

## THE PLACE OF THE MORMONS IN THE RELIGIOUS EMIGRATION OF BRITAIN, 1840-1860<sup>1</sup>

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GREAT BRITAIN underwent the rather mortifying experience of witnessing the voluntary exodus of approximately 17,000,000 of her citizens within the century between the end of the Napoleonic and the beginning of the world wars. The phenomenal aspects of the movement appear in even more bold relief when it is reflected that the entire population of the United Kingdom was less than 21,000,000 in 1821, and only 45,000,000 in 1911; therefore, the number leaving during the century following 1815 was nearly equal to the kingdom's population in 1815, and all this at a time when Britain was assumed to be the wealthiest, most prosperous, and most powerful country in the world. Perhaps the economic instability and confusion wrought by the industrial and scientific revolutions and the closely allied political discontent stimulated the greatest numbers to forsake their homeland, but the social and religious incentive also played a dominant role in fostering and directing the outward flow.

Religion had been a major factor in the English emigration of the seventeenth century, and while Britain created few religious refugees in the eighteenth century, the spiritual stimulus of Methodism encouraged many ministers of that and other crusading faiths to emigrate to the colonies for the purpose of teaching and preaching. The natural assumption that religious beliefs were the cause for very few British departures in the nineteenth century fails to weigh the influence religion exerted over early Victorian Britain, an era which not only produced religious leaders like Newman, Manning, Maurice, Kingsley, and Chalmers, but also allowed for the conversion and emigration of thousands of Mormons. Normally, religious and economic motives were so thoroughly merged that they became indefinable forces within a

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complex movement. Catholics and non-conformists were inclined to link Anglican landlords, schools, and tithes with their economic perplexities. British Latter-day Saints were thrilled at the prospect of having religious equality and economic opportunity in what was to them a semi-fabulous America.

British Catholics, starting in the seventeenth century at the time of the colonization of Maryland and Pennsylvania, constituted an important element in North American immigration. Later, in 1767, the lands of Prince Edward Island were allotted to sixty-seven proprietors who sent out Scottish Highlanders, mostly of the Catholic faith, to the new territory. Cape Breton Island, the northern fringe of Nova Scotia, and parts of Canada were also settled chiefly by Catholic Scots. By the nineteenth century, British Catholic emigrants were primarily of Irish descent who, finding conditions depressed in British cities, re-emigrated to North America, but occasionally persons of the faith from an old English gentry family also left.<sup>2</sup>

Essentially an Irish organization, but also publicized and presented to the poorer Catholics in England, the Roman Catholic Emigration Society, fostered by Daniel O'Connell in 1843, planned to purchase a tract of land in the United States, prepare it for occupation, and then settle it with United Kingdom Catholics. Having more the earmarks of a land agent's scheme than of a philanthropic venture, the project was generally ignored in England.<sup>3</sup>

Writing in 1848 after a trip to the United States, Sarah Mytton Maury, an English lady of the upper middle class and a most ardent Catholic, strongly urged English adherents of the faith to emigrate. Becoming well acquainted with the Catholic Bishop of New York and meeting numerous other American church and governmental officials, including President Polk, Mrs. Maury was confident that English Catholics would find both an economic future and religious freedom in America.<sup>4</sup> A widely traveled and polished Englishman, Richard Beste, who with his wife and twelve children moved to the American backwoods on the Wabash River, devoted a sizeable part of his two-volume work to

<sup>2</sup>J. D. Rogers, *A Historical Geography of the British Colonies* (Oxford, 1911), V, Part III, 54-56.

<sup>3</sup>*The Emigration Gazette and Colonial Advocate* (London), March 4, 1843.

<sup>4</sup>Sarah M. Maury, *An Englishwoman in America* (London, 1848), Part I, cxviii, and Part II.

a discussion of Catholic emigration. Even during the early fifties, when Know-Nothingism was at its height, Beste told his English readers that no religious distinctions embittered social intercourse and no dominant clergy controlled the lands in America. Conceding that some religious bigotry did exist in eastern cities, he explained that it was only an offshoot of Presbyterianism, and generally originated from the insulting attitude that uneducated Catholics had taken. For educated English Catholic gentlemen with some money and a sense of duty and responsibility, western America was recommended as the land of liberal feelings and financial opportunities.<sup>5</sup> A strongly biased Scottish journal inadvertently showed that many people followed the recommendation of Maury and Beste by its allegation that the common morality of America was being weakened because of the large number of Catholics emigrating from Britain.<sup>6</sup>

Jewish emigration, like that of other religions, was primarily a personal matter; however, The Jewish Ladies Benevolent Loan and Visiting Society did form an emigration committee which in 1853 discussed with Colonial Office representatives plans for young female departures.<sup>7</sup> But not until the turn of the century did the Jewish Board of Guardians and the Jewish Emigration Society begin to provide extensive emigration assistance.

Inasmuch as the Church of England had a coexistence with that of the state, a distinction between the activities of the church, the government, and Anglican humanitarians was not always clearly drawn. The Society for Promoting of Christian Knowledge and The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts were essentially Church of England organizations, but by their operation on a broad national scale, and in their assistance to all British emigrants, they actually performed as a nonsectarian organization. Somewhat more limited in its functions was the Colonial Church Society which attempted, with some success, to impress upon members of the Anglican faith the desirability of seeking out Episcopal pastors after arrival in the United States.<sup>8</sup> Supporting the sending out of

<sup>5</sup>Richard J. Beste, *The Wabash: or Adventures of an English Gentleman's Family in the Interior of America* (London, 1855), II, 13-17, 299-03.

<sup>6</sup>"The United States of North America," *The North British Review*, II (November, 1845), 141-42.

<sup>7</sup>C. O. 384/91, Emigration: General, Offices, and Individuals, 1853.

<sup>8</sup>*The Emigration Gazette and Colonial Advocate*, May 7, 1842.

female needleworkers and slopworkers from London, and proposing that Poor Law Guardians be given power to finance the passage of greater numbers, *The Quarterly Educational Magazine* of the Home and Colonial School Society, and *The Colonial Church Chronicle and Missionary Journal*, founded in the late 1840's, were examples of the close affinity between religion and nationalism.

Surely at this crisis, and at such an epoch, the Church of England has a duty to perform. She cannot and ought not to regard with indifference the spread of the Anglo-Saxon race over the earth, not caring what becomes of her children when they go forth to found future kingdoms.<sup>9</sup>

In the summer of 1855, an association was formed in London with the object of keeping the persons who went to the United States within the church. Led by H. Caswall, D. D., of Wiltshire, and supported by clergymen of Somersetshire and other west country counties, the organization hoped to secure about £500 per year from Church of England members to be used to occasionally assist and, in all possible cases, to maintain correspondence with Anglicans who planned to emigrate. Through close contact with the American Episcopal Church, the society's executive committee was to appoint in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and other American port cities agents who were to receive from the English secretary certified lists of Anglican members known to the association to be proceeding to America. Episcopal agents at the ports could thereby better look after the temporal and spiritual interests of both their church and the emigrants. American clergymen were enthusiastic and laudatory in their praise of the project; however, owing to lack of support and the Crimean War activities in England, the plan failed to materialize.<sup>10</sup>

Religious opposition to emigration was directed primarily against the exodus to America; church officials pointed out that the large number of English going to that country was an alarming political as well as religious development. Many clergymen, especially those going to Canada, were caustic in denouncing the

<sup>9</sup>James Cecil Wynter, "Hints on Church Colonization," *The Colonial Church Chronicle and Missionary Journal*, III (July, 1849-June, 1850), 350.

<sup>10</sup>"Association for the Spiritual Aid of English Churchmen Emigrating to the United States," *ibid.*, IX (July, 1855-June, 1856), 59-64.

United States. Confusing religion with nationality, a not uncommon practice, Reverend A. Rose, a Canadian immigrant, wrote:

Give me I say the cross-enblazoned flag of my gracious liege lady Her Most Excellent Majesty Queen Victoria for my government, or I cannot be content; and I think he who prefers the "stars," rightly deserves to have the "stripes" into the bargain.<sup>11</sup>

Not all clergymen relished seeing their communities depopulated even when the emigrants were going to the colonies; consequently, in 1848, Dr. Burnett, Vicar of Bradford, counseled his parishioners, as well as governmental officials, to adopt local land settlement programs.<sup>12</sup>

Probably more nonconformists participated in emigration than persons from all other faiths combined. As early as 1840 the Protestant Emigration Society of Glasgow charged their member in Parliament, James Oswald, with the responsibility of presenting their petitions for government aid, and the following year the First Glasgow Protestant Canadian Emigration Society contacted the Colonial Office for the same purpose.<sup>13</sup> Later, in 1846, Thomas Rawlings, resident of Liverpool and New York, addressed a letter to the clergy of the United Kingdom in which he told dissenting ministers that they possessed the power to make their parishioners happy by merely encouraging them to emigrate, and that the British Protective Emigration Society of New York was ready to help the migrants once they had crossed the Atlantic.<sup>14</sup> More tangible evidence of nonconformist activity was the banding together of local groups like the Dissenters' Mutual Friendly Colonizing Society, whereby members gave organized assistance to one another while traveling and after arrival. The projects invariably failed if a cooperative land settlement scheme was included.<sup>15</sup>

Upon returning from a six-months tour of America, George

<sup>11</sup>A. Rose, *The Emigrant Churchman in Canada*, Rev. Henry Christmas, ed. (London, 1849), II, 252-53.

<sup>12</sup>*Newcastle Courant* (Newcastle), July 7, 1848.

<sup>13</sup>C. O. 384/61, Emigration: North America, 1840: C. O. 384/67, Emigration: North America, 1841.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Rawlings, *Emigration: An Address to the Clergy of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, on the Condition of the Working Classes* (Liverpool, 1846), 7.

<sup>15</sup>W. R. P., *Dissenters' Mutual Friendly Colonizing Society* (London, 1848).

Lewis, a Presbyterian minister, recommended to Scotsmen that they could avoid starvation by crossing the Atlantic to a land where they were urgently needed and desired.<sup>16</sup> Although parties of Methodists from Yorkshire had settled with governmental sanction near present-day Nappan, Maccan, and Amherst, Nova Scotia and Sackville, New Brunswick between 1772-74, the government did not respond when in 1841 the Glasgow Wesleyan Emigration Society requested assistance.<sup>17</sup> Methodist pastors, emphasizing the favorable aspects of the United States, pointed out that she was a religious and political offspring of Britain and therefore a propitious emigration field.<sup>18</sup> Joseph Gurney of the Society of Friends, after spending three years teaching and preaching in America, failed to recommend it for settlement even though it was later suggested that the Quakers, having been so successful in earlier emigration efforts, should attempt a new experiment.<sup>19</sup>

Overshadowing other religions in both evangelical fervor and organizational acumen was the emigration program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As early as May 27, 1840, the *Latter-day Saints Millennial Star* started publication in Manchester and the next year, about a decade after its original printing in America, the *Book of Mormon* was first produced in England. By the summer of 1840, the *Millennial Star* was reporting Mormon departures, and the American missionaries, who had first arrived in Britain in July, 1837, laid the groundwork for a plan which matured into one of the largest systematized religious migrations

<sup>16</sup>Rev. George Lewis, *Impressions of America and the American Churches* (Edinburgh, 1845), 34-36.

<sup>17</sup>Rogers, *op. cit.*, 57. C. O. 384/67, Emigration: North America, 1841.

The British government in 1832, with a view of detaching the Canadian Wesleyans from those of the United States, had started a contribution of £900 per annum to the British Wesleyan Conference in Upper Canada. Paul Knaplund, "Sir James Stephen and British North American Problems, 1840-1847," *The Canadian Historical Review*, V, No. 1 (March, 1924), 31-32.

<sup>18</sup>James Dixon, D. D., *Methodism in America* (London, 1849).

Rev. Frederick Jobson of Bradford was chosen at the Wesleyan Conference held at Leeds in August, 1855, to go to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America meeting at Indianapolis in May, 1856. While traveling he wrote an interesting series of letters to his wife from which a book was later composed. He emphasized the extensive lands and vast opportunities to be found in America. Rev. Frederick J. Jobson, *America, and American Methodism* (New York, 1857).

<sup>19</sup>Joseph John Gurney, *A Journey in North America, Described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie* (Norwich, 1841), and *Sidney's Emigrant's Journal*, No. 22 (March 1, 1849), 174.

in the history of the British Isles.<sup>20</sup> In June, 1840, an initial cadre of forty-one, and about three months later, two hundred more Mormon emigrants sailed for New York; the sea voyage was only the first link in their journey to the Saints new home at Nauvoo, Illinois. Parties were accompanied by American church agents or old and responsible British converts, who managed all business transactions and personally supervised the groups while traveling. Families not possessing sufficient means to complete the journey to Nauvoo were advised to stop in Buffalo, New York, Kirtland, Ohio, or nearby areas until they were financially able to move on west. Many who adopted the suggestion later proceeded to Nauvoo, while others never resumed their journey.

Parties, some of which exceeded two hundred persons, principally from the Preston and Manchester districts, sailed from Liverpool in early 1841, and later in the year the church stationed an agent at the port to superintend the fitting out of companies and to protect emigrants from victimization while waiting to sail. Smaller groups leaving from Herefordshire and adjacent counties were embarking at Bristol or from farther up the Severn at Sharpness Point.<sup>21</sup> By late summer, 1841, considerable curiosity and anxiety had been aroused in the west country

by the departure of great numbers of deluded country people (Mormonites), old and young, for the "New Jerusalem" in America. Some of the unfortunate dupes . . . have broken up comfortable establishments at home. . . .<sup>22</sup>

In most journals, derogatory remarks were the rule rather than the exception when referring to Mormon emigration. Claiming to have visited Nauvoo, returning emigrants told fanciful stories which grew with circulation of its unfriendliness, chaotic social system, economic austerity, and general mismanagement,<sup>23</sup> but apparently neither missionary zeal nor the emigration incentive was arrested by the opposition.

Starting in 1841, the travel itinerary was changed from New York to New Orleans because river transportation from the

<sup>20</sup>*Millennial Star*, I, No. 5 (September, 1840).

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, I, No. 10 (February, 1841).

<sup>22</sup>*The Times* (London), August 14, 1841.

<sup>23</sup>Letters from a James Greenlough, excoriating conditions in the Mormon communities in America, were printed in pamphlet form and distributed for one pence each. *The Struggle*, Nos. 36 and 37 (1842).

latter port to the settlement was considerably cheaper than the overland route from the Atlantic, and also, as Joseph Smith was constantly urging the establishment of manufacturing industries, he desired the English operatives and craftsmen to come directly to Nauvoo. However, after his assassination in 1844, British Mormons were advised again to sail for Atlantic ports and settle in eastern industrial cities, later coming west as job openings could be provided for them. Branches of the church were established in eastern cities to minister to the members until they moved west.

With the abandonment of Nauvoo and the beginning of the westward trek in February, 1846, British departures were discontinued. Records of ship sailings indicated that approximately 4,750 persons in distinct Mormon groups had left England;<sup>24</sup> however, the most authoritative figures are questionable as emigration letters often directed friends to come with the Latter-day Saints as the cheapest and most satisfactory means of traveling.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, claims were made that the cleanliness, regularity, and moral deportment of the Saints while aboard ship caused many conversions at sea. For example, while the *Olympus* was between Liverpool and New Orleans in 1851, fifty persons were added to the church, and during an 1853 voyage, forty-eight became converts.<sup>26</sup>

As early as May, 1841, the usual emigration practices adopted by the Saints were noticed. Boarding off their section of the ship, they sang Psalms, knitted, and kept happy and profitably employed while at sea. Always well fitted out for the journey, they sometimes had so much equipment that it was necessary to sell or abandon clothing and tools before moving inland from American

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<sup>24</sup>James Linforth, ed., *Route From Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (Liverpool, 1855). The total was compiled from tables on pp. 14-16. A few groups sailing from the Severn after April, 1841, are not included in the 4,750 estimate; these Mormons, plus others not traveling in parties, would increase the total emigration to over 5,000 persons.

<sup>25</sup>*The Potters' Examiner and Workman's Advocate*, I, No. 8 (January 20, 1844), 64.

Several of the Staffordshire potters became Mormons and settled at Nauvoo, and their favorable letters helped to stimulate the rather large Mormon emigration from that area. See *ibid.*, I, No. 10 (February 3, 1844) and No. 14 (March 2, 1844).

Many contemporaries agreed that the large majority of the Saints were recruited from the manufacturing districts of England and Wales. Sir Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America* (London, 1849), I, 90; *The Edinburgh Review or Critical Journal*, XCII (October, 1850), 345.

<sup>26</sup>Linforth, *op. cit.*, 18.

ports.<sup>27</sup> A few years later even the British government recognized the superiority of the Mormon emigration methods. Elder S. W. Richards was called before the Select Committee inquiring into conditions aboard emigrant ships, which sat in 1854, and asked to explain, for the benefit of the committee the operation of the Mormon system.<sup>28</sup>

After the suspension of emigration in early 1846, English plans were quickly initiated for water transport to San Francisco, but American elders in Britain, hoping to forestall further departures until a new settlement had been decided upon, encouraged the English Mormons to appeal to the Queen for emigration assistance. A "Memorial to the Queen for the Relief, by Emigration, of a Portion of Her Poor Subjects" was drawn up advocating that settlement in some portion of Britain's vacant territory was the only possible means of relief. Vancouver Island or the Oregon country was thought to be ideal; their population would eventually create a commerce sufficient to repay the government for the original expense of transporting the emigrants, open up the China trade, and help preserve British interests against the expanding inclinations of the United States.<sup>29</sup> After signatures were attached, the instrument measured 168 feet in length and was purported to contain nearly 13,000 names. Copies were widely distributed to members of Parliament, government officials, and other influential individuals. Mormon officials claimed that if Parliament would grant them land in the colonies and give them transportation assistance, 20,000 persons from all trades were anxious to depart. Lord John Russell, as head of the ministry, acknowledged receipt of the petition without comment, and although considerable correspondence was conducted with other members of the Commons, neither the government nor Parliament took action.

In a letter from Thomas D. Brown to John Bowring, M. P., dated February 11, 1847, Brown explained that emigration to Vancouver Island was feasible, as 234 Saints had already landed at San Francisco and were anxious to go on to British territory.

<sup>27</sup>John Glanville Taylor, *The United States and Cuba* (London, 1851), 280.

<sup>28</sup>*Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, Report from the Select Committee on Emigration Ships, 1854, XIII (163) and (349). Also see The Emigrant and Colonial Gazette, June 16, 1849.*

<sup>29</sup>*Millennial Star, VIII (1846), 142.*

On April 1, 1847, Elder Orson Spencer, presiding over a meeting of the English Saints, told them that Vancouver was the gathering place for all Mormons, and that the English Saints should prepare to go there and not to any other spot in North America.<sup>30</sup>

Late in 1847, when the Great Salt Lake Valley was fixed upon as the Saints' home, an order was issued from America directing emigration to be reopened by way of New Orleans, and the Mississippi and Missouri rivers to Council Bluffs, Iowa, where preparations could be made for the last part of the journey. Emigration had been restrained only with difficulty during 1846-47 so that with the lifting of the ban coming as a new depression settled over England, large numbers desired to leave.

Wales was an especially fertile field for Mormon conversions. In the northern portions of the country, the emigrants proceeded directly to Liverpool, while devotees from Carmarthenshire, Brecknockshire, and Glamorganshire took ships at Swansea for Liverpool where they joined larger parties. Dan Jones, brother of the famous Welsh preacher, led out one such group of prosperous farmers in early 1849.<sup>31</sup> Those not possessing sufficient capital to reach Salt Lake were advised to stop in cities along the way (preferably St. Louis) and work before going on to Council Bluffs. With continentals generally coming to Hull, then crossing England by canal or rail, Liverpool, after 1852, became the Mormon embarkation port for all of Europe, and New Orleans continued to serve as their point of entry. However, unfavorable reports regarding sickness encountered on that route led Brigham Young to direct in August, 1854, that the Mormon parties proceed instead to Atlantic cities.

With many persons being too poor to start the voyage, and virtually all needing some assistance, the Perpetual Emigration Fund was founded in 1849. All or part of an emigrant's expenses could be paid by the fund with the understanding that those so benefited would reimburse the society as soon as they became financially able. By 1854, £6,832 19s. 11d., which had been used to emigrate nearly 1,700 persons, had been contributed to the fund in Great Britain, and by the same year, 349 additional persons had been assisted by relatives and former neighbors who

<sup>30</sup>Linforth, *op. cit.*, 4, 5.

<sup>31</sup>*The Emigrant and Colonial Gazette*, March 3, 1849.

deposited money at Salt Lake which their emigrating friends drew on at the Liverpool office.<sup>32</sup>

As the Perpetual Emigration Fund was not sufficient to transport the many clamoring to leave Britain, several additional schemes were attempted. A plan was worked out whereby Mormons with limited funds could pay £10 (£13 after 1853) in Liverpool and receive transportation to Salt Lake. Also, during the early fifties, a settlement was founded at San Bernardino, California, with the hope of bringing the Europeans to San Diego, then moving them inland to Salt Lake, but the experiment proved unsuccessful. Most novel was the system inaugurated in 1856, by which emigrants and American migrants literally walked across the plains pushing or pulling their possessions in small handcarts. After a few of the parties were caught in early winter snows, and the Mountain Meadows Massacre and difficulties with the United States government led to further uncertainties, British emigration was completely discontinued for 1858, and less enthusiastically resorted to in later years.<sup>33</sup> Copies of reports from the Latter-day Saints' European Publishing and Emigration Office of 42 Islington Street, Liverpool, indicated that by December, 1860, slightly over 29,000 Mormons, of which approximately 4,300 were continentals and the remainder natives of the United Kingdom, had sailed from England.<sup>34</sup>

Each religion viewed emigration as a means of helping its members or of strengthening its establishment. Though political and educational limitations on non-Anglican faiths were dissolv-

<sup>32</sup>Linforth, *op. cit.*, 8, 9.

<sup>33</sup>Richard F. Burton, *The City of the Saints and Across the Rocky Mountains to California* (London, 1861), 682.

Early in 1858, a rumor that the Saints were going to move to the British northwest led the Colonial Office to instruct Governor Douglas of Vancouver Island that he was not to allow the Mormons to enter or settle in the territory as a community, and under no circumstances were land grants to be made to them as a group; however, individual families of the faith were to be afforded all the privileges and opportunities of the area. F. O. 5/704, America: Domestic, Various, 1858.

The British rumor apparently started from a letter written by J. Roake, and sent to the British Consul at Buffalo, in which he warned that the Mormons planned to settle on the Saskatchewan River. The information was passed on to Lord Napier at Washington, then to the home government. F. O. 5/690, America: From Lord Napier, 1858.

One party of Mormons, while not going to Canada, did settle with their leader, James Strang, on Beaver Island at the northern end of Lake Michigan.

<sup>34</sup>Totals compiled from information in Linforth, *op. cit.*, 14-16, 117-20, and Burton, *op. cit.*, 358-63.

ing, the American ideal of complete religious freedom without state interference appealed to many Englishmen. Feeling itself to be synonymous with the British empire, the Church of England naturally encouraged the expansion and settlement of the colonies. Evangelical dissenters wished to spread the gospel as they interpreted it, while the Mormons emigrated because they believed it was the will of God.

The channel of Saint's emigration to the land of Zion, is now opened. The long-wished for time of gathering has come. Good tidings from Mount Zion! The resting place of Israel for the last days has been discovered. . . .<sup>28</sup>

Considering the well-ordered operation of the program and the loyalty to original purpose shown by the emigrants after their arrival in America, the Mormons produced the only successful, privately conducted emigration system of the period.

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<sup>28</sup>Such instructions were issued to the Mormons of the United Kingdom on February 1, 1848. Linforth, *op. cit.*, 5.