

# 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.

**M**ILLIONS of foreign-born Americans, representing almost every nationality of Europe, are planning to go back to the lands of their birth as soon as peace is declared. They are, as it were, straining at the barrier, waiting for the flag of peace to drop, whereupon will occur such an exodus from these shores as has never occurred before in our history.

So many inquiries about transportation abroad have been pouring into the steamship and railway offices during the past few months that a census was recently taken, unofficially, by these offices, with the resulting revelation that approximately 1,000,000 foreign-born persons 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 conservative estimate, at least 2,000,000 people will return to Europe the first year after the war if they can secure accommodation. Other immigration officials have said, privately, that they would not be surprised to see 3,000,000, 4,000,000, or even 5,000,000 go back. As the average emigration out of America for years previous to 1914 was between 300,000 and 400,000, (about one-fourth of the average immigration,) this country has looming before it an astonishing phenomenon.

For centuries the flow of peoples has been westward. The migration of the tribes, from the dawn of our era, has been toward the setting sun. Is the close of the great war to mark the end of his era in history? Has man at last looked his fill on the lands of the West? And is migration now to take its flow, for the first time since the discovery of America, toward the rising sun? And if so, why?

The question was put to Mr. Howe.

"Yes," he said, "we are, it seems to me, on the threshold of a vast change. It is idle to think our immigration problem will continue as it 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 slangily, we will have to take the 'i' out of immigration and replace it with an 'e.'"

The Commissioner spoke from his well-placed office on Ellis Island. The old atmosphere of the island is gone. The days when the ways swarmed with picturesque alien peasants, babbling in variegated tongues a Babel of elation, confusion and anxiety, all incident to a monumental hegira, are no more. The inclosures are now empty. Ellis Island is marking time.

"But," I remonstrated, "surely there will be a resumption 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 would be the greatest year of immigration in our history."

"No," replied Mr. Howe, "I think not. At least the net immigration is not likely to be very large; that is, if you subtract those going from those coming."

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

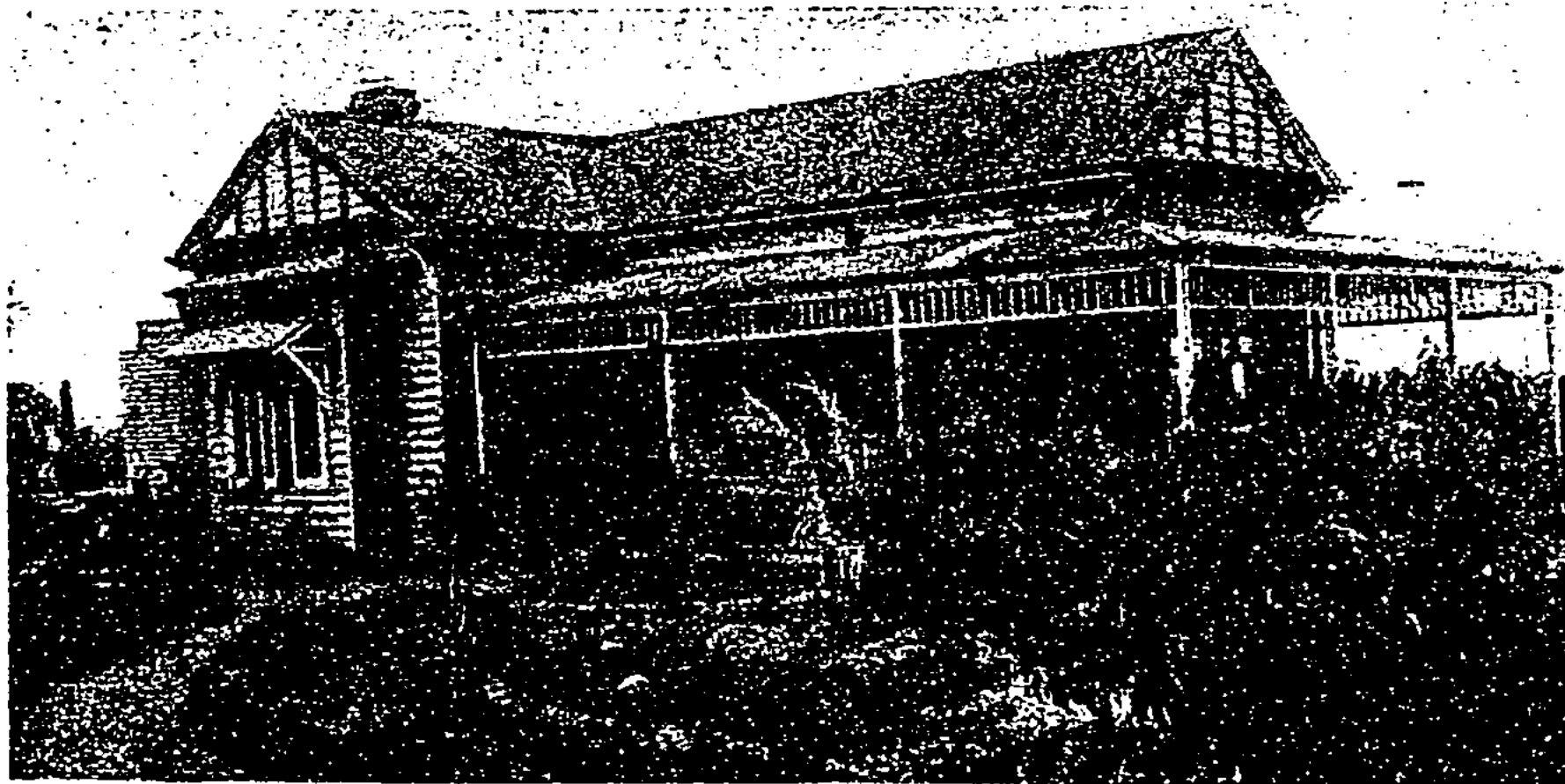
"First, a census taken by railroad and steamship companies, showing that at least 1,000,000 of our foreign-born are planning to go to Europe the moment peace is declared. Second, the reports of a large number of employers in Western cities that there seems to be a concerted movement to induce Hungarians, Austrians, and other Central European peoples to return to their native land. Third, bankers in 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-

tions as contrasted with those in the United States. This last is my basic reason, though the symptoms are well indicated by the others."

"How do you explain this potential exodus?"

"I will catalogue the reasons, beginning with the unimportant. First, the desire to see friends and relatives. We have 15,000,000 foreign-born persons in the United States, and for over three years these 15,000,000 have had little or no communication with their relations on the other side. Had communication been uninterrupted they might have been content to remain, would doubtless have followed the natural law and written back such tidings as would have lured others here. But, lacking communication, they remain restless and dissatisfied, and the imagination always conjures up the worst. This, combined with the conditions they face here, is a compelling motive.

"Second, the quest for family property and possessions. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, have lost relatives in the war. Many came to this country because of unsatisfactory division of property in the old countries. Now they will return in the hope of getting what



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

will be to them a more equitable division. Death and change have wiped out many an old score, tightened many a homesick heart.

"Third, there is a general expectation, among the Russians especially, and also among the Poles, Hungarians, and residents of the Balkan States, that land will be cheap in their countries after the war. Russia, of course, has a new deal, and many Russians are eager to get back quickly and profit by the change. Others are planning to profit out of the bankruptcy of feudal proprietors in Poland and Hungary, as well as out of the devastation of the country.

"Fourth, every country in Europe is working out an organized plan to foster this very movement which I am forecasting. In every country, from Ireland to the Black Sea, the days of absentee landlordism and of vast uncultivated estates, no matter who owns them, are probably over. Every European Government is awake to this condition.

"Fifth, many, perhaps a majority, will leave America because of industrial conditions. It has been said that the Texan hates the Slovak and the Northerner hates the 'greaser'; but, to both, it is America who has not welcomed them.

"Sixth, the increasing difficulty, and, in many cases, the practical inability, of the immigrant to acquire permanent homes. The country districts and villages of Central and Southern Europe have supplied the bulk of our immigration for the last decade. These Slavs, Latins, and Teutons are essentially home-loving. They came here after having been told that this was the paradise for the home lover; that in the United States every man could easily acquire a

home, which, in a former generation was true, but not now. So they are going back where they think they can get homes."

"Granting that all this is true," I cut in, "won't there be even more millions anxious to flee to America from the impoverished and devastated lands?"

"It is not likely," replied Mr. Howe. "In the first place, European Governments are going to place restrictions on emigration. Every Government will need every able-bodied human being at home. Moreover, it is universally predicted that the end of this war will see a swift rising tide of legislation along socialistic lines. That may mean a distribution of lands.

"Already, in the height of the war, in the shock of the desperate conflict, when it would seem that thought is given to nothing but militarism, commissions are working everywhere on this problem.

"Take England, for instance. A commission has been appointed to investigate ways and means for providing land for invalided soldiers, and this is expected to be the basis for legislation immediately after the war to provide land for returned soldiers.

ments to settlers. Recently, in Congress, Senator Sheppard of Texas, who has introduced a bill providing for an investigation of this problem, said that the lead in this sort of legislation for humanity had been taken by New Zealand. There all personalty, live stock, and improvements are exempted from taxation. The mortgagee must pay a tax on his mortgage as if it were land, and is prohibited from charging it to the mortgagor. About six-sevenths of the farm home owners of New Zealand pay no tax at all. Australia, too, has introduced the land tax to break up land speculation and idle land holding.

"All the States of Australia have worked out colonization schemes, with 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 Victoria, 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 man to work without help, with very little payment down and an easily graduated scheme of partial payments by which he becomes the proprietor in due time, but with provisions made for forfeiture and lapses, so that it is practically impossible for a fairly thrifty man to lose his investment.

"Contrast with this the American scheme which spends large sums—like the \$8,000,000 reclamation project on the Yuma desert—but which gives no thought to the essential creature comforts of the man who must work the land."

"How can America meet this foreign competition?"

"There are several ways, some of which have been suggested and 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 to become owners. They are not prohibited, it is true, under the law, and many negroes do own homes, but the crying need is for State encouragement.

"California, which is inclined to lead the nation in remedial legislation of this sort, has recently appropriated \$250,000 for the purpose of buying land for subdivision into small holdings. It is a small sum, comparatively, and 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 draft has hurt it. The rising wage market in the cities inevitably hurts it. The immigration shortage has hurt it. Now if we add to that, at the close of the war, an emigration away from the land and back to Europe, conditions here will become unendurable. There will be a serious decay in farming, which means, in a very definite sense, a decay in our national life, too.

"We do not do enough for the farmer here in America. Europe is going to meet us in competition for him and bid him away from us after the war. That is the situation in a nutshell.

"See what they do for the farmer in Australia. Germany began a similar scheme before the war and is said to have almost perfected it during the war. 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-

lated. 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 absentees, 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."

**The New York Times**

Published: October 14, 1917

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