

## **“These Treasures of the Church of God”: Catholic Child Immigration to Canada<sup>1</sup>**

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Between the 1870s and the depression of the 1930s one of the great population movements of modern times occurred: the emigration of some 98,000 British children to Canada. This work was undertaken by a number of philanthropic agencies, the best known of which is that established by Dr. Thomas Barnardo. Of these children, 8,228 passed through St. George’s Home in Ottawa, which became the primary receiving home for Catholic children in Canada. Boys were sent to Canadian farms as agricultural labourers, while girls were placed in domestic service. Most of these children were under fourteen years of age, and only a minority of them were actually orphans. For these and other reasons, historians have been severely critical of child emigration, though not unmindful of the benevolent motives of the agencies involved.<sup>2</sup> While Catholic participation in this movement has been touched on in the literature, the majority of attention has been paid to the

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Joy Parr and the journal’s anonymous assessors for their very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. I, of course, am responsible for its remaining imperfections.

<sup>2</sup> For statistics see National Archives of Canada (NA), microfilm reel C-7327, Immigration Branch Records, RG 76, v. 170, file 54087 (2), G.B. Smart, “Report on Juvenile Immigration for 1932-3.” For historians’ judgements see Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (new ed., Toronto, 1994), 82-8; Philip Bean and Joy Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire* (London, 1989), totally condemn the movement; Patricia T. Rooke and R.L. Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum: From Child Rescue to the Welfare State in English Canada (1800-1950)* (Lanham MD, 1983), are equally scathing: “Nowhere in the annals of British emigration history is there a more calloused expulsion of children, and nowhere in Canadian history is there a more shameful response to and treatment of the young and vulnerable.” (224).

non-Catholic agencies. This paper provides a preliminary examination of the Catholic role in child emigration.<sup>3</sup>

The nature of the Roman Catholic church in Great Britain changed dramatically in the nineteenth century. The restoration of the hierarchy in 1850, under the leadership of Cardinal Wiseman, created a normal institutional structure for the church. The composition of the membership of the church was drastically altered by an influx of Irish immigrants, many of whom became part of the mass of urban poor in the great British cities, and whose needs overwhelmed the existing resources of the church.<sup>4</sup> Church authorities were faced with a social – and spiritual – crisis that could not be ignored.

Wiseman himself considered concern for the poor to be central to Christian responsibility, and education the means to raise them from their poverty. He was well aware of conditions in his own see of Westminster, which he graphically described in a pastoral letter in 1864:

Close under the Abbey of Westminster there lie concealed labyrinths of lanes and courts, and alleys and slums, nests of ignorance, vice, depravity, and crime, as well as of squalor, wretchedness, and disease; whose atmosphere is typhus, whose ventilation is cholera; in which swarms a huge and almost countless population, in great measure, nominally at least, Catholic; haunts of filth, which no sewage committee can reach – dark corners, which no lighting board can brighten.<sup>5</sup>

Wiseman's successor at Westminster, Cardinal Manning, was an even greater advocate for the poor. Throughout his career he played an active role in various movements for social reform. He sat on a number of Mansion House committees dealing with charitable issues, served on the Committee on Distress in London and was appointed to the royal commission on the housing of the poor. He was a supporter of Florence Nightingale, an anti-vivisectionist, and a fervent advocate of the temperance movement. Manning also believed in government-assisted emigration as a means of countering unemployment, and in 1886 became a member of the Association for Promoting State-directed Colonization.<sup>6</sup> However, he was especially touched by the plight of children, whom he

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<sup>3</sup> This paper is based primarily on the records of the Canadian government agencies involved with child immigration. I hope at some point to examine the surviving records of the Catholic agencies in Great Britain.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Norman, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1984), 216-20; K.S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London, 1963), 125-6.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Norman, *English Catholic Church*, 155.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 282-3.

cared for deeply. He firmly believed that “the care of children is the first duty after, and even with, the salvation of our own soul.”<sup>7</sup> He was appalled by the existence of destitute and homeless children, which he saw as a symptom of the breakdown of family life. His attack on the problem was two-fold – the establishment of homes for boys in his diocese, and emigration, particularly to Canada.<sup>8</sup>

Catholic participation in the child rescue movement of this period was essential. This movement was largely driven by Evangelical Protestantism which underwent a revival in the 1860s. The child savers sought to save the children of the lower classes from a life of poverty and crime, and the method was the removal of such children from their milieu, not the reform of the social order responsible for their plight in the first place. As a result, “institutions, child rescue societies, boys’ brigades, girls’ friendly societies, schools and Sunday schools appeared like so many mushrooms on the landscape.”<sup>9</sup> The fervent Protestantism of these bodies threatened the faith of Catholic children that came under their care. The creation of a parallel set of Catholic institutions was a necessity.<sup>10</sup>

The loss of Catholics, particularly poor Catholics, to the faith was a widespread concern among church authorities in the 1880s. In 1880, a Catholic Children’s Protection Society was founded in Liverpool. In 1884, Bishop Ullathorne of Birmingham opened St. Paul’s home, Coleshill. By 1887, there were thirteen Poor Law schools in Westminster, and all but four dioceses had begun to provide such services. The Bishop of Salford (Manchester), Dr. Herbert Vaughan, acted on his concern in 1884 by appointing a board of enquiry which reported that nearly 10,000 children were in danger of losing their faith. Vaughan responded by establishing the Salford Catholic Protection and Rescue Society in 1886, issuing a pamphlet entitled “The Loss of Our Children.” His description of Britain’s philanthropic institutions in 1889 was a blunt statement of the opinion of the Catholic hierarchy:

They were nearly all Protestant, all absolutely non-Catholic, many of them merely proselytizing institutions, mingled with a great amount of

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in Robert Gray, *Cardinal Manning: A Biography* (London, 1985), 296.

<sup>8</sup> Gray, *Manning*, 303; V.A. McClelland, *Cardinal Manning: His Public Life and Influence 1865-1892* (London, 1962), 47-8.

<sup>9</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 197. On the role of evangelicalism see Kathleen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era* (London, 1962).

human benevolence. He gave them every credit for making great sacrifices for what they believed to be the best, but they looked upon Catholics as men tainted with disease, and if they could rid their children of the disease in infancy, they believed they were doing a service to the children and to the State. ... [Children] were snatched up in courts and alleys. Those private societies had agents who were busy all over large towns and all over the country. ... [Catholics] must march with the times, that as the people of England had established by private effort an enormous number of philanthropic institutions for rescuing and educating the waifs and strays of the lower class of society, and were gathering their children, it behoved them as Catholics belonging to the English community not to be behind the times, but to found their own associations for educating their waifs and strays.<sup>11</sup>

Part of the solution was the establishment of Catholic homes and refuges, and the emigration of some of the children to Canada.<sup>12</sup>

Manning also worked to free Catholic children from the hands of Dr. Barnardo, one-fifth of whose charges were estimated to be Catholic. Barnardo had more children than he could handle and was not averse to seeing Catholic children sent to Catholic homes, despite his frankly confessed hatred of Catholicism. However, he refused to hand over Catholic children already in his Homes, except by court order. This led to continual litigation until an agreement was reached between Barnardo and Cardinal Vaughan in 1899.<sup>13</sup>

If removing poor children from their milieu was seen as the best way of saving them, then the further away they were sent, the better. The dispersal of such children to the colonies “had the advantage of removing the child entirely from its sordid surroundings and provided no opportunity for the parents to fetch it back when it was of an age to work.”<sup>14</sup> The motivation for exporting these children was a complex mixture of benevolence and self-interest. Philanthropists believed that these children of working-class slums faced a bleak future at home and would be better off starting a new life in the colonies; they were committed to the idea of giving them a “fair chance” to make something of themselves.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the elimination of a certain number of the poor acted as a safety valve against social unrest at home and provided British stock for

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in John Bennett, “The Care of the Poor,” in G.A. Beck, ed. *The English Catholics 1850-1950* (London, 1950), 569-70.

<sup>12</sup> J.G. Snead-Cox, *The Life of Cardinal Vaughan* (London, 1910), 1:403-12; Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, 124-8.

<sup>13</sup> McClelland, *Manning*, 48-9; Bennett, “Care of the Poor,” 572-3.

<sup>14</sup> Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action*, 101.

<sup>15</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum*, 210-15.

the Empire.<sup>16</sup> As well, the cost of outfitting the children and subsidising their travel was far less than boarding them out in Britain or keeping them in institutions.<sup>17</sup>

Such motives were not absent from the Catholic movement, as is evident from the comment of Richard Yates of the Catholic Children's Protection Society of Liverpool, who described the children sent out from that city in 1883 as ones "whose destitute circumstances greatly endangered them here but who might be expected to do well in Canada, and to be valuable there."<sup>18</sup> A.C. Thomas, manager of Father Berry's Homes of Liverpool, noted that "we are merely transferring them from part of the Empire to another – from our own England where they have no prospects, to our own Canada, where their prospects are as bright as the flame that glows on the maple leaf in the fall."<sup>19</sup> However, the preservation of the faith of the children remained the overriding motive for Catholic participation in the child rescue and child emigration movements. As "Boys and Girls," the quarterly magazine of the Southwark Catholic Emigration Society, put it, "If we leave such cases to non-Catholics, we cannot expect them to teach or encourage them [Catholic children] in what they conceive to be the 'errors of Popery.' It is we, who are bound to come to the front and protect at all and every sacrifice, these treasures of the Church of God."<sup>20</sup>

In fact, there was Catholic involvement in child emigration from the very beginning of the movement. Father Nugent of Liverpool brought the first group of Catholic children to Canada as early as August 1870, while one of Manning's secretaries, Father Thomas Seddon, became involved in the work in 1874, remaining active until his death at sea in 1898, while escorting another party of children to Canada.<sup>21</sup> These earliest efforts, both Catholic and Protestant, were too haphazard and informal, particularly concerning the supervision of the children once in Canada. Nugent depended upon "gentlemen of good repute to keep in touch with the children and report to him" while Seddon relied on local clergy.<sup>22</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> Parr, *Labouring Children*, 27; Bean and Melville, *Lost Children*, 4-6.

<sup>17</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum*, 207.

<sup>18</sup> NA, Department of Agriculture Records, RG 17, v. 379, file 40886, Yates to Secretary, Dept. of Agriculture, 14 August 1883.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Rooke and Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum*, 215-6.

<sup>20</sup> NA, C-4775, RG 76, v. 112, file 22578, "Boys and Girls," July 1896, 3.

<sup>21</sup> John Bennett, "The Care of the Poor," in *English Catholics, 1850-1950*, 575; NA, C-4741, RG 76, file 4240, Seddon to Secretary, Dept. of the Interior, 22 Oct. 1895; Immigration Agent at Quebec to Secretary, Dept. of the Interior, 26 Sept. 1898.

<sup>22</sup> Bennett, "Care of the Poor," 575.

inadequacies of after care were condemned in 1874 by Andrew Doyle, senior Local Government Board Inspector, who had been sent to Canada to investigate. The English Local Government Board suspended the emigration of pauper children, but could not control the continuance of the movement from private institutions. Deepening economic recession in the next decade, however, led the Board to rescind its opposition in 1883.<sup>23</sup>

The Liverpool Catholic Children's Protection Society, established in 1880, was better organized. It sent children out regularly from its hostel in Liverpool, placing them through a receiving home in Montreal, the St. Vincent's Rescue Home, where an agent was responsible for the children.<sup>24</sup> They depended greatly on the bonus of \$2.00 per child which the Canadian government paid to all the societies engaged in child emigration. However, children that came from such public institutions as work houses, reformatories, industrial schools or prisons were not eligible for the bonus. Thus children from industrial school in Liverpool were paid for by the school board, with money donated to the Society used only if school board funding ran out. These children were carefully selected by a school board committee, which obtained the consent of the child; the consent of parents or guardians was very rarely sought.<sup>25</sup> The Liverpool Society withdrew from child emigration in 1902 because of financial circumstances.<sup>26</sup>

The origins of St. George's Home lie in the work of Canon Edward St. John, who was in charge of the Southwark (London) Diocesan Council and Rescue Society, its emigration work being done under the name of the Southwark Catholic Emigration Society. He was first drawn to child rescue work by his experience as a young priest with boys begging at the cathedral presbytery, which led him to establish a home for working boys in a former carpenter's shop. He emulated the approach of Dr. Barnardo, whose homes were generally considered the best run.<sup>27</sup>

Father Seddon was not pleased by the title used by the Society, which he felt too closely resembled his own Canadian Catholic Emigration Society, nor impressed by St. John's reliance on a formal agreement

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<sup>23</sup> Parr, *Labouring Children*, 31-4.

<sup>24</sup> Bennett, "Care of the Poor," 575.

<sup>25</sup> NA, C-4733, RG 76, v. 65, file 3114, Canadian Government Agent in Liverpool to J.G. Colmer, 1 Oct. 1895.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, Richard Yates to Miss Brennan, 5 February 1902.

<sup>27</sup> Bennett, "Care of the Poor," 574-6. For this judgement of Barnardo's work see Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth-Century Consensus* (Toronto, 1976), 29.

between the Society and the Canadian employer, following the example of Barnardo and others. He had

no faith whatever in any such arrangement. It will not secure of itself the happiness of a single child placed out under its conditions. I have been 21 years engaged in this emigration work, and this is my conviction. The success of the work depends on the zeal and intelligence of the Canadian Agent, and its fortunes will fluctuate in proportion as these are solid or the reverse, and not upon the efficacy of any sort of Agreement. Those at least are my sentiments.<sup>28</sup>

His views reflected a continuing belief in the more informal methods of the earliest period of child emigration and a certain sense of rivalry between workers in the same cause.

In 1895 the Southwark Society informed Canadian immigration authorities that it planned on opening a receiving home for children in Ottawa, a government requirement since 1893.<sup>29</sup> According to the first edition of the Society's quarterly magazine, "Boys and Girls," Ottawa was chosen as the Canadian destination for the children because it was

the centre of a splendid country in Ontario, where we can place a large number of children with prosperous Catholic and Irish Canadian farmers: it is essential that the children should be with men fairly prosperous, otherwise they will be made to do labour for which their age unfits them, the unprosperous man being too poor to hire help, or at any rate glad to escape the necessity. ... Next, it is necessary to have a resident and reliable agent, who can give his time to the work, and really watch over the interests of the children. Our agent is Mr. T.W. McDermott of 121 Sparks Street, Ottawa. Further it is necessary to have a receiving house at the centre, where our agent and his wife can reside, and to which the children can go on their first arrival in the country.<sup>30</sup>

The house rented for this purpose was in the village of Hintonburg, on the western outskirts of Ottawa proper, an area annexed by the city in 1907.

The Home was originally called New Orpington Lodge, probably after the Catholic orphanage at Orpington in Kent; it was opened in October 1895 and "furnished and fitted up for the reception of fifty children by the generosity of a benefactor." During the first year of

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<sup>28</sup> NA, C-4741, RG 76, file 4240, Seddon to Secretary, Dept. of the Interior, 22 Oct. 1895.

<sup>29</sup> NA, C-4775, RG 76, v. 112, file 22578, Rev. Lord Archibald Douglas to Dept. of Interior, 9 Oct. 1895.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, "Boys and Girls," v. 1, no. 1, July 1896, 6-7.

operation it was used for two parties of approximately thirty children each. It was purchased after the first year for 600 pounds, and was owned by the society and its successors until the 1940s.<sup>31</sup>

For whatever reason, McDermott was replaced early in 1897 by George Croxford, who was sent out from England.<sup>32</sup> Following Seddon's death at sea in September 1898, the Southwark Catholic Emigration Society merged with the Canadian Catholic Emigration Society, retaining the latter name, under the direction of Canon St. John.<sup>33</sup>

Two Catholic organizations remained, the other being the Liverpool Catholic Children's Protection Society, until its demise in 1902. It was replaced in 1903 by yet another society, the Catholic Emigrating Association, founded by A.C. Thomas of Liverpool and Father Emmanuel Bans of London. The previous year they had undertaken an extensive tour of Canada, discussing child immigration with some 75 Canadian authorities, both ecclesiastical and civil, and over 300 previous emigrants. They concluded that "Canada, our English Colony, wants population. Canada will welcome our children if we send the right sort; at home they are at a disadvantage; in Canada they have grand advantages."<sup>34</sup> They also urged the amalgamation of emigration agencies to promote better efficiency and economy.

The new Association resulted from the merger of a number of organizations and represented the child rescue work of the Archdiocese of Westminster and the Dioceses of Liverpool, Salford, Shrewsbury and Birmingham, including the Liverpool Protection Society. The Association continued to use the distribution home in Montreal, where its agent was Cecil Arden, an English convert from an old and well-connected family.<sup>35</sup>

In 1903 the Canadian Catholic Emigration Society reported on its progress to the Archbishop of Ottawa, informing him that "the work seems to be more promising than ever. On all sides we hear expressions

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, Douglas to Secretary, Dept. of Interior, 2 Jan. 1897.

<sup>33</sup> NA, C-7356, RG 76, vol. 202, file 87308 (1), Edward St. John to High Commissioner for Canada in UK, 5 July 1899.

<sup>34</sup> E. Bans and A.C. Thomas, *Catholic Child Emigration to Canada* (Liverpool, 1904), 18.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 50.



of great satisfaction of the way in which the children have been treated by those who have been good enough to take them.”<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately G. Bogue Smart, the federal government official in charge of inspection, was not at all happy with the condition of New Orpington Lodge itself. In 1900 Smart became head of the newly established Juvenile Immigration Division within the Department of the Interior, set up specifically to be responsible for the annual inspection of the immigrant children and to oversee the various agencies. It represented a tightening up by the government of the inspection process, which had not always been performed by properly qualified personnel. A staunch supporter of child immigration, Smart did not question the agenda of the agencies, with whom he formed a close rapport, but was determined to correct any flaws in the system, particularly by bringing the smaller agencies up to the stricter standards of the larger homes.<sup>37</sup> His report of 29 May 1904 was devastating.

The accommodation at this Home, I regret to say, is not what it should be. The boys’ sleeping quarters consists of one large room in the attic. This room is unfurnished, unplastered, and access to it is had only through a narrow attic stairway. There were some camp beds with mattresses and blankets sufficient to accommodate half a dozen boys, and the balance of the party are obliged to sleep on the floor on very ancient and worn looking mattresses, covered by a blanket and a quilt and a pillow, without a cover, for each. On a hot night this room must be insufferable. In case of fire or other emergency, it would be almost impossible to get the children out unless by jumping from the upper windows.

The building throughout is badly in need of renovation. The office, which is upstairs, is inadequately furnished. I would recommend that it be moved downstairs to the south corner of the building directly opposite to the reception room, and that the room at present occupied as an office be converted into sleeping apartments. The importance of the work which is being conducted I consider necessitates these alterations.<sup>38</sup>

The Canadian government immediately sent this report to the agent, requesting that it be forwarded to the Society in England.<sup>39</sup> Changes

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<sup>36</sup> Archdiocese of Ottawa Archives (AAO), file “Immigration d’enfants 1880-82” [these dates bear no relation to the material in the file which goes well beyond that period], J.R. Thomson to Archbishop of Ottawa, 15 Sept. 1903.

<sup>37</sup> Parr, *Labouring Children*, 56, 149-50.

<sup>38</sup> NA, C-7356, RG 76, v. 203, file 87308 (2), G. Bogue Smart, Inspection Report, 29 May 1904.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, L.M. Fortier to J.R. Thomas, 1 June 1904.

occurred, which may at least partly have resulted from this intervention. On 1 November 1904, the Canadian Catholic Emigration Association merged with the Catholic Emigrating Association, to form the Catholic Emigration Association.<sup>40</sup> Cecil Arden, the representative of the Catholic Emigrating Association in Montreal, became the agent for the new Association. As he informed Archbishop Duhamel of Ottawa in April 1905, "We have recently enlarged and refitted up the Home at Hintonburgh, and have named it St. George's Home. From May 1st it will be our headquarters in Canada, and I shall take up my residence there from that date."<sup>41</sup> Perhaps the change of name was an attempt to make a fresh start; it may have been taken from St. George's Cathedral, Southwark.

Further changes were in store. In April 1907 Archbishop Duhamel received a letter from the Archbishop of Westminster informing him that:

Our Catholic Children's Emigration Association is considering a proposal to put St. George's Home at Hintonburg, Ottawa, in which the children stay until places are found for them, and to which they return when out of place, under the care of four nuns, instead of having it under the management of the Emigration Office. It is believed that this change would be of great benefit to the children and also more economical than the present arrangement.

It was also in keeping with the situation in Britain, where a number of homes were managed by congregations of sisters.<sup>42</sup>

The nuns in question belonged to the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of St. Paul. Archbishop Duhamel's approval was requested, with the promise that "the number of the Sisters should never, without your Grace's sanction, exceed four, and that no other work than managing the Home would be undertaken by them."<sup>43</sup> Although the Archbishop's approval was required for the entry of the nuns into his diocese, the Home and its work were never under diocesan jurisdiction, nor did it receive any financial help from the Ottawa diocese.

This approach was augmented by a further letter from the Archbishop of Birmingham, delivered personally by Father George V. Hudson, Secretary of the Association. It noted that the congregation's

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<sup>40</sup> NA, C-7834, RG 76, vol. 205, file 252093 (1), Cecil Arden to G.B. Smart, 10 April 1907.

<sup>41</sup> AAO, "Immigration d'enfants 1880-82," Cecil Arden to Archbishop Duhamel, 28 April 1905.

<sup>42</sup> Bennett, "Care of the Poor," 573.

<sup>43</sup> AAO, "Immigration d'enfants 1880-82," Archbishop of Westminster to Archbishop of Ottawa, 6 April 1907.

Mother House was in the diocese of Birmingham, and that the sisters “take charge of the Houses for Boys at Coleshill near Birmingham to the satisfaction of us all. The Mother General and Council of the Congregation are quite willing to take up the work at St. George’s Home if your Lordship approves of their doing so.”<sup>44</sup>

While Archbishop Duhamel had no objection to this arrangement, a last-minute snag occurred because of a misunderstanding on the part of the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda at the Vatican. He wanted the Home to be in the charge of men because he believed that only boys were being sent out from Britain. The Archbishop of Birmingham took on the task of correcting the Vatican’s mistaken opinion:

I am writing to remove that impression by explaining that we emigrate girls as well as boys many of whom are of tender age and require a woman’s care. Father Hudson tells us that it can be arranged that the bigger boys should not go to St. George’s at all. I will explain this too and that the children are received at St. George’s for only one, two or at most three days – and that there are usually not more than 2 or 3 children staying there. Further I will say that the Government requires an Emigration Society to have a receiving house in the colony – that it would be desirable to have two such houses one for boys under a com[muni]ty of men the other for girls in care of nuns – But the society cannot bear the expense of two houses at present.<sup>45</sup>

With the Vatican duly reassured, the Sisters arrived under their superior, Mother Evangelist O’Keeffe, in October 1907. Permission to send out a fifth sister to help her with the office work was quickly sought and obtained.<sup>46</sup> She remained in charge until 1926 when she was succeeded by Mother Francis.

In 1909 Mother Evangelist noted that she had a total staff of ten, comprised of five sisters, two gentlemen visitors and two clerks; two of the sisters “also visit the children during the greater part of the year.”<sup>47</sup> Under the regime of the sisters the physical state of the Home continued

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, Archbishop of Birmingham to Archbishop of Ottawa, 4 April 1907.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, Archbishop of Birmingham to Archbishop of Ottawa, 31 July 1907. There is no indication on the file as to how this came to the attention of the Vatican in the first place.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, Rev. G.V. Hudson to Archbishop of Ottawa, 11 Oct. 1907 and 7 Nov. 1907.

<sup>47</sup> NA, C-7834, RG 76, v. 285, file 252093 (1), Mother O’Keeffe to G.B. Smart, 27 May 1909.

to improve. In 1913 Smart noted approvingly that St. George's was "now an imposing brick structure, well arranged and equipped throughout."<sup>48</sup>

The number of children passing through the Home fluctuated over the years. In a number of years during the century's first decade over 300 children were brought out by the Association. A sharp reduction occurred during the First World War, from 255 children in 1913-14 to 108 by 1916-17. By 1917 all child emigration was prohibited by the British government, because of the dangers of travel by sea. This caused great difficulty for St. George's, which now had no income, though was responsible for annual visits to 800 children still under its care, at a cost of some \$3,000. Pleas for a grant from the Canadian government for that year were unavailing.<sup>49</sup>

This situation quickly reversed after the war. The Canadian government was interested in returning to pre-war conditions. Inspector Smart enquired of Mother O'Keeffe how many children she felt she could place and how many the Association could send out.<sup>50</sup> The British government was also willing to encourage the spread of its surplus population to the Dominions, creating the Overseas Settlement Committee in 1919. The OSC, chaired by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, recommended policy to the Colonial Secretary and formed close links with various groups, at home and abroad, interested in emigration, including child emigration.<sup>51</sup> A rapid rise in unemployment in Britain in 1920-21 resulted in a decision to support a scheme of assisted emigration in cooperation with the Dominions. The Empire Settlement Act of 1922 provided for financial assistance to emigrants.<sup>52</sup>

As a result of this renewed interest on both sides of the Atlantic, the number of children placed by St. George's Home quickly surpassed 400 annually; in 1921 the Home spent between twenty and twenty-five thousand dollars on new buildings to cope with this influx.<sup>53</sup> In 1920 the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, file 252093 (2), G.B. Smart, "St. George's Home, Ottawa, Ontario," n.d. [ca. 1 April 1913].

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, Mother O'Keeffe to Scott, 2 April 1914 and 9 April 1917; G.V. Hudson to Scott, 13 Oct. 1917 and 11 Dec. 1917; Scott to Hudson, 15 Jan. 1918.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, file 252093 (3), G.B. Smart to Mother O'Keeffe, 26 Dec. 1918.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen Constantine, "Introduction: Empire migration and imperial harmony," in Stephen Constantine, ed. *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars* (Manchester, 1990), 3-4.

<sup>52</sup> Keith Williams, "'A way out of our troubles': the politics of Empire settlement, 1900-1922," in Constantine, ed., *Emigrants and Empire*, 37-41.

<sup>53</sup> NA, C-7834, RG 76, v. 285, file 252093 (4), G.B. Smart to F.C.C. Lynch, 31 Jan. 1922.

Canadian government replaced the \$2.00 per capita payment for each child with a grant of \$1,000 to homes bringing out more than 100 children per year, with a \$500 bonus for each additional hundred or fraction, if over fifty. In 1923 the government again changed this to a per capita grant of \$40 per child because of “the great importance to this Dominion of a more adequate immigration from the United Kingdom of well trained children and juveniles who are willing to settle down to farm life and work.” This amount was matched by the British government under the terms of the Empire Settlement Act.<sup>54</sup> Father Hudson agreed that this incentive “should materially encourage the emigration of children.”<sup>55</sup>

In fact, the nature of child emigration was soon to change dramatically. The movement had never been without its critics. In the 1880s and 90s many expressed concern that these children of the British slums were by nature degenerate and posed a threat to the purity of the Canadian population – they were not the kind of emigrants wanted in Canada. Labour groups argued that they competed with Canadians for jobs and contributed to the drift to the cities. Some even voiced concern for the welfare of the children, separated from family and inadequately supervised in Canada, where they were subject to exploitation and abuse by their employer.<sup>56</sup>

By the 1920s, as well, a new class of professional social workers had emerged in Canada. The most outspoken of them, Charlotte Whitton, exemplified their acceptance of contemporary theories of heredity which viewed the home children as inherently tainted, and their desire to gain control of all child welfare work. Such organizations as the Social Service Council of Canada and the Canadian Council on Child Welfare, of which Whitton was honorary secretary, added their voices to the opposition to child immigration.<sup>57</sup>

There was opposition in Britain as well, particularly from the Labour Party, which formed the government for the first time in 1923. Scornful

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, file 252093 (3), circular letter from F.C. Blair, 31 May 1920; 252093 (4), G.B. Smart to G.V. Hudson, 2 March 1923.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, file 252093 (4), G.V. Hudson to G.B. Smart, 19 March 1923.

<sup>56</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum*, 226-30; Parr, *Labouring Children*, 52-7; Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society*, 30-4.

<sup>57</sup> Rooke and Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum*, 247-68; Parr, *Labouring Children*, 153; P.T. Rooke and R.L. Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton A Feminist on the Right* (Vancouver, 1987), 51-6, 69. On theories of heredity see Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945* (Toronto, 1990).

of the advocates of peopling the Empire with British stock, Labourites preferred to deal with problems at home rather than continue to export “other people’s children.” In 1924 Margaret Bondfield, parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Labour, led a delegation that spent two months in Canada examining all aspects of child immigration. The result was not a total condemnation of the movement but a recognition that, as the children were obviously coming to Canada to work, they should be of school-leaving age. In March 1925, the Immigration Branch ruled that children unaccompanied by their parents would not be admitted to Canada under the age of fourteen for three years, a ban made permanent in 1928.<sup>58</sup>

This change in policy did not bring the work of St. George’s to an end. By 1930 the Home was still catering to nearly 400 juveniles and Smart continued to be pleased with its condition, noting that “the Home was in its customary good order – clean, tidy and comfortable. During the winter the basement has been somewhat remodeled – walls painted – new and up-to-date plumbing fixtures, shower baths, lavatories etc. etc. installed at, I judge, considerable outlay of money.”<sup>59</sup>

It proved to be a last hurrah. The Great Depression quickly sent juvenile immigration into an irreversible decline. In May 1931 the Deputy Minister of Immigration wrote Mother Francis: “I am most anxious that every care should be taken not to bring in more boys than can be properly handled. There is no doubt that the falling returns from agriculture mean less employment and lower wages and it looks at present to me as if next winter is going to be more difficult than the one we have just finished.”<sup>60</sup> In October St. George’s was given a quota of 100 boys for 1932, with no girls admitted at all, as the demand for domestic help, especially if inexperienced, was drastically reduced.<sup>61</sup> This number was further cut to 80 in April 1932,<sup>62</sup> and finally no juveniles whatsoever were permitted entry to Canada. By 1934 no new boys had come out to St. George’s in two years; when the Canadian government

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<sup>58</sup> Parr, *Labouring Children*, 152-3; G.F. Plant, *Overseas Settlement: Migration From the United Kingdom to the Dominions* (London, 1951), 131-4.

<sup>59</sup> NA, C-7835, RG 76, v. 286, file 252093 (7), G.B. Smart, Memo, ca. 7 April 1930.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 287, file 252093 (8), Deputy Minister of Immigration to Mother Francis, 15 May 1931.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, Assistant Deputy Minister, Immigration to Mother Francis, 26 Oct. 1931.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, Assistant Deputy Minister to Mother Francis, 11 April 1932.

decided against restarting juvenile immigration for that year at least, the Association could not carry on.<sup>63</sup>

Mother Francis informed the government that henceforth all work would be overseen from Birmingham. The Deputy Minister of Immigration, F.C. Blair, thought that “they regard all the boys as now on their own so far as the collection of current wages is concerned.”<sup>64</sup> “You will be sorry to hear,” Mother Francis wrote to all the wards of the Association, “that owing to the bad times, and the fact that our work is and has been at a standstill for a long time, we have decided to close St. George’s Home and return to England for a while; we hope to open up again in Ottawa as soon as things brighten up.”<sup>65</sup> That was not to be.

St. George’s Home stood empty. The Association hoped to keep it in Catholic hands but as Ottawa Archbishop Forbes wrote in October 1935, it “is in the state your Sisters left it about a year ago. I do not see at present any way of using it for diocesan purposes.”<sup>66</sup> In 1936 the house was jointly purchased by the Archbishops of Southwark and Liverpool but remained vacant. In 1940 it was rented to the Department of National Defence (Navy) and used for experimental research. Finally in 1946 it was sold to the Archdiocese of Ottawa to serve as the rectory for the newly established Queen of the Most Holy Rosary parish.<sup>67</sup>

The most controversial aspect of child emigration is the treatment accorded the children. While recognizing the good intentions behind the sending of very young children to Canada, commentators have given prominent attention to the exploitation and abuse that occurred. The children were not sent out to be adopted into loving families but to be employed; in the words of one student of the movement, “To be young, a servant and a stranger was to be unusually vulnerable, powerless and alone.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, C-7836, file 252093 (9), Assistant Deputy Minister to Mother Francis, 23 April 1934.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, F.C. Blair to Scobie, 26 Nov. 1934.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, Mother Francis to Child, Nov. 1934.

<sup>66</sup> AAO, file “Immigration of English Children 1930-1935,” Secretary of Catholic Emigration Association to Archbishop of Ottawa, 6 Sept. 1935; Archbishop Forbes to Secretary, 14 Oct. 1935.

<sup>67</sup> *Fortieth Anniversary 1947-1987: A History of Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Parish Ottawa, Ontario* (n.p., n.d.), 11, 13.

<sup>68</sup> Parr, *Labouring Children*, 82.

The reception of the child immigrants in Canada must be seen in the context of the treatment of children in Canada generally.<sup>69</sup> As in Britain, the trend at the end of the century was away from the institutionalization of children and towards placing them with foster families. The Ontario legislature, in 1893, passed an Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to and Better Protection of Children, which provided for the establishment of Children's Aid Societies.<sup>70</sup> The proliferation of these societies marked greater government involvement in child welfare and the growth of a professional body of social workers. Yet their goals and methods were markedly similar to those of the British emigration societies: to turn dependent children into productive adults by training them in work and discipline from an early age. Like the Home children, their Canadian-born counterparts were despatched to unfamiliar rural surroundings where they were generally regarded as cheap labour and their treatment was similar to that accorded the British children.<sup>71</sup>

From the beginning, all the Catholic organizations involved in child emigration sought to ensure that the children were properly treated, and sought also to send out only children capable of making a success in the new land. The background of these children, however, did not predispose them to the hard life and isolation of a farm in rural Canada. A report prepared by the High Commissioner's office in London in 1899 described the children from Liverpool as coming from "the orphan and destitute class, many are the offspring of criminal, drunken and immoral parents; they are taken from their vicious surroundings by the Society with a view

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<sup>69</sup> There is a growing body of literature on the history of childhood in Canada. Works already cited that are important in this context are Rooke and Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum*; Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society*. See also Neil Sutherland, *Growing Up: Childhood in English Canada from the Great War to the Age of Television* (Toronto, 1997); Cynthia R. Comacchio, *"Nations Are Built of Babies": Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston, 1993); Andrew Jones and Leonard Rutman, *In the Children's Aid: J.J. Kelso and Child Welfare in Ontario* (Toronto, 1981). Valuable collections of essays include Patricia T. Rooke and R.L.Schnell, eds. *Studies in Childhood History: A Canadian Perspective* (Calgary, 1982); Joy Parr, ed. *Childhood and Family in Canadian History* (Toronto, 1982); Russell Smandych, Gordon Dodds, and Alvin Esau, eds. *Dimensions of Childhood: Essays on the History of Children and Youth in Canada* (Winnipeg, 1991).

<sup>70</sup> Jones and Rutman, *In the Children's Aid*, 62-5.

<sup>71</sup> John Bullen, "J.J. Kelso and the 'New' Child-savers: The Genesis of the Children's Aid Movement in Ontario," in Smandych, Dodds, and Esau, eds. *Dimensions of Childhood*, 156-8; Rooke and Schnell, *Discarding the Asylum*, 174.



to preserving their religion and building up their character.” Those sent from the Industrial School had been committed for “petty offences.” A similar description was given of the children sent out by the Canadian Catholic Emigration Society.<sup>72</sup>

Those applying for children had to be approved by their local parish priest, who was asked to “take these children under your kind protection, to look after their spiritual welfare, and, by yourself or other competent persons, to provide for their temporal interests, that no ill-use be made of these children or their labour.”<sup>73</sup> The application form used by the Catholic Emigration Association noted that it preferred to place children with married Catholics and wanted them to have a place in the family pew at church. All children over seven should be taken regularly to mass, all children should be treated as one of the family, provided with suitable clothing, have their own bed, and only be employed in work suitable to their age, size and strength. Those aged eleven should be paid wages. The children should write to the Association at least once a year and to friends as often as they wished, free of censorship. The agent was to visit each child at least once a year with an opportunity to talk privately and would report on the child's clothing, bedding and regularity of attendance at religious duties and school – all children over seven were to attend at least one full school session yearly.<sup>74</sup> These were high standards which were not always met. Despite the good intentions of the organizations, children who were being indentured to employers were not one of the family; many employers were only interested in obtaining cheap labour, often ignoring the educational, not to mention emotional, needs of the child.

Two linked, long-standing causes of criticism of St. George's Home were the inadequate wages many of the children received, and the placing of children with francophone families, a practice followed by no other society.<sup>75</sup> Smart believed that part of the problem was the Home's continuing use of a system that combined a wage payment with a clothing allowance. Since the children arrived well clothed, the farmer “has little or no clothing expense while paying wage of \$3-4 per month – other organizations place their wards at \$8-10 and \$15 per month plus all

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<sup>72</sup> NA, C-4782, RG 76, v. 119, file 22857, Report by A.F. Jury, 12 June 1899. This was, of course, a distinctly middle-class view of the “lower orders.”

<sup>73</sup> NA, C-4733, RG 76, v. 65, file 3114, general letter to parish priests, n.d. [1897].

<sup>74</sup> NA, C-7834, RG 76, v. 285, file 252093 (1), application form, n.d. [ca. 1903-4].

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, file 252093 (4), Memo, 3 July 1923.

clothing required plus pocket money.” Older children working full time should be employed on a straight wage basis. Mother O’Keeffe agreed to place the point before the Association in England.<sup>76</sup>

The francophone farmers of Quebec and Eastern Ontario were noted for paying low wages. Much of the blame for this situation was laid on the shoulders of Mother O’Keeffe. As Mother Francis told Smart after becoming Superior in October 1926, “to be candid I have no love at all for the homes around the Gatineau and had fully made up my mind to recall every boy gradually from that district.”<sup>77</sup> Problems persisted, however, until the closure of the Home. In September 1928 Smart complained about boys in francophone areas being paid as little as \$4.00 a month, urging Mother Francis to refuse to send boys to such parsimonious employers.<sup>78</sup> In March 1929 he returned to the issue, noting that boys should be paid \$10.00 a month. “The plain fact is,” he lectured Mother Francis, “that there are certain sections in Quebec and Eastern Ontario in which you are placing your boys where employers will not pay a decent wage and the only way I know of preventing your boys from being exploited is to refuse to give employers boys on terms which permit it.”<sup>79</sup>

A complaint brought the problem to the attention of the Overseas Settlement Board of the Dominions Office in London. Again Mother O’Keeffe was blamed for “a few bad placings for which the late Superintendent of St. George’s Home, Ottawa, was responsible.”<sup>80</sup> F.C. Blair, the deputy minister of immigration, confirmed that her successor was dealing with an inherited problem:

We have found Mother Francis, now in charge of the distributing centre here, most anxious to improve conditions and I am glad to say that she has already accomplished wonders with the work. It is no easy job when farmers have been getting help for years at very low wages, to raise the wage and still satisfy the employer. I expect that the present improvement will continue and that before long there will be very little ground for any unfavourable wage comparison between wards of the Catholic Emigration Association and wards of some other societies.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, C-7835, v. 286, file 252093 (5), Smart to O’Keeffe, 7 April 1926; O’Keeffe to Smart, 9 April 1926.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, file 252093 (6), Francis to Smart, 12 Jan. 1927.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, file 252093 (7), Smart to Francis, 13 and 15 Sept. 1928.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, Smart to Francis, 20 March 1929.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, v. 287, file 252093 (8), Plant to Egan, 19 Nov. 1929.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, Blair to Plant, 22 Feb. 1930.

As late as 1934, however, complaints were still being made about the placing of English children with francophone families, on the grounds that they did not want to pay high wages and their homes were crowded: “It does not seem fair to place an English speaking lad with a French family whose standard of living is such that it requires a complete revision of his habits in order that he may continue with them and expect him to be happy.”<sup>82</sup> The Catholicism of the families remained more important than their ethnicity or willingness to pay a proper wage.

Another issue was the treatment of the children while at St. George’s Home. One lady who lived in the neighbourhood later recalled that the nuns were very good to the children,<sup>83</sup> one of the boys who went through St. George’s, however, felt that the nuns “were tough. We boys and girls spent weary hours on our knees, scrubbing and waxing miles of wooden hallways. Then to prevent any circulation of the blood back to our knees there were innumerable periods of prayer. The nuns thought the desire for food was a mere animal lust and kept this temptation to a minimum.”<sup>84</sup>

The use of corporal punishment became an issue in 1928 when Mother Francis was accused of striking a boy across the face with a strap. Smart made it very clear that he did not approve of the use of corporal punishment in receiving homes. While he believed that corporal punishment had not been widespread at St. George’s, he wanted it eliminated, lest bad publicity undo the good work of the society.<sup>85</sup>

Each child’s story is individual. Some were badly treated, others fared better. One child who was well treated by his employer nevertheless provided a poignant description of how he was chosen from the Home: “Most every day we were lined up in the front room for people who came to adopt a boy, and every day the line-up diminished by one or two boys. My older brother Mike was the first to go. I don’t remember having said goodbye, they just took him, and I suppose they thought it was better that way. A few days later it was my turn. About six or seven of us – including my younger brother Jos – were cleaned up and made presentable. Two ladies looked us over, chose me, and I left in the same manner as Mike did.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, C-7836, v. 287, file 252093 (8), Supervisor, Juvenile Immigration to Blair, 23 March 1934.

<sup>83</sup> *Fortieth Anniversary*, 12.

<sup>84</sup> Phyllis Harrison, *The Home Children* (Winnipeg, 1979), 257.

<sup>85</sup> NA, C-7835, RG 76, v. 286, file 252093 (7), Smart to Francis, 14 and 16 August 1928.

<sup>86</sup> *Fortieth Anniversary*, 15.

Other children were sent off to more distant employers, on their own. As Mother Evangelist described the process,

The employer is notified at least three days before the child is sent, the name of station is stated, and the time the child is to be met. The child is taken to the station in Ottawa, and placed in the charge of the conductor, to be let down at the right place. The employer is supposed to be at the station to meet the child. In the case of a new Party coming from England, the children are accompanied by a travelling Agent. They are all met at the Union station, Ottawa, and brought to St. George's Home. They remain here for a period of two or three days for rest, and the Travelers Aid in Toronto and Montreal are notified and asked to meet the children and put them on the trains for various destinations. Each child carries a letter, bearing the route to be taken to destination, showing changes of trains.<sup>87</sup>

The system was hardly foolproof: one child recounts being forgotten by a conductor, missing his stop and spending the night at the home of the forgetful conductor's mother.<sup>88</sup>

This same child was sent to four different farms between the ages of 12 and 18. His first employer's family spoke little English and the wife took a dislike to him. Twice he was removed from employers for lack of proper payment. He received no education, was poorly clothed and worked hard. In one case letters he received were opened and read by all before being given to him. He had the initiative to write to Father Bans in England to complain about not receiving the wages due him, and refused to contradict himself when the Mother Superior at St. George's insisted he do so. When he turned eighteen, "You bet I got away from the farm."<sup>89</sup>

Another child recounted that he only went to school twice, one day being so cold that his feet froze. He spent the winter cutting wood. He was "horse-whipped, kicked, and belted around until I got so hard I could no longer feel it." When he was told by the farmer that there was no law for Englishmen in Canada he wrote to the authorities in Ottawa and was soon removed from the farm. He then went to a family who treated him well, and to whom he remained grateful.<sup>90</sup>

Perhaps the worst aspect of their treatment was the sense of not belonging, and of a childhood lost. "I never had a ball, sled, skates, or books to read," one man recalled. "Not a cent in my pocket until the age

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<sup>87</sup> NA, C-7835, RG 76, file 252093 (5), O'Keeffe to Smart, 9 April 1926.

<sup>88</sup> Harrison, *Home Children*, 65.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 64-8.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 160-2.

of 18. Christmas, New Year's and birthdays meant nothing to them when it came to me."<sup>91</sup> Another was "given to understand that an orphan was the lowest type of person on earth just about and the insults I had to take even at the age of 10 or 11, have always stayed with me.... I was to blame for most anything and everything."<sup>92</sup>

Some children broke under such trying conditions; others failed to make a success of their adult life. The files of the Immigration Branch contain numerous references to former St. George's wards who were deported back to Britain because they had been convicted of a crime or had become a public charge. In 1928 the supervisor of the women's branch listed five St. George's girls, four of whom had at least one illegitimate child; one had been "taken from an undesirable home and put in jail," and one had been in reformatory.<sup>93</sup> In the most extreme case, one boy killed his employer.<sup>94</sup> Commenting on the case of a St. George's boy who had gotten into trouble for theft F.C. Blair, who was more cynical – or perhaps more realistic – about child immigration than Smart, noted that "It would appear that this is another case of a boy used only to city life and daily association with many persons being sent to Canada for the comparatively lonely life on a farm."<sup>95</sup>

Essentially, the Catholic child emigration movement must be seen in the same terms as the child emigration movement generally. It was a Catholic counterpart to the work of the non-Catholic agencies, part of the system of parallel social agencies established by the Catholic Church in Britain to stem the loss of Catholics to the faith. No doubt the motivation was benign, and no doubt there were children who benefitted. But there is too much evidence, both documentary and oral, to show that the immigration of children, including those under Catholic auspices, was not in the best interests of "these treasures of the Church of God."

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>93</sup> NA, C-7835, RG 76, v. 286, file 252093 (7), memo for file, 13 Feb. 1928.

<sup>94</sup> Parr, *Labouring Children*, 108.

<sup>95</sup> NA, C-7834, RG 76, v. 285, file 252093 (4), Blair to J. Obed Smith, 22 May 1923.