

**THE WESTWARD MARCH OF  
EMIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES:  
CONSIDERED IN ITS BEARING UPON  
THE NEAR FUTURE OF COLORADO  
AND NEW MEXICO. MARCH, 1874**

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The Westward march of emigration in the United States: considered in its bearing upon the near future of Colorado and New Mexico. March, 1874 by Various

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Wm. William Wilberforce, 1825 - 1899.

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THE WESTWARD MARCH  
OR  
Emigration in the United States,  
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I

The United States has about forty-two millions of inhabitants. Its annual production exceeds \*ten thousand millions of dollars. Its foreign exports exceed 600 million dollars, gold value. All classes, it is safe to say, are more prosperous in the United States than in any country of the world. The population increases annually about 1,500,000, due—

1st. To the natural growth caused by an increase of births, an evidence alike of the salubrity of the climate and the general comfort and prosperity of the people.

2d. To an immigration which now amounts to about 400,000 annually. In the 50 years from 1820 to 1870, it has been 8,518,334, of whom 2,375,095 were farmers.

The character of this immigration may be inferred from the fact (see the Report of Secretary of Board of Immigration issued in December last,) that these colonists bring with them to the United States an average sum of \$800 each. They are in fact, for the most part, enterprising and intelligent people, who, from religious or political persecution, or a desire simply to acquire land or otherwise better their fortunes, have sought the shores of the new world.

One effect of this large yearly increase in population has been to induce a national movement from the Eastern States to the West, which has come to have the certainty and uniformity of a great social law.

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\*By some authorities six thousand millions.

This part of the "new world" is about 3,000 miles in width from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans.

Having been discovered and peopled by Europeans, it was, of course, settled up first along the Atlantic shores, and the navigable streams communicating therewith. The settlements extended thence westward about 300 miles to the Ohio river and the chain of great lakes—where water communication again came in to promote and distribute the westward movement. When, at last, railroads were introduced, access was afforded to every part of the interior of the new States, and the growth and production of the West were wonderfully stimulated. The westward march of population was now fairly inaugurated on its modern scale. The emigration from Europe assumed larger proportions and increased yearly with the improvements in ocean travel, and the opening up of railroad communication with fresh parts of the virgin *Mississippi Valley*.

This great basin, drained by the Mississippi river and its tributaries, is about 1,700 miles in width, and extends nearly 1,000 miles from North to South. Its eastern border is the low range known best as the Alleghany Mountains, and its western rim, the Sierra Madre, or "Rocky Mountains," the back-bone of the continent, whose drainage is shed eastward to the Atlantic and westward to the Pacific ocean. So rapidly has this westward movement gone on, that the "Mississippi Valley" already contains the \*majority of the people of the United States, and it has even been proposed to move the capitol of the nation, from Washington (which was sufficiently central for the 4,000,000 people who effected a separation from Great Britain in 1784) to St. Louis, a city 1,000 miles west of New York, but containing over 400,000 inhabitants, and occupying a much more central position to the existing 42,000,000 of people. In size, St. Louis is the third city in the United States, or was by the last census.

The growth of the great West is measured by the rapid increase in population of its large cities :

Chicago, from 4,170 in 1836, to 400,000 in 1873.

St. Louis, from 12,000 in 1836, to 400,000 in 1873.

Cincinnati, from 33,000 in 1836, to 250,000 in 1873.

Pittsburg (and suburbs), from 16,000 in 1836, to 300,000 in 1873.

\*Population of the States in the Mississippi Valley, according to the census of 1870, 18,000,000; add for growth in 3½ years, 3,000,000. Present estimate, 21,000,000.

The most rapid growth, however, set in after the close of the war of the rebellion, 1865. St. Louis, which had 180,000 population in 1865; has more than doubled since; and the growth of Chicago has been perhaps even more astonishing.

The energetic building of railways which then began, and the adoption of special and organized efforts by the States and railway companies to induce colonization to the lines of those roads, have caused this rapid opening up and development of the West, which is rightly considered one of the great social phenomena of the 19th century.

These lines of railway were rarely built to accommodate existing population or traffic. They were built ahead of both, *in order* to colonize the country. Their construction was necessary to make it inhabitable, and the lines found at once a lucrative business in carrying in the immigrants and their household goods, tools and *plant* generally, lumber for their houses, and the first supplies even of food itself, to start them in their new homes.

The railway companies well knew that this business would support their lines until the colonists could get to work on the virgin soil and raise a surplus for shipment.

When the Kansas Pacific railway had reached Topeka, in 1866, the line of Concord coaches from the end of its track westward to Denver and the intermediate country, carried sometimes six passengers daily, and often none at all. In two years, with the extension of the rail, the daily trains were running (from Topeka westward) with 400 to 500 passengers each, and from the inability of the company to anticipate such an increase in time to supply the rolling stock, it was more usual than otherwise to see the aisles of the cars and even the platforms of a long train crowded. Thus was Kansas settled, other railway lines having been rapidly added to join in the work of colonization.

In 1865 the construction of railways began in Kansas. In 1873 there were 2,500 miles in operation. The population meanwhile had increased from about 100,000 to 400,000, the bulk of whom had gone there in four years. In Texas, since 1871, the population has increased from 800,000 to 1,100,000; there having been added to it 100,000 yearly for the last three years.

When the writer of this paper began his connection with railways, twenty years ago, it was necessary to go west by stage-coach a part of the way to reach Pittsburg (at the eastern edge of the Mississippi



Valley, about 400 miles from New York), and the construction of railways was then just beginning West of Pennsylvania. He has had occasion since to keep *en rapport* with their extension through the West. In 16 years thereafter, he was able to travel by rail across the entire continent, 3,300 miles.

In 1857 the financial panic interrupted all railway building, including a line then under construction, the Pittsburg, Fort Wayne and Chicago railroad, now one of the leading and most remunerative trunk lines of the United States, deriving a revenue in 1873 on 500 miles, of \$9,780,310, and of which over four and a half millions were net. It found itself 84 miles short of reaching Chicago, a promising town which then numbered about 70,000 inhabitants. The enterprise was, however, taken hold of by J. Edgar Thomson (then, as now, standing at the head of the railroad men of the United States), who raised the money by an appeal to capitalists, in which he showed, amongst other things, that the line would pay, because the clearing of the forests along its line, while opening the country to the farmers, would give transportation to the railroad, since all the lumber would be required at Chicago, a growing place in a prairie country; which would also consume the manufactured products of Pittsburg. This was sixteen years ago. Long since, Chicago became the "New York of the West," far outstripping Boston and Baltimore in population: and the Fort Wayne railroad, besides possessing great local significance, has become a great national highway for the commerce between the West, the entire Northwest, and the East.

Even the Pennsylvania railroad, perhaps the most important line in the United States, was started by the merchants of Philadelphia (about the beginning of this great heira to the West), not so much as an investment expected of itself to pay, as an effort to secure trade as merchants, and as a matter of city pride. Subscriptions were made and frequently charged off to profit and loss. A reputation for public spirit demanded they should subscribe, and the merchants paid over their money to this unpromising enterprise in much the same spirit that they would have done toward a public library or a city park.

It is gratifying to know that an original subscriber has received back in dividends, in 20 years, since 1853 (a year before the completion to Pittsburg) for each \$100.00 invested, the equivalent\* of

\*Counting the stock dividends at their market value when paid.

\$250 cash, an average of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. per annum, while the company has besides a surplus of 9 millions; and that this road, undertaken as a daring adventure on money considered rather as sacrificed to public spirit, is now transporting yearly nearly six million passengers and ten million tons, and that it derived an annual revenue in 1873 from the 358 miles of main line alone, of \$22,308,481, or net \$9,428,273.

The above are only a few of a thousand incidents which might be cited to illustrate the wonderful extent and rapidity of this peculiar American movement, epitomized by the words of Horace Greeley, "Go west, young man, go west."

Of what classes are those who thus emigrate? Partially foreigners, but chiefly young Americans—pushed out by the large annual influx from Europe. The young American has inherited a genius for colonization. He has seen and learned by tradition of the growth of comfort, wealth and refinement, of the increased value of land, and the rapid rise of cities and acquisition of capital around him in his more easterly home. He starts out full of courage and hope, with no other capital than these qualities and his strong arm, to acquire the cheap land, and build himself a home in the West. He leaves behind friends and kindred, resolved to achieve fortune and consequence, and then to return East to marry and carry his wife to the new land. He is enterprising and full of faith. He knows that his adopted State or Territory will soon become populous, and contain large cities and all the comforts and luxuries he has left in the East. He hastens to seize the rich soil, the forest of timber, the coal field, the iron, copper or lead mine, the fine water-power or the promising town-site, which have remained since creation untouched in that country of hope.

As he acquires fortune, and his boys grow up, they too become filled with the inevitable longing. The land around them has become in its turn valuable; the social and business chances are diminished by competition; they know the story of their father's career, and the most enterprising imitate it and start out to advance still farther the line of the western frontier.

All this is but a truism to the American, but to the European reader it seems a necessary preliminary to impress upon the mind the character and magnitude of this national westward movement, which is calculated upon by every thinking man in the United States with the certainty of an unquestioned natural law. A few more illustrations may be interesting:

The State of Illinois has now nearly three millions of people. It is one of the richest States of the Union. It contains 7,000 miles of railways, and it is a common remark that the resources of eight miles of country on each side of a line in that State will warrant the construction of a new railway. But in 1856-7, when the writer first visited Illinois, and the more active construction of these lines had begun, one might ride by rail across the unbroken prairie for a hundred miles without seeing a house or fence. The lines were built *in advance* of population—not to supply existing wants, but to *settle* the country by making it accessible and enabling its future products to reach a market. How well they have succeeded in making this state the "granary" of America is too well known to require expression. The lines themselves—the machines which have absolutely *created* this prosperity—have abundantly shared in it; and, with few exceptions, have paid a high interest upon their cost.

West of the line of the Mississippi river the same rapid progress has continued, building up first, Missouri, Iowa and Minnesota; then the more westward tier of States—Texas, Kansas and Nebraska—pausing only during the war, to be renewed with much more startling activity upon its conclusion. Here again, with the extension of the railways westward, one city after another arose, along the banks of the Missouri, to challenge, with one or two exceptions, even their older tier of sisters on the Mississippi.

Omaha, Council Bluffs, St. Joseph, Atchison, Leavenworth, Lawrence and Kansas city—all within a stretch of less than 200 miles—contain populations of from about 20,000 to near 50,000 each. Practically few of these had their birth earlier than the close of the war in 1865.

At that time the writer was obliged to stage across the western part of the State of Missouri to reach Kansas City, then a place of less than 8,000 people. Now Kansas City has between 40,000 and 50,000 inhabitants; and between 1865 and the government census of 1870, its population had quadrupled. Nine railway lines (from every quarter) terminate there, and the ambitious little city even asserts its claims as a future rival of Chicago.

The land where these railways intersect at Kansas City was then, in 1865, a "muddy bottom," which could have been bought for from \$50 to \$100 per acre. In four years thereafter (1869) the railways themselves, requiring a small tract for a joint depot, were