

"Making Good": The Canadian West in British Boys' Literature, 1890-1914

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ABSTRACT. Following the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885, the federal government made concerted efforts to attract British emigrants to western Canada. To that end immigration authorities received considerable assistance from the British juvenile press. Boys' literature, which was aimed at independently-minded adolescents, offered its readers enticing pictures of life in the farming and ranching communities of the Canadian West; it actively encouraged immigration to the prairies and in so doing provided advice and assistance to intending settlers. The impact of this literature is difficult to evaluate, but it appears likely that it did provide a very effective means of encouraging the immigration of youthful and ambitious British males to western Canada in late-Victorian and Edwardian times.

RESUME

Lorsque le Chemin de Fer du Canadien Pacifique fut achevé en 1885, le gouvernement fédéral fit des efforts concertés pour attirer des émigrants britanniques dans l'Ouest canadien. En cela, les autorités responsables de l'immigration reçurent l'aide considérable de la presse britannique destinée aux jeunes. La littérature pour garçons, qui s'adressait à des adolescents à l'esprit indépendant, offrait à ses lecteurs des images alléchantes de la vie dans les fermes et les ranchs de l'Ouest canadien; elle encourageait activement l'immigration dans les Prairies et, pour cela, offrait conseils et aide aux éventuels colons. L'impact de cette littérature est difficile à évaluer, mais il paraît vraisemblable qu'elle ait servi très efficacement à encourager l'immigration de jeunes Britanniques pleins d'ambition vers l'Ouest canadien, à la fin de l'ère victorienne et sous le règne d'Edouard VII.

In the quarter century prior to the Great War approximately one and one half million Britons migrated to Canada. Included in this veritable army were thousands of young, independent males, ranging in age from about fifteen to twenty-five; the majority were unmarried and most were unaccompanied by their parents or guardians. Undoubtedly many of them received some assistance from voluntary organizations interested in the welfare of new settlers; in most instances, however, the youths migrated independently of the Barnardo Homes and other philanthropic societies for juvenile emigration.

Like many of their countrymen, the youths were motivated by a variety of "push" factors such as unemployment, low wages, overcrowding, and the rigid class structure which persisted in Great Britain. But these young emigrants were also motivated by "pull" factors, notably by the attractive if glamourized impressions they had of life in the Canadian West. Ralph Stock, the author and adventurer, was one young man drawn to the West by such impressions. At the turn of the century, he recalled in 1913, London was "plastered with flaring posters representing fields of yellow grain and herds of fat stock tended by cowboys picturesquely attired in costumes that have never been heard of outside the covers of a penny dreadful." Alluring pamphlets were distributed freely on street corners, while "unctuous" immigration agents implored young passers-by to attend meetings where they would hear of the fortunes to be made in the Dominion. "What chance

was there, then" Stock asked, "of the average city youth, cooped in an office from nine o'clock until six, resisting such an appeal to the spirit of adventure?"¹ What chance, indeed? Not only were there pamphlets, posters, and hordes of sidewalk agents to attract his attention, but there was also a striking array of boys' literature, much of which was dedicated to promoting immigration to western Canada.

Popular literature for boys occupied a prominent place in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Fully one quarter of the British publishing industry was devoted to the juvenile market, and that market was the largest and most sophisticated in the world. Adventure novels by the leading boys' writers sold upwards of 150,000 copies per year, while juvenile periodicals, such as the *Boy's Own Paper*, achieved circulations in excess of one million per week. Yet despite these levels of circulation, and despite the fact that the literature often featured stories and articles relating to Canada, juvenile books and magazines have received very little attention from Canadian historians.² This is unfortunate, because western Canada was a popular setting for much of this literature. The region offered a hardy climate plus an impressive landscape and, with a little embellishment, boys' writers could readily introduce hostile natives and a population of struggling white pioneers. Such elements were prominent features in the well-remembered juvenile stories of R. M. Ballantyne, W. H. G. Kingston, and J. Macdonald Oxley, authors who were personally familiar with the Canadian North West. The standard dramatic elements were found, too, in tales by writers such as Robert Leighton who never visited the Dominion but who, nevertheless, provided young Britons with thrilling accounts of life in the Great Lone Land.³

Possibly of more importance were the many non-fiction accounts of western Canada which were presented to Victorian and Edwardian youths. The *Boy's Own Paper*, published by the Religious Tract Society and arguably the most respected of the juvenile weeklies, regularly provided its readers with articles on the Canadian Indians, the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the ever-popular North-West Mounted Police. Other juvenile magazines, such as *Chums*, *Young England*, the *Captain*, and the boys' papers of Alfred Harmsworth (Lord Northcliffe), provided similar accounts, many of which were written by colonial correspondents and specially-appointed overseas reporters. Almost to a man the journalists who contributed to these publications extolled the fertility and awesome grandeur of the prairies; they praised the climate as being exhilarating, described the wealth and the personal satisfaction to be gained through farming or stock raising, and frequently drew attention to the generous homesteads provided to settlers by the Canadian government.

British boys' books and periodicals did not concentrate solely on western Canada, for readers were also provided with accounts of life in

Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. However, Canada generally received more attention and was recommended more highly to intending emigrants than were the other settlement colonies. The prominent and favoured position which the Dominion enjoyed in the literature was due partly to its geographic proximity: quite simply, it was cheaper to travel to Canada than to Africa or the Antipodes. In addition, the availability of free homesteads and the existence of an extensive transportation network to settlement areas, the presence of a long-established British community, and the relative political stability of the country (of considerable importance during the Boer War years) all enhanced Canada's position in the popular press. Mostly, though, the attention which was accorded to Canada in late-Victorian and Edwardian publications was due to the varied and widespread publicity campaigns which were then being conducted by Canadian government and private immigration agents.⁴ Overall, Canada maintained a high profile in its efforts to recruit emigrants and, consequently, there was in Britain a general interest in all things Canadian. Contemporary boys' literature reflected this interest; by providing eulogistic accounts of pioneer life, it stimulated further interest in the West.

As suggested above, the youths to whom the accounts were directed were not the paupers, waifs, and destitute boys who emigrated under the auspices of the Barnardo Homes and similar agencies.⁵ Rather, the books and periodicals were directed at young men who had, or were expected to have, an adequate education and a small amount of capital at their disposal. In other words, the literature aimed at independent youths who were willing to take up new professions and able to move to new localities in Canada wherever and whenever their services were required. Such persons were regarded by many as ideal immigrants. In the first instance, adolescent boys who had left the Board (state) schools were among those most likely to be frustrated by social barriers and by the lack of career opportunities in Britain; the directed migration of these youths, it was argued, would relieve Britain of some of her "surplus" population and would provide Canada with energetic young workers.⁶ Secondly, it was widely believed that young people were more adaptable to the rigours of colonial life than were adults. "It has been proved," the *Boy's Own Paper* later declared, "that men over a certain age find great difficulty in adapting themselves to the climatic and other changes involved in a move from England to Canada. Boys, on the other hand, adapt themselves very readily."⁷ Another prevailing belief was that young British immigrants would strengthen Canada's imperial connection and would further the development of a Greater Britain. Specifically, it was assumed that they would readily be assimilated into English-Canadian culture and that their presence would help to counter the growing numbers of American and European immigrants in the West.⁸

The glowing accounts of colonial correspondents and the romantic adventure tales were obviously calculated to produce in young minds favourable impressions of Canadian life. But to the literature's credit, utopian visions were balanced by sober, pragmatic, and sometimes discouraging reports. This was especially true of the *Boy's Own Paper*, whose editor often proffered advice to would-be immigrants. Young clerks who were unwilling to abandon their pens were advised not to emigrate, as were those who erroneously believed that in Canada they could live the leisured life of an English country squire. The editor informed a correspondent in 1890 that the Dominion would welcome "those with capital, in a position to develop the resources of the new country, and pay wages and fees to the clerks and professional men, of whom the colonies have too many; and . . . those without capital who will do the rough laborious work the said clerks and professional men are unfit for."⁹ The *Boy's Own Paper* stressed repeatedly that emigration was a serious step and one which in fairness to both Canada and the intending migrant was not to be taken lightly. "I am very hopeful," a contributor wrote in 1906, "as to the possibilities of Canadian life for young men, and preferably boys from sixteen to eighteen, not too old to learn, coming from England—having health, strength, and a mind to work as chief assets; but otherwise they are better away."¹⁰

The trinity of health, ambition and industry was similarly stressed in the other mass-circulation juvenile periodicals. The *Boy's Realm*, one of Harmsworth's weeklies, referred in 1901 to the "splendid openings" then available in Canada to "enterprising and intelligent boys who were not afraid of hard work."¹¹ The *Captain*—published by George Newnes of *Tit-Bits* fame—also spoke of the "great advantages" which Canada offered to the "young and energetic,"¹² as did *Boys of the Empire*, an illustrated journal founded and edited by the British paper manufacturer, Howard (later Sir Howard) Spicer. "There is nothing slipshod or haphazard in the conditions of success here," a correspondent from Winnipeg informed Spicer's readers in 1900:

Work, intelligent work, all through is the prime feature, and the fellow who can start [homesteading] . . . with stout heart, hard hands, and some real training to his credit must find himself at the outset with a great pull over the tenderfeet and greenhorns whom Mother England too often dumps overseas, to their own grievous disillusion and this country's detriment.¹³

Similar warnings and exhortations appeared in the juvenile emigration tales which were published in the early years of the present century. Unlike the boys' adventure stories of Kingston or Ballantyne, which simply conveyed romanticized impressions of a "wild" West, the aforementioned tales were meant to serve as practical guides for intending emigrants. In this regard the tales bore a resemblance to the trans-atlantic novels of the mid-nineteenth century, notably to John Galt's *Lawrie Todd* (1830) and *Bogle Corbet* (1831) and Susanna

Moodie's *Life in the Clearings* (1853).¹⁴ Their authors managed to discuss immigration policies, the availability of land, local Canadian customs, and generally to dispense advice to adolescent readers.

Undoubtedly the best examples of this genre were the juvenile novels of Frederick Sadler Brereton (1872–1957). Brereton, an English surgeon and medical officer in the Scots Guards, began his long and successful career as a writer for boys just after the Boer War. It has not yet been established when, or indeed if, Brereton actually visited Canada. However his juvenile tales, particularly *A Boy of the Dominion: A Tale of Canadian Immigration* (1912) and *A Sturdy Young Canadian* (1914), so faithfully reflect details of Canadian life in the early 1900s that first-hand knowledge by the author is almost a certainty. In any case, like the contemporary boys' periodicals, Brereton's tales emphasized the personal attributes which were thought necessary for success in the new land. Consider, for example, the advice given to the seventeen-year-old hero in *A Boy of the Dominion*:

Where a man has no ties, where a young fellow has lost his parents and has little influence to start his career [as had the hero], then Canada calls loudly to him. There he will make new ties, new friends, and new hopes. There he can have land for the asking if farming is what he wants; and success is assured, if only he will put his back into the work.

The youth's counsellor acknowledged that there were failures in the Dominion; but failure, he claimed, was met only by "slackers" who were not sufficiently determined and resourceful. "Slackers get deported," Brereton has his character declare, "but young active fellows with pluck behind them, and with grit and health, they make good everytime. . . . They help to form the backbone of Canada."¹⁵

Brereton might have added, albeit at the risk of dampening readers' ardour, that there were other reasons besides lethargy which accounted for failure: soft markets, crop blights, cattle diseases, adverse weather conditions, and insufficient capital for farm equipment were but some of the factors that could thwart even the pluckiest settler. A more usual detriment to most homesteaders, though, was lack of experience. The article in *Boys of the Empire* (noted above) had alluded to the importance of prior experience, and certainly a lack of practical training was a problem for young newcomers. At the turn of the century less than thirty per cent of British adult immigrants intending to take up homesteads in Canada recorded agriculture as their occupation.¹⁶ It may safely be assumed that the proportion among adolescent immigrants, most of whom were drawn from London and the industrial cities of northern Britain, was even smaller. Nevertheless, a number of opportunities were available for youths who wished to acquaint themselves with agricultural and stock-raising techniques.

The first avenue was through the agricultural schools and colleges. Among the best known in Britain were the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester, near Gloucester, the Agricultural College at Downton, in Shropshire, and the Colonial College near Woodbridge, in Suffolk. Smaller establishments, some associated with church emigration societies, were located in other parts of Britain and there boys could learn ploughing, metalwork, animal husbandry, and even thatching. The Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph was extensively advertised in Britain and this, too, offered instructions to intending farmers. But enrollment in all of the training colleges was limited, and the fees (which ranged from about \$250 at Guelph to \$850 at Cirencester) prohibited many aspirants from undertaking formal instruction.¹⁷

A second avenue open to novices who desired some training prior to taking up their own homesteads was the so-called agricultural apprentice or farm-pupil system. This was a common, controversial, and often ruinously expensive introduction to practical farming. The apprenticeships, which were widely advertised in British newspapers and educational journals, usually demanded that a premium of between two hundred and one thousand dollars be paid through an agent to a Canadian farmer or rancher. The countryman provided his "pupil" with room and board and agreed to "train" his charge for a stipulated period of time, usually from one to three years. At the cessation of the apprenticeships the employer would declare his pupil to be a qualified farmer or rancher, and not infrequently a certificate or diploma would be issued to that effect. In some cases these arrangements proved to be mutually satisfactory. In too many instances, though, the premium system exploited gullible parents and their ill-advised sons. On the one hand, Canadian overseers who received the substantial payments could use their pupils simply as a source of free, menial labour; often the youths were not taught sophisticated agricultural techniques and the diplomas issued were for the most part meaningless. On the other hand, as long as the premiums were accepted by the farmer or rancher, the pupil was under no obligation to actually work; he might easily lead an aimless existence and learn nothing of practical value. Because this system was subject to abuses by both parties it was universally criticized; it was denounced by government officials on both sides of the Atlantic, and boys' writers regularly warned intending emigrants to beware of the premium-hunters.

A more practical avenue of instruction for young British emigrants was outlined by F. H. Williams, a Winnipeg schoolteacher, to the *Boys of the Empire* in 1900. Through a series of epistolary articles entitled "Aboard for the West" the author provided his readers with a regimen of "home training." He suggested that boys who had decided to emigrate should acquire as much gardening experience as possible; this they might acquire from their homes, from a neighbouring farm, or

from an allotment (a plot of land, available from local civic councils, which supported small vegetable gardens). After developing a green thumb, boys were then advised to study carpentry, to acquire some rudimentary metalworking skills, and to learn to ride a horse bareback. But above all, the author said, boys should prepare themselves for hard work.¹⁸

Williams followed up his advice on home training with a number of articles on outfit and with suggestions as to the best means of travelling to Winnipeg. The articles are of particular interest in that they provide a comprehensive inventory of an immigrant's kit, as well as a detailed itinerary of a journey that would have been undertaken by thousands of migrants. Boys were instructed to take with them a couple of pairs of sturdy boots (without nails) for the Canadian spring mud, a dozen coarse flannel shirts (with collars attached) and, very sensibly, woollen underwear and laced flannel pyjamas. They were told not to pack any "smart suits," but rather to bring corduroy trousers, canvas overalls, Alloo stockings, and old football jerseys—apparel which would be more suitable for the rough labours which lay ahead. The entire kit, along with an "India rubber pneumatic tub," was to be packed in a small, flat-topped steamer trunk which was to serve as a writing table when the boy was settled on a farm. The cost of this "Western outfit" was said to be less than £25 or about \$100.¹⁹ A similar inventory had been included in a book edited by Alfred John Church in 1889 and based on letters from Church's sons, aged 17 and 18, who had settled near Calgary.²⁰ Although the youths were well-equipped they greatly regretted not having brought an India-rubber tub for their morning ablutions.

In 1900 the steerage/colonist-class fare from London or Liverpool to Winnipeg was just over £9. Young immigrants were advised to keep a few shillings for pocket expenses and to send any extra money they might have on to the government immigration agents in Winnipeg for conversion into Canadian dollars. On arriving at Halifax or Quebec City readers were told to board a 'colonist sleeper.' The author hinted that the immigrant trains were rather spartan and suggested that young travellers include in their kits some cooking utensils, preserved food and beverages, and a double horse-hair rug for warmth. Williams was most adamant, however, that boys should not carry pretentious references: "Don't bring letters of introduction; they are mostly a farce and will raise false hopes. 'Gilt-edged letters' and 'remittance men' (the two things go together) are the laughing stock and detriment of this country." Instead, the author urged immigrating youths to bring with them a number of practical reference books on animal husbandry.²¹

Winnipeg featured prominently in boys' books and periodicals, for it was frequently in Winnipeg that the immigrant either began his

fabled ascent to success or met with the first of his misfortunes. The young Ralph Stock managed to avoid the dubious characters who preyed on unwary newcomers in the gateway city, although prior to his leaving London a determined shop assistant had induced him to purchase an expensive "six-shooter"—"without which," he was told, "no Canadian outfit was complete."²² Apparently the merchants of Winnipeg were just as anxious to outfit novices with such items, as readers of the *Boy's Own Paper* were warned not to be "tempted by plausible shopmen into buying fancy slouch hats, revolvers, etc." Rather, when Winnipeg was reached boys were advised to immediately take employment with a "practical farmer," who would afterwards advise them on necessary purchases.²³ Subscribers to *Boys of the Empire* were also directed to secure employment by placing their names on the Farm Help Register in Winnipeg. It was suggested that young Britons work with an experienced farmer for a year or two, after which time they would be in a position to apply for a government homestead of their own.²⁴

But gaining suitable employment was not always as easy as readers were sometimes led to believe. A contrasting and, one suspects, a more realistic picture of an immigrant's first days in the West was provided by Edward Anthony Wharton Gill in *A Manitoba Chore Boy* (1912), which concerned the impressions of a sixteen-year-old boy who had emigrated from England. Unlike the fictitious young heroes who appeared in much of the literature, though, the youth's progress was not altogether smooth. The book described the bustling immigration sheds in Winnipeg and the crowds of anxious, confused immigrants who herded into large hiring-halls in search of work. Unlike the articles in *Boys of the Empire*, which conveyed the impression that there were hosts of government agents on hand to assist in placing newcomers, *A Manitoba Chore Boy* showed how a young immigrant, unadvised by any benevolent official, was apt to become lost in the general melee. Moreover, the book warned readers who intended to come to Manitoba to be wary of unscrupulous farmers whose practice it was to hire "English boys in the spring . . . work them hard all summer and then in the face of winter quarrel with them, or make them so miserable that they run away, and never pay them any wages at all."²⁵

Despite the pitfalls outlined in his book, Gill's picture of the West was generally encouraging. But according to most of the juvenile publications the immigrant's attitude to his neighbours was most important, and in this regard Gill's model hero was noticeably lacking. *A Manitoba Chore Boy* clearly reflects unfavourable local attitudes towards non-English speaking immigrants. Gill suggested that English emigrants pay extra in order to travel intermediate, rather than steerage, class; by so doing they would avoid having to associate with "stalwart peasants in sheepskin coats," although, even then, English

youths would not be entirely free from the presence of those immigrants:

There were [Gill's character noted] several hundred foreign steerage passengers, Galicians, I think they called themselves—some kind of Austrians or Poles, anyway; and though they were kept mostly separate from the English, still they were pretty close neighbours and rather wild and strange-looking and smelling.

Equally disparaging remarks are scattered throughout the book, leaving little doubt that Gill did not welcome the immigration of ethnic and nationality groups from Eastern Europe.

This attitude, common to many Canadians and to a number of British commentators,²⁶ was not generally shared by other writers for boys. For the most part, the characters in F. S. Brereton's juvenile tales do not appear to be patronizing or prejudiced. Indeed, the principal character in *A Boy of the Dominion* is surprised to learn that Englishmen were held in low accord by some Canadian employers. "You're English," one farmer observes with a pronounced drawl; "wall now, in past years Englishmen got such a bad name with us colonials that we wouldn't employ him if we could help it."²⁷ This was something of a revelation to the young hero of the novel and undoubtedly to many of Brereton's readers. But it was a valid comment, nonetheless. Emily Weaver, writing for the more mature emigrant, noted that many Englishmen had the unfortunate habit of "stroking Canadians the wrong way" and warned intending immigrants against any notions of superiority they might bring with them. Howard Kennedy, an English journalist who had toured western Canada in 1906, gathered the same impression and offered similar advice to his readers.²⁸ Certainly many Englishmen did arrive in Canada with abrasive and condescending attitudes; unskilled in labour, resentful of "foreign" competition but themselves unwilling to compete, their reputation had reached such a low ebb by about 1906 that notices reading "No English Need Apply" were not uncommon.²⁹ It was to deter the arrogant, narrowly nationalistic emigrant that Brereton and some of the other boys' writers dispensed their advice. "Remember," the *Boy's Own Paper* admonished in 1906, "that as a rule the name Englishman means 'Greenhorn' and do not think that because you are an Englishman you are better in the eyes of the farmer than a hardworking Swede or other countryman."³⁰

On the western side of the Atlantic social mobility was more pronounced than in Britain: there still remained class distinctions, but these could more easily be transcended. This at least was the popular belief which found considerable expression in contemporary boys' literature, especially in the tales of Horatio Alger, Jr.³¹ In the Alger stories many tattered young men, personifying the "American dream," climbed manfully up the ladder of success. The Alger stories (the first

of which, *Ragged Dick*, was published in 1867) were phenomenally popular in the United States and Canada, but were virtually unknown in Britain. However, British readers had what may be regarded as reasonable facsimiles in juvenile immigration novels and periodicals of the pre-War period.

Michael Zuckerman, in questioning the whole rags-to-riches myth, has argued that luck, rather than character, accounted largely for the success of Alger's heroes.³² His point is well taken, for luck also played an important part in making the fortunes of model Britons in western Canada. But the importance of character cannot be completely denied, since luck (often coupled with a solicitous patron) was in the literature the reward of virtue. The Reverend Gill's fatherless chore-boy, for all his ethnic prejudices, was a diligent worker who was accordingly taken in by a gregarious Manitoba farmer and put on the road to success.

Brereton's characters, in particular, were uncannily lucky. His penniless orphans, fortunate in being in the right place at the right time, saved immigration vessels from destruction, prevented the managers of Canadian railways from being robbed, and rendered timely assistance to the Mounted Police. For these and other acts of bravery, the youths were invariably rewarded with sums of money. The money was then invested and, while the investments appreciated, the youths were advised to gain experience in farming, ranching, lumbering, or mining. The results of such actions Brereton described in *A Boy of the Dominion*, and repeated in *A Sturdy Young Canadian*, whose hero begins with property investments in Calgary and progresses steadily westward until, at the story's close, he is able to open a large retail department store in downtown Vancouver.

At every turn Brereton's heroes, and thus his readers, were urged to invest and re-invest, to speculate boldly and to see every opportunity as a business opportunity. "Buying and selling," they were told, "is the life and soul of Canada."³³ At first glance the author's advice might seem rather unsavoury, avaricious almost, and his tales to depict the Dominion as a nation of money-hungry financiers. However, Brereton's readers were urged not to form that impression. "There's people will tell you that Canadians think and dream nothing but dollars and just for the sake of dollars," a character in one of the books is made to say. "Don't you go and believe it." Rather, the character explains, it is "making good" that motivates Canadians.³⁴ But did "making good" necessarily mean making money? It would seem so, but with some qualifications. "Dollars do not spell happiness," Brereton declared, "they spell success." Success, in turn, led to self-esteem and by way of it to happiness; and in a country such as Canada, Brereton added approvingly, nothing so denoted a man's success as did wealth:

Dollars show a man's independence . . . his position in the world,

and when it is known broadcast that he commenced life's struggles with empty pockets and was always a hard worker and a thinker, and made his dollars by those two means, why, then, those same dollars demonstrate to all and sundry that that particular man has achieved something, he has made a success of his life; he has, in fact, done what every fresh-minded Canadian hopes for, he has made good.³⁵

Equally important to young Britons, many of whom suffered low wages in jobs which offered little hope of advancement, would have been the promises of an egalitarian society. They were told that "there are only two classes in Canada—the one class that embraces baronets' sons, Barnardo boys, and everybody else who works hard and makes good . . . and the other class that equally embraces everybody, whether born in the purple or in the slums, who shirks work."³⁶ Sedulous young men, the literature maintained, would not suffer in Canada because they lacked impressive lineage, the proper accent, or an Oxbridge education.³⁷

Such assurances were loudly sung in Brereton's books. Gill also conveyed this impression to his readers when drawing attention to the fact that in western Canada even a lowly chore-boy was respectfully treated and invited to sit as an equal at his employer's dinner table.³⁸ Likewise, pupils in English elementary schools were informed in 1900 that "there is much less difference between the various classes of society [in Canada] than in an old country. The working man, while respectful to his employer, is more independent than his brother in England because he feels sure of a livelihood." "The feeling of equality with one's neighbours," it was said, "and particularly the knowledge that the land is one's own, is worth a great deal."³⁹ Lower middle-class youths, for whom those words were written, would undoubtedly have agreed; for those who chose to emigrate, the prospect of leaving behind one's station in life would not have been unwelcome.

While they might leave behind restricting notions of social class, young British immigrants were encouraged not to abandon their sense of loyalty and their pride in the Empire. The imperial spirit was never lacking in contemporary juvenile literature: Gill's Manitoba chore-boy delighted in seeing the Union Jack waving loftily in Canada, Brereton's boys worked to the strains of "Rule Britannia," as did the youths depicted in the *Captain*, the *Boys' Realm*, and in the other juvenile papers. As its title suggests, though, the imperial spirit imbued *Boys of the Empire* to a greater degree than most publications. That the paper regarded juvenile emigration in imperial terms was illustrated by its sponsoring of a prize competition for "A Free Start Out West," in which boys between the ages of sixteen and twenty were offered "free kit, free passage, and free location with a selected farmer in North West Canada." The contest, first held in 1900, was not only a further means of advertising the West; it was also, the paper declared, intended to

stimulate "manly effort to some true purpose and specially to bring the opportunities and duties of Imperial Citizenship within the reach of all British Boys."⁴⁰

The contest was held in conjunction with the Boys' Empire League, an organization founded by Howard Spicer and Andrew Melrose, the publisher of *Boys of the Empire*. The purpose of the League was to "promote and strengthen a worthy Imperial spirit in British boys all over the world" and the League's ten thousand members were pledged to take an informed interest in the welfare of the Empire. Since one of the responsibilities of Empire involved emigration, the League and *Boys of the Empire* prided themselves on their Canadian affiliations. In December 1900 Nicholas Flood Davin, the Irish-Canadian journalist and politician, wrote in glowing terms of the League's work in forging a stronger Imperial bond between Britain and the Dominion, while in 1902 Sir Gilbert Parker, the Canadian novelist, spoke on Canadian patriotism to a Boys' Empire League meeting in London.⁴¹ Furthermore, a number of prominent Canadians were included in the League's impressive list of patrons: Sir Charles Tupper, Lord Strathcona, Premier (later Sir) Rodmond P. Roblin of Manitoba, and Premier (later Sir) George Ross of Ontario.⁴²

The Free Start Competition took the form of a written examination comprising questions dealing with Canadian history, geography, resources, and divisions of government. Also included were a number of more detailed questions in which competitors were asked to outline the provisions of the Dominion Land Acts and to explain "the part played by the Canadian Pacific Railway (a) as a means of developing and uniting the Dominion, (b) as an Imperial highway."⁴³ The contest was supported by the Canadian High Commission in London and was modelled, in part, on the very successful essay competitions which James Smart, Deputy Minister of the Interior, was then organizing for younger children in British elementary schools.⁴⁴ To assist competitors, specially-prepared atlases were freely distributed, as were copies of E. R. Peacock's *Canada: A Descriptive Textbook* (1900).

Edward (later Sir Edward) Peacock, an Ontario-born entrepreneur, had served as senior English master at Upper Canada College in Toronto from 1895 to 1902. His textbook on Canada had been commissioned by the Department of the Interior in 1899. It contained the usual information on the Dominion's climate, geography, and development and—as might be expected from an imperial enthusiast like Peacock—a statement on Canada's loyalty to the Empire. However, since the book was intended primarily to encourage British immigration, Peacock concentrated on Canada's western settlement areas. He described the size and the fertility of the West, made encouraging allusions to the friendliness of the inhabitants, and provided a number of romanticized impressions of a young man's life on the prairies.

Appropriately, the first competition entries were submitted to the London office of *Boys of the Empire* on Dominion Day, 1901; they were then sent to Canada where they were marked by Professor (later Sir) George R. Parkin. An ardent imperialist and one of Canada's leading educationalists (he was Principal of Upper Canada College from 1895 to 1902), Parkin was a fitting choice as adjudicator in a contest of this type. He was an active patron of the Boys' Empire League and he may well have viewed the Free Start Competition to be as much a step towards his elusive dream of Imperial Federation as it was an incentive to emigration.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, the answers to the examination papers have not survived. Some of the answers to the elementary school papers, however, were reported in the *London Canadian Gazette*, and it is likely that the Free Start entries were of a similar nature. Generally, the children described Canada in romantic and utopian terms, although no more so than had Peacock's textbook, their primary source of information. Many of the contestants dwelt on egalitarian aspects of Canadian society and, in answer to the question "Where would you like to settle in Canada, and why?," nearly all declared their choice to be the Prairie West.⁴⁶ James Smart and Lord Strathcona were especially gratified by these answers and doubtless they would have been as pleased with the Free Start replies. George Parkin certainly was. "The two papers presented by the winners of your prizes are exceedingly creditable," he wrote to Spicer:

In congratulating the winners of the two prizes I may say that I think the kind of ability shown in their papers is such as would find a good opening for itself in Canada. . . . There is always plenty of room in this country for intelligent and thoughtful workers, and a young man who does thoroughly well in a comprehensive examination such as this has evidently a good deal of the ability which brings success.⁴⁷

Thus, filled with a knowledge of the western wheatlands and Parkin's accolades, the contest's first two winners—a boy from London and another from Glasgow—set off for Canada. Curiously, though, they took with them more than their free kit and an emigrant's dream. Despite admonitions by *Boys of the Empire*, they also took letters of introduction from no less a personage than Canada's former governor-general, the ninth Duke of Argyll.⁴⁸

The success or failure of these competitions, and of the articles, the advice columns, and the edifying novels, is difficult to evaluate. Although the reminiscences of Western pioneers and printed memoirs suggest that the advertising did have the desired effect, there are no statistics to indicate the actual number of immigrants who were motivated primarily by the appeals in question. There were other schemes for encouraging emigration, the most important of which was the campaign waged by the Dominion Government itself; furthermore,

in the decision to migrate, push factors were never negligible. Even so, a number of considerations indicate that popular juvenile literature did provide a valuable means of promoting emigration to western Canada. In the first instance, the literature provided the Dominion with a very economical source of publicity. During Clifford Sifton's tenure as Minister of the Interior, Canadian immigration authorities spent approximately \$1.6 million promoting the Dominion in the British Isles.⁴⁹ Advertising provided by boys' authors, editors and correspondents cost the government nothing. Not only was the advertising inexpensive, it was also directed to an exceedingly receptive audience. There was, as Ralph Stock suggested, a "spirit of adventure" in most adolescent boys. Finally, the wide circulation of the boys' literature must also be considered. As Edward McCourt has noted, stories set in western Canada were very popular in Britain, and few stories reached as large an audience as those published by the boys' press.⁵⁰

Canadian immigration records do not contain any specific references to British juvenile literature, nor did immigration authorities in Ottawa and London officially acknowledge the services rendered by the boys' press. There are, nevertheless, a few indications which suggest that government officials did appreciate benefits which might have resulted from juvenile advertising. Referring to the prize essay contests held in British schools (contests which, as noted above, were adapted by the editors of *Boys of the Empire*), James Smart told Lord Strathcona that he could imagine "no better means of educating the youth of England to the advantages offered by Canada as a suitable field of settlement."⁵¹ Similarly, the Free Start Out West competitions were thought to have been so successful that in 1903 Sir John Cockburn, the Agent-General for South Australia, offered Boys' Empire League members a prize of £25 for the best examination paper on the future and resources of his colony. The Australian competition, like the one on which it was modelled, attracted considerable interest and was well received, although the winner of the contest, much to the sponsors' chagrin, used his prize money to emigrate to Canada.⁵²

The popularization of the Canadian West in boys' books and periodicals was one of the most appropriate campaigns of the period. As we have seen, patrons of this literature were regarded as being ambitious, enterprising, and adventurous. It was therefore fitting that they were so imaginatively courted by those who sought to promote immigration to Canada, for in the popular mind the Dominion's image was certainly one of youthful vitality and promise. Canada was the "new nation"—the nation which, to paraphrase Robert Stead's poem, 'Manhood's Estate,' had been given the keys to a continent with the bidding, "Be a Man!"⁵³ Young Britons were also on the threshold of adulthood and, like the personified Dominion, they were being exhorted to manly purpose. In popular juvenile literature the interests of the new nation and the prospective new immigrant ideally coincided, the aspirations of the one serving the needs of the other.

NOTES

- ¹ Ralph Stock, *The Confessions of a Tenderfoot* (London, 1913), 1-2.
- ² Victorian/Edwardian boys' literature has received some attention in J. W. Chalmers, "Ballantyne and the Honourable Company," *Alberta Historical Review* [AHR] XX (Winter, 1972), 6-10; Ermeline Ference, "Alberta Ranching and Literature," in A. W. Rasporich and Henry Klassen, eds. *Frontier Calgary: Town, City, and Region 1875-1914* (Calgary, 1975), 71-86; E. A. McCourt, *The Canadian West in Fiction* (Toronto, revised ed., 1970), 20; and Bruce Peel, "English Writers in the Early West," *AHR* XVI (Spring, 1968), 1-5. But references are brief and the authors make little mention of the role which the literature played in promoting emigration to Canada.
- For a consideration of British popular juvenile literature and leading boys' authors see my unpublished Ph.D. thesis, "Boys' Literature in an Age of Empire, 1880-1914" (Manchester University, 1975); and Patrick A. Dunae, "The Boy's Own Paper: Origins and Editorial Policies," *Private Library*, 2nd series, IX:2 (Winter, 1976), 123-158.
- ³ A number of Ballantyne's juvenile tales were based on his experiences as a Hudson's Bay Company trading-clerk in Rupert's Land in the 1840s; Kingston, who was greatly interested in emigration problems, had visited Canada in the 1850s, while J. Macdonald Oxley was born and spent most of his life in Canada. In contrast, Robert Leighton—author of such popular works as *Sergeant Silke the Prairie Scout* (1913)—based all of his adventure tales upon reference books he found in suburban London libraries. See Eric Quayle, *Ballantyne the Brave* (London, 1967), the Rev. Maurice Booke Kingsford, *The Life, Work, and Influence of W. H. G. Kingston* (Toronto, 1947), and Clare Leighton, *Tempestuous Petticoat: The Story of an Invincible Edwardian* (London, 1948).
- ⁴ Canadian agents used a great variety of methods to promote immigration: newspaper reports, chain-letters, travelling exhibitions, dramatic presentations, and jubilee arches were but some of the means used to advertise Western Canada in Britain. Contemporary reports of this advertising are most readily available in J. Castell Hopkins, ed. *The Canadian Annual Review* (1903-1914).
- ⁵ For accounts of assisted juvenile immigration see Stanley C. Johnson, *A History of Emigration from the United Kingdom to North America* (London, revised ed., 1966), 272-294; G. J. Parr, "The Home Children: British Juvenile Immigrants to Canada, 1868-1924," (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1976); Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society* (London, 1973), II, 546-581; Leonard Rutman, "Importation of British Waifs to Canada, 1868-1916," *Child Welfare* LII (March, 1973), 158-166; and Neil Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society* (Toronto, 1976), esp. 3-35.
- ⁶ *The Captain*, XXIV (October, 1910), 76; W. A. Carrothers, *Emigration from the British Isles* (London, revised ed., 1965), 282.
- ⁷ *Boy's Own Annual*, XLIX (1926-27), 623; Cf. a post-1918 government immigration pamphlet: "Experience has shown that boys between the ages of 14 and 20 years usually make the most successful settlers on the land . . . [they] adapt themselves to fresh conditions of climate and work more quickly and easily than grown ups, who have formed more settled habits." *Opportunities for British Boys in the Dominion Overseas* (n.d.), 4; cited in Carrothers, *Emigration from the British Isles*, 283.
- ⁸ The belief was clearly expressed in H. R. Whates, *Canada The New Nation* (London, 1906) and in H. B. Gray, *The Public Schools and the Empire* (London, 1913). The imperial role of adolescent immigrants was also a favourite topic at the annual meetings of British schoolmasters. See *Reports of the Headmasters' Conference* (London, 1899-1914), *passim*.
- ⁹ *Boy's Own Paper*, XII (18 January, 1890), 256; XIX (16 January, 1897).
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, XXVIII (14 July, 1906), 655.
- ¹¹ *Boys' Realm*, I (12 July, 1902), 75.
- ¹² *The Captain*, V (September, 1901), 572; XIX (June, 1908), 479.
- ¹³ *Boys of the Empire*, I (27 October, 1900), 8. In 1901 this magazine was published under a revised title, *Boys of Our Empire*. To avoid confusion its original title will be used throughout this study.
- ¹⁴ For the intentions and impact of the trans-Atlantic emigration novel see Charles E. Shain, "John Galt's America," *American Quarterly*, VIII, 3 (1956), 254-263.
- ¹⁵ F. S. Brereton, *A Boy of the Dominion: A Tale of Canadian Immigration* (London, 1912), 28-29.
- ¹⁶ Lloyd G. Reynolds, *The British Immigrant* (Toronto, 1935), 43-45.
- ¹⁷ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *An Official Handbook of Information Relating to the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa, 1890), 28; *The Captain*, I (September, 1899), 620-623.
- ¹⁸ *Boys of the Empire*, I (27 October, 1900), 8.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I (3 November, 1900), 40.
- ²⁰ Alfred John Church, ed. *Making a Start in Canada* (London, 1889), xii-xv.
- ²¹ *Boys of the Empire*, I (10 October, 1900), 47; III (18 October, 1902), 43. Boys were advised to take Stonehenge's [pseud. John Henry Walsh] *The Horse* (London, 15th ed., 1890) and William Youatt's *The Complete Grazier and Farmer's and Cattle-Breeder's Assistant* (London, many eds., 1833-1908).
- ²² Stock, *Confessions of a Tenderfoot*, 2.
- ²³ *Boy's Own Paper*, XXVII (14 July, 1906), 655.
- ²⁴ *Boys of the Empire*, I (10 October, 1900), 47.

- 25 Rev. E. A. Wharton Gill, *A Manitoba Chore Boy: The Experiences of a Young Emigrant Told From His Letters* (London, 1912), 19. Gill (1855–1944) was a Dean of the Anglican Church in Canada.
- 26 Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada, 1896–1921* (Toronto, 1974), 66–74; Howard Palmer, "Nativism in Alberta, 1925–1930," *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers 1974—Communications Historiques*, 183–196 and notes.
- 27 Brereton, *Boy of the Dominion*, 86.
- 28 Emily P. Weaver, *Canada and the British Immigrant* (London, 1914), 276; Howard Angus Kennedy, *New Canada and the New Canadians* (London, 1907), 95–96.
- 29 The situation was sourly reported in Basil Stewart's *The Land of the Maple Leaf; or, Canada As I Saw It* (London, 1908). Stewart was typical of those exclusionists who deeply resented the labour competition of European immigrants. His book, part of which was re-published under the title *No English Need Apply* (1909), included as a chapter an article by Charles Watney, "Why the Englishman is Despised in Canada," *National Review*, L (November, 1907), 431–443. For a temperate Canadian view see the *Canadian Annual Review* (1907), 291–294.
- 30 *Boy's Own Paper*, XXVIII (14 July, 1906), 655.
- 31 Edwin P. Hoyt, *Horatio's Boys: The Life and Works of Horatio Alger, Jnr.* (Radnor, Penn., 1974); John W. Tebbel, *From Rags to Riches: Horatio Alger, Jnr. and the American Dream* (New York, 1963).
- 32 Michael Zuckerman, "The Nursery Tales of Horatio Alger," *American Quarterly*, XXIV (May, 1972), 190–209.
- 33 Brereton, *Boy of the Dominion*, 187.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 77.
- 35 Brereton, *Sturdy Young Canadian*, 222.
- 36 Arthur E. Copping, *The Golden Land: The True Story and Experiences of British Settlers in Canada* (London, 1911), 58.
- 37 One popular magazine for boys held up Sir John A. Macdonald as an example of someone who, despite having a humble birth and education, had "made good" in Canada. "Many a boy who has not a public school education, to help him in the race [of life] will take courage from Sir John Macdonald": *The B.B. [Boys' Brigade Gazette]*, V (January, 1899), 230. See too the inspiring verse, "The Young Colonial," in *The B.B.*, I (March, 1895), 62.
- 38 Gill, *Manitoba Chore Boy*, 21.
- 39 E. R. Peacock, *Canada: A Descriptive Textbook* (Toronto, 1900), 22, 30.
- 40 *Boys of the Empire*, I (27 October, 1900), 13.
- 41 *Ibid.*, I (5 January, 1901), 190; III (6 December, 1902) supplement, iii.
- 42 Admittedly, it was common practice in leagues of this nature to advertise notable patrons who took very little real interest in the organization, and this appears to have been the case with Tupper and Roblin. Tupper's name appeared only briefly in the Boys' Empire League list of patrons. There is no mention of the League in the Roblin Papers [Provincial Archives, Manitoba] and the premier's few surviving letters and his career do not suggest that he held any great imperial enthusiasms. But a keen imperialist like George Ross was a very likely patron, as was Lord Strathcona. Ross would certainly have been in sympathy with the aims of the Boys' Empire League; indeed a prospectus of the League is included in the records of the Ontario Education Department [Public Archives, Ontario], of which Ross was minister. For an indication of the emphasis which Ross placed on juvenile imperialism see Robert M. Stamp, "Empire Day in the Schools of Ontario; the training of young imperialists," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes*, X (August 1973 aout), 32–42. Despite W. T. R. Preston's unflattering biography and his accusation that Strathcona did little to promote Western settlement [*The Life and Times of Lord Strathcona* (London, 1914), 240–241], the High Commissioner was an active member of a number of organizations which encouraged juvenile emigration. These included Lord Meath's League of Empire, the Lads' Drill Association, the Boys' Brigade, and the Public Schools Emigration League. Strathcona also presented a wreath for the Boys' Empire League at the Queen's funeral in 1901. A good indication of Strathcona's activities and imperial enthusiasms is to be found in Beckles Willson's romantic and eulogistic *The Life of Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal* (London, 1915).
- 43 *Boys of the Empire*, I (25 May, 1901), 578.
- 44 British elementary school children competed for bronze medallions. In two of the government-sponsored contests (held between 1900 and 1902) over 90,000 children competed. PAC, Department of the Interior, Immigration Branch (RG76), XLVIII, File 1781: 1892–1902.
- 45 Among Parkin's many publications was his popular school 'reader,' *Round the Empire* (1892). For his imperial views see Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867–1914* (Toronto, 1970) and Terry Cook, "George R. Parkin and the Concept of Britannic Idealism," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes*, X (August 1975 aout), 15–31.
- 46 *London Canadian Gazette*, (February, 1901); reprinted in the *Ottawa Evening Journal*, 13 February, 1901.
- 47 *Boys of the Empire*, II (9 November, 1901), ii–iii.
- 48 *Ibid.*, II (2 November 1901), 16.

- ⁴⁹ W. G. Smith, *A Study in Canadian Immigration* (Toronto, 1920), 59.
- ⁵⁰ McCourt, *Canadian West in Fiction*, 12, 20–25.
- ⁵¹ PAC, Department of the Interior, Immigration Branch (RG76), XLVIII, File 1781: Smart to Strathcona, 1 April 1901.
- ⁵² *Boys of the Empire*, III (16 May, 1903), 674.
- ⁵³ Robert J. C. Stead, "Manhood's Estate," in *The Empire Builders and Other Poems* (Toronto, 1908), 14.