
Why Europeans Migrated to America

WHEN William the Conqueror established the manorial or feudal land system in England, he allotted land to his barons, who were to render to him and his successors certain services. These feudal services were, in effect, a perpetual land rent to provide the requirements of government.

In addition, areas of land were set aside for free use by the landless serfs as commons on which to grow food, pasture their domestic animals, and cut fire wood.

With increasing population causing increasing demand for wool, the barons steadily encroached upon the commons by enclosing them for sheep pasture, and the area of free land allotted to the serfs was continually reduced.

"In this way it came that these poor wretches," Sir Thomas More wrote, "were driven from their native fields without knowing where to go." Cardinal Wolsey issued a decree that all enclosures be reopened, but it was not effective. Starkey, in a *History of England*, said: "Now they go about in England, from door to door, and ask alms for God's sake, and some of them, because they will not beg, do steal, and then be hanged."

Froude, the historian estimated that, up to his time, the ministers of the crown and their friends had appropriated, and divided among themselves lands worth in modern currency about £5,000,000.

The Duke of Somerset pitied the poor and demanded that enclosed lands be reopened. The landholders' parliament resented this, and the duke was arrested and executed.

During Elizabeth's reign the punishment for begging was ameliorated, being modified to "whipping on the bare back until his body is bloody," and "rogues, victims of eviction and unemployment were trussed up, and there was not a year wherein three hundred or four hundred were not hanged."

In 1606, during the reign of James I (1603-1625), when the lands of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators were confiscated and distributed to court favorites, the new grantees of this land—the new aristocracy—made fresh enclosures and evictions. This caused eight thousand people, led by "Captain Pouch," to assemble in protest.

British soldiers demurred at attacking their fellow countrymen, with whom they sympathized, whereupon the manor lords with their servants attacked the dispossessed. Captain Pouch was hanged, drawn and quartered, but his fellows were "only hanged." These laborers were neither felons nor traitors; they were simply Englishmen defending their use of the common land against private appropriation. [163]

The first English migration to America was just then leaving for Virginia. The Archbishop of York, in a sermon three years later, said: "The lords hath got most of the tillage in their hands. They convert to a shepherd and his dog townships in which there had been one or two hundred communicants. Look seriously to the land and see whether there be not necessity to seek abroad."

Migration to Virginia was widely advocated to draw from England large numbers of the unemployed, diminish begging, vagabondage and crime, and thus lessen the cost of poor relief. [20]

The population of England was then fifty per square mile, while it is now 748 per square mile. The land, source of all employment, was held as it is today in most countries, by the relatively few, at prices and exactions which prevented the more general use by which laborers could maintain themselves.

So many idle and disabled men were turned loose upon the country by the parishes that they threatened a dangerous pestilence of vagabonds. In 1627 to reduce the cost of poor relief, 1,400

children were collected in different parts of England and sent to Virginia. [20]

At that period ocean passage for adults was £6, and freight £3 per ton.

The Puritan exodus to New England, a territory which was entirely English, really commenced in 1629, when Charles I, ruling without a parliament, levied taxes, imprisoned objectors and collected forced loans. In 1642 when the Long Parliament met and civil war began, the Puritan exodus ceased. For more than a century after, there was no considerable migration to New England. [49]

Meanwhile, however, the sale of land in New York and Maryland, and emigration thereto, continued to be actively promoted by the proprietary landholders who were living in Holland and England. A more likely cause of the cessation of emigration to New England at that period was the revocation of the charter of the Council of New England and the distribution to its members of the lands. This took place seven years prior to the date named and left New England without an organized agency for promoting emigration. The Massachusetts Bay Company does not seem to have maintained a sales and emigration agency in England.

In 1649, during the Commonwealth (1649-1660) there arose another rebellion against enclosures, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Lilburne and Gerrard Winstanley. "They had no quarrel with the rights of property, or desire to steal lands of other people; they only wanted restoration of their own rights to common pasturage and tillage. 'Englishmen,' they said, 'are not a free people while the poor are not allowed to dig and labor on the commons.'" Lilburne was imprisoned in the Tower of London, and the diggers were shot down. [163]

During the period many pamphlets were written on the subject of the unemployed. One, by the Rev. J. Moore, on the *Crying Sin of England*, denounced "the broode of those wretches that by their enclosures do unpeople country, cities and towns by their unsocial, covetous and cruel actions in trebling the price of the land which they enclose, which makes such swarms of beggars that go from door to door."

At the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, the enormous annual revenue from land rents payable by the barons to the king was, by act of Parliament, compounded for a cash payment to the king of £100,000 per annum, to be paid by taxation. The barons, thereby being freed for ever of land rents, a proposal was made to raise an equivalent sum by a tax upon land.

An opponent, speaking in the House of Lords, declared: "You can get this money by an easier method. By indirect taxation you can tax the last rag off a man's back, the last mouthful of food from his mouth, and he will not know what is injuring him; he may grumble about hard times, but he will not know that the hard times have been produced by taxation."

The first excise tax in England was imposed on liquors in 1640, and was afterwards extended to other articles. The Parliament, by a majority vote of two, in a membership of three hundred, ordered payments to the king to be made by a general excise (or sales) tax on commodities. The landholding members of parliament, thus voting to abolish all services and payments for land due from the barons to the king, did not abolish the land rent payments due to the barons from their own tenants. [41]

Indirect taxation was, therefore, the next great cause of poverty in England, much as it is today in all countries.

During the reign of Charles II the tax for support of the poor was the heaviest tax, amounting to little less than one-half the entire public revenue. In 1694 during the reign of William III, a land tax of 4s in the pound (20 per cent) raised £2,000,000 with certainty and dispatch. [97]

In 1698, English woolen manufacturers resenting competition, caused similar manufactures in the north of Ireland to be suppressed. Twenty thousand Ulsterites, descendants of those whom James I, grandfather of the reigning king, had earlier in the century sent there from Scotland and the North of England, were deprived of employment. All who could do so migrated to America.

In that year of 1698 Gabriel Thomas, of Wales, wrote from Philadelphia: "The great number of poor men, women and children in England, half starved, visible in their meagre looks, that are continually wandering up and down looking for employment

without finding any, if here, need not lie idle a moment. Wages for labor are nearly three times that of labor in England or Wales. There are no beggars to be seen here; . . .”

Emigration to America was not confined to the English, Scotch and Irish. Thousands of Hollanders, Belgians, and Flemish together with some Swedes went, or were sent, to New Netherland. Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV, in 1685, caused no less than five hundred thousand Protestants (Huguenots) to flee from France. Nearly all were of eminent respectability, their ranks including artisans as well as many persons of the ancient nobility, large numbers of whom migrated to America. Concurrently, Penn, who had had his literature regarding Pennsylvania translated into German, was inducing large numbers of Germans and kindred people to go to Philadelphia.

Of the population of 5,500,000 in England, in 1696, it was estimated that one-fourth of them were beggars and on the public charge. All the people in Gloucestershire (and similarly in other shires) were then either living on alms, or being ruined by paying them, and there were serious riots. [97]

The cost of the poor laws enacted during the reign of Elizabeth was fabulous for that time, just as it was in the United States during the 1930's. Less than a century afterwards the tax levy for the poor in England had increased from £730,000 to £7,000,000.

Up to about 1710, enclosures were not sanctioned by law, but the landholders in that year applied to and easily obtained from a Parliament composed largely of landholders, acts enclosing the common land. Thereafter, instead of being robbed without process of law, the landless were by law robbed further of the right to use the commons. [163]

In the six years following 1728 at least four thousand men were imprisoned every year for petty thefts in England, largely because of poverty due to unemployment. [5]

For refusal to take oath of allegiance to the British Crown, seven thousand French in Acadia (Nova Scotia) were, in 1755, transported to American seacoast towns.

Watt perfected the steam engine at about the time of the outbreak of the American Revolution, and factories were established

in England for converting into cloth the wool which hitherto had been exported to the continent. Eleven years later the Watt engine was installed in cotton factories. This somewhat relieved unemployment, but unfortunately became the cause of child labor and slum housing in the mill towns, to the great profit of landholders in those towns.

In 1782 a poor-law act provided outdoor relief for the able-bodied and the practice became common, as it had been eighty-two years previously; this was similar to the unemployment relief in the United States 150 years later, in the 1930's.

Professor Ogilvie, an economist of King's College, Aberdeen, in an essay on the rights of property in land, suggested taxation of land values for poor relief.

Parliament enacted numerous land enclosure acts and in 1801 passed a general enclosure act which caused a rapid increase in enclosures. Prothers cites that during the thirty-two years preceding 1809 there were 1,651 acts passed permitting the enclosure of more than 4,500,000 acres of the English commons. Thus additional vast numbers of the landless were shut out from use of the commons for cultivation, pasturage and fuel.

At the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, in 1815, the British national debt had risen to £846,000,000. Increased indirect taxation levied to pay the interest charges brought still more suffering to the common people.

In some counties the unemployed marched with banners inscribed "Bread or Blood." Machinery in textile mills was destroyed by the unemployed, who in their ignorance considered it the cause of their distress. One leader, Brandreth, with some followers, was arrested, and though ably defended, he and two others were hanged and then beheaded—at that late period in a presumably cultured society. Some juries before whom prisoners were tried felt pity for the starving unemployed and declared them not guilty. [163]

Ten years later another insurrection by the unemployed occurred, and in one day every power-loom in Blackburn and within a radius of six miles was smashed. There, and in other towns, within one week 1,000 power-looms were destroyed. [163]

The condition of the poor in all parts of Great Britain steadily

became worse. Meanwhile, thousands of the earlier American settlers were moving into the country west of the Appalachian Mountains to locate on fertile land.

During that period about two hundred books and pamphlets (some by promoters of land settlement in America) were printed in England depicting the misery of the poor there and urging that they be sent to America.

Very few of these writers, however, noted that poverty was directly being caused by appropriation of the land by the British aristocracy, and by indirect taxation of the people. [163]

It was not realized then that non-landholders were being taxed—and but few seem now to realize it. The constant use in common speech and print of the term “the taxpayers” would indicate a separate class of citizens. But as tax after tax is placed on all sorts of articles, every producer and merchant naturally must add the tax to the price of what he sells, and all consumers become taxpayers. Use of the term “the taxpayers,” indicating only those who pay taxes on land, buildings and incomes, is fallacious, misleading and a careless use of words. All citizens pay taxes.

Up to the time of the execution of Charles I in 1649, the greater part of the public revenue in Britain was from land rent. When as cited above, the feudal tenures were abolished during the reign of Charles II and the barons were relieved of paying their stipulated land rent, the percentage of public revenue from land rent dropped to 31 per cent of the total revenue; the average during the thirteen years ending in 1727 was 23 per cent; in 1770 it was 15 per cent; in 1798 (after the war with the American colonies which cost Great Britain £98,000,000) the public revenue from land rent had further dropped to 6 per cent; in 1837 to 4 per cent; and in 1908, to 1 per cent. [41]

In Ireland, during the five years following the potato disease and famine, beginning in 1847, there were 221,845 evictions of the agricultural population from their homes. Their houses were destroyed—whole townlands being depopulated—to make room for the cattle and sheep which were more profitable to the absentee, mostly English, landlords. [156]

In Scotland, between 1710 and 1843, it was estimated that by various enclosure acts about seven million acres of land were

enclosed for sheep, deer and grouse. Eviction of people began in 1807, accompanied by the tearing down of their houses. The dispossessed, if given any land at all, were given unproductive plots while others were deported by the hundreds to the United States, Canada, West Indies, and Australia with no pretense of consulting their preference. Many more were driven to live in the cellars and attics of the slums of Glasgow. [156]

These deplorable conditions in Ireland and Scotland, the industrial and economic distress in Europe following the Napoleonic Wars, and failure of the revolution in Germany in 1848 accelerated migration to America which continued until the high speculative prices of land resulted in the panic and depression in America in 1857.

The effect during the past several centuries of shutting people out from the use of land and of levying taxes on commodities are here clearly shown.

Under these social and economic conditions, urging migration to America grew into a systematized business for profit conducted by various lords proprietors of royal grants of vast areas of land on the North American Continent. They were interested only in finding buyers for their lands, and to that end became active propagandists in inducing people either to go, or send others, to America for land. These, and some ship captains transporting indentured servants, were, during the early Colonial Period, the only agencies for peopling America.

Among the grantees of land the Virginia Company, the Council of New England, Calvert of Maryland, Carteret of New Jersey and Carolina, Penn of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and the Dutch patroons of New York were, in their respective provinces, the most proficient.