

## The Rise of Mass Immigration, 1815 – 60 \*

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The extraordinary increase in immigration to the United States in the early decades of the nineteenth century was one of the wonders of the age. The huge scale of the movement and its seeming inexhaustibility captured the public imagination on both sides of the Atlantic and inspired a flood of fascinated comment. The remark of the *Democratic Review* in July 1852 that there had been nothing to compare with the exodus in appearance "since the encampments of the Roman Empire or the tents of the crusaders" was but one expression of a sentiment that pervaded discussion at every level. The same sense of awe was apparent in newspaper accounts of the movement's progress, in the efforts of pamphleteers and publicists to trace its origin, and in the debates of legislative bodies upon its probable outcome.

This did not mean, however, that opinion was unanimous about the new phenomenon. In Europe, some people welcomed the rise of mass emigration as a much-needed bloodletting and as a safety valve for discontent, but there were others who deplored a process which seemed to them to be draining the Old World of its most vigorous inhabitants. Similarly, in America opinion ranged from the excited warnings of the nativist against the menace of foreign influence to the enthusiasm of those who, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, welcomed the spectacle of "a heterogeneous population crowding in on ships from all comers of the world to the great gates of North America."

Most of the attention the movement attracted, and not a little of the disagreement it provoked, were due to a recognition of its uniqueness. Though immigration had been a familiar aspect of American development throughout the colonial period, there was no precedent for a movement of such magnitude and persistence as that which began in 1815. In the hundred years between that date and the outbreak of World War I, no fewer than thirty million people, drawn from every corner of Europe, made their way across the Atlantic. They came in a series of gigantic waves, each more powerful than the last and separated from one another only by short periods of time.

The first of these waves began soon after the close of the Napoleonic Wars, and after gathering momentum steadily during the 1830's and 1840's, reached its crest in 1854. Its progress could be followed in the immigration statistics which the federal government began to collect in 1820. In the decade of the 1820's, the number of arrivals was only 151,000; but the 1830's brought a fourfold increase to 599,000. This figure was in turn dwarfed by the 1,713,000 immigrants of the 1840's; even more staggering was an immigration of 2,314,000 in the 1850's. Later on, the figures would climb to still greater heights,

but in assessing the impact of this first great wave one should bear in mind the comparative smallness of the American population. The five million immigrants of the period 1815-60 were greater in number than the entire population of the United States at the time of the first census in 1790. Moreover, the three million who arrived in the single decade 1845-54 landed in a country of only about twenty million inhabitants and thus represented, in proportion to the total population, the largest influx the United States has ever known.

Though every country in Europe was represented to some degree in this pre-Civil War movement, the overwhelming majority of the immigrants came from areas north of the Alps and west of the Elbe. Over half of the total of five million had been born in the British Isles, two million of them in Ireland and a further three-quarters of a million in England, Wales, and Scotland. Germany was the next largest contributor with a million and a half, though to this total must be added a large proportion of the 200,000 immigrants listed as Frenchmen, most of whom were in fact German-speaking people from Alsace and Lorraine. No other country sent anything like as large a number, the only ones to send sizable contingents being Switzerland with 40,000, Norway and Sweden also with 40,000, and the Netherlands with 20,000.

Comprehension of the causes of this vast movement must begin with a recognition of their complexity. To attempt to explain mass immigration by means of an all-embracing formula, or by a mere listing of European discontents, or again by a graph tracing the fluctuations of the trade cycle would be to miss its deeper significance. One must insist, first, on the infinitely varied motives of the immigrants. The push and pull of impersonal economic forces must certainly be part of the answer, but no less important were the hopes, fears, and dreams of millions of individual immigrants. Moreover, it is an error to imagine that emigration conditions were identical in every part of Europe. The situation which resulted in emigration from Ireland, for example, was quite different from that which uprooted people in England, while the German movement owed much to forces which were unknown in the British Isles. Emigration derived some of its sweep from local and temporary influences and consequently changed in character with variations in time and place. Then, too, there is a point beyond which economics and politics can no longer serve as guides to the understanding of mass movements. It was no accident that so many contemporaries spoke of emigration as a kind of fever, as mysterious in its origin as the cholera epidemics which periodically ravaged the land. The movement bore in fact a distinct air of irrationality, even of frenzy, and many of those who took part in it were simply carried along by a force they did not understand.

Having made these qualifications, one can nevertheless single out a number of social and economic factors which underlay the movement as a whole and which gave it most of its impetus. The first of these was the doubling of the population of Europe in the century after 1750. This unprecedented

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\* Jones, Maldwyn Allen. *American Immigration*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

increase was due in the first instance to a sharp decline in the mortality rate resulting from improved medical and sanitary knowledge and the absence of serious plagues. Other contributory factors were the greatly increased food supply made possible by the introduction of improved farming methods and by the adoption of the potato as the staple diet of the European peasant. With hunger and disease in retreat, population increased by leaps and bounds, though the full extent of the increase could only be guessed at before official censuses were instituted in the early nineteenth century.

Population increase was not in itself a cause of emigration; it served merely to accentuate the effect of other changes which at the same time were transforming the social and economic life of western Europe. The most striking transformation of all resulted from the growth of the factory system. Originating in England in the middle of the eighteenth century and spreading from there to the Continent, the Industrial Revolution destroyed the old system of domestic manufacture and threw countless artisans out of employment. In Great Britain many displaced artisans moved to nearby factory towns to become wage-laborers, but a considerable number preferred emigration to America as a means of "perpetuating a rural existence." From Germany there was an even greater exodus of artisans, for the factories which had deprived them of work were not near at hand but in England. Indirectly, too, industrialism was to prove a spur to emigration in that it bound the urban worker more closely to the trade cycle and thus subjected him to repeated periods of unemployment. At such times emigration was for many the only alternative, if not to starvation, then at least to a narrowing range of opportunities.

An equally important change was the fundamental reorganization of rural economy resulting from the rise of large-scale scientific farming. The expansion of urban markets for foodstuffs called for changes in the system of cultivation and especially for the application of new agricultural techniques to large units of land. These changes appeared in a variety of forms; in England and Scandinavia in the enclosure movement, in Ireland and southwest Germany in the consolidation of estates and the transition from arable to pasture, and in the Scottish Highlands in the conversion of farm land to sheep runs. But the social effects were everywhere the same. The old communal system of agriculture was replaced by modern large-scale production, and a large proportion of the rural population was cut loose from the soil. Nor were these displaced people the only ones affected. Because of the competition of large-scale agriculture the small farmer's difficulties multiplied and his hold on the land weakened. As for his children, only emigration offered an alternative to a reduction in status to the rank of a paid laborer.

Though economic factors predominated as causes of emigration, the influence of political and religious discontent cannot be entirely ignored. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Europe witnessed a succession of

political upheavals, each of which produced a wave of exiles. Some of them chose to remain in Europe in order to continue their revolutionary activities from a convenient base, but a considerable proportion made their way to the New World. By far the largest group to do so came with the failure of the revolutions of 1848 in Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary and the simultaneous collapse of the Young Ireland movement. Even before this the United States had granted political asylum to a motley group which included German *Bur-schenschaften* fleeing from the tyranny that followed the liberal demonstrations at Wartburg and Hambach, Polish and French refugees of the 1830 revolutions, and disappointed English and Scottish Chartists. Yet these earlier victims of political unrest came in mere handfuls, and even the Forty-eighters numbered only a few thousand. In short, political exiles accounted for only a tiny proportion of the total immigration of the period.

Many contemporaries in the United States tended nevertheless to attribute immigration largely to the political attraction of their country. The falsity of this belief was evident even at the time to the more perspicacious observers of the movement. As a Belgian commentator remarked in 1846:

The influence of American institutions acts in a very indirect way upon European immigration. When the immigrants are established in the United States, they often eagerly take advantage of the privileges that are offered them; but they did not leave their native villages to seek political rights in another hemisphere. The time of the Puritans and of William Penn is past. Theories of social reform have given way to a practical desire for immediate well-being.

While religious factors alone were hardly ever responsible for emigration, they were nonetheless a significant element. They were particularly important in stimulating emigration from regions which had hitherto contributed little to the outgoing stream. Thus emigration from Norway to the United States originated in part in the anxiety of Stavanger Quakers to escape persecution at the hands of the official clergy; that from Holland stemmed in some degree from the discontent of seceders from the Dutch Reformed Church at the numerous petty annoyances to which they were subjected; and the beginning of a movement from Prussia in the 1830's can be partly attributed to the reluctance of the Old Lutherans to conform to the United Evangelical Church. Yet in all these cases religious discontent was blended with economic pressure, and one can safely say that the prospect of earthly ease was a stronger stimulus than that of heavenly bliss.

Spiritual and secular influences are more difficult to separate, however, in the case of Mormon emigrants from Great Britain and Scandinavia. While they were not unaware of the economic benefits that awaited them in the Great Salt Lake Valley, European Mormons thought of emigration as the natural consequence of conversion. With faith in the distinctive doctrine of gathering,

they moved to Zion in order to live in peace, prosperity, and righteousness while they awaited the coming millennium.

No matter how it originated, discontent with existing European conditions was invariably heightened by awareness of American opportunity. The astonishing increase in popular knowledge of the United States in the early decades of the nineteenth century must rank as one of the most important influences contributing to the rise of mass immigration. The spread of public education greatly enlarged the influence of the printed word, and with the appearance of a vast flood of literature relating to the New World, the common man's ignorance and misconceptions of American geography, economic life, and institutions began to be dispelled. Books like Morris Birkbeck's *Letters from Illinois* (1818), Gottfried Duden's *Bericht tiber eine Reise nach den westlichen Staaten Nord Amerikas* (1829), and Ole Rynning's *True Account of America* (1838), with their descriptions of pioneer life in the West, enjoyed an immense vogue. In addition there were scores of emigrant guidebooks, compiled by travelers, land and shipping agents, and philanthropic societies, giving details of wages, prices, crops, climate, and topography in different parts of the Union. Hardly less important as a source of information were the new cheap newspapers, most of which ran regular emigration features. Indeed, so intense was the interest in emigration that there were even a number of journals, like the *Allgemeine Auswanderungs-Zeitung* of Rudolstadt, devoted exclusively to the subject. Yet it is probable that none of this printed matter was as influential as the innumerable "America letters" written by immigrants to relatives and friends at home. These communications, at once more personal and more reliable than books and newspapers, not only spoke in glowing terms of the high wages, abundant lands, and equal opportunities that America offered but contained a wealth of advice, information, and warning appropriate to the recipient's needs.

If increasing knowledge of American opportunity contributed to the emigrant's decision to leave Europe, the state of the American economy largely determined the time of his departure. The relative strength of expulsive and attractive forces naturally varied with time and place, but statistical studies have made it clear that, except in periods of unusual disaster or unrest in Europe, a close connection existed between American economic conditions and cyclical fluctuations in the flow of immigration. Periods of depression in the United States tended to be closely followed by a decline in immigration; periods of prosperity by an increase. This was less true, perhaps, of the years before the Civil War than it became subsequently, for in the earlier period immigrants responded as much to the lure of free land as to job opportunities. But the sharp falling-off of immigration after the panics of 1819, 1837, and 1857 shows that from the beginning of the movement the pull was a stronger influence than the push.

Emigration from Europe was not, however, synonymous with immigration to America. Of those uprooted from their European homes in the

decades after 1815, only a proportion came to the United States. It is probable that, for the majority, emigration involved simply a move to another part of Europe. In addition to the vast numbers who became city-dwellers without crossing any national boundaries, a considerable number chose to emigrate to other European countries. Thus 250,000 Germans are estimated to have settled in southern Russia between 1818 and 1828; in the same period German immigration to the United States hardly exceeded 10,000. Then again, until the Irish Famine there was almost as much Irish immigration to Great Britain as there was to the United States; even as late as 1850 Great Britain had 727,000 Irish-born residents compared with 926,000 in America. There was, moreover, a substantial movement from Europe to British North America, Australia, and South America. Though none of these places attracted as large an immigration as did the United States, each had a peculiar appeal to certain groups. In the 1820's, for example, more Germans went to Brazil than to the United States; until 1832 most Irish immigrants to the New World landed in Canada and the Maritime Provinces, though not all of them stayed there; and in the early 1850's Australia was the destination of the bulk of English emigrants. . . .

The phenomenon of mass immigration could not, of course, have occurred at all had not the growing desire to move been accompanied by greater freedom and ability to do so. Hence the removal of restrictions on emigration and the development of cheap ocean transportation were no less important than were the growth of European discontent and the spread of knowledge concerning America. The change in official attitudes to emigration came first in Great Britain. Within little more than a decade of 1815, the old mercantilist policy of outright opposition was completely abandoned. The repeal in 1825 of the laws prohibiting artisan emigration was not only a belated recognition of their ineffectiveness but an official indorsement of the view that the country was overpopulated. That all the remaining restrictions on emigration were removed in 1827 was a measure of the alarm aroused by the rising volume of Irish immigration into Great Britain. If the Irish were not allowed to depart freely for the New World, a parliamentary committee warned in 1826, they would "deluge Great Britain with poverty and wretchedness, and gradually but certainly ... equalize the state of the English and Irish peasantry." To be sure, halfhearted attempts continued to be made for some time longer to encourage emigrants to go to British North America rather than to the United States, but with the waning of interest in colonies during the 1830's and 1840's, complete *laissez faire* came to prevail.

In Germany opposition took somewhat longer to dissolve. Though absolute prohibition was not attempted after the 1820's, emigration continued still to be officially frowned upon, and as late as 1836 the American consul at Bremen could report:

The different governments of Germany are, in general, not much pleased with the spirit of emigration since several years predominant in Germany, and, as is said, try by all means to keep their subjects at home. The emigrants often loudly and bitterly complain that the said Governments, before they give to people permission to depart, put as many obstacles as possible in their way.

But after the 1848 revolutions the German authorities reversed their attitude. Hopeful that emigration might prevent renewed outbreaks of disorder, they jettisoned the multitude of regulations which had hitherto hindered departure. Legal formalities were simplified, and although the obligation to perform military service remained, it became increasingly easy to evade.

In Sweden the law of 1768 restricting the right of emigration was repealed in 1840, mainly because of the need to meet the growing problem of pauperism. Though in 1843 the Swedish-Norwegian government appointed a commission to investigate emigration from Norway and to consider regulatory measures, it announced that it did "not want to hinder the emigration or to make it more difficult." By the mid-nineteenth century the thesis of overpopulation was universally accepted in Scandinavia, and with the virtual abolition of passport regulation in 1860, the last serious obstacle to departure was removed.

Before a mass movement could actually take place, however, a transportation revolution would be necessary in order to provide prospective emigrants with what had hitherto been lacking, namely, a regular, reliable, and inexpensive Atlantic crossing. In the years immediately after 1815 a revolution of this kind was brought about by an unprecedented expansion of transatlantic commerce. The most striking new development was the rise of the North American timber trade. After the close of the Napoleonic Wars, the Baltic countries gave way to Canada and the Maritime Provinces as the main source of British timber, and a vast quantity of British tonnage found new employment. As early as 1820 more than a thousand vessels were annually employed in carrying North American timber to the British Isles, and twenty years later that number had more than doubled. Simultaneously there was an astonishing increase in the amount of tonnage engaged in transporting to Europe the staple products of the United States. By the 1830's the number of freighters carrying American cotton annually to Liverpool had risen to more than a thousand, compared with only three hundred some twenty years earlier; and there were comparable increases in the amount of shipping taking cotton and tobacco from the United States to Le Havre and Bremen, respectively. On the eastward voyage across the Atlantic the timber, cotton, and tobacco vessels were generally fully laden, but when sailing in the opposite direction much of their cargo space was unoccupied, since the European manufactures they carried were much less bulky than American raw materials. With space thus available for passengers, merchants and shipowners came to look to emigrants to provide

part of the return freight. In a short time the emigrant trade became a highly organized and lucrative branch of transatlantic commerce. The passenger broker made his appearance to serve as intermediary between shipowners and emigrants, and in consequence of his activities a vast network of agencies came into being to tap the emigrant stream at its various sources.

In its earliest years the emigrant trade flourished at practically every port in northwest Europe with a New World connection. Because of the difficulties and expense of overland travel in early nineteenth-century Europe, emigrants generally preferred to embark at the ports nearest to their homes. This circumstance largely accounted for the popularity with emigrants of the timber vessels, which offered passage from a score of Irish ports and from more than fifty in England, Wales, and Scotland. It explained, too, why emigrants were regularly to be found traveling on the tiny brigs which took out Welsh slate or Swedish iron to the United States. But with the improvement of European internal communications brought about by railroads and coastal steamships, the trade became gradually concentrated at the larger ports, where vessels were bigger and faster and were organized into lines so as to sail in succession on regular schedules. Liverpool became the main port of departure for the Irish and British, as well as for considerable numbers of Germans and Norwegians. On the Continent, Le Havre, Bremen, and Hamburg fought for supremacy, each port attracting to itself a portion of the movement from Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavia. As a result of intensive competition between these ports and between brokers in each of them, fares everywhere came tumbling down. At Liverpool the cost of steerage passage to New York fell from twelve pounds in 1816 to just over three pounds thirty years later; at Le Havre the rate to New Orleans dropped from between 350 and 400 francs in 1818 to between 120 and 150 francs in the early thirties. While comparable reductions occurred elsewhere, the drop was nowhere as great or as abrupt as in Irish ports, where passage to Quebec during the 1820's could commonly be obtained for as little as thirty shillings, or only one-tenth of the rate prevailing a decade before.

Nor was this the only way in which commercial developments facilitated emigration. Since many of those engaged in the emigrant trade had personal or business connections with the United States, they were able in the late 1820's to establish American agencies for the sale of prepaid passage tickets. This enabled those who had immigrated earlier to bring over their relatives and friends, and the arrival of tickets and money from America proved an additional stimulus to emigration generally. What proportion of immigrants traveled on prepaid tickets is not known, though a sample survey conducted by the Irish Emigrant Society of New York in 1843 suggested that it might have been as high as one-third. This estimate did not, however, take into account the great numbers who, though not in receipt of prepaid tickets, had paid their fares with remittances from America.

Cheaper and easier to obtain though it might be, the Atlantic crossing nevertheless remained an undertaking fraught with considerable hardship and danger. Until the Civil War the immigrant trade was virtually monopolized by sailing vessels, with the result that the crossing still took between one and three months, according to the state of wind and weather. Moreover, though the vessels employed in it steadily improved in soundness of construction, sailing qualities, and seaworthiness, they remained primarily freight carriers hastily converted for passenger carrying at the beginning of each westbound voyage. Steerage quarters were in consequence cramped and ill-ventilated, sanitary arrangements were crude, and cooking facilities entirely inadequate. Although governments on both sides of the Atlantic attempted to improve conditions by enacting a series of passenger laws, these could be only partly enforced, and the evils of overcrowding and inadequate food persisted until the coming of the steamship. At every stage of the journey, moreover, the bewildered immigrant was swindled, imposed upon, and ill-treated, the victim successively of dishonest passenger brokers and their runners, lodging-house keepers, and unscrupulous ship captains. Nor was this all he had to endure, for at times ship fever and cholera broke out at sea, carrying off scores of passengers and leaving hundreds of others enfeebled.

Yet historians have tended both to exaggerate the incidence of disease on immigrant ships and to misunderstand the reasons for its occurrence. The frightful ship-fever epidemic of 1847 which caused thousands of deaths among Irish immigrants and the equally severe but smaller-scale outbreaks of cholera in 1832 and 1853-54 were altogether exceptional; in every other year most ships arrived with a clean bill of health, and the mortality rate during the passage only rarely rose above one-half of 1 per cent. Moreover, the great epidemic outbreaks, on which so much emphasis had been placed, originated not in bad conditions on the ships but in the fact that immigrants were infected before they embarked. Overcrowding and lack of sanitation, not to speak of the reluctance of the immigrants themselves to co-operate in establishing minimum standards of hygiene, undoubtedly added to the virulence of an epidemic once it had started, but the real cause of the trouble lay in contemporary ignorance of epidemiology. So long as medicine remained ignorant of the causes of typhus and cholera, these diseases would continue to appear at sea and on land alike, as indeed they did long after the steamship had ousted the sailing vessel from the immigrant trade. . . .

Though emigration had now become financially possible for a poorer class than ever before, it would be wrong to conclude that the movement we have been considering consisted wholly of the impoverished. If generalization were possible about a movement so far-ranging, protracted, and diverse, one might say that it consisted rather of people who feared a future loss of status rather than of those already reduced to the last extremity of want. But so greedy did

the personnel of migration vary at different times and in different areas that one can arrive at a general picture only by considering briefly the special influences determining the character of emigration from each of the countries concerned.

Nowhere was economic change better calculated to promote large-scale emigration than in Ireland. In 1815, Ireland had a population density greater than anywhere else in Europe and, granted the existing agrarian structure, it was grossly over-populated. An iniquitous land system characterized by absentee landlordism, rack-renting—that is, excessive and extortionate rent increases—and insecurity of tenure kept the mass of the population chained to the margin of subsistence. Increasing competition for land had led to the subdivision of holdings into tiny plots which precluded efficient farming and limited the peasant's activities to the cultivation of rent-paying crops and of the potato, upon which he relied almost wholly for food. Though in consequence the condition of Irish agriculture had long been deteriorating, the landlords decided to act only when a change in the agricultural situation after 1815 affected their personal interests. The collapse of grain prices after the Napoleonic Wars and the unrestricted opening of the British market to Irish provisions in 1826 pointed the need to convert land from arable to pasture, a process necessarily involving the amalgamation and clearing of estates for large-scale operations. Moreover, the disfranchisement of the forty-shilling freeholder in 1829 gave a further stimulus to the process of clearance. Until now, landlords had allowed small freeholds to multiply so as to increase the number of votes they controlled. Henceforth, there were to be no political motives for subdivision. Until about 1830 the majority of Irish immigrants were small farmers whose burden of rent, tithes, and taxes had become intolerable owing to competition from large-scale agriculture. As in the eighteenth century, the bulk of these smallholders came from Ulster, where the tradition of emigration was long-established and where the custom of tenant right provided outgoing lessees with a capital which frequently supplied the means of crossing the Atlantic. But in the 1830's a significant change occurred in the character of the movement. The wholesale clearance of estates, accelerated after the Irish Poor Law Act of 1838 had placed additional burdens on the landlords, led to a large-scale emigration of cottiers—that is, smallholders—and laborers from every part of Ireland, especially from the south and west. In a number of cases landlords combined eviction with financial aid to emigrate, but for the most part the evicted had to rely on their own meager resources. What commonly happened was that families sent their younger and more able-bodied members to America in the confident hope, which only rarely was disappointed, that in a short while money would be remitted to finance the removal of those who had remained.

While the number of departures steadily increased throughout the 1830's and early 1840's, it was not until the Great Famine that the floodgates finally opened and the exodus attained epic proportions. The successive potato blights of 1845-49, leading as they did to untold deaths from starvation and

fever and to appalling physical suffering even for those who survived, were a catastrophe which finally broke the Irish peasant's tenacious attachment to the soil and convinced many of the futility of further struggle against hopeless odds. As an Irish peer remarked at the time, the famine had reversed the peasant's former attitude to emigration; hitherto considered a banishment, it now came to be regarded as a happy release. The prevailing mood of despair gripped not only the laborer and the cottier but even those who in famine Ireland passed for substantial farmers. Thus all classes were represented in the million and a half people who left Ireland in the decade that followed. The panic-stricken flight from hunger that occurred in 1847 was followed by a more deliberate and sustained movement that continued even after the return of relative prosperity in the early 1850's. By now, the tide had set inexorably toward the west, and for many decades the continuing effects of the famine were to be seen in the flow of Irish emigrants into the United States.

In its general outlines the pattern of emigration from Germany closely resembled that from Ireland. Slowly gathering momentum throughout the 1830's, it reached its peak during the decade 1846-55, when more than a million Germans entered the United States. The belief that German emigration was a consequence of the failure of the 1848 uprisings and consisted largely of political refugees is now known to be a myth. Only a few thousand Forty-eighters came to America, and the great mass of German immigrants were, in Marcus Hansen's phrase, from "classes which had been little concerned with politics and with revolution not at all." Though virtually the whole of Germany was shaken by political disturbances in 1848, the overwhelming majority of emigrants, both before that date and after, came from the states of the southwest, especially Wurttemberg, Baden, and Bavaria, where, in contrast to the rest of Germany, small agricultural holdings predominated. After 1815 the peasants in these areas had mortgaged their farms in order to be able to modernize them, but in the 1840's crop failures and the diversion of credit from agriculture to more profitable fields like railroad-building had plunged great numbers into financial difficulties, thus swelling the volume of departures. Furthermore, while the emancipation laws passed after 1848 improved the peasant's legal status, they added to his economic difficulties by requiring annual cash payments in lieu of former feudal obligations. When, therefore, further crop failures occurred in the early 1850's, countless small farmers were ruined. Mortgage foreclosures and forced sales rose to unprecedented levels, and tens of thousands of the dispossessed made their way to America. Even greater numbers, perhaps, decided not to wait until disaster overtook them but resolved to go while something could still be obtained for their property. Not until the later 1850's, when the agricultural transformation was virtually complete and consolidated farms had supplanted the patchwork of small holdings, did the German exodus begin to lose momentum.

Though the typical German immigrant of the mid-nineteenth century was thus the small farmer, he by no means monopolized the movement to the exclusion of other social and economic groups. There was, for example, a substantial sprinkling of really wealthy farmers whom the prevailing economic difficulties barely touched but who considered the future of German agriculture to be so unpromising that they chose to migrate with their capital to the cheap and fertile acres of the New World. At the other end of the social scale were the paupers sent out annually at the expense of state and municipal authorities anxious to reduce the burden of poor relief. The practice of dumping undesirables went on continuously from the early 1830's, but it was never as widespread as many Americans believed. In response to congressional inquiries on the subject in 1836, American consuls in Germany reported that, while paupers and even criminals were being regularly shipped out by various towns and communes, only a few hundred undesirables were annually involved. Pauper immigration was in fact completely overshadowed by that of artisans, tradesmen, and professional people, who had figured continuously in the German movement from its early stages and who departed in unprecedented numbers after depression and revolution had combined by the middle of the century to cast a blight over every form of activity. The uncertainty of the times, in short, found expression in a general restlessness which resulted in emigration becoming the panacea of every class.

Probably because of the ease with which they merged with the American population, the British immigrants of 1815-60 received less attention from contemporaries than their numbers warranted. The British influx never attained the proportions of those from Germany and Ireland; but it nonetheless totaled three-quarters of a million and accounted for about one-sixth of all the arrivals in the United States during the period. British immigration was more diverse in origin than that from any other area, with no one social or economic group predominating. It regularly included, from the late 1820's onward, a significant proportion of skilled laborers. Lancashire calico-printers, Yorkshire woolen operatives, Scottish carpet-weavers, coal-miners from Wales, the Midlands, and Scotland, Cornish copper- and lead-miners, Staffordshire potters and iron-puddlers, and Welsh quarrymen—all were represented in the outgoing stream, especially during times of depression and unemployment such as occurred during the early 1840's. In contrast to those who left Britain later in the century, these skilled craftsmen took their families with them to America.

The same was true of the farmers and agricultural laborers who probably made up the majority of British immigrants during this period. As in Germany, some of those who went were farmers possessing large amounts of capital. The best-known was Morris Birkbeck, who in 1817 sold his property in Surrey and emigrated with a capital of £18,000 and a large quantity of prize livestock to Illinois, where he hoped to establish an English colony. Birkbeck was probably unique in his wealth, but as William Cobbett remarked after

observing emigration from Lincolnshire in 1830, many farmers left for America with between £200 and £2,000 in their pockets. Yet it is probable that such men were much less important numerically than smallholders, who found agriculture increasingly unprofitable in the face of large scale competition and who believed, however wrongly, that the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 implied the imminent doom of English farming. What motivated them to emigrate was not the pressure of existing poverty, but the fear of future ruin if they stayed at home. Along with them went many agricultural laborers whom economic change had plunged into redundancy and pauperism. In many English parishes, particularly in the southern and eastern counties, the ratepayers found it cheaper to promote the emigration of the agricultural poor than to continue supporting them at home. So far as the United States was concerned, this type of immigration was most common during the decade or so preceding 1834. Though the Poor Law Amendment Act of that year authorized parishes to mortgage the rates in order to subsidize emigration, it also stipulated that the assisted were in future to be sent to a British colony.

Emigration from Norway began with the departure of the celebrated "sloop party" from Stavanger in 1825. After this, however, there was no further Norwegian emigration for more than a decade, and it was not until the 1840's that the movement really began to gather momentum. Contemporary writers often attributed the exodus to religious discontent; it is a fact that many immigrants sympathized with the pietistic movement known as Haugeanism in its struggle with the state church and some of them were members of minor dissenting sects, such as Quakers. But, as elsewhere, the underlying causes of emigration were primarily economic. Historians of the Norwegian movement tell a familiar story of rapidly increasing population and of lands being subdivided until holdings became too small to support those who cultivated them. Under these circumstances a large proportion of Norwegian emigrants consisted of *bander*, or freeholders, who saw in emigration the only alternative to a drop in status. But as the movement developed, it drew in its wake increasing proportions both of *husmand*, or cotters, and of laborers and servants.

The first appreciable nineteenth-century emigration from Holland to America began in 1846, when a number of clergymen, who had earlier seceded from the official Reformed Church, led groups of their followers to western Michigan and central Iowa. The movement's clerical leadership, and the fact that even in the fifties a large proportion of those who left Holland for America were *Afgescheidenen*, or Seceders, has led some students to point to religious discontent as its cause. But it is significant that the Seceders, who had been steadily persecuted ever since the middle 1830's, began to think of emigrating only when the potato blight of 1845-46 intensified a long-standing agricultural depression originating in excessive competition for land. The same period, moreover, saw the departure for Wisconsin of groups of Dutch Catholics who had experienced no religious difficulties in Holland but who resembled the

Seceders in belonging to that same class of small farmers which furnished the earliest emigrants from practically every European country.

Yet immigration to the United States in the pre-Civil War period did not consist wholly of Europeans. Though statistics of overland arrivals are lacking, at least a quarter of a million people born in British America settled in the United States between 1815 and 1860. Up to the late 1830's the number of **Canadian** immigrants was inconsiderable and was in any case canceled out by a similar, small-scale American movement to Canada. But after about 1837 the tide turned definitely in favor of the United States. In the van of the new movement were a number of political refugees who moved after the abortive **Canadian** rebellions of 1837 and 1838. A much larger group were those who were obliged to leave the Maritime Provinces when Britain's free-trade measures of the 1840's brought depression to the region's timber, shipbuilding, and provision trades. The largest exodus of all, however, was from the province of Quebec, where a rapidly growing French-Canadian population was experiencing increasing difficulty in obtaining land, the unoccupied portion of which had fallen into the hands of speculators. Since Canada had no Middle West of her own, great numbers, first of young men, then of families, crossed the border into Michigan, Illinois, or Wisconsin; "the Laurentian Shield/" as Marcus Hansen has pointed out, "deflected Canadian expansion to the south of Lake Huron and Lake Superior." Other French-Canadians, mostly young people, spilled over into northern New York and New England to become farm laborers or lumbermen or to work in brickyards or textile mills.

Whether from the New World or the Old, immigrants to the United States resembled each other in traveling usually as individuals and relying wholly upon their own resources. This was not, it must be remembered, a universal characteristic of nineteenth-century migration. The contemporary British movement to Australia, for example, remained very largely a government-directed and government-financed enterprise, at least until the gold rush of the early fifties. To be sure, a great many agencies were engaged in promoting emigration to America too. As we have seen, English ratepayers, Irish landlords, and German municipalities furnished the financial aid necessary to enable various groups to depart. A number of British trade unions did likewise in an effort to rid particular industries of surplus labor. American employers, too, occasionally paid the passages of skilled workers whose services they were anxious to secure, while emigration societies, like those composed of unemployed Scottish weavers in the 1820's or of Staffordshire potters in the 1840's, appealed successfully to public benevolence for the means to finance their members' departure. Finally, the Mormon church established a Perpetual Emigrating Fund in 1850 in order to transport its poor European converts to the Great Salt Lake Valley.

Yet the number and variety of such agencies should not be allowed to obscure the fact that, even in aggregate, they dispatched only a small fraction of

the immigrants who arrived in the United States during this period. The mass immigration of the nineteenth century originated as a self-directed, unassisted movement, and this character it retained throughout. Here lies a key to the patterns both of distribution and of adjustment. That immigrants moved almost entirely as individuals or in family groups, that they received virtually no aid or direction, and that they were subject to control neither by European nor by American agencies or governments would largely determine their destination in the New World and the nature of their reaction to it.