

THE EMIGRATION DEPARTMENT

Some years ago I was present one night in the Board-room at Euston Station and addressed a shipload of emigrants who were departing to Canada under the auspices of the Salvation Army. I forget their exact number, but I think it was not less than 500. What I do not forget, however, is the sorrow that I felt at seeing so many men in the prime of life leaving the shores of their country for ever, especially as most of them were not married. This meant, amongst other things, that an equal number of women who remained behind were deprived of the possibility of obtaining a husband in a country in which the females already outnumber the males by more than a million. I said as much in the little speech I made on this occasion, and I think that some one answered me with the pertinent remark that if there was no work at home, it must be sought abroad.

There lies the whole problem in a nutshell--men must live. As for the aged and the incompetent and the sick and the unattached women, these are left behind for the community to support, while young and active men of energy move off to endow new lands with their capacities and strength. The results of this movement, carried out upon a great scale, can be seen in the remoter parts of Ireland, which, as the visitor will observe, appear to be largely populated by very young children and by persons getting on in years. Whether or no this is a

satisfactory state of affairs is not for me to say, although the matter, too large to discuss here, is one upon which I may have my own opinion.

Colonel Lamb, the head of the Salvation Army Emigration Department, informed me that during the past seven years the Army has emigrated about 50,000 souls, of whom 10,000 were assisted out of its funds, the rest paying their own way or being paid for from one source or another. From 8,000 to 10,000 people have been sent during the present year, 1910, most of them to Canada, which is the Mecca of the Salvation Army Emigration policy. So carefully have all these people been selected, that not 1 per cent have ever been returned to this country by the Canadian Authorities as undesirable. The truth is that those Authorities have the greatest confidence in the discretion of the Army, and in its ability to handle this matter to the advantage of all concerned.

That this is true I know from personal experience, since when, some years ago, I was a Commissioner from the British Government and had authority to formulate a scheme of Colonial land-settlement, the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, told me so himself in the plainest language. Indeed, he did more, formally offering a huge block of territory to be selected anywhere I might choose in the Dominion, with the aid of its Officers, for the purposes of settlement by poor folk and their children under the auspices of the Salvation Army. Also, he added the promise of as much more land as might be required

in the future for the same purpose.[3]

Most unhappily, as I hold, that offer was not accepted by the British Government. If this had been done, by now hundreds of English families would have been transferred from conditions of want at home in the English towns, into those of peace and plenty upon the land abroad. Moreover, the recent rise in the value of Canadian land has been so great that the scheme would not have cost the British taxpayer a halfpenny, or so I most firmly believe.

Unfortunately, however, my scheme was too novel in its character to appeal to the official mind, especially as its working would have involved a loan repayable by instalments, the administration of which must have been entrusted to the Salvation Army or to other charitable Organizations. So this priceless opportunity was lost, probably for ever, as the new and stricter emigration regulations adopted by Canada, as I understand, would make it extremely difficult to emigrate the class I hoped to help, namely, indigent people of good character, resident in English cities, with growing families of children.

Young men, especially if they have been bred on the land, and young marriageable women are eagerly desired in the Colonies, including Australia; but at families, as we have read in recent correspondence in the newspapers, they look askance.

'Why do they not want families in Australia? I asked Colonel Lamb.

'Because the trouble of housing comes in. It is the same thing in Canada, it is the same thing all through the Colonies. They do not want too much trouble,' he answered.

These words define the position very accurately. 'Give us your best,' say the Colonies. 'Give us your adult, healthy men and women whom you have paid to rear and educate, but don't bother us with families of children whom we have to house. Above all send us no damaged articles. You are welcome to keep those at home.'

To my mind this attitude, natural as it may be, creates a serious problem so far as Great Britain and Ireland are concerned, for the question will arise, Can we afford to go on parting with the good and retaining the less desirable?

On this subject I had a long argument with Colonel Lamb, and his answer to the question was in the affirmative, although I must admit that his reasons did not at all convince me. He seemed to believe that we could send out 250,000 people, chosen people, per annum for the next ten years without harm to ourselves. Well, it may be so, and, as he added, 'we are in their (that is, the Colonies') hands, and have to do what they choose to allow.'

Also his opinion was that 'the best thing possible for this country is wholesale emigration,' of course of those whom the Colonies will

accept. He said, 'People here are dissatisfied with their present condition and want a change. If we had money to assist them, there is practically no limit to the number who want to go. There are tens of thousands who would conform to the Canadian regulations. One of the things we advise the man who has been forced out of the country is that rather than come into the town he should go to the Colonies.'

On the matter of the complaints which have been made in Canada of the emigrant from London, Colonel Lamb said, 'The Londoner, it is alleged, is not wanted. The Canadian is full of self-assertiveness, and the Cockney has some of that too; he does not hesitate to express his views, and you have conflicting spirits at once. The Cockney will arrive at the conclusion in about twenty-four hours that he could run Canada better than it is now being run. The Scotchman will take a week to arrive at the same conclusion, and holds his tongue about it. The Cockney says what he thinks on the first day of arrival, and the result is--fireworks. He and the Canadians do not agree to begin with; but when they get over the first passage of arms they settle down amicably. The Cockney is finally appreciated, and, being industrious and amenable to law and order, if he has got a bit of humour he gets on all right, but not at first.'

Colonel Lamb informed me that in Australia the Labour Party is afraid of the Army because it believes 'we will send in people to bring down wages.' Therefore, the Labour Party has sidetracked General Booth's proposals. Now, however, it alleges that it is not opposed to

emigration, if not on too large a scale. 'They don't mind a few girls; but they say the condition that must precede emigration is the breaking up of the land.'

Colonel Lamb appeared to desire that an Emigration Board should be appointed in England, with power and funds to deal with the distribution of the population of the Empire and to systematize emigration. To this Imperial Board, individuals or Societies, such as the Salvation Army, should, he thought, be able to submit their schemes, which schemes would receive assistance according to their merits under such limitations as the Board might see fit to impose. To such a Board he would even give power to carry out land-settlement schemes in the British Isles.

This is a great proposal, but one wonders whence the money is to come. Also how long will it be before the Labour Parties in the various Colonies, including Canada, gain so much power that they will refuse to accept emigrants at all, except young women, or agriculturalists who bring capital with them?

But all these problems are for the future. Meanwhile it is evident that the Salvation Army manages its emigration work with extraordinary success and business skill. Those whom it sends from these shores for their own benefit are invariably accepted, at any rate in Canada, and provided with work on their arrival in the chosen Colony. That the selection is sound and careful is shown, also, by the fact that the

Army recovers from those emigrants to whom it gives assistance a considerable percentage of the sums advanced to enable them to start life in a new land.