he would doubtless have succeeded as a planter and been lost to poetry. There would have been on ‘Edinburgh’ edition, no ‘Tam o’ Shanter,’ no ‘Scots wha hae; for these and many another poem and song of his best were written after his plan of emigration was abandoned.

The Chartist agitation was stifled by the discovery of gold in Australia and the emigration of the ‘agitators.’

What would happen in Russia, what would have happened long ago, had the unhappy subjects of the Czar no constantly open outlet to other lands. Probably the Russian Revolution would have long since taken place. As it is, Russian despotism is tolerated because emigration serves as a safety valve.

Empty Britain

The green fields of Britain are empty of human souls. The United Kingdom is becoming a place of sport and antiquarian shows. ‘What would we not give for your churches, your lawns, and your old houses’ say Colonial visitors. One may go down to Scotland by all three routes through hundreds of miles of empty country. From Newcastle to Edinburgh, from Leeds to Edinburgh, from Manchester to Glasgow, the train travels without passing a single great city or notable town on the way, with perhaps the one exception of Preston on the west coast route. Carlisle is a mere

railway station. Berwick has a bridge. Dumfries is small, sordid and save for its unhappy memorials of Burns, uninteresting. From Edinburgh to Glasgow on to Dundee and Aberdeen, Scotland is again a place of empty fields and a bracing climate. The population of Britain is huddled into the towns, which, except in Lancashire and Yorkshire, are surrounded by blanks in the map.

With our coal, our iron, our railways, canals and good roads, our many rivers, extensive seaboard, easy distances, profitable fisheries, the fertilising rain, the favoured geographical position, and the skill of our workers, there is plenty of room and a crying need for many times the population that these islands support, and there is abundance of adventure and the worthiest of struggles before the men who will lend a hand to set the house in order. Enterprise needs to begin at home. There is nothing a man may do abroad that he cannot do at his own hallan door. There is gold everywhere, says Dooley, if you will dig for it, it must be added, not that you get the fruits of your digging!

The Remedy.

To be sent into exile used to be regarded as punishment; and banishment is so regarded today by educated persons who value the comforts and pleasures that only civilization can give. The French officer went to Algeria, is broken hearted till he can return to the amenities of La Patrie, the hub of his universe. The officer who has to live on his pay considers it the greatest of his hardships to have to stew in India. Siberia, which is a sort of European Canada, is a word of horror to the well to do Russian. But, persuaded out of ordinary horse-sense by the prevailing cant about emigration, men sell their business or give up a good post and rush to book a passage to an erstwhile penal settlement, where men were formerly sent only in punishment for their misdeeds. To anyone who appreciates the fine fruits of an ordered and slowly perfected civilization, it is surely a punishment to have to go into the wilderness, leaving behind the tramcars, trains, baths, libraries, the water, gas and electricity laid on; to go to a wilderness where there are no paved footways, no macadamised roads, no bridges, no telephones; where the doctor, the church, the shops are twenty miles distant, where there are no libraries, theatres, art galleries, where a man has to be his own mason, carpenter, blacksmith, veterinary surgeon, butcher, nacker, navvy, and letter and parcel carrier.

A Manufactured Exodus.

The exodus is not a natural movement of population. It is made by advertisement and press puffs, and the great shipping companies are as much dependent on the continuance of this illusion as the armament firms are upon the illusion that national security means ships and guns. Huge showcases of colonial produce are now among the recognised decorations at big railway stations; as if we could not show far finer products than they can! From the hoardings gleam coloured picture-postcards of waving grain and snug farmsteads to lure the simple, credulous man away from his

own kind acres and old green hills. Fortunes are being made by the many agents of the emigration pressgang, who rob their own country of its finest asset, its people, while taking good care not to go themselves! The effete old country is good enough for them! If it pays the Colonies so well to secure emigrants, is it not equally to our advantage to induce them to stay and work for the progress and glory of the Homeland, in which their own true wellbeing is involved.

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