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Immigration Tide May Turn from West to East
Millions of Our Foreign-Born Citizens Planning to Return to Europe
After the War, Says Commissioner Frederic C. Howe

By RICHARD BARRY.

MILLIONS of foreign-born Americans, representing almost every nation in the world, are making plans now to go back to the lands of their birth as soon as peace is declared. They are the Democracy's barrier, waiting for the flag of peace to drop, whereupon will occur such an exodus of the foreign born as has never occurred before in our history.

Statistical workers believe that the migration abroad has been pouring into the steamships and railway offices during the past year, and that these transfers can be taken, unofficially, by these offices, with the resulting migration that approxi- mately 3,000,000 of the American born now on American soil are planning to return home. Commissioner of Immigration, Frederic C. Howe, says that he is of the opinion that, on a most conserva- tive estimate, at least 2,000,000 people will return to Europe the first year after the war if they can secure accom- modation. Other immigration officials have said, privately, that they would not be surprised to see 2,500,000, 4,000,000, or even 5,000,000 go back. As the average immigration figures previous to 1914 was between 300,000 and 400,000, (about one-fourth of the average annual immigration,) this crisis has brought before it an astonishing phenomenon.

For centuries the flow of peoples has been westward, from the tribes, from the dawn of our era, has been toward the setting sun. Is the close of the 20th century to mark the change in history? Has man at last looked back on the lands of the West? And is the beginning of a new time since the discovery of America, toward the rising sun? And if so, why? The answer is, "Yes." Howe, "we, are, it seems to me, on the threshold of a vast change. It is not that we wish to think our Americanism has been. Unless all signs are wrong and our Government, national as well as State, institutes drastic measures, we may see almost a complete reversal of conditions. To put it slugantly, we will have to take the 'I' out of Americanism and replace it with a 'c.'

The Commissioner spoke from his well- placed office on Ellis Island. The old_statistics, always ready to look at the past days when the waves swarmed with pic- tureque alien peoples, blending in America, make the fact that a million and a half of us, of confusion and anxiety, all incident to a monumental change, are now being washed away, Ellis Island is marking time.

"But," I exclaimed, "surely there will be no great revolving of immigration after the war. Surely millions will flee from war-ridden Europe for asylum in America. I should think the first year after the war will be the greatest year of immigration in our history."

"I do not think so," answered Howe. "At least the net immigration is not likely to be very large; that is, if you subtract those who are returning home.

"What reasons have you for thinking so many are going back?"

"First, a census taken by rail- road officials abroad shows that at least 1,000,000 of our foreign-born are planning to go to Eu- rope, if not Germany. In the second place, the reports of a large number of employers in Western cities that there were great numbers of people from Russia, Bero- ducce, Hungarians, Austrians, and other Central European peoples to return to their home. This is only the beginning of the wave, for the coal and industrial regions report that Poles, Italians, and Russians in very large numbers are saving money and making preparations for return. Fourth, my study of European agricultural condi-

The Kind of Home Provided by the Australian Government as an Inducement to Settlers.

What Germany is going to do can only be seconded at. But we may be posi- tive that Germany will not lose a day or a chance. We may have some idea of what Germany will do if we take into consideration that her enlightened policies previous to the war were such that the average immi- gration into Germany for a number of years before 1914 was 800,000 per annum. We do know that already Ger- many is breaking up her large landed estates, that notice has been served on the titled and landed proprietor.

"Fourth, every country in Europe is working out an organized plan to foster every movement which I am forw- arding. In every country, from Ireland to the Black Sea, the days of absentee land- lords and of vast unoccupied estates, no matter who owns them, are probably over. Every European Government is awakened to this condition.

"Fifth, many, perhaps a majority, will leave America because of industrial conditions. It has been said that the depressed condition of the Russian and the sweat shop and the German, in many cases, the practical inability, of the immigrants to acquire property, the country districts and valleys of Central and Southern Europe have supplied the bulk of our immigrants. In the last decade and three quarters the "greaser" has been on the increase, but, to both, it is America who has not welcomed them.

In Scotland the English Government is taking steps to break up great estates into small holdings to be sold to returning soldiers on easy terms of pay- ments. A whole new scheme of land taxation is being considered with the primary purpose, not of increased revenue for the State, but of ending speculation in land and opening it to use.

"Canada is working on colony proj- ects in the Northwest, while Australia and New Zealand have already out- stripped the world in offering induce- ments to settlers. Recently, in Congress, Senator Sheppard of Texas, who has in- tended the immigration side of the immi- gration of this country, said that the lead in this sort of legislation for hu- manity will come from Canada. There all personality, live stock, and im- provements are exempted from taxation. There is no mortgage, no life mortgage as if it were land, and is pro- hibited from charging it to the mortgagor. All changes of value in the home owners of New Zealand pay no tax at all. Australia, too, has introduced the idea of a differential tax on rental and speculation and idle land holding.

All the States of Australia have worked together to build up the prime object of breaking up big estates and placing on them many small farmers, not as tenants, but as owners or prospective owners. The State of Victo- ria, for instance, offers a wonderful inducement to the settler. It builds him a home, places therein furniture and essential working machinery, gives him six head of cattle and a specified amount of live stock besides, and hands all over to him, with enough acreage for one and a half horses, with a little money down and an easily gradu- ated scheme of partial payments by which he may pay his installment interest, but with provisions for forfeiture and lapse, so that it is practically im- possible for the badly thrifty man to lose his investment.

Comparing with this the American scheme, where is the $8,000,000 reclamation project on the Yuma desert—but which gives no tenant no ownership of the potential creature com- forts of the man who must work the land."

"How can America meet this foreign competition?"

"There are several ways, some of which are already in operation, some of which are being developed. At the present time I can no more than diagnose the condition and point out the undisputed facts. Take, for instance, the migration recently of hundreds of thousands of negroes from the South to northern cities. This would not have occurred if better chances existed in the South for negroes. But what, if anything, is prohibited, is true, under the law, and many negroes do town homes, but the cry is heard around the country: "California, which is inclined to lead the nation in remedial legislation of this sort. Another scheme is for the purpose of buying land for sub- division into small holdings. It is a scheme contagious with many in the nature of an experiment, but it will point the way. It is in line with the teachings of Ireland and Australia.

"The problem is for all America. Farm labor has had several severe blows. The world has been hurt, and the rising wage market in the cities inevitably hurts it. The immigration shortage has hurt it. Now if we begin, at the close of the war, an emigration away from the land and back to Europe, conditions here will be the same. There is the problem of a serious decay in farming, which means, in a very definite sense, a decay in our national life.

"We do not do enough for the farmer here in America. Europe is going to be the great society, and the man who keeps himself away from us after the war. That is what we are in danger of doing."

"See what they do for the farmer in Australia. Germany began a similar scheme before the war and is said to have saved more than a million acres. It consists in eliminating the middleman. The Australian farmer, as today the German, has an agent who handles his business and gives him all the returns, less a commission, which is State regu-
Speculation is practically eliminated. Middleman profits are eliminated. We give our farmers free seeds; Australia gives them free homes. We abandon ours to the transportation wolves; Germany handles the farmer’s transport for him, at cost. We offer public land for homesteading after the desirable land is all gone; Ireland commandeers its best land, long fallow under absenteees, and splits it up among small farmers.

In the United States today more than 400,000,000 acres of land, ostensibly in farms, is not under cultivation, while 200,000 acres, or one-quarter of our total agricultural area, is in great estates, principally in the West and South, some many hundreds of thousands of acres in extent. Land speculation has frozen out the small farmer without capital. And land speculation can best be met by taxation, as is being done in Canada. We hear of the old grinding conditions in Russia and Ireland where the tenant farmer groaned under his burden. America is the Russia and the Ireland of the future in this respect.

“The people, and especially our new immigrants, are land hungry, but they cannot be fed. They are thwarted by land monopoly, by land speculation, and by promotion companies which make it almost impossible for a man to establish himself as a farmer if he has no capital.

“Europe has a farseeing eye on these millions. It proposes to make a bid for them. It will offer the prize of homestead to the small settler. It will ruthlessly eliminate the profiteer and the speculator, the land hog and the land baron. Meanwhile, America stands alone as practically the only country which is not considering the reclamation of agriculture in a constructive, intelligent way.

“America exhorts the farmer and educates him, but it will have to do more than that for him if it wants to keep him. We have land in abundance. We have 15,000,000 foreign-born people, many of them peasants, eager for land. Yet conditions are such that they are now looking anxiously to war-scarred Europe to acquire a home.”